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(Hansard)**

F-12

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des débats
(Hansard)**

F-12

**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Pre-budget consultations

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

Consultations prébudgétaires

2nd Session
42nd Parliament

Thursday 20 January 2022

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42^e législature

Jeudi 20 janvier 2022

Chair: Ernie Hardeman
Clerk: Michael Bushara

Président : Ernie Hardeman
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CONTENTS

Thursday 20 January 2022

Pre-budget consultations	F-295
Ontario Korean Businessmen’s Association; Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change; Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation.....	F-295
Mr. Kenny Shim	
Ms. Shalini Konanur	
Mr. Michael Kerr	
Ms. Karen Littlewood	
Ontario Museum Association; Canadian Federation of Independent Business; Heart and Stroke	F-304
Ms. Marie Lalonde	
Mr. Ryan Mallough	
Ms. Liz Scanlon	
Ms. Allison Tse	
Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario; Rothmans, Benson and Hedges Inc.; Brampton Board of Trade.....	F-314
Mr. Douglas Kwan	
Mr. Jeff Gaulin	
Mr. Todd Letts	
Society of United Professionals; Residential Construction Council of Ontario; Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations	F-323
Ms. Michelle Johnston	
Mr. Richard Lyall	
Ms. Amina Dibe	
Dr. Sue Wurtele	
Ms. Jenny Ahn	
Mr. Nathan Jackson	
Conservation Ontario; Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care; Canadian Beverage Association.....	F-332
Mr. Andy Mitchell	
Ms. Kim Gavine	
Ms. Carolyn Ferns	
Mr. Jim Goetz	
TTCriders; Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan; Ontario Nurses’ Association	F-341
Ms. Lindsey DeSousa	
Mr. Tim Shortill	
Ms. Cathryn Hoy	
Ms. Shelagh Pizey-Allen	
Ms. Angela Preocanin	
Innovative Medicines Canada; Canadian National Institute for the Blind; Community Care Durham.....	F-350
Ms. Susan Baker	
Mr. Thomas Simpson	
Mr. Wayne Henshall	
Mr. James Meloche	
Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs; Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization; Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario	F-359
Mr. Noah Shack	
Ms. Gail Garland	
Ms. Mary Argent-Katwala	
Ms. Nadia Todorova	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Thursday 20 January 2022

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

Jeudi 20 janvier 2022

The committee met at 0900 in room 151 and by video conference.

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll call the meeting to order. Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs will come to order. We're meeting today for the second day of public hearings on pre-budget consultations for the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. The Clerk of the Committee has distributed committee documents including written submissions virtually on SharePoint.

To make sure that everyone can understand what is going on, it is important that all participants speak slowly and clearly. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. As always, all comments should go through the Chair.

Are there any questions before we begin? If not, each presenter will be given seven minutes for their presentation, and after we've heard from all of the presenters, there will be 39 minutes of questions from members of the committee. This time for questions will be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members and the official opposition members and two rounds of four and a half minutes for the independent member.

ONTARIO KOREAN BUSINESSMEN'S
ASSOCIATION

COLOUR OF POVERTY – COLOUR
OF CHANGE

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL
TEACHERS' FEDERATION

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We will now call on the first presenter: the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association. We will ask the presenter to come forward and start the presentation with giving us your name to make sure we have it recorded in Hansard, then you will have seven minutes to make your presentation. With that, we'll turn it to you. At six minutes, I will notify you that you have one minute left. Don't let that interrupt you, because the minute will keep timing and that's not trying to stop you. So one minute's notice, and with that, the floor is yours.

Are we ready? The Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association?

Mr. Kenny Shim: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay, speak up. No, you're not coming through.

Mr. Kenny Shim: Hello? Can you hear me?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Now we can hear you, yes.

Mr. Kenny Shim: Okay, thank you. Technical difficulties here.

Mr. Chairman and members of the finance committee, my name is Kenny Shim and I am president and CEO of the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association. I don't do too many presentations so I may not be as good as many presenters here, but I'll try my best.

The Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association was formed in 1972 as a non-profit organization, representing 1,000 store owners who are all across Ontario. First, we'd like to thank our government for considering convenience stores as an essential service and allowing us to stay open to serve the public, which hasn't been that easy because most of our members are aging, with an average age of 65 to 67. We've been trying hard to supply them with PPE and all that.

For over 30 years, like our members, I have been operating many stores in Ontario, and over 30 years many things have changed. I know you have, with COVID, a lot of things to handle, but in early 2000 we had 2,700 stores in Ontario, operating and hiring Ontarians and working many, many hours. Currently, we only have 900 members due to the hard conditions.

One of them is the contraband tobacco issue that we've been facing. Over the years, our members have lost legal tobacco sales to the contraband market, which is run by First Nations and some of the gangs, this sale of illegal tobacco. When we started, I myself used to sell 200 cartons a week. Now I'm down to 50, which is 75% of my sales down. I know that cigarette smoking is bad. I know that the Ontario government has come out with many policies to reduce smoking for Ontarians. I myself quit five years ago when a pack of cigarettes became \$20. Yet we still sell the same amount of lighters because we know that people are still smoking. In 2018, former finance minister Victor Fedeli announced that we were losing close to \$750 million of tobacco tax that could be collected if it was sold through the legal market.

We know that cigarettes are bad. It's not good for you. But as long as it's a legal product for us to sell, I think we need an equal opportunity so that we can sell the legal product and maintain our business.

For example, Quebec has come out with—from what I hear, the municipal and provincial governments have the authority to enforce contraband tobacco. Right now, here in Ontario, if store owners do call metro police or OPP, they point us to another direction, saying, “We're not familiar with this territory. We just don't know what to do with it.” We have people in front of our stores selling, in a duffel bag, a pack of cigarettes for \$5 which we sell for \$20. Every construction site, at their lunch truck, they sell these packs of cigarettes for \$5 which—same—we sell for \$20. It is a huge problem that we have. I hope that in the next budget, there will be something with stronger enforcements on contraband tobacco.

The second issue I wanted to talk to you about is the OLG, the Ontario lottery and gaming board. I know back in 1975 we started with the Wintario tickets. Back then, the minimum wage was \$2.40 an hour. Now it's 2022. The margin for the OLG is 5% for the retailers. Our minimum wage is \$15. The average rent in downtown Toronto was \$4,000 a month; now it's about \$12,000. A 5% margin does not cut it anymore, and nowadays with COVID and electronic credit card payments—the processing fee, as you know, is 2%. Therefore, the margin has gone down to 3% instead of 5%. We sell billions of dollars of lottery and create revenue for our government. Considering not 1% but even 0.5% to make up the difference to help the independent convenience stores would be greatly appreciated.

Thirdly, the beer and wine subject: We've been lobbying and collecting hundreds of thousands of petitions so that we can sell beer and wine, just like other provinces and other countries. We haven't seen it yet. Premier Ford said that we will get the beer and wine in our stores—promise made, promise kept—but we haven't seen anything yet. I know some of the supermarkets have beer and wine, but convenience stores still do not have it.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Kenny Shim: Also, I'd like to suggest pay-at-the-pump when you fill up the gas, because there are so many runaway customers. It hurts our business, and sometimes it's dangerous for our staff to stop the thieves that are running away.

These are the four items that I'd like to emphasize and recommend that our government insert in our next budget. Thank you.

0910

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for your presentation.

We will now go to Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change. Again, we will have seven minutes for the presentation. I will give a warning at six minutes for the last minute. I would ask anyone who's going to speak to make sure that they mention and introduce themselves prior to speaking so Hansard can record who's here.

With that, the floor is yours.

Ms. Shalini Konanur: Good morning. My name is Shalini Konanur. I'm a steering committee member for Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change. I'm also the executive director of the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario, which is a legal aid clinic. I'm here with my colleague Michael Kerr, who I believe is also unmuted and will go first.

Michael, are you with us? Okay. In light of the time constraints, I think what I will do is I will go ahead with my submission while Michael prepares—

Mr. Michael Kerr: Hello?

Ms. Shalini Konanur: Yes?

Mr. Michael Kerr: Sorry, Shalini. I was waiting for the operator to unmute me.

Ms. Shalini Konanur: Apologies.

Mr. Michael Kerr: Thank you again to the committee members. I'm Michael Kerr. I'm the coordinator of Colour of Change – Colour of Change. I wanted to quickly introduce Colour of Poverty by way of highlighting—I'm trying to share my screen. Are people seeing it?

Ms. Shalini Konanur: Yes, Michael.

Mr. Michael Kerr: Okay.

As Shalini indicated, we are a province-wide racial justice, education and advocacy network. We wanted to draw committee members' attention to—I'll quickly go through the first opening slides, and hopefully, this can be shared with committee members to have a look beyond today's presentation.

Colour of Poverty has been in existence since 2007 and has created a number of tools and resources to give background and context for attempting to help everyone to understand the colour-coded nature of poverty in the province of Ontario. I encourage everyone to visit the fact sheets that are available at the links provided in the Power-Point that I can share, which help to unpack that issue much more fully in looking at a whole range of different policy areas of priority concern to the members of our network—some of the discussion here around the nature of racialized poverty, but also poverty being a window into the larger challenges of systemic and structural racism in Canada, helping to build people's understanding and appreciation of the nature of that reality and the depth and the extent.

Thinking of that, I just wanted to draw attention to some of the demographics that are important for today's conversation. Here, we have just a snapshot of the fact that now, in 2022, well over 30% of the population of the province of Ontario is peoples of colour, looking at the left column. If you look at the right column, which is taking all of those people of colour in the province as 100%, then breaking it out by ethno-racial group and using the problematic standardized categories that are currently in use by Statistics Canada, showing how it breaks out—30% being Ontarians of South Asian background, 20% being Chinese and so on. If we break the levels of poverty out from those numbers, if you look at the column on the far right in this graphic, if you look at the bottom of the screen, you'll see that people who are of white or European or Caucasian background and heritage—across the province of Ontario, they have a

rate of poverty of 11.5%. You go up from there, and you can see how the experiences of different communities of colour across the province are very, very different, with the high of Ontarians of Arab background and heritage being over 40% living in poverty; Ontarians of West Asian background being 36%; and then Ontarians of Korean background being 31%, those being the three highest across the province—

Ms. Shalini Konanur: Michael, can I stop you there and take over with our recommendations, just because of our time limit?

Mr. Michael Kerr: I just wanted to highlight the last slide, Shalini—and again, for members to look at after the presentation, a breakout of some of these numbers on our—so a select number of cities around the province.

Over to you, Shalini.

Ms. Shalini Konanur: Thank you so much for that background, Michael.

I wanted to take this opportunity, as well, to provide you with what we have been seeing through the pandemic and what our recommendations are.

Michael has very aptly pointed out that Ontario has a growing racialization of poverty, and the reality is that we are now seeing higher rates of unemployment for racialized communities and higher rates of poverty across the board in Ontario.

What we are recommending to the province, in looking at the 2022-23 budget, is that we have to consider how we administer social assistance. It has to be made available to all people in Ontario regardless of immigration status, and the rates must be raised.

To be frank, I see the very real impact of the current rates of social assistance on clients daily in my work at the legal clinic. People are at food banks at rates that I have never seen before. People are making choices around whether they feed their children or whether they feed themselves. So we need to address urgently those social assistance rates.

The second piece I wanted to talk about is health care. Ontario did a brilliant thing during the pandemic: They extended health care to every person in Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Ms. Shalini Konanur: We want to encourage you to keep that extension for all people to have access to health care.

The other piece that's critical for us is housing. I have, this year, never seen as many women as I have in the past leaving violence who have been forced to live in their cars. This budget must consider the housing crisis in Ontario for racialized and vulnerable communities.

Also, I want to encourage this province to think about employment equity. The rate of unemployment for racialized communities is significant, and employment equity will be a framework to address making sure that we have comprehensive labour market outcomes for the communities we serve.

Finally, I would like to say that the budget should consider enhancing and restoring legal aid rates. The cost to the justice system of the number of self-represented

litigants in this province has become exponentially higher. Investing in legal aid will assist—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That does conclude the time that we have. Hopefully, the rest of your presentation can come out in the question period of the process.

We now have the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: I'm Karen Littlewood, the president of OSSTF. I would like to thank the committee for providing us with the opportunity to speak with you today.

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation was founded in 1919. OSSTF/FEESO represents educators in all four publicly funded school boards, as well as in six universities—almost 60,000 public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, instructors, psychologists, secretaries, student services supports, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel and many other educational workers.

Amid the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, when the Premier promised he wouldn't spare a penny in order to keep schools open and safe, the government refused to take steps to better protect students and staff.

OSSTF calls on the government to take further steps to keep schools safe by:

- immediately restoring the reporting of cases and contact tracing in Ontario schools;
- increasing access to testing;
- reinstating cohorting in all grades and dismissals for outbreaks;
- implementing physical distancing requirements in schools;
- making sure there is an ongoing supply of N95 masks for all staff; and
- ensuring all staff and students are fully vaccinated.

The government continues to shortchange education. Last year, \$2.2 billion in education funding went unspent. In its May 2021 review of education spending, the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario identified a \$200-million funding gap for this year. On top of this, the government's fall economic statement revealed the removal of \$500 million from education funding.

Consequently, school boards are experiencing financial pressure as enrolment continues to increase and inflation balloons to 4.7%. OSSTF recommends that the government increase education and post-secondary education funding annually in all areas, at a minimum, to keep up with inflation and other cost pressures.

Bill 124, Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019, has created a crisis in Ontario's public service. The 1% cap on compensation has created a wage disparity between the provincial public sector and other sectors. This is contributing to a shortage of skilled workers in hospitals, long-term care and schools. OSSTF calls on the government to immediately repeal Bill 124.

0920

OSSTF believes that all students deserve to have every opportunity to reach their full potential and succeed personally and academically. To properly address the inequities that exist in every classroom, funding should be directed to improve learning conditions where it is needed. With smaller class sizes in schools, all students achieve greater success.

Funding for special education and programs for at-risk students must be expanded so that those who need supports receive them to ensure they succeed. Grants should be adjusted to provide education assistance for students in secondary, just as they are funded throughout the elementary grades. The allocations in the Learning Opportunities Grant and Special Education Grant should be supplemented by sufficient funding to support learners based on their needs. OSSTF recommends:

- reducing class size and increasing school-based supports, ensuring that all students, including students who are at risk, along with students with special needs, get the supports they need to be successful;

- providing additional programs and supports for English- and French-language learners and newcomers to Canada;

- providing parity for funding of adult and continuing education programs;

- removing the requirement for mandatory e-learning; and

- abolishing hybrid learning, and fully funding school boards to provide dedicated remote instruction where necessary.

In post-secondary education, nominal funding increases do not keep up with inflation, nor do those increases address the growing need for educated professionals and skilled workers to fuel Ontario's economic growth. Research and experience from the United States show that performance-based funding for post-secondary institutions will do little to increase accountability or, more importantly, student outcomes. OSSTF recommends that the government immediately abandon performance-based funding of post-secondary institutions and provide stable and predictable funding.

Supporting student well-being and positive mental health is essential to student success. Providing permanent, predictable and meaningful funding for specialized programming and supports for all students strengthens learner outcomes and translates into higher graduation rates, more opportunities and increased success. Having more staff in buildings creates safer schools and campuses, promotes student and worker mental health and supports healthy communities.

OSSTF recommends that the government increase mental health supports for students in every school and work site on every campus. The government must fully fund and support mental health services in schools, provided by board-employed professionals. They must also ensure that the more intensive tier 3 services, services provided outside of schools, are adequately funded by the appropriate ministry, so there can be seamless and equitable access in every community in Ontario.

All students, teachers and education workers, from junior kindergarten to post-secondary, need healthy, well-maintained environments in which to learn and work. Students and staff want a learning environment that is free from violence. OSSTF recommends that the government establish a specific education sector regulation within the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act to address the increased acts of violence, increase the number of qualified and trained adults in our schools and provide mandatory, enhanced, culturally responsible and proactive training to prevent, appropriately respond to and report all incidents of violence in our schools.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: Students and education workers need schools and workplaces that are safe, healthy and accessible. The government must fix the more than \$16.8-billion school repair backlog that has resulted from the chronic underfunding of school maintenance and renewal. OSSTF recommends that the government establish the stable funding that is necessary to increase board-employed staff to maintain schools and prevent further disrepair.

OSSTF urges the government to move beyond the status quo and to build for a better tomorrow in education and public services. Now is the time to embrace the opportunity before us. Ontario's publicly funded education system must be protected and enhanced to rebuild the province and the people living in it.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for your presentation. That concludes the presentations for this panel.

Before we get into the questions, we have some new members who have joined us. MPP Hunter?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Hi, Chair. Good morning. I'm MPP Hunter, from Scarborough-Guildwood, and I am in Toronto.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. And we have here with us in the room MPP Thanigasalam.

With that, now we will start the round of questioning. We'll start with the independent member. MPP Hunter will have four and a half minutes, and the government and the opposition will have seven and a half minutes, going around two rounds. MPP Hunter?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Good morning. I want to thank all of the panel members for your presentations. Shalini, you were cut off. Did you want to finish your comments, please? I think it's important that we hear you and your organization's perspective on the dramatic rise in poverty, so please continue.

Ms. Shalini Konanur: Thank you, MPP Hunter. I think where I left off was to discuss the state of access to justice for racialized communities. What we know is that there have been significant cuts to legal aid, and what we're seeing on the ground really is that there's an increase in self-representation across the board, which is slowing the justice system down. From a cost and access-to-justice perspective, the costs are rising for the province.

When you have people who are not represented, everything moves much slower.

The other, more important and significant aspect is that access to justice is significantly curtailed particularly for racialized people, who are entangled in the justice system more. So we're recommending the enhancement of legal aid funding. In particular, I work with women facing gender-based violence. I cannot impress upon you how real the stats on the increase have been and how real the consequences are when those women find themselves standing in courtrooms on their own.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Okay. And you want to make it clear that we need to reverse those cuts that were made to support justice for people who live in poverty?

Ms. Shalini Konanur: Absolutely.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I think that's very clear.

I wanted to also ask Kenny: You talked about an increase in the percentage share. You said you don't even need 1%; you need 0.5%. Can you expand on what difference that 0.5% would make to your members? And I understand that they are largely family-run businesses, so this is creating an employment base for Korean families. We just saw the Colour of Poverty data that shows that Koreans are one of the groups that are exposed, in fact. Can you talk about that, the work that you and your members are doing, and what that 0.5% difference would make?

Mr. Kenny Shim: Yes. Previously, back in the 1970s and 1980s when everything was dandy, the economy was good, we used to work about nine or 10 hours a day, seven days usually, just like Kim's Convenience. And then, with the new processing—as you know, when you accept Visa, they take 2% off, which means that from 5% you're down to 3%. So if you sell \$1,000, you get \$30. That gives you two hours of \$15 minimum wage. Therefore, you cannot afford to do that. When you pay somebody \$15, you've got to pay WSIB, CPP, EI, all that as well.

Therefore, most of the people who are members now—I told you their average age is 67 or 68. They've put their children through school and everything, but they're working 17 hours a day, and that's where the poverty comes from. You can't make ends meet. Hydro bills: 30 years ago it was \$500; now it's \$2,500. As you know, it goes up every day. As everything goes up, the number of hours that my members work is increasing—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Mr. Kenny Shim:—so that 2% would be good, or 1%, or anything. When I said 0.5%, we will take anything. That's what I meant by 0.5%.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Okay. I really appreciate your presentation and you joining the committee today. You have presented a unique perspective that we have not heard from witnesses before.

I also want to thank you for the detailed sharing, and I will look at that data that the Colour of Poverty has shared on how poverty is spread, and that there is a colour and a face to poverty. I represent a community in Scarborough—Guildwood that has seen food banks increase by dramatic

rates over the course of the pandemic, and it is something that we need to address on a systemic level.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. Your time is up.

We now go to the government. MPP Smith.

0930

Mr. Dave Smith: I'd like to go to Mr. Shim first. Do you mind if I call you Kenny?

Mr. Kenny Shim: No problem at all.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you. I appreciate that. I wanted to touch on the contraband tobacco, too, if you don't mind. You had mentioned that when you first started you were selling about 200 cartons a week. Now you're selling about 50 cartons a week—a significant drop—but the lighter sales haven't changed at all. So that is your evidence that the number of people smoking hasn't changed. The amount of cigarettes that are being smoked really hasn't changed. You also mentioned that our previous Minister of Finance said that there was about a \$750-million loss of revenue.

We've also heard numbers that it could be upwards of \$1.2 billion lost in contraband tobacco sales. You mentioned Quebec, in particular, and some of the things that they are doing. What do you think that would mean for your industry if we were able to reduce—because I don't believe we could actually get rid of—the amount of contraband tobacco by, let's say, 50%. If it was \$350 million that we recovered in sales tax as a result of that, how do you think that would affect your industry?

Mr. Kenny Shim: First of all, I think our reduction in the number of stores we had will cease. I think we'll still be able to operate our stores. Another thing is, when they come to buy cigarettes, it's not just cigarettes that they buy. We call it a basket of goods. Like you say, they come and buy lighters and all those things along with that. Now they don't have to because they spread a business card to the apartment doors with two-carton delivery. Nobody needs to come to the stores anymore. It will help tremendously. There are no buts or doubts.

As you know, when the pandemic broke, the smoke shacks near the reserves shut down for two to three weeks. Our members experienced a 50% increase in sales, which means each carton of cigarettes had \$36.95 in provincial tobacco tax, and on top of that, you have HST and you have a federal tax, a tobacco tax, for our Prime Minister Trudeau. So half of them is all taxes. And you know what? At the same time, we will lose the revenue; we'll make only 10% in tobacco sales. A can of pop, we double the money, but tobacco we don't. Anything that will help, but the contraband tobacco issue has been so bad that we had 2,700 stores, and we're down to about 800 stores. It's a simple reality.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm glad, actually, that you brought up the fact when there was the one lockdown and the First Nation communities weren't allowing non-First Nation members to come in that there was a significant increase in tobacco sales, because that really would demonstrate that there is a strong contraband market, and when that

market was closed for a period of time, you saw a significant increase.

I want to pivot a little bit to the beer and wine sales. The opposition has said that we have focused so much on alcohol and that we seem to have this fascination with alcohol. We've been trying to make it so that it's more choice of availability, let me put it that way, so that you don't necessarily have to go to a government-run store to purchase beer and wine or spirits. When I look at the square footage and how much space would be taken up by that type of a product to be sold, do you have any concerns that the amount of square footage that you would have to use in your store would be a negative impact on other sales? Or do you see it that if you had beer and wine sales available in your stores, that would also be the thing that drove people in to buy other products that you are selling at a higher profit margin, perhaps potato chips and pop and so on?

Mr. Kenny Shim: Exactly. As I told you, the contraband tobacco—we lost the sale of cigarettes to the contraband market. If the beer comes in, like you said, people will start to come into the store. I'd encourage people not to get into their car and go to the Beer Store, when they could walk to the convenience store and get the beer and, like you said, chips, pepperoni, beef jerky. That will all be great. Anything—I beg you, anything, anything—will help.

I've been with the association for about 15, 20 years. I collected a minimum 100,000 petitions, and you know what? The beer and wine went to the supermarket now, so the people drive to supermarkets to get beer. They have no need to come to the convenience store. I think, please, speed up the process. I mean, we Koreans joke about it: What is this, North Korea? You can't even buy beer at the store. It has come to that. I mean, come on. This is Canada and Ontario. Quebec, Alberta, BC, everybody does it.

And one more for your information: Our age verification rate at OKBA was 98% compliance. In London, Ontario, we have a chapter with 99.1%, done by government statistics. So we can handle these things and we can do it.

Mr. Dave Smith: I understand.

Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have just over one minute.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you. I'm going to skip on to one more thing, then, with you, Mr. Shim, and that's the pay at the pumps. The member from Mississauga—Malton introduced Bill 231 that would address that. How much of a challenge is that? In my area, there are very few convenience stores that have gas stations, so I don't get very many people through my door who say it's a problem for them. How much of a challenge is it for your members for the pump and drive away?

Mr. Kenny Shim: There's usually two or three. And, as you know, the gas stations use a lot of staff. I worked as the clerk at a gas station: Sunny's gas bar, 1982 at Yonge in Thornhill. I used to make \$3.50 an hour. If somebody took off with it, I had to pay for it. In other words, I had to

work two days. When I tried to chase it, he almost ran me over. Therefore, it's a danger.

Anywhere you go these days, you have to pay first. I mean, it will eliminate a lot of problems. Pay first: It's not that hard with a credit card. With COVID, it would be better to pay with a card first, instead of risking that people will go after these people who run away with it. These poor students who have been working to make their tuition and everything, they have to pay it out of their own pocket. It's just not fair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that presentation.

We now go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to all the presenters for sharing your thoughts on the 2022 budget today.

Karen, I want to start with you. Yesterday was a tough day for many of your members, going back after the snow day—snowmageddon. The promised supports that were made by the Minister of Education and the Premier were not in the schools. I'm including HEPA filters, masks, the social distancing piece, a cohorting plan, as you pointed out. I wanted to give you an opportunity to talk about how important it is for this government to actually talk to the education leadership in the province so that we can actually get this right. So please go ahead with that starter question.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: Thanks so much, MPP Fife, for the question and for the ability to elaborate on this. I've been hearing from many of our members through all sectors of education—early childhood educators, the secondary schools and some of our members in the universities as well—that the government—they're making promises. They're late. The promise of the N95 masks made at the beginning of the break was a challenge for many school boards. How do we distribute them and get them where they belong? What I'm hearing is that there's a very limited supply of those N95 masks. Members are concerned that while they feel a greater level of protection with an N95 mask, they don't know how long they're going to be able to have one, either.

HEPA filters have been a concern for a long period of time. You either need to have mechanical ventilation with MERV 13 filters or perhaps even windows that open, and that's still not the reality in many Ontario classrooms.

Cohorting, where you keep a group of students together in order to prevent spread, just does not exist. Especially if the government is saying, when we have unfilled vacancies, that we're going to combine classes, how is that protecting the students of Ontario? Parents have really been put in a challenging situation to decide whether or not they're going to send their students back to class because they don't have the information. Without the knowledge about testing, tracing, any of that information—there is no tracking. There's this number, 30% absences, and if that happens, then the health unit is called. There is no predictability. What we need in education right now is stability and predictability, and we're not getting that and we're not getting that information that we need to make informed choices.

0940

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for that. That's consistent with what we've been hearing. We also heard from ETFO yesterday, as well.

Karen, you talked about hybrid learning and why it needs to go. I just wanted to give you a chance to get on the record why hybrid learning is detrimental to both students and to the working environment.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: Hybrid learning does nothing to protect the individual needs of students, so you have a situation where you have a teacher in a classroom, some students in the classroom and some students at home following along by laptop. We have many of our courses where we know students will benefit from actual experiential activities. I don't know how you create that when you've got people online and people at home. Wood shop teachers: Do they say to their students, "Go to the garage and get some wood and some tools, and now we're going to do something"? It's incredibly challenging.

It's such a distracted model. It is a model that does not respect the needs of learners. If there was appropriate funding and if there were virtual schools where we needed to have them, then we'd be able to meet the needs of the students with very specific methods. That's not being done. This is a business decision to say, "We don't have the money to spend on it and we're not going to." We must consider education to be an investment, and we have to be looking at the money that has to go into education in order to make sure that we have the citizens and the taxpayers of tomorrow who are going to help to fund, fuel and rebuild the province.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Karen. We brought forward a motion to have mandatory vaccines for educators and for students. I mean, we do have immunization cards for every student in Ontario to get their polio and their MMR. What are your members saying about the mandatory vaccine piece? You referenced it in your opening comments, but I just want to get a sense from you of how important it is for teachers to know that everybody is vaccinated in their classroom.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: First of all, I'll start by saying the decision to say that something is mandatory or not is up to the government. If the government were to say, "We're going to have mandatory vaccines and we're going to add it to the vaccine requirements for students," we would support that, and that's probably the right thing to do right now.

You're exactly right that people have the right to know about those around them. What's happening right now with COVID is that we are asking to protect our community. Yes, we're doing things to protect ourselves, but the actions we take are protecting our community.

Education workers are doing everything they can to continue to provide education for students, trying to keep everybody safe, trying to have access to the information that they need. It was great when the government said that they were going to have more booster clinics with priority access for education workers. It should have happened right at the beginning of that time period. Instead,

everything that was provided was south of Highway 7. This is a big province. We have to be protecting all of the citizens of Ontario.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's a very good point. Thank you so much for that, Karen.

I'm going to move over to Shalini. Shalini, I have to say, the call for improved and increased legal aid support is obviously at a crisis point. You connected housing as well. That's where people here in Waterloo are being reinvicted, and they are highly racialized communities. They're asking for support from legal aid, but you can't stretch those dollars any further than they already have been.

Do you have an actual figure? Do you want the cut to be reinstated, or do you have an actual figure for us on the increase that's needed for legal aid?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Ms. Shalini Konanur: What I would say is that, absolutely, the cuts should be reinstated. Then I would point you to the submissions of our sister agency, ASLA, the Association for Sustainable Legal Aid, which actually give a figure.

But what I want to say is something very close to my heart: I've been working in clinics for 20 years, and Colour of Poverty has been working with racialized communities for that long. I have never seen so many people choosing to live in their cars because they've been evicted and they can't find housing. We are in a crisis. It is minus 24 today. I have a client who has to leave shelter and be in her car because we have not found her a place to live. I want to crystalize that for all of you and help you to understand that our social assistance rates and housing rates are in crisis, and every life outcome for racialized people is worse because of it.

We are talking about recovery. This is our chance, our opportunity. We triaged during COVID; we need to triage now.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That does conclude the time in this round.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you, Shalini. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll now start the second round with the independent member: MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Well, I do have questions for OSSTF, but I do want to say to Shalini that we hear you and definitely support the advocacy you're bringing forward on behalf of people who are in these vulnerable situations, and I recognize that.

I would also say that—let's bring focus to your presentation, to increase the rates of OW and ODSP—it was unfortunate that a planned 3% increase all the way back in 2018 was cut in half by this government, and people only received a 1.5% increase. Look at all the things that have happened since then. People are trying to survive through a pandemic, the worst health crisis in our lifetime, so those rates also do need to be increased, at a bare minimum restoring that 1.5% that was taken away from people who had already looked forward to receiving it, because it was

already something that they had hoped they could count on.

I do want to talk about education and our students. I want to thank OSSTF and President Karen Littlewood for your very, very thoughtful and informative presentation, and I'm wondering about learning gaps and about how this is a cohort of students—you're sort of the bridge between high school and life, really, whatever that pathway is for those students, who we always say are our future and ought to be our priority. Do you think enough is being done to address the learning gaps?

I talk to students in my community, and the online aspect has not been something that they like or that they're engaged in. It's very difficult to even just get them up and engaged, and so I'm wondering about those learning gaps and what you're asking for by way of support. Rather than cuts, in terms of the half a billion dollars, how can we invest in those young people?

Ms. Karen Littlewood: Thank you, MPP Hunter, for the question, but I want to first thank both Kenny and Shalini for their presentations, and especially Shalini. If we had a universal basic income, we might be sitting in a different situation right now, because those people living in their cars are also sending their kids to school. This is absolutely a crisis across the entire province, not just in a certain area of the province, so we really need to be working together on this.

Thank you again for the question, MPP Hunter. There are definitely gaps. Researchers are going to have massive jobs ahead of them to look at this time period and what's happening. For kids who are in grade 12 right now, the last time they had a regular classroom experience was in grade 10. Think back to when you were in grade 10 and when you were in grade 12, and the social and emotional development that happened during that time and what the experiences did for you, and how that improved and led you to be the person that you are today. Students have not had that. They've had this: looking at screens, and being isolated and masked, and no facial expressions.

We're going to have to look to the entire education team to meet these gaps. At OSSTF, we're so fortunate that we represent workers in so many different job classes. We need to be looking at—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: —mental health supports. We've been hearing that we need to be face to face for the mental health of students. Absolutely, but if we'd been funding mental health supports appropriately in the schools over the last number of years, as opposed to cutting those supports, we would be in a slightly different situation. Yes, this is challenging, but we need to be looking at the whole team and what we can provide. Educational assistants need to be there to support students.

I'm just going to say it: It might take a little bit of money in order to rebuild and to deal with some of these gaps, but it is worth it for us to be investing in education and doing everything we can to address the needs of the students. We need to be looking towards the peak of Omicron, and when it goes down, what we can do to build Ontario back up. I can't stress that enough.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I do want to say thank you to your members, who show up every day with their full self for the well-being of those students, and that's their focus. I was told by a high school teacher today that regardless of the chaos, that's the focus—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We will now go to the government. Mr. Kanapathi.

0950

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to all the presenters for your presentations.

I'll start with Kenny from the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association.

Kenny, thank you for your presentation and thank you for your bringing all the in-depth information about the challenges faced by small businesses.

There are so many small businesses in my riding, in Markham—over 1,800 businesses alone in the Markham–Thornhill riding. I know of so many grocery stores there, like yours.

Tell me what kind of long-term [*inaudible*] your members are looking for to return to business confidence, increase their competitiveness, and ensure that their businesses recover after the pandemic.

Mr. Kenny Shim: Your voice was cut off a little bit, so I couldn't understand the beginning part. Can you repeat that? I'm sorry.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: What kind of long-term [*inaudible*]—and I know you talked about your profit margins and you talked about your recommendations. You're losing the profit margins—you make 1% or 2%. What kind of long-term [*inaudible*] are your members looking for to return to business confidence, increase their competitiveness and ensure their businesses recover after the pandemic?

Mr. Kenny Shim: Well, we're just going through this pandemic—it's tough, as you know. We're just hoping that everybody stays healthy and this pandemic goes away, which seems to take forever. However, what can we do? We just work hard. Hopefully, our government can bring a new venture like beer and wine to the stores so we can increase the traffic—and possibly give whatever you can from OLG, to get a better margin, so that we can hire Ontarian students and all that and create more jobs for people.

Hearing from all the presenters today, minorities and all that—we all want to work together, and we look for your leadership to cut a lot of red tape for us so that we have an easier time.

All we ask for is fairness. If somebody is doing illegal things, please stop them so that law-abiding citizens like ourselves can continue to do business fairly and rightly.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you.

I will go now to Colour of Poverty. Thank you, Shalini and Michael, for your wonderful presentation. You mentioned that your organization is a network across Ontario working to build concrete strategies, tools, initiatives and community-based capacity through which individuals, groups and organizations, especially those reflective of the

affected racialized communities, both Indigenous and people of colour—can you begin to develop content and shared action plans? The pandemic affected marginalized communities more than others. Could you please provide your strategy initiatives to address the increased need in these communities—and I'll give you the space for it.

Ms. Shalini Konanur: Absolutely. The first thing that Colour of Poverty has been calling for is a very comprehensive collection of disaggregated data based on race and other identity factors, so that we can actually have very concrete numbers in Ontario. I can tell you, MPP Kanapathi, from my own work with the Tamil population in Markham, that it is actually one of the largest-growing groups of low-income population in Markham. So what we need to do, as a province, is to have a better understanding through data collection of what the reality is.

We know from the limited data that we have that racialized communities across the province are having poorer labour market outcomes, as are Indigenous communities. We know they are having a housing crisis that is different, actually, than other Ontarians, in the way they are able to access housing. We know that because of a lack of immigration status they're not able to get a number of services that are available in the province to other people—and that was my call for considering the extension of universal health care, so that all people in Ontario can have health care, not just permanent residents and citizens. We have to recognize in Ontario that we are the province in this country that has the highest number of racialized people. We are the province that has the highest number of people with precarious immigration status. We cannot ignore in the budget that we have an obligation and a responsibility to take their cause up.

What little bit got cut off is that we learned to triage, during COVID, the most vulnerable students. How we're doing, I don't know, but if we know that that's the case, an equity framework on the 2022-23 budget should triage all of the concerns that Kenny, Karen and I have discussed, because we are talking about the most vulnerable in our province, and that's what I really want to get across in the budget consideration: that we must triage those most vulnerable, including racialized and Indigenous communities.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you, Shalini, you and your team, for your passionate work and your advocacy for vulnerable and marginalized people. Thank you for doing that.

You wanted to finish—you didn't have the time to finish your recommendations. Could you finish? You mentioned four recommendations.

Ms. Shalini Konanur: Absolutely. The two things that I didn't get to were (1) the plight of racialized women. I work in gender-based violence. I was a very proud recipient of Ontario's award of distinction for victims.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Ms. Shalini Konanur: We must discuss in this budget enhanced supports for people leaving situations of violence. We've heard in the media over and over the data on the uptick in violence, and it impacts families. It impacts children, it impacts work, it impacts all of that. So we must.

One of the starting points to doing that is to really talk about child care and universal child care. We need to have that conversation now. It is an emergency point. The 2022-23 budget needs to consider it. Ontario needs to put that front and centre as a priority and as one of the ways that we can support women—racialized women and all women across the province—to come out of this recovery and start to have better outcomes across their life outcomes.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you for that presentation. Thank you to all the presenters for coming out and making their presentations. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that presentation. We now go to the official opposition. MPP—

Interjection: MPP Arthur.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: One day, Ernie, you'll remember my name.

Thank you very much, everyone who came in today. Karen, I'm going to start with you, and I want to touch on Bill 124. I want to talk a little bit, though, not about—I think the immediate repercussions of it are blatantly obvious, and we've talked about that a lot. But in a similar fashion to how we have to consider the mental health crisis that we're causing among students, what are the long-term effects of a bill like Bill 124 on teachers, on people entering that job market, on the future of teaching in Ontario? What are those effects going to be?

Ms. Karen Littlewood: Thank you so much for the question, MPP Arthur. We're already seeing the effects of that. We're absolutely seeing it in the health care sector, where it's causing massive shortages, but we are seeing it in education too. We had the move last week, which you saw from the Peel board, looking to basically hire monitors in a classroom—people with a high school education to come in and sit where there aren't others. We have people who have gone into education and have left education.

What Bill 124 says to the people of Ontario is that we don't respect women-dominated job classes, because that's exactly what we have in education. That's what exists in health care. Bill 124 says, "Don't worry. You're okay. You'll be fine. We're not going to give you universal child care, we're not going to give you universal basic income and we're not going to give you anything above 1%, either."

In male-dominated job classes, it's much different for them, and we have to be looking at that long-term. This is a women-dominated job class in education—all sectors, all parts of education. We have to be looking at those effects and the ability to do the staffing that is going to be needed in the future. Enrolment is rising, but we're not having the rise in the number of people going to teacher's college, going into child and youth work, going into the fields that support education. We're not seeing that, and we have to be addressing that.

Again, I will say it takes a little bit of money in order to rebuild, and we have to be looking at what's best for the province.

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Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you. I was really—I guess not happy, but pleased you made the comments about kids who are in grade 12 having the last time they actually had a classroom experience being grade 10.

I'll make a quick plug. I was the last cohort of OAC, and that was, I think, really important. It's kind of remarkable to think about the difference between grade 12 and grade 13 for me. And you can't help but wonder how much of the growing mental health crisis we have—we're pushing these kids out into the world without the foundation to really know how they want to navigate it for themselves, not telling them to do it in a certain way, but how they want to enter that world. We're pushing these problems downstream. We're saying that we're not going to make the investments right now. The immediate repercussions of them are an inconvenience for the government, but they're going to be a crisis at some point in the future. At that point, it's going to be so much more expensive and so much more difficult to counteract that problem, both in the workforce for educators and for the students who went through it.

I want to switch over to Shalini very quickly. Thank you for your presentation. It's amazing, sometimes, what you learn in finance committee. I was just looking at the comment that was made about—and you spoke a little bit about—the need for better data. The categories written by StatsCan feel like they haven't been updated since the 1950s. The catch-all terms that we have in there are kind of incredible and definitely don't actually allow us to understand what is really happening on the ground. There's no way you can pull from that data what's actually happening. I think the most egregious one I see there is probably Arabs, with 40% of Arabs living in poverty and a complete inability to tell what's causing that in the demographic group that represents.

How would even changing the language that StatsCan collects allow you to do your job better, or the government, really?

Ms. Shalini Konanur: I think that's a great question. I have to say, we've been working at the federal level around StatsCan and reconsidering the way data has been collected. But Ontario started the process of creating a very robust, disaggregated data collection potential. Regardless of what StatsCan does, Ontario can move the needle in this province and be a best practice, actually, across the country. When I speak about it, I do speak of Ontario as an example, because we have anti-racism legislation, we have a framework already for data collection. And so you can look even internally in the province at things like Legal Aid, who is doing race-based data collection; you can look at the Toronto Police Service and all projects they've been involved in. They've done exactly what you've said, MPP Arthur, which is that they have drilled down. "South Asian" is not a real term. My clients are not South Asian; they are from many different countries, with many differences.

Data is the key, because we don't know right now. We hear all of these anecdotal stories, and I am telling you my

on-the-ground experience. But if we have the data to understand, we can make the fix. CAS is a great example. Understanding the number of Black children in care is the starting point to the process to fix the system and consider the system and how it's impacting those communities.

On social assistance and housing, that data would be invaluable so that we can then think about the supports. In labour, even more invaluable, because I have to tell you, the root of all of this is if people can work, they can thrive, and the labour market outcomes for racialized people—and Kenny spoke about this, with the Korean community, and we saw the data—are horrific in this province.

We need to think about the way data can inform employment equity and better outcomes for Indigenous and racialized communities, low-income communities, disabled communities, women and on and on.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I want to just talk a little bit about—you've brought up housing a couple of times and the importance of housing and the housing affordability crisis that's been a consistent theme throughout these pre-budget consultations, from every sector. It's been mentioned by so many diverse groups. Would you speak to the importance of affordable and accessible housing for people of colour in Canada and the outcomes of our current system and, frankly, the ghettoization of poverty and people of colour that is currently unfolding across Ontario in multiple communities?

Ms. Shalini Konanur: What we know on housing is two things. More racialized and Indigenous people and more disadvantaged people are tenants. One of the starting points that we often don't talk about is the devastation of the legislation and protections for tenants. Home ownership is a dream that's maybe dying for so many people in this province, but renters are growing, and racialized people are largely renters, in my experience here. So we need to look at what's happening with the Landlord and Tenant Board, with the legislation. The rent freeze has ended now. We're not post-COVID—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That does conclude the time, not only for that presentation but for the panel presentation.

We just want to remind all the presenters this morning—first of all, thank you for being here, and secondly, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. on Wednesday, January 26. Any answer that you didn't quite get all out today, put it in writing, get it to us by Wednesday and we'll be putting that in the record. Thank you all for being here.

ONTARIO MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

CANADIAN FEDERATION
OF INDEPENDENT BUSINESS

HEART AND STROKE

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Our next presenters: We'll start with the Ontario Museum Association. As with the others, we ask that as you come forward to speak, you introduce yourself with your name for Hansard.

You'll have seven minutes. I will remind you at the one-minute mark as to where we're at. Thank you.

Ms. Marie Lalonde: All right. Good morning. I hope you can all hear me. My name is Marie Lalonde. I'm executive director of the Ontario Museum Association. Thank you very much for the opportunity to present to the committee on behalf of the 700 museums, historic sites and art galleries across Ontario.

As you will know, museums currently are closed to visitors as part of the public health measures. This March, we'll be going on two years of almost non-existent revenues for our museums and, of course, some increased costs to operate when they have been. We want to ask that the government prevent the loss of our Ontario museums and the programs and all the services that they provide to hundreds of communities across the province.

Museums are at risk. The seasonal museums in particular have been unable to operate for two years now. We continue to recommend three solutions, three ways that museums can be supported and to prevent their loss: an Ontario museum relief fund that would help them to survive despite the closures; a digital response fund so they can continue to reach out to students, seniors and the public at large and engage during the pandemic, as we will continue to offer hybrid experiences; and, very importantly, to look at increasing support for community museums by \$10 million to reach 300 communities across Ontario. That would go a long way to stabilizing their operations.

Only with targeted provincial financial support will museums be able to survive the current wave of closures and, of course, participate in the economic and social recovery from the pandemic.

For every dollar that's invested in museums and their operations, they return \$3.70. That's from an Oxford Economics study. They're community assets. They are part of community-building infrastructure. They contribute to employment, to education, to equity. Despite the ongoing challenges, again, museums have exhibited resilience and they've delivered some invaluable engagement. It's only with adequate and stabilizing government support that they will be able to continue.

What I want to particularly emphasize is, with the operating support that the OMA is requesting consideration of, that would make the grant, the Community Museum Operating Grant program—last year, this very committee recommended that that program be bolstered. The OMA has suggested that with an additional \$10 million in that envelope, the number of museums that are reached would double, so that we would reach a number of museums—for example, the Canadian Automotive Museum presented earlier this week. They currently are operating without that basic support. It would allow museums to thrive and fully participate in the community experiences.

1010

We know that museum visits build higher achievement and skills in reading, math, science and critical thinking, especially for rural students. We know that formal school visits to museums are worth \$600 million for Ontario

every year. That's a quality, authentic experience that museums support the curriculum of Ontario.

I would like also to suggest that with critical ongoing funding of museums—this operating program, for example, has been closed for close to 20 years. We have museums—the Ingersoll cheese museum, the Canadian Automotive Museum, the Museum of Health Care. A number of these museums are struggling, and it is only, again, with targeted provincial support—there have been programs that are of support, and we recognize and thank the government for some of those programs that have been essential to helping many of our museums survive, but it is essential that we get some targeted provincial support for these institutions. They have been able to be recipients of some of the programs, but there's been, again, no targeted funding for museums, and that is essential to their survival.

Really, I think, for the budget of 2022, we call for these strategic government investments to ensure that all our museums across the province that are vital, also, tourism assets, and that can really help in pandemic recovery, social, essential to their local service to communities—we ask to help preserve the gains and the successes they have been able to achieve—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Ms. Marie Lalonde: —not only pre-pandemic, and we ask for consideration of support to Ontario's museum community. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for your presentation.

We now will hear from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. As with others, the rules are the same: seven minutes, and I will notify you at the end of six minutes. With that, the floor is yours.

Mr. Ryan Mallough: Thank you very much. Good morning, everyone. It is a pleasure to be speaking with you today. I am Ryan Mallough, senior director of provincial affairs for Ontario with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

CFIB represents 95,000 Canadian-owned and independently operated small and medium-sized businesses across the country, with 38,000 members here in Ontario. As you have no doubt heard from small businesses in your constituencies, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to colour nearly all aspects of small business life. Preliminary data from our January 2022 survey shows that small business confidence in both the short- and long-term has cratered to its lowest level since April 2020. A third of Ontario small businesses report being somewhat or very discouraged about the future of their business heading into this year.

The most recent lockdown has had a significant impact. Only 60% of Ontario's small businesses report being fully open. That's a 17-point drop since the end of November. Only 27% are making normal revenue levels for this time of year, an eight-point decline, and that revenue number has not reached higher than 40% since we started tracking it at the beginning of the pandemic. The average COVID-related small business debt in Ontario remains well over

\$100,000, and nearly one in five small business owners are actively considering bankruptcy.

We cannot address the challenges ahead without facing the ones that are already here, and we urge you to remain focused on the present, even as you consider measures for the future. We are hopeful that there will be positive news for Ontario's small business owners later this morning, but I cannot stress this enough: Reopening, especially reopening to capacity restrictions, is not a silver bullet. It does not fix six-figure debts or make what will be well over 400 days of full closure disappear for many of our gyms, our indoor dining rooms or our event spaces and dance studios. Consumer confidence has always lagged reopening, and government messaging has never helped. It has always been, "Yes, things are open, but stay home. Limit your contacts. Essential trips only." That message is devastating if you are a bowling alley or an escape room or a retail store or a corner café. We need government to be saying, "Pack movie theatres. Pack gyms. Pack restaurants." If we cannot do that, then support has to be there.

As we await details and the launch of the Ontario COVID-19 Small Business Relief Grant, we urge government to consider the impact this latest round of restrictions has had on all businesses, not just those fully closed. Hair salons and barbers are reporting mass rescheduling or cancellations of appointments and that forced many to go so far as to limit the number of days of the week they are open. Dry cleaners sit empty with another remote-work order in effect, and taxis idle with Ontarians having nowhere to go. All of these businesses need support too. It's an ecosystem: If you shut down one area, several others are affected. All current and any future support programs have to recognize that.

As we have all seen and experienced, the cost of living is going up. This is also very true of the cost of doing business. Small business owners are experiencing significant supply chain pressures. They, too, are feeling inflation, and other fixed costs are mounting.

Commercial insurance premiums have skyrocketed for some businesses. An Ottawa restaurant saw premiums jump from \$30,000 to \$55,000 last year, despite being closed or facing capacity limits for the majority of the year. A Guelph restaurant saw monthly premiums quintuple. A marina owner in central Ontario saw premiums septuple. This is the small business backdrop against which government decisions are being made and must be weighed. To put it bluntly, small business owners cannot afford to take on additional costs at this time. The mindset has to be, first and foremost, "Do no harm."

We are also seeing challenges arise from a shortage of labour. This was a top issue for small business owners before the pandemic hit, and while it was muted in 2020, four lockdowns have taken their toll. Many employees have moved on from the hardest-hit sectors, upskilling and finding positions in areas less vulnerable to prolonged and uncertain shutdowns.

There is also significant upward pressure on wages that is increasing competition for employees. Some small business owners are increasing wages and have even resorted to offering signing bonuses, however, they are

very often outpriced by larger competitors and have found that even offering wage increases is not a guarantee to get a new hire or keep an employee on. This has left a gap for many small business owners that can prolong recovery if it is not addressed.

We applaud the government for moving on measures to make it easier for skilled immigrants to get licensed work in professions that match their area of expertise. That is certainly going to help, and we encourage considering the latest labour mobility bill out of Alberta, which provides for mutual recognition of certifications across other Canadian jurisdictions, to further advance that work here in Ontario.

The result of not being able to find labour is that small businesses are hiring less qualified staff and putting significant time and investment in training them up. While there are government programs out there that help with formal training, like in-class workshops, there isn't anything that recognizes the informal on-the-job training that is done in countless Ontario small businesses. We urge the government to develop financial support that recognizes the informal training and the investment behind it.

I'd also like to take a quick minute to recognize Minister McNaughton and how proactive he has been on busting the trades taboo, especially at the high school level. I've heard from business owners, both in their capacity as business owners and as parents, who are thrilled with these efforts. I would encourage the government to actually take it a step further and look at overhauling the high school co-op system. Currently, these programs are considered lesser. There is a taboo at the high school level, despite them being prestige programs at the university level. Co-op students are extremely popular amongst the businesses that use them and often lead to full-time post-graduation hires. Expanding small business access to these programs at all levels and broadening financial support for them would be a positive move.

Lastly, many small businesses have resorted to automation during the pandemic. While it can greatly improve efficiency, it does come with a cost, whether it's a robot that serves coffee—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Ryan Mallough: —or new inventory-tracking software. In recognition of this direction, we encourage the government to consider financial supports as small businesses adopt new technologies.

I thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing your questions. We will be submitting a written document before the deadline that will touch on these areas, as well as others, including things like red tape reduction, WSIB, electricity, recycling and some of the other areas that affect our members. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

Our next presenter is Heart and Stroke.

Ms. Liz Scanlon: Good morning. Thank you so much for the—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you so much. Kindly introduce yourself as you start. That would be very helpful.

Ms. Liz Scanlon: Absolutely. Thank you so much for the invitation today. My name is Liz Scanlon. I'm director of health policy and systems at Heart and Stroke. I'd also like to introduce Allison Tse, who is one of our amazing volunteers and the vice-chair of our young leaders committee.

Before Allison shares her experience with you, though, I'd like to just set up her remarks by saying that, among the other priorities that are outlined in our written submission to you, I wanted to let you know that we are here for the third year in a row to talk about funding for our FAST Signs of Stroke campaign.

1020

For those of you who I haven't spoken to already about this, FAST is a public awareness campaign that Heart and Stroke runs to remind people of the three most common signs of stroke and the need to call 911 immediately when you see them. This campaign was funded by the province until March 31, 2020, which was, of course, just two weeks after the government declared the first state of emergency as a result of the first wave of COVID-19 in Ontario. I want to share why that is so important, and the timing and the impact of COVID are so important, in just a moment, but I'd first like Allison to share a little bit of the importance of knowing the signs of stroke from her own experience.

Ms. Allison Tse: Thank you, Liz. Good morning, everyone, and thank you so much for having me today. As mentioned, my name is Allison Tse. Today I'm here to tell you a little bit about my personal story, and more specifically, about why the FAST campaign means so much to me.

The story starts with my dad. When I was four years old, my dad had a massive stroke in his early forties. At the time, my family wasn't sure what was happening to him. By the time he got to hospital, it was too late. The stroke left him completely unable to speak or use the right side of his body. Although it didn't take away his life, it took away something that so strongly defined him, which was his ability to communicate. Because of this, I don't remember ever having a conversation with my dad.

In the truest definition of coincidence, my own life changed in September 2020. One morning, I went on a bike ride with some friends, when I suddenly started to feel terrible. Within seconds, I had debilitating vertigo, I was nauseous, I was sweating and my speech was slurred. But because of what my dad went through, I was intimately aware that slurred speech was one of the signs of stroke, and I quickly clued in that something was wrong. I called my mom, and she drove me to the hospital, where I was expedited to the front of the line at emergency. After speaking to a doctor, I was immediately sent to do a CT scan, which confirmed my fear. I had suffered from a minor stroke. I learned that an artery in my neck had torn and blocked the blood flow to my brain. Right away, I was put on blood-thinning medication and monitored every four hours. I was just completely shocked. I was only 29 years old, and the kind of stroke that I had had was completely unrelated to my dad's.

After two nights in hospital, I started to slowly get better and regain my energy. After a few months, I pretty much made a full recovery and thankfully did not suffer from any brain damage. Since my stroke, I've lived a pretty normal life. I've picked up cycling again, gone on camping trips and ski trips, and I even got promoted at work. All these things were possible because I knew the FAST signs of stroke and I took action right away.

Stroke is the leading cause of disability in Canada and is also affecting young people in increasing numbers, which is why it's so crucial for everyone to know the signs. Getting treated immediately makes it that much more likely that the person will be able to walk out of the hospital on their own, or speak again, or go back to work, or live an independent, meaningful and rewarding life.

All this being said, this campaign is incredibly impactful and means the world to me. Thank you for your time. I'll pass it back to Liz now.

Ms. Liz Scanlon: Thank you so much, Allison, for being here and sharing your experience with the committee. You can see that FAST and understanding the signs of stroke is a crucial element of pre-hospital care for stroke in Ontario. Ontario has, in fact, one of the best stroke systems in the world, but unless someone knows to pick up the phone and call 911, that system cannot respond with the cutting-edge treatments that Heart and Stroke has been instrumental in funding the research into that will improve recovery, as Allison said, and reduce hospitalizations and the demand on our health care system, which is absolutely crucial right now.

In the past, I've presented to this committee with the amazing results that FAST has earned in the past, and those numbers are included in our written submission. But I wanted to focus today briefly on the results of the Auditor General's report, the value-for-money audit that was conducted in December and presented to the Legislature, on the stroke and cardiac systems. The report highlights the devastating impact COVID has had on cardiac and stroke care in Ontario. I wanted to quote from the report and say that, "patients experiencing milder heart or stroke-related symptoms were not seeking proper and/or preventative care during the pandemic. As well, when patients actually did seek care, they were generally sicker than the typical cardiac disease and stroke patients seen before COVID-19." That is why it's so significant. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have been unable to communicate with Ontarians about the need to call 911 when experiencing signs of stroke.

What did the Auditor General say about FAST specifically? Her report recommends the government—and again, I'd like to quote—"provide supports to initiatives or programs (such as funding the FAST campaign run by Heart and Stroke) that increase public awareness of stroke symptoms and appropriate actions (such as the need to call an ambulance) if symptoms of a stroke are occurring."

To sum up, if people know to seek treatment quickly, they can improve their own outcomes tremendously and they reduce the burden on our health care system, which I

don't need to tell all of you is tremendously important right now. The recommendations of the Auditor General I hope give urgency to this request that we've been making to this committee for three years. The best time to fund FAST in Ontario was March 2020, but the second-best time is today.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation. That concludes the presentations. We'll start the questions with the government. MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you to our three presenting groups this morning. I appreciate all of your presentations.

I've got a couple of questions. I'll start with Ontario museums. Marie, thank you so much for your presentation. I represent a riding in Ottawa, and of course, we have a really vibrant museum community in Ottawa. It's definitely been tough to not be able to go to our museums quite as often.

Two questions that I want to touch on. The first one is, what have you guys learned throughout the pandemic in terms of how museums can reach people who aren't able to come to the physical sites that are lessons learned that you can carry forward? The second question is, what other things can government, once we're able to start reopening and able to start welcoming folks back to cultural centres—are there other things that we can do to help promote and get people back into our museums?

I think about unique things that have happened in Ottawa. We had our museum of nature running Nature Nocturne for a number of years, which was turning the museum into a bit of a dance club in the evening for young people to come out to, to draw a new audience that may not have come to the museum before. Are there unique ideas like that that we can support and promote that might help people get back to museums and draw everyone back to these great cultural centres in so many of our communities?

Ms. Marie Lalonde: Yes. Thank you very much for the question. I think we all know that being central to community life, museums, as you've said, have played a very significant role with supporting the curriculum. So during the period of the pandemic, many museums attempted—to the best of their ability, obviously, with tremendously limited resources, staffing, disruptions etc.—to pivot and be able to offer some programs online. The oil museum, for example, in Petrolia, was able to reach about 17 school boards digitally, but they were able to do that with some support. In Ottawa, for example, I know that—you mentioned the Canadian Museum of Nature. Of course, as a national museum, they were strongly supported throughout the pandemic.

I guess what I especially want to share with the committee is that the operations of museums are truly at risk right now. They need some stabilization. The program has been stagnant for 20 years. It is vital that we support the museums that are in communities across the province. With the suggested \$10 million, it would double the envelope. We would go from 150 to 300 communities

across this province. Every rural and northern community would be able to benefit. For example, in the Ottawa group, Nepean Museum gets very little CMOG funding. So again, it's essential that we support them so they can reopen, so they can provide the safe staycations that we talk about for tourism, so that they can continue to play their role in the centre of these communities.

It's been a very difficult time for everyone, and I think everybody recognizes the financial pressures. But it also presents an opportunity to invest where the return is substantial. I think this is where, in particular, we want to support the digital outreach that can be provided, support to artistic communities, to the public at large and to engage communities in rebuilding.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: For sure. I agree. We're really hopeful that, as things start to reopen, as the weather gets a bit better, we can attract folks to Ottawa through our staycation tax credit and other measures and get them out to these museums in our communities that have been struggling and have so much to offer.

1030

I really appreciate your comments today, your proposals. We'll definitely read over the written submission. I appreciate all the work that you're doing.

I'm going to pivot over to Heart and Stroke. First of all, Allison, thank you so much for being here and for sharing your family's story and your personal story. It always helps to make a point much clearer when we're able to put a face and a story behind an ask.

I'm somewhat familiar with cardiac health. My partner is a cardiac researcher at SickKids, researching tetralogy of Fallot and other congenital heart diseases, so it's something I hear about on a daily basis.

I'm wondering if you can—I'm not sure whether it's better from Allison or Liz—walk the committee through what an investment in the FAST program would do. What would you guys do with that money that would help deal with that issue that you're talking about in terms of not enough awareness in the community right now on making that trip to the hospital? This isn't something new that I'm hearing. I've definitely heard it from our hospitals in Ottawa, from the Ottawa heart institute, and it's definitely a message that they pushed in the news, as well. I'm curious what an investment would accomplish.

Ms. Liz Scanlon: That's a really good question, MPP Roberts.

I think we have really good results from the previous round of funding that we received from the province that can demonstrate what we do. The campaign itself is full—we've got a complete suite of assets for digital, television, radio—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Ms. Liz Scanlon: —the full suite. The results that we had from the last round of funding from the province—we were able to increase by six times the number of people who could recognize the signs of stroke when they had seen the ad, and a baseline increase of 100% of Ontarians in our polling were able to recognize the three signs of

stroke pre- and post-campaign. So we know that it's effective. We know it works.

Particularly during COVID-19, when people have been really wary of going to a hospital and reaching out to seek care, we think this is an absolutely critical message to get through.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: For sure. We're making significant investments to deal with the backlog in terms of—there was \$700 million in volume funding last year. But I think you're right: That's helping on the health care side. These are some ideas on how we can actually get people to go to the hospitals, so I really appreciate that.

I think we're probably out of time—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you. We'll move on to the opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to all presenters.

I just want to say first, Allison, thank you so much for sharing your story. It's very powerful to hear something like that, because we all sometimes think that we are free of potential stroke or heart attack.

Liz, I remember your delegation from three years ago, I think it was. I hope that the government now understands that investing in prevention and keeping people healthy is a smart investment, and hopefully this budget reflects it. This is going to be an incredibly important budget for this province for our recovery and for our health and well-being. Thank you very much for your comments today.

Marie, I do want to just touch on the relief fund that you referenced in your presentation. Can you just give us a quick sense of what that looks like for you on the ground?

Ms. Marie Lalonde: Museums closed, have had to lose staff—and it's skilled staff who have particular community engagement, curriculum-related etc.

Fairly early in the pandemic, there was federal support provided to museums. It was efficient and expedient, and it was as simple—I shouldn't say simple—as straightforward as 10% of the previous year, the healthy year's operations. That helped the rising tide. All museums had a little bit of help to be able to pivot and retain some staff, to be able to work within the closures and reopenings etc., with the staff.

When we look at stabilizing them, while there have been good programs available—for example, the property tax rebate etc.; those were very important—they have not been targeted to museums, so there have been competitive aspects to that. Some other sectors, like sports, have received targeted support.

It has been said: It's all part of the ecology. If you don't enable or provide a lever—I think the Canadian Automotive Museum is an example of a museum that used small investments and leveraged those to be able to offer a speaking series etc.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, they actually presented yesterday, and it was really powerful to see how they—I'm not even going to use the “pivot” word in that sense, because we're all sick of it.

But the staff retention piece, I think, is the most compelling piece for that relief fund, so thank you very much

for the presentation today. I also think that your presentation highlighted the fact that some communities can fundraise and fill the gap, and then other, smaller communities just are not in that position. So that's the need. That's why you've advocated for the stabilization funding.

Ryan, I don't even know what to say. I mean, we've had so many conversations over the last 22 or 23 months. Even yesterday, the mixed messages and communication on reopening—it was infuriating, actually. I heard from so many businesses in Waterloo saying, which actually kind of mirrored what Rocco Rossi said, “Stop holding this steak in front of our members and saying, ‘We might open; we might not,’” in a little teaser, as if this is a game.

I think that you and the CFIB have been very clear. These small businesses that you represent are people's lives and their livelihoods, and the number one ask from businesses at this stage in the game is some clarity around the rules of engagement and transparency in how those decisions are being made. I wanted to give you an opportunity to address—you sort of ran out of time in your presentation around some of the other issues, but can you just relay to this government how important it is? If they're sending these mixed messages out about if it's safe, if it's not safe, if it's open, if it's not open, if it's partially open—I mean, this is a detrimental communications strategy from this government for small businesses, and I just want to give you the opportunity to vent a little bit, actually, quite honestly.

Mr. Ryan Mallough: The communications throughout have been really tough. I think modified stage 2 is what we're in right now; that's the 23rd different term for closed or kind of closed that we have gone through over the course of this pandemic. We went through over the last couple of years what's essential, what isn't, who qualifies for grants, who doesn't. Grants get closed without any warning or tell that it's coming. Eligibility criteria get clarified and nobody thinks to let anybody know that there has been a change made that may or may not clear up your eligibility.

Even today—I don't want to take away from the fact that being open is better than not being open. Being open at 50% is better than being fully closed, but why 50%? Why now? When are we getting to 100%? It sounds like vaccine passports are going to be a pretty big element of it; why? We were promised that we wouldn't be locked down again if we brought them in last time. We were. Omicron doesn't seem to care if you're vaccinated in terms of spread, so what is the goal?

And I'm not saying there aren't goals, but you've got to be clear about what we are trying to achieve and what the metrics are to achieve them so business owners can plan ahead. That's what we're asking for: some time to plan ahead.

Ms. Catherine Fife: You also mentioned some interesting stats, though, in your presentation. I think you survey your members on a regular basis, and you have a very informed and engaged membership, but you said that one in five businesses are considering bankruptcy? Is that right?

Mr. Ryan Mallough: Yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And in total there were 400 days of full closure in Ontario? Or is that across the entire country?

Mr. Ryan Mallough: For the city of Toronto, if you are a restaurant, for example, January 31—assuming we reopen on the 31st—will mark 437 days of full closure. Toronto and Peel are a little bit longer than the rest of the province because they had some local health units be out about two or three weeks in advance of some of the provincial measures.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. So your call is, “Show us the evidence for why decisions are being made.”

Yesterday we had Dr. Moore say, “Maybe at the end of this month,” and then of course you have the Premier today making an announcement. The inconsistency, I think, undermines confidence and trust in the entire process, and that also is not helpful for businesses in the long term.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Twenty-one seconds.

1040

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, Ryan, the last word to you. Go ahead.

Mr. Ryan Mallough: I was going to say, tough on businesses, and also consumers. There is a lot of consumer fear around there. If we're open and people are too afraid to go out, the businesses are going to die. We have to bolster consumer confidence. You've got to say it's open because it's safe.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that.

We now go to the independent member. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzi Hunter: Thank you so much to all our presenters today. You are doing such vital work. I'm going to get to Heart and Stroke, I hope, in my next round. It's very moving testimony you've provided today, and solutions.

I do want to begin with Ryan. Dan Kelly is with the Scarborough Business Association this morning, and you and I are here. I'm not sure who got the better end of that, but—actually, I do know who got the better end of that. Dan Kelly did. He's there presenting and engaging with our local small business community in Scarborough, who desperately need his advocacy, your advocacy, and support, and need this government to do things in a way that is meaningful and helpful to the small business community, who have really, really taken a big hit, as you've rightfully pointed out, and yet who we will rely on to sustain our economy and to thrive beyond COVID. So we need to make sure that they get the help and support.

One of the areas that I don't believe the government has listened to is who is eligible for those supports and who is deserving of those supports. I was very, very disappointed in the fact that the grants that were given were only given to about one in four small businesses—those who were even eligible. Just the way that it is communicated, the

way that it is rolled out, is not necessarily small-business-friendly. Most small businesses are just really trying to hang on and do their day-to-day. They're coping with supply chain issues right now. They're not necessarily looking at a press release. They're just really trying to survive.

I'm wondering about your organization's—and I really believe that you have that pulse, because these are registered members and they're giving you real-time information, and we ought to be listening. So if there was something that was important to show up in this budget for you, for your members, for the small business community to be able to bridge to better times, what would that be?

Mr. Ryan Mallough: I think, ultimately, additional support. Again, we're looking forward to the next grant. The last time a grant was available in the province of Ontario was April 7, 2021. We shut down the third time April 8, 2021. Some of those businesses were not back until mid-July and were not back to 100% until October. It's had a monster toll. There does need to be expanded support. I also think, too, it's important to understand that it can't end at reopening, that recovery is a very long road and reopening is very much only the first step. There is still a lot of support that's needed, moving forward.

We applaud measures like deferring payment. We'd love to hear something around forgiveness around some of those taxes that are due. At the same time, if we are deferring—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Mr. Ryan Mallough: —no lump-sum payments required on day one and interest kicking in right away. That did happen the last time around. We heard from businesses that were still closed throughout that deferral period, didn't really have the money to pay it back, and the government said, “Hey, the deadline is over. You now owe money, and interest is kicking in daily now.” That's a really tough conversation to have when you're not fully open, when you're still getting back on your feet. So extra support and recognition that support needs to continue beyond reopening, so businesses can be stable again.

Ms. Mitzi Hunter: And being realistic. You can't defer and then that liability stays on their books and they have to pay it with interest on day one. How is that helpful to a small business owner who's really trying to manage cash flow and employees and suppliers? It's just not the reality of businesses on the ground, and this government needs to understand the needs of those businesses. I completely agree with you. When the Minister of Finance said, “I'm going to collect every penny of that deferral”—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We now go to the government. MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to all presenting groups today. Hopefully, I'll be able to get questions to all three of you, but I'll start with the Heart and Stroke organization. I want to thank both of you for being here, giving your story, talking a little bit about your organization. As my colleague MPP Roberts mentioned, having that personal story, I think, is really effective to hear right

from individuals like yourself who have gone through a situation like this.

I guess my question is—I want to get a bit more understanding of FAST, but before I do that, I want to get a bit of an understanding of how your organization has been affected by COVID. When I say that, I mean it insofar as you're a charitable organization. Have you seen, for example—I'll throw a few questions out there, and then you can go with it in terms of giving me an overview. Are charitable donations up, or are they down through the pandemic? Is volunteerism something that's dropped dramatically, or has it gone up? Have you seen more people actually activated? Have there been more support calls or people questioning, calling in to your organization, concerned about heart and stroke, or is it less? I just want to get a handle on how your organization, as a charitable organization, is handling the pandemic.

Ms. Liz Scanlon: Thank you for the question. It's a really great opportunity to be able to share that experience. Two years ago, much of our funding came from small donations that came through events like Ride for Heart, which takes over the DVP and the Gardiner every year. We have tons of small volunteer events across the province, and of course, that all went away overnight. We took a large and immediate hit to our fundraising in those first few months, which actually led to having to let go about half of the organization in April 2020. We went from I think about 450 down to about 200, or just over. That was a big hit.

We have pivoted successfully in many ways to other, I would say, modes of fundraising. I'm not a development lead myself, but we've seen the development team really, to use that hated word, pivot and do a lot of really fantastic things, to the point where we are in much better shape today. However, we haven't regained the numbers in terms of staff that we've lost, so we are still a much smaller, tighter organization.

To your question of the kinds of outreach we're getting, it's constant. We get constant calls from people concerned—a lot of mental health calls, especially from caregivers who are trying to get through in isolation, when they're not able to access the same kinds of in-person supports that they have been, and people concerned about delays in procedures; I think that was raised earlier. There's lots of that, and the Auditor General's report captures some of that.

Certainly, the pandemic has had impacts on all sides, and I think we have done the best we could. I'm very proud of my colleagues for pivoting as well as we have, but it has been very, very difficult, for sure.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Yes. So the FAST campaign: What sort of funding are you looking for, and what would be the outcome if you were to receive it?

Ms. Liz Scanlon: That's right. We had a three-year commitment from the province that ended in 2020. It was \$700,000 for the first year and \$1 million for each of the following two. We'd like to ask for a commitment of \$1 million a year going forward. With that, as I said earlier, we have a full suite of assets that are in the can, ready to

go, ready to be deployed, and we use them through every channel: social, digital, radio, television. We use Orange Media, of course, to get the word out. We have great volunteers to help us support the messages, as you saw with Allison. And the impacts are huge, as I mentioned earlier. Six times the number of people who recognized or recalled seeing the ad recognized all three signs of stroke, a 100% increase from baseline in terms of recognizing the signs of stroke unfolding. So we know that it works. We know the message gets out there.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. All right, thank you.

My next question will go to the CFIB. I want to thank you, Ryan, for being here today. I know without question how difficult this has been for small businesses, having, obviously—all MPPs have small businesses in their constituencies that we talk to. I have family members. I understand fully the difficult time we've gone through.

Having said that, I don't agree with one comment in terms of how the government should be suggesting people pack restaurants and theatres. I don't think that's appropriate given the health circumstances we're under right now. I understand your concern. Believe me, I've got independent restaurants and I've got independent theatres that I fully want to support and I do want to eventually see packed, but I don't think it's appropriate until we're out of this.

1050

But we do need to support the businesses. We've done some financial supports. I know there's always more to be done. So my question is, and you touched on it—coming out of the pandemic, I think we're, hopefully, going to see the light at the end of the tunnel here. We do want businesses to come out of this stronger than ever. I fully believe that Ontario is going to be positioned extremely strong coming out of this—no different than the 1918-19 Spanish flu, when it led the way to the Roaring Twenties. I really believe we're going to be in for the Roaring Twenties here in Ontario, but we're not there yet. We've got a lot of work to do. We've got to help those in need. What non-financial measures will help a lot of your small businesses for the future, post-pandemic?

Mr. Ryan Mallough: To get at the notion of packing places—I don't want the pandemic to come back. I don't want a fifth wave either. What I want to be clear on, though, is, if we're not in a place to say that, then we need the financial support. We want to get to a point where we can. We don't want to do it prematurely. But if we can't say that with confidence, then we need the financial support until we get to the point where we can. I think that that is part of one of those non-financial things that we really need, for government to come out and tell—we've been in a cave for two years. No one is going to run out of it. Everyone is going to be wary.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Mr. Ryan Mallough: Everyone is going to come out of this slowly. We need to make sure that we are encouraging people to come out when it is appropriate to do so.

In addition to that, there are a number of red tape measures—and I give immense credit to Attorney General

Downey: allowing alcohol with takeout very quickly, getting rid of the five-acre rule for cideries that don't have an apple orchard on site, pivoting to online renewal of licences, allowing digital signatures. That kind of red tape cut cost government very little, if anything at all, and is crucial for businesses, because it frees up their time and ability to get back to what they need to be doing, which is running their business.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You're just about out—19, 18, 17—

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Well, with only a few seconds left, I'll pass my time on.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We will now go on to the official opposition. MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Ryan, I'm going to go straight back to you and talk about a couple of your comments that you made.

In the beginning of this pandemic, everything was changing. The calls that we would get to our offices as MPPs were, honestly, mostly fact-seeking. Folks were scared. They didn't know—and you talked about the instability that was there in terms of accessing the relevant information and knowing what was available to support businesses.

Would you comment on what it is like to be two years into the pandemic and still be faced with those sorts of challenges? I get, out of the gate, any government is going to struggle with developing a policy framework. But we are two years in, and it feels very much like this government is still flying by the seat of its pants. We've been calling for consistency and policy for small business from day one—financial supports that are stable and consistent so that businesses can plan. What is it like for small business owners being faced with constantly moving targets two years into a pandemic?

Mr. Ryan Mallough: It's incredibly frustrating. I can give you examples early on where—I really want to underscore, business owners do not do what they do to call in and be on hold on a government hotline. It's just not something that's in their purview. It's a service that we try to do for them. I called that stop the spread hotline four times on the same day on behalf of the same business owner, and I got four different answers from four different people on whether or not they could be open. We had business owners where local bylaw was saying yes and local police was coming by and saying no. It was incredibly frustrating, incredibly inconsistent. Again, business owners don't have time to read through the entirety of a regulation. They don't have time to check if a change has been made in an eligibility FAQ on a portal. They come in once; the answer they get is the one that they go with.

The CRA, in recent years, has done a really fantastic job of committing to written advice even if it's wrong. We actually saw a delay by a week in the tax week a few years ago because they said May 7 instead of April 30. We'd love for government to embrace that in Ontario and to go further and do it for verbally communicated advice as

well. If the government says yes—they're calling once; they got a yes—it's a yes. If it turns out to be wrong, there's no penalty. That sort of thing is important.

And again—sorry—to answer your question, to be here at two years and to still be at Friday afternoon announcement for Saturday morning implementation or Monday morning implementation is very tough. There's still a lot of constant refreshing on Twitter and Facebook to figure out if you're going to be open the next day.

Consistency is king. We really hope we can get to that, moving forward.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Absolutely. I agree on that. I think you touched on something that's really, really important there, in their consistency. In my opinion, there's been a kind of sloughing off of difficult decisions. If there's possibly another jurisdiction that could be forced to be the enforcers or the bearers of bad news, this government has jumped on the opportunity, frankly, to not lead, and to put it onto public health units.

You're a pan-Canadian business; you're already navigating different sets of rules in different sets of provinces. But then that inconsistency that you get down to—and the bylaw officer versus the local police example that you gave I think is exemplary of how difficult it is when you don't have those clear lines of communication and a government that is willing to lead from the top. It really is very difficult.

From that, I want to talk about vaccine mandates and what that has meant for small businesses. The enforcement of it was put on the business owners, but they're also not particularly universal. What would it mean if there had been a consistent vaccine mandate for everyone from this government, and that it wasn't put on individual hospitals or businesses or whatever it is? That clarity and that certainty from the top down: What would that translate into in terms of economic activity and a path out of this pandemic?

Mr. Ryan Mallough: So, it's hard to say, in terms of what the impact would be. I can tell you that when we asked in September, October last year—so, well pre-Omicron—businesses were pretty split on whether or not they wanted to enforce a vaccine mandate. But what we were hearing clearly is there was a lot of nervousness and outright fear around what happens if we do. Is someone going to sue? Are there human rights considerations at play?

I think that a clear direction either way from government would have put a lot of minds at ease in terms of, "This is what you can or can't do." We are still, to this day, to this morning, getting those same questions: "Can I enforce it? Can I ask about it?" It's becoming a hiring decision, which makes us very nervous from an HR perspective. It's becoming an issue with businesses like contractors who work in people's homes. The customer wants to know if the employee is vaccinated. Are we to share that information?

I know a lot of business owners are watching the city of Toronto very closely to see if there are repercussions for laying off unvaccinated staff. No business owner wants to

be the test case in that lawsuit. There's a holding pattern, I would say, for business owners, not sure which way to go.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Yes. And that's exactly what I'm alluding to: the lack of a sort of leadership. No decision like that is going to be popular. There are going to be people who land on both sides of whatever outcome it is. But the responsibility of those in those leadership positions is to just make the definitive decision, allow that to be distributed down and provide the supports that are necessary for the small businesses, for those at our institutions to enforce that decision. The lack of clarity is so damaging. When I hear from businesses across my riding, that is all they have asked for this entire time. They know they have to step up with the public health measures. But that lack of, yes, clarity, has just been absolutely detrimental.

I don't think I have a whole lot of time left, but I just want to pivot over to Allison and Liz. Thank you for your presentation and, Allison, for sharing your story. I'll echo MPP Fife's comments on sharing your story. But what you bring to us, year after year, consistently—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Mr. Ian Arthur: —it is such a clear-cut example of dealing with upstream causes of health care costs, and it's such an effective example of how to do that well. Liz, do you want to just talk about that a little more in terms of those costs that we are able to avoid downstream?

Ms. Liz Scanlon: Yes, absolutely. And as Allison mentioned in her remarks, stroke is one of the leading causes of both hospitalization and disability in every jurisdiction—Ontario is no exception—and stroke is uniquely urgent in terms of treatment.

To your point of presenting downstream costs, if people are aware of the need to go to a specific stroke centre—and this is why the “call 911” piece is such an important part of the message, because we have stroke centres regionally across the province that are equipped at all times to do the imaging necessary. They have the specialists on site and available, and if you aren't aware or if you're—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question.

The independent member. MPP Hunter.

1100

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Hi. Thank you so much. Again, the discussion is so valuable.

I want to just turn to Heart and Stroke. Thank you, Allison, for sharing your story and your dad's story. It gives hope, and I really appreciate you coming forward to committee.

The pandemic has shone a light on disparities in many ways in our society, including in our health system. I represent a community in Scarborough that is highly impacted by this disease. It's a very diverse community, a racialized community. I'm wondering about what you are seeing when it comes to health inequities in our province, and what we need to do to address that.

I'll turn it over to Liz, I believe. Thank you.

Ms. Liz Scanlon: Yes, absolutely. I think that's vitally important. There are a couple of ways we can try to address that through FAST. For example, we target Indigenous-owned media with the FAST message, as First Nations in Ontario are at a higher risk. In particular, we want to make sure that message is out there.

We use in-language media in Mandarin and Cantonese for those communities, who are also at higher risk. There are couple of ways that we use our FAST assets in a targeted way to reach communities that are higher risk.

I think the question you asked, though, really also is in terms of who accesses the appropriate rehabilitation after care, right? Who has the ability to participate in rehab? Who is getting the community-based supports? Where are those supports located? I think there's some work being done within CorHealth—which has now become part of Ontario Health, and we're a partner with them—to understand where care is needed, where it's not being accessed, who is not able to access it and why, and to really make sure that we have that equity lens.

There are issues around the increased risk for certain communities, and then there is also the issue when people experience stroke and heart disease: What kinds of supports are they getting afterwards that are going to help their recovery? That is also a huge equity issue. So there's a need to address on both ends of the whole chain of survival, with both heart disease and stroke, that we need to be a part of addressing. I think understanding first, having better data and having a better understanding of what's happening, is absolutely critical.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: And we don't have the data based on race.

Ms. Liz Scanlon: We don't.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: That is something that is needed. It should have been there, and we should have utilized the opportunity during COVID to build that into our health system, because there are disparities. For instance, for vaccine hesitancy, there are communities—in the Black community, for instance, there is some built-in hesitancy. Some of it just comes from the institutions and just not having been able to rely on those institutions in the past, because of systemic racism, and it has carried forward.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: So I am actually wondering about your FAST program and if you have specific outreach to the Black community and to the South Asian community, where I know this issue is of particular prevalence.

Ms. Liz Scanlon: As I said, we have done assets in Punjabi, Cantonese and Chinese, so we do have those assets trying to target communities. We have partners with organizations that are supportive of us in terms of directing us to the right channels, the right tactics.

But I think, frankly, we could do a better job of understanding how the messages could be tailored specifically for the Black community in Ontario, to make sure that not only are the tactics and the channels we're using appropriate, but that the message is appropriate. We know, for example, that when someone arrives in an emergency room with signs of stroke, that not everyone is treated the

same, right? So what is the work that we could be doing to educate health care providers to make sure that they understand how they need to be reacting to people in emergency when they arrive—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes the time for this presentation.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you so much.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): This panel is concluded. We go now to the next panel.

ADVOCACY CENTRE
FOR TENANTS ONTARIO

ROTHMANS, BENSON AND HEDGES INC.

BRAMPTON BOARD OF TRADE

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The first presenter is the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario. As they will have heard, seven minutes for the presentation. I'll let you know at six minutes that you have one minute left. With that, the floor is yours.

Mr. Douglas Kwan: Thank you, and good morning. My name is Douglas Kwan. I'm from the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario. We're a community legal clinic that advances the rights of tenants across the province. We do so through legal services for renters through test case litigation and duty counsel services at the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Ontario faces an ever-worsening affordable housing crisis. Almost half of renter households in Ontario pay unaffordable rents, which means they are spending 30% or more of their household income on shelter. In fact, one in five spends 50% or more of their income on shelter, placing them at a higher risk of homelessness.

For budget 2022, we ask the government to maintain support for low-income and vulnerable renters and make secure housing for everyone in Ontario a cornerstone of the government's response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

We have recommendations that focus on the government to help Ontarians stay in their homes, support the creation and preservation of affordable units, and protect individuals' access to justice.

In helping residents to stay in their homes, we have two suggestions. Introducing a rent relief program: Many renters have lost their jobs or have had their income reduced during the pandemic. As a result, they cannot pay their rent and have fallen into arrears. To prevent evictions, a program should be introduced that consists of both grants and loans that are accessible to households of all income levels, to help them recover from the pandemic. The United States and British Columbia have launched similar programs, and they can be a guide for Ontario's rollout.

We also ask that the government legislate 10 paid sick days for Ontarians. A lack of paid sick days means that workers making low to moderate incomes must choose between going to work sick or losing much-needed income by staying home to recover. In a province where

almost half of renter households pay unaffordable rents, it's an unfortunate reality that many workers cannot afford to stay home while feeling unwell. Many employees go to work sick. They take longer to recover and they increase the risk of COVID-19 outbreaks, putting themselves and others at risk. This is counterproductive to efforts to reduce the spread of infections, especially in light of a fast-moving variant like Omicron.

To support the creation and preservation of affordable units, the government can do so in three ways, the first being eliminating vacancy decontrol. Vacancy decontrol means landlords can charge any amount of rent to new renters when moving into vacant units. This results in a loss of affordable rental units as renters move or are evicted. It also creates an incentive for landlords to remove long-term tenants, resulting in higher rates of eviction. The government should propose an end to vacancy decontrol and a rent control exemption on new units, by setting limits to rent increases. This is a legislative change that can immediately make rental housing more affordable and help Ontarians afford that dream of owning a house one day, because, as we all know, renting is a gateway to home ownership.

The second suggestion we have is to utilize surplus land for affordable housing. To help develop more affordable housing, the government should consider selling or leasing properties below market value to non-profit developers who will guarantee that the housing developments will be affordable in perpetuity.

The third suggestion we have is that the government should address the financialization of housing. The financialization of housing is a major factor behind the loss of affordable rental units. It has resulted in rising rents, escalating home ownership prices and an increasing number of Ontarians being priced out of the housing market, both as renters and first-time homeowners. In the rental market, financialized landlords such as real estate investment trusts have acquired large numbers of apartments in urban centres, where most renters live. These acquisitions are often followed by the eviction of long-standing renters, and rent increases for the newly vacant units, facilitated by the policy of vacancy decontrol.

The provincial government needs to address the scope and impact of the growing financialization of housing. Measures could include restricting global capital flows into local real estate, examining tax treatment of financial firms, creating a publicly available beneficial ownership registry to eliminate hidden ownership, reining in speculators in real estate and targeting money laundering.

The third item that we want to discuss is increasing access to justice. The government can do so in two ways, the first being making meaningful reforms to the Landlord and Tenant Board. Since September 2020, the board closed its 44 sites across the province and moved to a completely digital hearing format. Many tenants lack access to technology, making it difficult to attend and participate in their virtual hearings. Hearings have often been chaotic, with parties unable to access hearings for 30 minutes or more, calls being dropped, difficulty providing

evidence, and the list goes on. When tenants can't participate and assert their rights to maintain their housing, then it results in more evictions and more strain for municipalities, which provide homelessness prevention programs, and the loss of another affordable unit due to vacancy decontrol.

1110

We ask the province to heed the call from the Ontario Human Rights Commission, the Ontario Bar Association, some of your fellow MPPs and other justice sector partners who have expressed concerns about the digital wall that Tribunals Ontario has erected. If virtual hearings are to continue, the board needs to review its current procedures and provide appropriate supports for renters to participate in in-person hearings and make counter staff available in regional offices in ServiceOntario locations so the processes can be quicker and reduce the backlog. In the short term, additional funding should be made available for libraries and legal aid clinics that have had to modify their spaces and IT infrastructure to bridge the digital access gap.

The last item we want to suggest is to restore funding to Legal Aid Ontario. The 2019 provincial budget included a 30% reduction of Ontario's contribution to Legal Aid Ontario. Ontarians rely on a strong legal aid system to ensure there's access to justice for our most vulnerable residents.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Mr. Douglas Kwan: With fewer resources, courts and tribunals slow to a halt because there are more self-represented parties. Besides greater efficiency in the legal system, legal aid investments also produce economic, social and health benefits for society and those using the system. For every dollar invested in legal aid, research has shown that it results in the savings of \$9 to \$16 in justice services and programs. To guarantee access to justice and ensure our courts run efficiently, the budget of Legal Aid Ontario should be restored to at least its pre-2019 levels.

In closing, I want to thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions this committee may have.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Our next presenter is Rothmans, Benson and Hedges Inc. Again, if you would identify yourself as you start to speak and I will let you know at the six-minute mark that you have one minute left. You're still muted.

Mr. Jeff Gaulin: It wouldn't be a COVID call without someone saying that.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You're coming through loud and clear now.

Mr. Jeff Gaulin: Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and good morning. Good morning, distinguished committee members and fellow guests. Thank you for the opportunity to appear this morning.

My name is Jeff Gaulin and I'm the director of external affairs for Rothmans, Benson and Hedges. RBH is an affiliate of Philip Morris International and one of Canada's leading tobacco companies. We have our national headquarters here in Toronto, about 350 employees across Ontario, a factory in Quebec City and partnerships with 150

farmers nationwide. I'm joined this morning by two colleagues, Gerald Proctor and Sabrina Sotiriu.

Now, we appreciate the opportunity to share our transformation with you and the role that public policy and fiscal policy can play to accelerate a smoke-free Ontario this decade. So I'd like to make three points for your consideration today.

First, smoke-free innovations such as vaping, heated tobacco, nicotine pouches and others represent a tremendous opportunity for the Ontario government to improve the quality of life of its citizens and to reduce future cost pressures to the health care system. The Ontario government should consider how to make such products more accessible and affordable in a responsible and prudent way to help the province's 1.8 million existing adult smokers to move away from cigarettes.

Two, the illicit and criminal trade of tobacco to Ontario is a serious threat to public finances and to public safety. The Ontario government should invest more funding into law enforcement and public security to recoup up to \$750 million in lost provincial tax revenue per year and to help keep Ontario communities safer.

Third, and finally, RBH is committed to a cleaner and greener Ontario. We are expanding our sustainability initiatives to clean up cigarette butts from our streets and ideally to divert them in the first place for appropriate disposal. Furthermore, we are piloting, here in Ontario, the world's first industry-wide recycling program for vaping and electronic nicotine devices, so we ask the Ontario government to allow us to continue to expand these market-based solutions.

So my first point is about a smoke-free Ontario. RBH is committed to a smoke-free future, and our message is quite clear. If you don't smoke, don't start. If you do smoke, quit. And if you don't quit, change. Abstaining from smoking is the best choice anyone can make for their health, and the next-best choice if someone does smoke is to quit entirely.

But for adults who are not quitting and would otherwise continue to smoke cigarettes, there are alternatives, such as vaping or heated tobacco, that are scientifically substantiated by health agencies such as the US Food and Drug Administration and Public Health England to be deemed less harmful than cigarettes.

Now, such products are not risk-free, and they contain nicotine, which is addictive, but these smoke-free products generate far fewer chemicals and in far lower doses than cigarettes. Yet in Ontario, these smoke-free products are often less accessible, in terms of retail, than much more harmful cigarettes. Harmful cigarettes are available at every corner store, and yet these better alternatives are often harder to find and harder to buy.

A smoke-free Ontario is achievable this decade, but it requires the collective efforts of industry and government, science and common sense, to find a balanced approach to protect youth and to help adult smokers.

My second point is about the illicit tobacco trade in Ontario. To build a smoke-free Ontario, it is crucial to eradicate contraband tobacco. Illicit trade makes cheap,

untaxed cigarettes too easily accessible and too easily affordable, undermining the efforts of the province to reduce smoking prevalence and to protect youth from smoking.

In Ontario, contraband represents about one third of the total tobacco market, so one in every three packs of smokes in Ontario is illegal and untaxed. An Ernst and Young report estimated that the size of forgone provincial tax revenue in Ontario due to contraband tobacco is about \$750 million per year. As neighbouring provinces have demonstrated, investing resources into the elimination of contraband can yield significant fiscal benefits.

At the peak of the pandemic in 2020, Ontario saw a record increase in tax collection from legal tobacco sales across the province. This was due to the disruption of illicit supply chains and retail outlets caused by COVID restrictions. People weren't smoking more, but they were buying more legal cigarettes. COVID restrictions have meant that illicit tobacco makers cannot easily ship their products and Ontarians cannot easily buy cheap, untaxed cigarettes, so during lockdowns, more Ontario smokers have gone to their neighbourhood convenience store and bought legal, fully taxed cigarettes.

Investments in curtailing contraband tobacco will have significant ramifications both fiscally and in terms of public safety, as the illicit tobacco trade is closely associated with criminal elements, so our recommendation is that the Ontario government support law agencies further and invest in their efforts to curtail, disrupt and suffocate the contraband market. Expanding the number of police officers who focus on illicit trade prevention, or empowering all—not just some, but all—police officers to conduct contraband tobacco investigations or inspections, is one way to improve the revenue capacity of the province.

While close interprovincial trade is encouraged on most fronts, in terms of contraband tobacco, it's an area where provincial borders add layers of complexity in the coordination among police forces—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Jeff Gaulin:—so an interprovincial task force with Manitoba and Quebec could increase policy development and the coordination of law enforcement on this important issue. This is not just an economic issue, but one of public safety, and it should be dealt with strongly.

Finally, just as RBH is committed to reduce the harm of our products on people, we are also committed to reduce the harm of our products on the environment. We have launched two sustainability initiatives in Ontario to address the issues of littering and single-use plastics. In the essence of time, I'll just focus on that here in Toronto, we are launching an innovative recycling program for electronic tobacco and nicotine products. In partnership with a world leader in consumer recycling, we are processing and collecting all forms of vaping and heated tobacco pods, devices, accessories and packaging—not just RBH products; all products. We believe providing Ontarians with a convenient and timely way for consumers to dispose of their waste easily avoids having it end up in our streets or in our landfills, so we hope the Ontario government—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for your presentation. That concludes the time.

Our next presenter is the Brampton Board of Trade. Again, it's seven minutes. I'll let you know at the one-minute mark, and if you would kindly introduce yourself before you start your presentation. The floor is yours.

Mr. Todd Letts: Good morning, Chair and committee members. My name is Todd Letts. I'm CEO of the Brampton Board of Trade, and it's my honour to take a few moments to outline our members' priorities for the 2022 Ontario budget.

Before I do so, I think there is some brief context that is relevant. Our organization is about supporting business success, and what that means to us is both enterprise growth and community prosperity. Our members employ more than 61,000 in Brampton. As you know, Brampton is Ontario's fourth-largest city and one of the country's fastest-growing. In terms of context, again, we welcome more than 16,000 newcomers to Brampton every year.

1120

The diversity of our business community is also an important context. Our members are businesswomen and businessmen who represent all sectors, including logistics and advanced manufacturing, information technology, food processing and a growing post-secondary footprint. About 75% of our members are small businesses employing 10 or fewer people in our restaurant, retail and business service sectors. I think everyone knows Brampton is located at the centre of Canada's innovation corridor, a dense cluster of industry and high-tech employment that spans from the Kitchener-Waterloo region to Durham. This unique geography is very strategic positioning and informs many of our policy priorities.

The first priority I want to share with the committee relates to initiatives to stimulate economic recovery. Ladies and gentlemen, our business community is both bewildered and fatigued. We're talking about 22 months, five waves, four lockdowns. It is taking its toll. We acknowledge the unprecedented nature of this situation and appreciate the extraordinary measures that the government has taken, including recent grants and payment extensions on loans. Thank you for that support.

Today, looking forward, I echo the call of chambers of commerce around the province for a longer-term strategy, one that will provide a more targeted response than the blunt instrument of business lockdowns. Businesses are finding it very, very difficult to forecast: to forecast hiring, to forecast supply and customer care. What needs to happen is—well, let me just say that businesses know full well how to protect their employees and protect their customers. What they need is more time to accommodate restrictions when they come about—more than a couple of weeks. They also need predictability in what supports they'll receive to match the restrictions during those times.

There also needs to be a plan to help businesses carry the significant debt many have taken on. By way of example, instead of additional lockdowns, alternatives to keep Ontarians safe without further damaging our small business communities include expanding the capabilities

of Verify Ontario and better tracking of the virus, including contact tracing and proof-of-vaccination technology. As well, let's incent and assist businesses to upgrade their on-site ventilation, to bring even more employee safety and customer confidence. And thirdly, because we understand that the trigger to lockdown is directly related to hospital bed and staffing capacity at our hospitals, we recognize that this is the best time to accelerate approval of the credentials for internationally trained medical professionals. This would ease the burden on our health care system and reduce the likelihood for needing future lockdowns to protect our health care capacity.

Of course, infrastructure development is also an urgent priority for budget 2022. Brampton is one of the country's fastest-growing cities and our infrastructure needs to reflect this. Building infrastructure pays a wonderful return on investment, as well.

In terms of better connectivity, soon the government will receive an ask from the city of Brampton for an LRT extension of the Hurontario LRT onto Main and to the Brampton GO station. This is an ask that could be anywhere between \$400 million and \$1.7 billion, dependent upon the route. This is an essential piece of infrastructure that will have a wonderful uptick in wonderful connectivity that will help the entire innovation corridor region, not just Mississauga and Brampton.

Of course, regional connectivity remains a critical issue across the innovation corridor. We welcome the recent steps to advance the goal of two-way, all-day GO along this major innovation corridor and look forward to further investments to accelerate that.

Now, closely related to infrastructure is the importance of goods movement. Consumer demand, e-commerce, the expectations of customers to get goods with next-day delivery and the ability of our businesses to provide that depend on efficient goods movement. We want to thank the province for their firm commitment to build the GTA west corridor highway, Highway 413. Our region is simply growing too quickly to further put that off, and your attempts to accelerate this critical piece of infrastructure are appreciated.

We remain concerned about the impacts of supply chain hiccups on our members—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Mr. Todd Letts: And we appreciate what efforts you're putting in to improve the connectivity with Pearson employment centre as well.

Our last two initiatives for the committee's consideration is child care—members of this committee may be interested in knowing that Brampton has been designated by the policy alternatives group as a child care desert. We have coverage for only one out of five eligible children—and one of the most expensive. We hear loud and clear from our members that more daycare, particularly for our families who work shifts, is required.

Lastly, as an earlier speaker mentioned, housing affordability—whatever we can do to prevent exclusionary zoning at municipalities. We need more multi-unit complexes.

I want to thank the Chair and committee again, all members, for your time and careful consideration of these priorities and our feedback today. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation.

We now will go to the questions, and we will start with the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to all presenters for coming to committee this morning.

I'm going to start off with the Brampton Board of Trade. It's good to see you, Todd, as always.

It's really encouraging to hear that the Brampton Board of Trade is advocating for child care. We're hearing this more and more, of course, because Ontario is the only province in this country that has not signed on to the \$10-a-day deal that the federal government has sponsored and is supporting.

I want to give you an opportunity to drill down a little bit and talk about how important it is to invest in early learning and care. It is an economic driver. It also addresses some of the inequities that folks in Brampton and Peel and Mississauga have actually experienced around investment in early learning and care. Can you tell us how important it is for the province to get on that?

Mr. Todd Letts: Yes, it is so important to ensure that we have talent to fill the vacancies in the many jobs that are available in Brampton and all along the corridor. As I mentioned, Brampton is unique in its propensity for more shift work in our food processing and our manufacturing plants.

We appreciate the efforts that Ontario has done in their CARE tax credit.

To your point, there needs to be much better alignment between the provincial government and the federal government to free up more spaces sooner. That may include federal or provincial incentives for employers to build daycare on-site. This is an initiative that would have tremendous return on investment, in terms of bringing more people into the workforce to fill those needs of talented people. In many cases, it still is women who bear a heightened responsibility for child care, and to bring these talented women back into the workforce sooner, investment in child care is required.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think making the connection between filling vacancies and ensuring that women and families have options for safe, affordable child care is the circular economy. Certainly, post-pandemic, we need that investment to recover fully. And having a tax credit for a child care space that doesn't exist doesn't work, obviously.

I want to thank the board of trade for raising the importance of child care, and I know that our members—MPP Singh and MPP Yarde—have been advocating for that locally as well.

What are your members saying about the importance of having access to rapid antigen tests? Chambers really took a leadership role in ensuring that those tests could be a factor in the successful opening of businesses and the monitoring and tracing of COVID-19. Do you have

anything to add on the rapid antigen tests and access to them?

Mr. Todd Letts: Thank you very much for the question.

When it comes to rapid antigen tests, what we're trying to do as an outcome is confidence: confidence in workplaces where our colleagues know their status of COVID, confidence to customers, knowing that the businesses that they frequent are safe. Whatever we can do to expand Verify Ontario, testing, tracing and to have numbers that we can support that won't lead us to the default of lockdowns is very, very necessary, I think, in 2022 and 2023, as we continue to combat this nasty virus.

1130

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Todd, for appearing before the committee.

My next question is going to be for Douglas Kwan. Thank you so much for coming to committee today. I think that there has been a general theme, I would have to say, Douglas, about the importance of housing. Housing is health care as well. Your presentation certainly resonated with us, especially given the half-day housing summit that we saw come out of the Legislature yesterday, where streamlining developments was proposed as a solution. I think we all know that we need to accelerate multiple options around housing and affordability.

Our housing critic, Jessica Bell, has proposed introducing a speculation and vacancy tax on those who don't pay taxes in Ontario who own houses or condos. We've heard from several delegations that those empty units are essentially safety deposit boxes in the sky. They're being held there in trust until more money can be made from them in the absence of having, quite honestly, a speculation or vacancy tax that can be applied.

Can you talk about how important it is for the government to use those financial levers to ensure that whatever available stock is there is opened up for renters and for buyers across Ontario?

Mr. Douglas Kwan: Thank you for the question. We are increasingly concerned about the growing affordability crisis. Most recently, we've seen stats where investors now outnumber first-time homebuyers in the purchase of homes and, as I mentioned in my presentation, the growing financialization of housing. It's looking more like a commodity as opposed to a place to call home and build a community around.

It's important to work on multiple tracks. Tackling the supply of housing is a long-term strategy.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Mr. Douglas Kwan: Buildings will not get online immediately or right away. It's legislative tools that this government can use, such as implementing rent controls, ensuring that the real estate investment trusts don't take over even smaller landlords. Many of these real estate investment trusts have to maximize their profits for their shareholders because they're publicly traded on the stock market. So it's important that those legislative tools can be used so that we can preserve our affordable housing stock and really commit to making initiatives, making things

work right now as opposed to five or eight years down the road.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, and those legislative tools do exist. Rent control has to happen, but on the newer units, they can increase the rent by 30%, 40%. That's what we're seeing here in Waterloo. It's impacting seniors, it's impacting students and it needs to be fixed—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We will now go to the independent member. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you so much to all our presenters.

I wanted to start with the Brampton Board of Trade. Hello, Todd. It's nice to see you. You made a passing statement in your comments that I want to expand on for the panel and for the government as it's putting the budget together, and that is that Brampton is becoming a future hub for post-secondary education. How important do you see this in terms of supporting the employment base in the community and the growth of business in the community, having this type of homegrown talent in Brampton, being able to be educated there and the type of education that's important in terms of micro-credentialing and some of the things that are needed right now? We talked about bridging, for instance, for foreign-trained medical professionals and how important it is that we do that faster. We haven't heard a lot on post-secondary education in our deliberations, and I just really wanted you to emphasize that.

Mr. Todd Letts: Thank you again for the question, and it's great to see you again, MPP Hunter. Yes, this is one of the remarkable success stories of Brampton, and this is an Ontario success story as well. What I'm referring to is the expansion of post-secondary education in Brampton. We have seen in recent years the Rogers Cybersecure Catalyst, one of the leading centres of excellence in cyber security, in Brampton. We've seen the Ryerson Venture Zone with specific start-up assistance, an incubator for both the logistics and the health care sector. We're seeing churches establish in-school programs on cyber-awareness and cyber security. Algoma has tripled their size with computer science and their business faculties, and even a unique program to train pilots, given our proximity to Pearson airport. That's to your point about micro-credentialing and relevant curriculums to help Ontario succeed.

Of course, Sheridan is the largest post-secondary institution in Brampton, with the Davis campus offering 25 degrees and so many more diplomas. A lot of that has to do with health care, nursing, PSWs etc., as well as many new creative industries as well. So this is a success story.

What's really important is that we develop homegrown talent as a foundational strategy, and then ensure that we create an environment to recruit talented newcomers from all around the world, repatriating folks who may have gone to California. We can provide so much more in terms of lifestyle amenities here now in Brampton and Ontario.

Thanks for the question. It truly is an Ontario success story happening in Brampton.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes, and we want to see the growth of businesses in Brampton. That corridor is incredibly important. It is part of our tech corridor, and we want to see that supported.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I also appreciate you recognizing Sheridan. Another area of real North American leadership is in digital animation, and also arts and culture. We talked a lot yesterday about *Come From Away* and the importance of the live arts. Well, it was conceived of and workshopped at Sheridan.

Our post-secondary institutions are really important to the success and the future of Ontario, so I would really encourage the government to reinvest in post-sec, because some of the budgets were cut in the last number of years in post-secondary education. I think that we need more investments, not the opposite.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We will now go to the government. MPP Thanigasalam.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thanks to all the presenters from the Brampton Board of Trade; Rothmans, Benson and Hedges; and the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario. Thank you for your presentations and thank you for being here.

First, I'll go to the Brampton Board of Trade. Todd, thanks for the presentation. I want to focus on the economic recovery that you talked about, and also specifically on cutting red tape and reducing the cost of doing business. As you know, our government is committed in terms of cutting red tape or to reduce the cost of doing business. Having passed the reducing red tape legislation last year in the fall, I know during that time the Brampton Board of Trade supported and also applauded our government's work to reduce these regulatory burdens and lower hydro rates. Minister Sarkaria and PA Sandhu are great advocates to cut red tape and lower the cost to do business in Brampton.

As we look to the future and, as you mentioned, the economic recovery moving forward, can you tell us what areas of red tape and regulatory burden Brampton business members feel continue to be barriers? Is there any other red tape that you think our government should look into that will enable Brampton businesses to quickly recover and grow once the economy starts recovering?

1140

Mr. Todd Letts: Thank you, MPP Vijay Thanigasalam. Yes, you are correct. Both you and Minister Sarkaria and members of cabinet have been very accessible and very focused on the reduction of red tape. Red tape simply limits job creation and the speed of job creation, and your efforts in doing that in the past are very much appreciated. It's a tough portfolio, but listening to businesses and fighting that red tape is certainly appreciated.

I will answer your question by restating how important it is to get Ontario businesses open again. These lockdowns have been devastating for so many. The regulation

that I think needs the most focus right now is what I mentioned earlier in my presentation. If our health care HR capacity, staffing capacity, is what triggers this latest lockdown and may in the future, let's get serious about accelerating the recognition of internationally trained medical professionals' credentials so that we can get more trained and talented people into our hospitals, into our community settings so that we're not going to the blunt default of lockouts for businesses again.

Your government has been very generous with your wage subsidies, with your rent subsidies, with loans to businesses through the small business grant. If our members had a preference, sir, it would be to serve customers—customers over cash. Again, fighting and breaking down regulations that prevent talented internationally trained people from serving Ontarians in our health care system would be the highest priority going forward.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you, Todd.

Next, I'll move on to Rothmans, Benson and Hedges. Thank you, Jeff, for your presentation. You talked about smoke-free Ontario. I know that in 2019 you unveiled the Unsmoke Canada project, and you've seen a lot of progress with that as well. Could you please tell us more about Unsmoke Canada and the particulars that you mentioned today, the smoke-free products in Ontario, as well as the innovative recycling program to recycle not just your products, but all the products on the market when it comes to alternative products, like vaping and other electronic products? How has this whole Unsmoke Canada campaign plan adapted since the beginning of this campaign? What kinds of factors have affected and have—how these campaigns and their appearance have changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Mr. Jeff Gaulin: Thank you very much for the question. In 2019, we announced in Canada our intention to ultimately get out of the cigarette business and that we would like to accelerate that as fast as possible by making available lower-risk products that provide nicotine in an electronic, non-combustible format, products that have been reviewed and deemed by international agencies such as the US Food and Drug Administration or by Public Health England to be substantively less risky and less harmful than combustible cigarettes.

We are trying to accelerate our transition away from cigarettes and into electronic nicotine delivery alternatives, substantiated by science and supported in the marketplace so that they are responsibly marketed and sold. We do not want to see a new generation of nicotine consumers, and we are very committed and supportive of government initiatives to prevent youth initiation. These are products that are intended only for existing adult smokers, of which there are nearly two million in Ontario who would benefit.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Jeff Gaulin: We have seen great discussions across Canada with health care, scientific, academic and government officials to find a balanced approach to policy in terms of taxation and regulation so that these products can be scientifically validated, politically acceptable and

widely accessible to the consumers who would benefit from them.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you, Jeff. In the remaining short time, could you please highlight—I know in the second point you talked about illicit tobacco products. I know you have a recommendation for the government for more OPP law enforcement officers and investigation into this illicit system that's going on. You mentioned one in three packs that are sold are illegal. How is this affecting youth, and how can we work together with our government to combat this?

Mr. Jeff Gaulin: The illicit tobacco trade in Ontario is pretty significant in volume, but it is devastating when it can make widely available significantly cheaper cigarettes at a moment's notice. In Quebec, where they saw—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That now concludes the time for that presentation.

We will now go to the official opposition. MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Todd, I'm going to start with you. I hear you loud and clear about recognizing the credentials for health care workers, and I would expect many different factors beyond health care as well. The role that we are giving to immigration into Canada as an economic driver really is the core of our recovery plan leading into the future. If we welcome those people into Canada and we don't give them an opportunity to actually contribute in the most meaningful and, frankly, economically significant way they can, we're actually going to undermine those recovery efforts.

We heard from the council for people of colour earlier and talked about how poverty was concentrated among persons of colour. It could be a virtuous cycle. It could be exactly what we need for recovery, but if we don't take action on it, it could be a very damaging cycle to go through.

I want to try to link your comments about recognizing credentials with your comments about the need for infrastructure spending, because Brampton, as every MPP in the Legislature knows, is in desperate need of both actual health care workers but the infrastructure that corresponds with it. Frankly, I believe we've been underfunding infrastructure for an entire generation, and it's coming home to roost at this point. We are suffering the repercussions of underfunding that we committed to an entire generation ago, and the only way out of it is significant investment. What would that do for your community in terms of being an economic driver for the infrastructure and then allowing folks who may have their credentials recognized enter the workforce in a field that they're trained to excel in?

Mr. Todd Letts I very much appreciate the question. Let me just follow on your logic there and help the committee to connect the dots. Brampton, as you know, has suffered a disproportionate impact from COVID. Why? Because Brampton is Ontario's logistics hub, and it also, as I mentioned earlier, is attracting more than 16,000 newcomers every year. Investing in infrastructure that helps accommodate this influx of 16,000 people a year, or 2.8 million more people coming across the GTA but specifically in Brampton—we simply need better highway

infrastructure, better regional connectivity in LRT and two-way, all-day GO in order to maintain the quality of life.

As a country, we're attracting a little over 300,000 immigrants this past year, 400,000 targeted this year. Many of them come with skills and experience that can be used in our health care systems, and if they are, then we will be less likely to lock down businesses. If we're less likely to lock down businesses, we can unlock the \$300 million of pent-up savings that Canadians have now to spend in our stores and our restaurants.

1150

Finally, infrastructure investment—Highway 413; LRT; two-way, all-day GO: The return on investment in terms of the attraction of new companies and new businesses and the expansion of those, again, is unparalleled. So it is all connected.

And, yes, helping to more quickly recognize and approve the credentials of the internationally trained is a fundamental part that connects all those dots and amplifies the return on investment for Ontario.

Mr. Ian Arthur: On the infrastructure, on the two-way, all-day GO and LRT, and beyond even those public transportation parts—I will say we're probably at different viewpoints on the need for more highways, but that's okay. That's totally reasonable, and I understand the needs that Bramptonians have.

On the investment on the public transportation side of things—it's incredibly expensive in terms of upfront costs. Canada, unfortunately, suffers from some of the highest costs per kilometre for rail in the entire world, and a huge part of that, frankly, is NIMBYism. We pay more for a lot less because of all the hoops we make ourselves jump through and the unwillingness to have that infrastructure in our own backyards.

But Brampton strikes me as a great place to actually pursue those investments, because there isn't a lot of the same resistance that you will find in other communities and you're so desperate for a solution. I just see it as such an incredible opportunity to put that infrastructure in place to demonstrate the effect that it can have on a community and to really realize the economic output that can come from a well-funded public transportation system.

Mr. Todd Letts: Thank you for that question. I agree with you that Brampton is Ontario's solution for many things.

If we take a look at the issue of transit, of course, we've got the recent electric bus pilot project in Brampton. We hope to expand that. And by investment in the extension of the LRT, just for perspective, on the benefit to Ontario—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Mr. Todd Letts: —that would link Port Credit on Lake Ontario, in Mississauga, to the GO station, the Kitchener line, which provides so much more mobility for labour to accept jobs wherever they may be—K-W, Guelph, Mississauga, downtown Toronto.

With the debt of Ontario now, because of COVID-19, close to \$400 billion, we need to be thinking about these infrastructure investments to generate wealth.

McKinsey estimates a \$17.5-billion uptick in GDP for the two-way, all-day GO. And Highway 413, a \$2.3-billion uptick in GDP over the next five years—just the construction period of it—and then \$1 billion a year after that.

Infrastructure pays the highest return on investment and solves a lot of problems for Ontario—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that presentation.

We will now go to the independent. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: What a great discussion we're having with the three presenters.

I do want to speak to Doug Kwan regarding ACTO. My first question is in terms of the government support for tenants when it comes to the pandemic.

We talked a lot this morning about people who live in poverty. The Colour of Poverty talked about people living in their cars; that's their roof right now. The education people said that even if they live in their cars, they still send their kids to school, and we have to step in and support that.

Do you think that we've done enough for tenants? BC gave a \$500 subsidy directly to renters so that they could pay their rent and keep housed. So, Doug, can you talk about the current condition and what you're seeing?

Mr. Douglas Kwan: I'm pleased to. Thank you for the question. I just also want to quickly point out that when we're talking about infrastructure—and the committee was talking to the member from the board of trade—housing is also an important piece of that infrastructure. You can't have workers work in a community, contribute to a community if they don't have an affordable place to live. It's key.

During this pandemic, what we've seen is it's not just low-income tenants who are being affected, it's people in the middle class. It's people who are earning \$40,000 to \$60,000 a year who are falling into arrears because of what's happened during the pandemic. Even if they were to get that same job back with the same income, it still won't help them tackle the massive debt that was accumulated in the previous months or the arrears that were accumulated. So they're still facing evictions.

This government has supported tenants with a rent freeze, and we're very thankful for that, but we also think more can be done. As I illustrated, it's not just the current renters who need support. They also need support for all of the arrears that have accumulated from the lockdowns, from the restrictions, where people have had their hours reduced. What's made it worse is that the digital process that the Landlord and Tenant Board has implemented has made connecting Ontarians to valuable supports in their municipality and their community much more difficult, in finding them and connecting in with them and preserving an otherwise sustainable tenancy. So much more can be done.

We talked about the commercial support, more for commercial tenants. There has never been any support for residential tenants. British Columbia had a similar program and the United States had a program of both a

moratorium, support for tenants, support for small landlords, and that lasted almost 18 months.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Mr. Douglas Kwan: It saved millions of families from being evicted in the United States. That's what we're seeking from this government: similar supports.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Excellent. I think that's very well articulated.

I know I don't have a lot of time, but I do want to ask about smoking in Ontario and how we get that down. I'm just wondering about vaping trends in youth. What are you seeing there? Maybe I'll give it over to you right away. Is that Jeff? I think he's ready to go.

Mr. Jeff Gaulin: Thank you very much. I'll try to squeeze it in.

What we've seen from evidence is that youth initiation is no different than with cigarette smoking. People have maybe tried it in 30 days, but the uptake has not been what the headlines have lead you to believe. That said, I still think we need to have strong measures—and we have proposed some for government—to prevent youth initiation. These are not products for kids.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that section.

We now go to the government. MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm going to go back to Jeff. My colleague MPP Thanigasalam asked a question. You started talking about Quebec and you ran out of time just as you said, "Well, in Quebec...." So, if you don't mind, could you pick up from there and let us know what it was that you were going to get out?

Mr. Jeff Gaulin: Thank you very much. I appreciate that. About 10 years ago, Quebec and Ontario faced a very similar situation, with contraband tobacco being a significant portion of the market and being a public threat and a threat to public finances.

Quebec took drastic action on multiple fronts on the law enforcement side and has seen material changes to its marketplace. In the last 10 years, for example, for every \$1 invested in Quebec into law enforcement, it has returned \$14 in increased tax revenue. When you think about it in this way, Quebec has lower taxes on tobacco than Ontario, it has a smaller population than Ontario, it has a lower smoking incidence rate than Ontario, and yet in terms of absolute dollars, it collects more tobacco tax revenue than Ontario does.

There is almost three quarters of a billion dollars being left on the table from Ontario taxpayers every year that could be recouped for valuable investments in health care, in infrastructure, in job training, in affordable housing that could be materialized through strategic investments in increased law enforcement activity in Ontario. So I think there's a tremendous opportunity here to support communities, to support taxpayers and to reduce the incidence of smoking, by cracking down on contraband tobacco in Ontario.

1200

Mr. Dave Smith: Sorry; I'm a little bit confused on this, and please pardon my ignorance on it. Tobacco products are something that is grown in Ontario, harvested in

Ontario, processed in Ontario. We check product coming across the border from the United States. We don't necessarily check it from Quebec or Manitoba. If we're growing the tobacco here and we're processing the tobacco here and we have a significant contraband sale, where is that tobacco product coming from, then?

Mr. Jeff Gaulin: For the most part in Ontario, the contraband products are produced in Ontario. There are legitimate reasons for unmarked or untaxed product to be sold. Unfortunately, because of the wide accessibility of it in Ontario, it is often sold to people who should pay tax on it, but don't. In retail outlets, with the access to those locations, crackdowns and investigations on that would reduce the supply of that.

There are legitimate reasons in Ontario to produce tobacco that is unmarked. Unfortunately, because of lax enforcement, it is more widely available than it should be, and that leads to this big gap in tax revenues and in the wide accessibility of contraband. No other province in Canada has a contraband issue as significant or as large as Ontario does.

Mr. Dave Smith: So if I understand correctly, then, if it's unmarked, it's probably destined to be exported out of country or out of province? It would make sense to me, then, that if we were also to be tracking the amount of unmarked product at the production point, that would give us a very good idea of how much is not leaving the province as it should be. Is that a fair assessment on my part?

Mr. Jeff Gaulin: We could track it at sale or at distribution. There are allocations of unmarked—duty-free, for example—where it's permitted. But the wide accessibility is because there is a significant manufacturing base for tobacco in Ontario—most of it for legitimate purposes; some of it not—and retail outlets in many communities make untaxed cigarettes available to those who should not buy them.

Mr. Dave Smith: If we solve the problem, or we significantly reduce the problem, of contraband tobacco being sold in Ontario, is there a risk of that contraband tobacco then being exported to other jurisdictions?

Mr. Jeff Gaulin: There's always that possibility, but it does increase the cost. The further you have to ship it away from the source of manufacturing, the costlier it gets. The supply chain disruptions right now for trucking, rail or shipping would certainly make it impossible, but it might surprise people to know that illegal or contraband tobacco made in southern Ontario is available for sale in Germany, so it does make its way around the world. But it does have a significant impact on Ontario taxpayers when that product is sold here and goes untaxed, unpaid.

Mr. Dave Smith: Where I'm going on this line of questioning—I'm playing devil's advocate here, and purely hypothetical—is that if I am an industry or I am a company who is making this contraband tobacco and I am shipping it, if I'm going to be sending it outside of Ontario, I have a cost in that transportation. If I look at the standard supply chain, I'm going to have to have some transports. I'm going to have some transport trailers. I'm going to send my product somewhere. Those trucks have to come

back to me, and I don't make any money if they're coming back to me empty. If I'm already a criminal element, can you hypothesize on what products I might be bringing back on those trucks to sell, because I don't want to have empty trucks that make no money?

Mr. Jeff Gaulin: Yes, deadhead deliveries don't make any money. I won't have to hypothesize. We've seen this. Ontario trucks are shipped all the way to Vancouver. They come back with guns. They come back with people. They come back with illegal marijuana. They come back with hard drugs. It is a significant criminal element involved in the contraband tobacco trade in Ontario, and it's not as harmless as selling cheap cigarettes. It's involved in human trafficking. It's involved in distribution of weapons. It leads to shootings on our streets, which we saw earlier this month.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Mr. Jeff Gaulin: An individual who was charged and arrested with being involved in contraband tobacco was gunned down in Toronto. So there are significant public safety issues in addition to the substantive public revenue issues. The Ontario government and the Ontario Legislature could see the conditions in Ontario improve with a significant crackdown in this trade.

Mr. Dave Smith: So it would be safe for me, then, to say that if I address the contraband tobacco, I increase my government coffers, but I'm also going to reduce the expenses on some of the other things I'm dealing with, like the war on drugs, like human trafficking and those types of things, and it's actually a further savings for the province of Ontario if we actually address it this way.

Mr. Jeff Gaulin: Absolutely, the criminal element realize that nobody cares much about tobacco and cigarettes, so they think that it's a low-risk criminal activity. But it is part of a much broader organized crime network that involves human trafficking, guns and—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for this presentation, and it also concludes the time for the whole panel.

I just want to remind all presenters, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. on Wednesday, January 26.

I want to thank all the presenters and the committee for this morning. We'll now recess until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The committee recessed from 1206 to 1301.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll call back together our meeting of the pre-budget consultations of the 2022 budget for the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. We have one housekeeping duty. I think MPP Kusendova has joined us. If she would just be recognized and tell us where she's at now.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Good afternoon, Chair. This is MPP Natalia Kusendova, and I am in Ontario this afternoon.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): With that, we will start this afternoon. I will remind everybody that each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. After we've heard all three presenters, we'll have 39 minutes of time allotted that will be for questions from the members of the committee. The questions will be divided

in two rounds: seven and a half minutes for both the government and opposition members, and then four and a half minutes for the independent members.

With that, we ask each presenter to identify themselves when they start their seven minutes. At six minutes, I will draw your attention to the clock running out to one minute, and I will cut it off on the exact time, even if it's mid-sentence. I do want to tell the presenters that the deadline for written submissions is the 26th. Anything you do not get finished saying today that you would like us to know, you can send that in. As long as it's in by the 26th, it will be part of the record.

SOCIETY OF UNITED PROFESSIONALS
RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION COUNCIL
OF ONTARIO
ONTARIO CONFEDERATION
OF UNIVERSITY FACULTY
ASSOCIATIONS

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): With that, we are starting with the Society of United Professionals. The floor is yours.

Ms. Michelle Johnston: Thank you, and good afternoon. I'm Michelle Johnston. I'm the president of the Society of United Professionals. I am joined today by Nathan Jackson, who is our research officer.

The society is a union of more than 8,000 professionals working in the public, private, regulatory and not-for-profit sectors, with the majority of our members working in the energy sector and the legal sector. That is where I will be focusing my attention today.

This next budget provides the province with an opportunity to make investments that will provide needed economic stimulus during the recovery from the pandemic, while also reducing carbon emissions to help meet our climate targets. The society believes the 2022 Ontario budget should address the following priorities:

- (1) electrify Ontario's transportation sector to boost the economy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
- (2) reverse the cuts to Legal Aid Ontario and improve access to justice in the province; and
- (3) repeal Bill 124 to restore free and fair collective bargaining.

I will now speak briefly to each of these and provide our recommendations. Currently, the transportation sector contributes 35% of Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions. More than half of those emissions are from passenger cars, trucks and motorcycles. Supporting a shift towards electrification in transportation is one of the most significant moves that the government could make in the province's fight against climate change, while also providing a crucial boost to the province's manufacturing sector during this economic recovery.

Ontario was once a national leader in electric vehicle sales, accounting for almost half of all reported BEV sales in Canada at its peak. But since the cancellation of the Electric Vehicle Incentive Program, Ontario has fallen

behind jurisdictions that offer electric vehicle rebate programs. Ontario should reintroduce the program to help establish a robust market for electric vehicles, and it should create a similar program for commercial fleet vehicles, particularly in sectors hardest hit by the pandemic.

Further, with the expectation of millions of new electric vehicles on the roads in the coming decades, Ontario will require the construction of infrastructure to support electric vehicles. That means first creating a network of charging stations that make choosing an electric vehicle a viable option for every Ontarian. The society is glad to see the government's commitment to the Ivy charging stations, which our members at Hydro One and OPG are playing a direct role in. We look forward to implementation and expansion of this program.

Additionally, the government needs to plan now to meet the future generation, transmission and distribution needs associated with increased electrification. The society applauds today's announcement that the government has asked OPG to investigate new opportunities for hydroelectric power in northern Ontario. We support all forms of carbon-free energy that will help us meet our growing electricity needs while reducing carbon emissions.

However, we also recognize that this is just one small step when what we need is a giant leap towards emission-free electrification. For example, the IESO predicts that just to meet the charging demand of electric vehicles, Ontario will need an additional 24 terawatt hours annually by 2042, which is roughly the current output of the Pickering nuclear station. Therefore, it is the society's strong recommendation that Ontario work with OPG to begin the process of investing in a new publicly owned and operated nuclear power station to replace Pickering.

From the electricity sector, I will now turn to Legal Aid Ontario. In its 2019 budget, the Ontario government announced a short-sighted and unpopular \$133-million cut to Legal Aid Ontario's budget. The result of this decision has been worse outcomes for litigants as well as higher costs to the province. As we said in our last consultation, every \$1 spent on legal aid saves \$6 in social spending. So we are asking that the government immediately reverse its funding cut to Legal Aid Ontario's budget.

Legal Aid Ontario receives revenue from both government funding and payments from the Law Foundation of Ontario. Since the law foundation revenue is derived from interest payments made on mixed trust accounts held by lawyers and paralegals, this revenue is highly dependent on interest rate levels. The Ontario government could provide stability to this funding by offering a funding guarantee to smooth law foundation revenues over time. This would mean that the government would reduce expenditures during periods of higher interest rates and would increase expenditures during periods of low interest rates. This would greatly stabilize funding.

Finally, I will turn to Bill 124. Society members and other essential public services have put their health—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Michelle Johnston: —and the health of their families at risk, going to work throughout the pandemic. The government has rewarded their service with a mandated 1% wage increase at a time when inflation in the province is at 3.5%. The society views Bill 124 as a circumvention of our statutory rights and a violation of our constitutional rights. Moreover, it is an unwarranted and unnecessary interference in free and fair collective bargaining. The society asks that the government repeal Bill 124. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for your presentation.

Our next presentation will be from the Residential Construction Council of Ontario. The same rules apply. There will be seven minutes. I'll let you know when we're down to one minute. And I ask everyone who is going to speak to introduce themselves for Hansard prior to speaking. With that, the floor is yours.

Mr. Richard Lyall: Good afternoon, Chair, Vice-Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. My name is Richard Lyall. I am the president of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario, also known as ResCon. I will be presenting with Amina Dibe, who will introduce herself shortly.

1310

I first want to thank you for providing us with time to share our recommendations for budget 2022. ResCon represents over 200 builders of all forms of high-rise, mid-rise, low-rise, market and social housing in the province. We work in co-operation with government and related stakeholders to offer realistic solutions to a variety of challenges affecting housing supply, many of which have wider social impacts.

Unfortunately, Canada is not at the forefront of approvals innovation, which is clear from international rankings. Canada only ranks 34th out of 35 OECD countries in the length of time it takes to get a general construction project approved, and only ranks 64th out of 190 countries by the World Bank on construction permitting.

We also have the highest amount of immigration amongst G7 countries per capita but the lowest housing supply, according to a new report from Scotiabank that came out last week. Ontario needs 650,000 more housing units just to meet the Canadian average and 1.2 million units to hit the G7 average. The Royal Bank notes—and this is worth noting—that there are many consequences for this, and that the lack of housing supply and affordability issues are affecting our ability to attract and retain skilled talent in Ontario and Canada.

We have long been promoting solutions and sponsoring research on these issues, which Amina will discuss shortly, and which should be included in the budget.

Amina?

Ms. Amina Dibe: We are pleased with outcomes of the housing supply summit and that the Premier and Minister Clark are committed to increasing housing supply and removing red tape. The number of development applications continues to increase to meet housing demands, yet limited resources at the municipal approvals level act as a

bottleneck for the ability of the private sector to deliver much-needed housing. The reliance on paper-based submissions, staffing constraints due to COVID-19 and the sheer number of approval agencies involved in getting a development application approved have slowed approval timelines and thus slowed the overall construction process.

With the support of over 30 entities, including the city of Toronto, a proposal for a centralized data exchange and e-permitting platform has been developed called One Ontario, for use by municipalities, provincial ministries, conservation authorities and all applicable approval and law agencies in Ontario for development and permitting processes. ResCon is recommending the province adopt the One Ontario proposal to innovate the development approvals process.

Building new housing is dependent on having an adequate skilled workforce to do so. We're grateful to have Monte McNaughton as the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development. He has been a champion for getting more people interested in the skilled trades. Domestic recruitment and retention alone, however, won't be able to keep pace with the over 40,000 workers needed to be trained and retained by 2030 in the GTA. Immigration of skilled trades workers who want to work and live in Ontario would complement domestic recruitment. However, the existing OINP system doesn't provide a pathway for certain in-demand tradespeople to come to Ontario to work from overseas. The province should expand the list of eligible professions to include NOC skill level C and D positions, allocate greater seats for general labourers and remove administrative burdens for employers.

As density increases in the GTA and we're building up, the demand for tower crane operators continues to grow. ResCon is a partner of Durham College and is supportive of the launch of their tower crane apprenticeship program. Being the only college with TDA status for tower crane apprenticeships, Durham has great potential to help train the next generation of needed tower crane operators. We echo Durham College's request for \$2 million in provincial funding to purchase and install the tower cranes required to deliver this program.

Many recommendations from the recently released youth advisers report have the potential to attract more youth into the trades and encourage employers to hire and train. As residential trades are mostly voluntary, and as the voluntary trades make up a large part of the overall construction industry, greater prioritization is needed to attract more youth to voluntary trades and to engage with employers.

ResCon recommends that the province prioritize the youth advisers report recommendations that address non-apprenticeable voluntary skilled trades and make it easier for employers to recruit, train and retain job seekers in the voluntary trades.

Municipal overreach is a term ResCon has coined whereby municipal governments act independently, contrary to the Ontario building code, mandating their own unique technical building requirements as they see fit, including requirements related to green standards and net-

zero buildings. While the province and federal government are working together to harmonize the Ontario building code with the national construction codes, municipalities are implementing their own unique technical requirements. This has undermined the research, subject matter expertise, industry consultation and testing that have gone into the process thus far.

The harmonization of these codes will help reduce barriers related to labour mobility, product manufacturing and building design, all while ensuring a path forward for net-zero buildings across Canada.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Amina Dibe: Municipalities acting independently and more hastily ahead of higher-tier governments could sometimes come with unintended consequences, adding additional barriers and red tape and slowing down the overall development approvals process. ResCon supports the provincial and national building code process over municipal programs, as built-in checks and balances vet code change proposals and institute accountability to the process before any changes can be made.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing should bolster their commitment to code harmonization and rein in the fragmented municipal requirements. That brings us to the end of ResCon's budget recommendations for 2022. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. I wonder if you could just state your name, which you didn't do at the start of your presentation.

Ms. Amina Dibe: Sure. Sorry about that. My name is Amina Dibe, manager of government and stakeholder relations at ResCon.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

We then move on to the next presentation, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations. Again, the same rules apply: seven minutes, we'll notify you at one minute, and anyone who speaks, state your name before you start your presentation so Hansard will know who's talking to us. Thank you very much, and the floor is yours.

Dr. Sue Wurtele: Thank you very much. My name is Sue Wurtele and I'm the president of OCUFA, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations. I'm also a professor at Trent University. With me this afternoon is Jenny Ahn, OCUFA's executive director. We would like to thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you today.

OCUFA is the provincial voice for university faculty in Ontario. We represent 17,000 full-time and contract professors and academic librarians in 30 member associations across the province. OCUFA's recommendations for the 2022 Ontario budget focus on two areas. The first is university funding, including per-student funding, funding for northern and bilingual grants, and research funding; and the second is faculty renewal, by which we mean the replacement of retiring faculty members with tenure or tenure-track faculty, and ensuring pathways to job security and equal pay for contract academics.

Our recommendations also take into account the alarming events that unfolded at Laurentian University last year with the devastating impacts of the insolvency proceedings. We put forward suggestions to ensure this doesn't happen at any other university in the province.

The recommendations are also informed by the important role that universities play in economic recovery and scientific advancement, both of which are more important than ever given the COVID-19 pandemic.

For over a decade, there has been an erosion of public funding and investment in Ontario's university sector. Considered on a per-student basis, inflation-adjusted operating allocations from the Ministry of Colleges and Universities have been falling since 2008-09. As a result, Ontario's universities are currently the lowest-funded in Canada, and this situation has continuously worsened over the last decade. Ontario's per-student funding levels now sit at 43% behind the rest of the country. It's critical that this government begins seriously considering the investment required to close this per-student funding gap.

Ontario's universities are essential economic engines and have a vital role to play in the economic recovery that our province desperately needs after the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ontario government needs to provide universities with strong, stable and long-term funding so they can effectively contribute to the province's economic recovery and innovation. A sensible step would be for Ontario to improve our level of per-student funding to enhance our national ranking by one step by 2027. Our written submission provides details and costings on how to accomplish this.

Further, and given the devastating insolvency proceedings at Laurentian University, it's important that this province meaningfully invest in northern and bilingual grants after years of funding stagnation. Increasing these grants is critical to ensure the longevity and sustainability of Ontario's northern and bilingual institutions, which have particular mandates and play extraordinarily important roles in their local communities as economic and knowledge centres.

1320

In terms of the state of student tuition: Currently, 60% of Ontario universities' operating income is provided through student fees. The devastating cuts to OSAP in 2019 burdened many students with less access to financial assistance, with more costly loans and higher amounts of debt. The changes to OSAP funding levels decreased the percentage of student financial assistance provided in grants from 92% to 67% and increased the percentage of financial assistance provided through loans from 8% to a staggering 33%. We provide further details regarding the accessibility of university education in our written submission.

Our second priority for Ontario faculty relates to faculty renewal and fairness for contract faculty. Stagnant funding has contributed to the increase of class sizes and ballooning of student-to-faculty ratios at Ontario's universities. Driven by universities' desperate need to replace lost provincial funding in the last decade, full-time student

enrolment has far outpaced full-time faculty hiring. As a result, Ontario now has the highest student-to-faculty ratio in Canada, and since 2000 that ratio has worsened substantially, increasing by more than 41%.

While full-time tenure-stream faculty hiring has stagnated, the reliance on contract faculty, initially a temporary stopgap measure to accommodate significant enrolment increases in the early 2000s, has become an entrenched strategy in universities across the province. Over half of faculty at Ontario universities are now working on contract, and OCUFA estimates that the number of courses they teach has nearly doubled since 2000. These faculty lack job security. They are regularly paid less than their tenure-stream colleagues, even while doing more work. They face unpredictable scheduling and very often juggle jobs at multiple institutions.

OCUFA recommends that, in this year's budget, the government launch a faculty renewal strategy, supported by a multi-year investment to support meaningful long-term change. To improve the student-to-faculty ratio by a modest margin and improve Ontario's ranking by one step, OCUFA estimates that some 8,000 full-time professors would need to be hired by 2026. This would substantially improve Ontario's average student-to-faculty ratio from 31 to 24 students. Again, our written submission provides further details and costing to achieve this goal.

In conclusion, to guarantee a high-quality learning experience for the next generation of Ontarians and to ensure a robust knowledge sector to support Ontario's success in a post-pandemic world, the province must invest—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Dr. Sue Wurtele: Thank you—the province must invest in our universities and faculty, so that these vital institutions and the students who learn there can thrive. This can be achieved through investing in university funding and faculty renewal, as well as increasing grants and reducing loans for students at Ontario universities.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation. That concludes the three presenters.

We will now start with the questioning, and we will start with the independent member. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the presenters this afternoon. I'm actually going to start with OCUFA, because there was one part of your presentation that I really want to make sure is captured for the record, and I didn't hear it. When you talked about the cuts to student financial aid and how it shifted the burden onto the backs of students for post-secondary education, resulting in higher debt and an increased financial burden, you said that in 2019 it moved from 8% to—I just didn't hear that percentage that it moved to in terms of loan burden.

Dr. Sue Wurtele: Yes, the number was that the percentage of financial assistance provided through loans has gone from 8% to 33%.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: So then students are now saddled with that higher debt burden.

Dr. Sue Wurtele: That's correct.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'm wondering how it has affected enrolment, because part of the motivation for student financial aid is the downstream motivation of young people thinking that it's an achievable goal for them. We wanted to see more equity in the education system, that it's not just about you being able to afford to go, but it's actually, "This is the right place for you, and the financial resources will be there to support it." Have you noticed any change in demographics in terms of those accessing post-secondary?

Dr. Sue Wurtele: Yes, we've noticed a significant change in terms of the retention from year over year. Students will start and then, particularly with the stresses of the pandemic, what folks who are doing exit interviews with students who have decided to take a break or to drop out of school are finding is that the lack of funding and insecurity around their funding, the lack of jobs and the like that they usually would carry as part of what most students do when they attend universities, is really suffering. This is what they're reporting to us about the impact.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: And I can imagine it's just stretching out the time that it takes, which actually delays their jumping into the labour market and into their careers, so it's hurting all of us. It's actually a lag on our economy and our productivity.

I want to move and shift to the precarity of the post-secondary education system due to the lack of investments. We see the very terrible situation that is happening with Laurentian, which affects learning in the north. It affects the French language. There are just so many risks there. So part of what I'm wondering about, if you can shine some perspective on it, is the performance-based aspect. More of the university funding is shifted to certain performance metrics, which actually really depends on where in the province you are located as well as the across-the-board cut to tuition, regardless of income and need, that also took away base funding from universities and from post-secondary. Can you talk about what that has done and what potentially is happening there with the stability of the system?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Dr. Sue Wurtele: Yes, for sure. I may turn some of this over to our executive director, Jenny Ahn, in a moment, but just let me start by indicating that we certainly have seen—sorry; I'm losing my train of thought. The performance-based funding is definitely something that universities struggle under, because what we find is that the metrics can change and the universities pivot to try to address this. And universities, rightfully so, depend on a high degree of stability, I think, and pivoting in those regards can be really challenging.

I think Jenny Ahn might have something to add.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes, jump in, Jenny. You only have a few seconds.

Ms. Jenny Ahn: Okay, sure. What we do know, especially during this pandemic, is that the performance-based funding isn't something that works as a metric. In fact, when we look at the SMAs that this current government

has put in place, they've put it on hold during the pandemic, because they can't measure—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes the time for that presentation, but I would ask the last speaker to introduce themselves for Hansard. Jenny?

Ms. Jenny Ahn: Oh, sorry; I missed that. Do I get to continue?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): No—

Ms. Jenny Ahn: Oh, my name. It's Jenny Ahn, OCUFA executive director. Sorry about that.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

We now will go to the government. Mr. Parsa.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Thank you very much, Chair. It's much appreciated.

I want to start off, first of all, by thanking all my colleagues on this committee for the great questions that have been asked already. I certainly want to thank all the presenters who have been here this morning and yesterday, and certainly this panel. Thank you very much for joining us and helping us with some answers through your submissions. It's incredibly helpful to us.

My question is going to be to the Residential Construction Council of Ontario. I want to start off with them, if you don't mind, Richard, please. Despite the pandemic, we've seen and we continue to see homes being developed, and a lot of it is as a result of measures that were put in place by the government. In fact, we've seen the highest number of housing starts in our province, Richard. A lot of credit goes to stakeholders and our partners in the construction industry and everyone that's involved.

1330

But when it comes to housing, we're nowhere near where we need to be, Richard. We need more homes, we need to build homes faster, and we need a variety of homes built. In fact, I think you referenced the Scotiabank report that talked about the 1.2 million homes that we need just for us to be able to match the average ratio of homes per capita to the G7 peers.

I'm just wondering if you can elaborate, first on the urgency of why this is so important. And I'll go back to some of the work that's since been done with regard to a task force that the minister has put together with a group of professionals that can help us within the sector. Also, yesterday, for example, we saw the provincial-municipal housing summit by the minister and the Premier to help us build homes, and a variety of homes.

So I'm going to just pause there. Maybe you can help us: Why is this so urgent? And then I just want to follow up on a couple of questions. Thank you.

Mr. Richard Lyall: Sure. You know, I think you said it perfectly. I mean, just look at those numbers—the shortages. These are not metrics that we've created or something else. We're talking about the OECD and the World Bank. We know from the media reports every day what's happening out there and we know from further reports that there are extenuating circumstances here.

Toronto Community Housing commissioned a great, big data report a couple of years ago that showed that if

certain improvements aren't made and units made livable—they actually measured the health care consequences and health care budget consequences of inadequate housing and the cost of the renovations, which aren't cheap—they have a pretty expensive process. The health care costs of not acting were actually going to be twice that.

Unfortunately, we have a lot of silos in our system. We have layers of government and a lot of actors there. We have got 45 different government agencies of one form or another that are involved in the housing approvals process. There's often a lack of accountability and transparency, and certain standards just aren't being met. The planning access site plan approval should take a month. Well, on average, they take 18 months to get through, and that costs money. The builders build to a market, largely. Even when we build social housing—we're building social housing for non-profits or whoever—the companies that do that obviously have to stay in business. They can't do it by losing money.

Those realities are real. This problem has been a slow-moving freight train. It got ignored for a very long time, much like infrastructure did. Thankfully—and I'm not buttering up the current government, but I have to say, and I expressed it today, we have got one of the best Ministers of Housing we have had in years—in decades. I have worked with probably over 20 Ministers of Housing in the past; some of them very good.

But we have a very serious problem here. We're starting to lose talent. God knows what's happening. A fifth of the kids in Canada are living in poverty, and I can tell you, that's got a lot to do with housing. And it's mind-boggling that a country like Canada is in this situation. The solutions are there. But again, you just look at those metrics. The current government has done quite a few things to tackle this. Very laudable, commendable, but we've got to do a lot more.

Of course, what COVID did was it just made a bad situation way worse because on top of everything else, now we've got to—and we stayed open. We said, "Look, housing is a need." We stayed open for the pandemic. We developed the first health and safety protocol of any industry to do that. We did it in a week. We've worked successfully, but our supply chains are a mess. We've got too much stimulus in the system right now. Money supply has gone through the roof, so there's too much money floating around out there right now and it's fuelling what's been happening in the housing market.

Of course, people aren't travelling anymore, so they're really paying more attention to working at home and stuff like that. This is urgent. It's critical not just for, obviously, our industry. We're going flat out right now, and you're right. Starts did jump. We are as busy as we possibly can be. We're looking for skilled trades. We have a shortage there. But that again is just symptomatic of a problem that's been building up for a generation. We haven't paid attention to things. We've got one level of government that increases immigration, to a massive number—and we need immigrants. That's who built this country. But

nobody asked the question on the other side to say, “Where are they going to live?” We can’t continue like this.

Anyone who thinks that this isn’t a serious problem—I don’t know what to say. I think one of the problems here is that the people who are making decisions about how housing gets built, and the rules—they’re not affected by this.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Mr. Richard Lyall: They’re my generation. It’s serious.

Good things are happening, though, but it’s going to take us awhile to work our way through this and out of it. We need to get innovative really quickly. We need to modernize. We need to digitize. That is happening now. We’ve been at this for a long time. There are analytics, big data analytics, that could be put to better use to measure and quantify the effect of not having enough housing—sorry; thanks.

Mr. Michael Parsa: No, that’s good. Thank you, Richard. I don’t know how much time we’ve got left, but before I get—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Twenty seconds.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I know I have another round, so I’m going to ask you quickly on—when we talk about housing, not only do we know that we need housing, but the variety of the housing that we’re in need of is also just as important. That’s a big part of the discussion that we need to have as well, and how quickly these houses need to be built, because there is an urgency here. If you can just touch on the red tape aspect—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We now will go to the official opposition. MPP—

Mr. Ian Arthur: Arthur.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I feel like I want to keep calling you Minister, but not anymore.

Richard, my question—I’m going back to you: I want to talk a little bit about what MPP Parsa was talking to. I want to talk about how much cost there is baked in before you ever get a shovel in the ground. I mean, you can’t put up a single-storey bungalow right now without probably going and getting an engineer’s stamp on that, simply to try and speed it through the process a little bit faster. So you have homebuilders going through extreme measures to do as much as they possibly can on the front end to counteract any delays that they may encounter over the zoning, the site plans, the permitting that’s required in that. We’re talking about, from planning to development, three to eight years, depending on the size of the project.

You talked a little bit about the disconnect between efforts by the province to streamline things and then individual municipalities superseding them. They may be superseding them with the best of intentions, for greening buildings, for making them more efficient, for taking the proactive steps that should be on the province’s agenda but aren’t necessarily there yet. How can we deal with that? Because the cost of goods, the labour shortfall—we talk about that a lot. I think you are uniquely positioned to

speak to the front end of that, before we ever spend a dollar on purchasing lumber or other materials.

Mr. Richard Lyall: So how do we deal with the supply chain and cost of materials?

Mr. Ian Arthur: No, the front end of that, the permitting and before we ever even get to that place, because that’s integral. If we can’t get to a place where we’re actually putting up houses quickly—

Mr. Richard Lyall: Yes, yes. One of the things that’s being contemplated right now, and certainly by the city of Toronto, is a pre-approvals process. Some other municipalities have done that. Done properly, that can help a lot to indicate how long it’s going to take something to get through the approvals pipeline.

But we really do need to modernize and digitize our process. We are not a leader on this globally, in Canada. We don’t even have a BIM mandate in Canada. We’re the only G20 country that does not have that. If you really want to do green and you want to measure GHG and carbon and whatever, you’ve got to be on BIM, right? We’ve really got to up our game. There is leadership that is needed there. Unfortunately, our wonderful federation—it has its advantages, but when it comes to developing a focus on a problem like this, given its importance, which I think is now quite obvious, it’s difficult to do.

Now, at the front end, yes, there’s a lot of risk baked in for proponents of projects. One of the things we know from other, more advanced jurisdictions—we brought them over from Europe some years ago, and now, one of the leading companies in North America is a company that we first introduced to this market over here. It’s been slow to go, but one of the things that they’ve known there is by streamlining a process, modernizing it, having some discipline around when things get done.

1340

Remember, we have to utilize fee-for-service monopoly services. If they decide, “Well, we’re not going to do it this way. We might get you an answer six months from now,” or “12 months from now,” we’re left waiting. That’s often the situation. That’s why, rather than someone saying, “Yes, if you want to do that project there, you’ll get that done in three and a half to four years”—it might be five to 10 years. And, of course, money drives housing investment, and critical to that is risk, and risk is driven by accountability and transparency. That’s what we need more of, and that’s where we need to really up our game on that.

And then we’ve got to do something about the costs. Look, a new million-dollar home in Ontario, you’re talking about \$250,000 in taxes and levies, and then you’re probably talking about—it’s not even \$400,000 now, but let’s use the million-dollar number. The land is \$400,000. And then your cost to build is probably what’s left over in amongst some other soft costs. It’s a tough market. We’ve got a lot of builders right now that are in trouble, because our material and supply chains are in shreds, and our material costs have gone through the roof. We don’t really control some of that.

And, of course, this current thing with the federal government and the truckers, all of a sudden, at the border—you talk about bad timing. Who thought of that? It doesn't make sense. But now we're in even further jeopardy. I was talking to a builder today. The only source of this particular kind of glue that all builders use is out of Florida, and they said it got delayed because of a trucking problem. They said, "When can we get it?" and they said, "Well, you can pick it up now if you come to Florida and get it"—right? That's what we're dealing with.

No, we'll get through. We've got—I call it a pig and a python right now. We'll get through. The next year to two years is going to be really tough, but we really have to up our game and really get innovative. With municipalities, sometimes they're with the—we've had municipalities that have gone green. They've said, "This is the only way you can go," and we've said, "That particular way is actually a private sector system, and you've just caused a monopoly." We have to use a monopoly service provider for a particular way to build green. They're well intended and they mean to do that, but building science is not uncomplicated. It's a complicated business, and that's why we have a building code and a building code review process. We're already well past Paris 2030. A lot of people don't realize that. This obsession with net zero, what we really want to do is get to near-net zero, but the cost of getting to net zero—some of the measures that have been invoked by municipalities actually haven't reduced any greenhouse gas emissions at all. This is where we're saying, "Let's do the building science." It's kind of like vaccinations in a way. "Let's do the building science"—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Mr. Richard Lyall: "Let's get this right, and let's up the code." The reason why the code was introduced in 1975 was so that builders—every one, right across the province—would understand that this is what you need to do in building that building to make it safe. Now we're kind of jumping around all over the place. It's not the right way to go, and it increases costs and increases risks.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Okay. Thank you very much. I appreciate that. I think we're basically out of time, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

Next, we go to the second round for the independent. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to ask the Society of United Professionals to speak about the work that you're doing on empowerment and on looking at our post-pandemic society moving from inequality, equality, equity and justice, and really going towards justice. You talk about the cuts to legal aid. The 30% cut has really been a burden on certain segments of our society at a time when we really should be aware of the inequalities and those issues towards justice. I just really want you to expand on that and looking at a post-pandemic society that is more just. Go ahead, Michelle or Nathan.

Ms. Michelle Johnston: Thank you for that question. Yes, we've always taken the position that the cuts that the

government made, the \$133-million cuts to Legal Aid's budget, really have had an impact on access to justice.

Something that you'll read in our submission, as well, is that we talk about the new Toronto courthouse and the amalgamation of all of those courthouses into one. When you think of the constituents in those ridings who are now going to have to travel further distances for their cases and whatnot, we believe that that simply takes away from access to justice. We need to make sure we focus on the folks who are out there who have been severely impacted by the pandemic, giving them the opportunities, the avenues, to be able to access justice where they need to.

I think that with the cuts—and then with the increase in the interest rates, with regard to the law foundation funding—that, on top of the pandemic, is going to make it even harder for individuals to have access. We're looking to this government to make sure that there is some equality here, that there is access to justice, because these people are the folks who are suffering the most and they need to have that ability. It's simple.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you. And I see justice as not just in the actual system, but really accessing resources and what you need to survive and to live your potential.

You mentioned as well—your presentation sort of really brought in a lot of different perspectives. You talked about how the EV market has fallen behind in Ontario because of the cut to the subsidy, while other places like Quebec and the United States actually saw that there was a need to go with the direction of the market, which was moving by automakers to electric. If you can also just talk about what needs to be corrected there, that's something the Ontario Liberals certainly have seen as important to address. We want to address climate change and we want to address even just modernization and innovation. We've got to make sure that we are—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: —looking towards making our investments where innovation is occurring and going. Go ahead.

Ms. Michelle Johnston: Thanks for that, Mitzie. We've all talked a little bit about it. Climate change is the greatest threat to our province and the world as a whole. Ontario is in a quite unique position because we do have such a clean energy grid, and the best bang for our buck when it comes to fighting carbon emissions is to transition our transportation sector to electric vehicles. Half of Ontario's transportation carbon emissions come from passenger vehicles, so we have to tackle that challenge. That's a must.

In a province that is as big and geographically diverse as Ontario is, it isn't feasible to expect everyone to get around by public transit, bike or on foot. Private vehicles are necessary, so we need to make that transition to electric. As with all newer technologies, adoption—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question.

We now will go to the government. MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm going to come back to ResCon. There were a couple of things that Ms. Dibe touched on that I want to do an expansion on.

You mentioned the NOC C and D codes and how we should be doing some stuff around immigration based on that. I personally know what you're talking about when you're talking about NOC codes. I was the lead developer for Ontario's most used experiential software for OYAP and co-operative education. But this is being broadcast, and I would imagine that the vast majority of people in Ontario have no idea what the NOC codes are, let alone C and D versus A, B or 0 to 9. Could you expand a little bit about what you were referring to then, please, on the NOC C and D job categories?

Ms. Amina Dibe: Yes. The NOC codes are employment codes that are used countrywide, I believe, and because immigration is obviously primarily a federal responsibility, the OINP system bases a lot of the labour conditions on the NOC codes, labour market demands and information.

1350

The two NOC codes that we're specifically talking about relate to general labourers, which is a voluntary trade, which I kind of got into in my other parts of the training and apprenticeship portion. Voluntary trades make up a majority of the residential industry. However, they're not traditionally recognized compared to compulsory trades, and that's because you don't need to have a formal apprenticeship or a licence. So that makes it hard for people who want to come from overseas to work in the voluntary trades, again, because there is no need for a professional licence or apprenticeship. We're requesting that those general labour voluntary NOC codes be included and encompassed in the OINP system.

Mr. Dave Smith: On the NOC code C, just as an example, a long-haul trucker would be one, and part of the supply chain that Richard was just talking about—that would be something that could definitely help on it.

At present, if you fall in one of those categories of NOC C or D, it requires provincial nomination in order for you to be accepted as an immigrant through that nomination process.

Again, just for clarification: Are you suggesting, then, that the federal government make the change so that if you fit in NOC C or D, you don't have to have a provincial nomination; you could come to Canada and seek employment directly without having to have one of the provinces step in and make the recommendation that you be brought over?

Ms. Amina Dibe: We're requesting that MLTSD work with the federal government to expand the list of eligible professions to include, like you're saying, the NOC skill level C and D positions, and then also allocate within the OINP 1,000 of the 9,000 seats for NOC C and D general labourers who can self-attest to having construction skill sets, having verifiable work experience from overseas and having already secured sponsorship with an employer.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'd like to go back to the building permit process, from the municipalities side. You talked about it being a paper-based application and that we need to get to something that's more digitized, but you also mentioned the number of agencies that get an opportunity

to comment on it. At present, there isn't any requirement that those agencies concurrently comment on something, and it is possible for one organization to make a comment and then a second organization to expand upon that first comment and extend the time period. Developers in my area are telling me that it's a minimum of 10 years to build anything that is of any substance, and in some cases it is upwards of 12 and 15. This is putting significant pressure on the final cost of construction, because you have all of those carrying costs that someone has to recover, as well as the interest, and you have the lost opportunity costs, because you've got money tied up that couldn't be someplace else.

You mentioned the One Ontario application program that you've promoted. Could you give us a little bit of an expansion on what that process is, just so that we who aren't involved in it have a better understanding of how that might be a red tape reduction and speed up the process?

Mr. Richard Lyall: There are other jurisdictions in the world—we don't rank in the most advanced ones, although now we're moving there. The province is all over this. We just can't get to it fast enough. There are really two elements to this. One of the things is, we need a data exchange standard, or call it a data exchange platform, so that any entity that's involved in the process, regardless of their level of sophistication, can share data securely. That's critical in a full-blown e-permitting system. We've got entities that think they do e-permitting, but it's not really e-permitting. What we're talking about is, all the applicable law groups—certainly, with larger projects, because they're important—would be included in a file with a communications system where things can happen concurrently rather than sequentially or in a linear fashion. If you combine that with some performance standards on some groups—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Mr. Richard Lyall: —where they have to respond by a certain period of time, rather than where you just get things—I've had major developers that had projects stalled for a year because they were waiting for a formal letter to confirm what they were told verbally, that everything was okay. Before they could go to the next step, they needed this. There are some really nutty things that have been happening.

We're not talking about creating something new here. Again, there are other jurisdictions that are way ahead of us on this stuff, so it's not something new. I would love to see Ontario not just catch up, but become a leader. I mean, we've got other jurisdictions that are selling their approvals know-how to us. Why can't we sell this to other jurisdictions, you know, this kind of thing? So your comment and thinking are right on the money.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We now move to the opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to all the presenters—interesting conversation this afternoon.

I want to start with OCUFA. Thanks for your presentation. I have two universities and a college in my riding and

I'm very much in contact with what's happening on campus, Susan. I think as the years have progressed, first through the Liberals and now to the PC Party, we've seen a steady decline in base funding. The fact that student fees are carrying the majority of the costs is not sustainable. It's just not a sustainable situation that we're in. I've actually heard from faculty on both campuses that they have come to think of our university campuses as the biggest temp agencies in Ontario because of contract workers. So I really wanted just to give you an opportunity to explain how that affects the overall education experience of students.

This government has 70 days to table this budget. Budget 2022 is going to be one of the most important budgets, I think, in the history of this province, and we need to make the case for that investment in staffing on campus. Please go ahead.

Dr. Sue Wurtele: Thank you very much for the opportunity to address this. You're absolutely right: The proliferation of contract faculty positions has been a natural response on the part of university administrations because of the drop in funding, but it comes with extraordinarily high costs for students. Students are increasingly unable to know in advance which faculty member is teaching a course. Faculty are often hired at the very last minute to teach a course, which has implications in terms of their ability to prep. Students report that they have a very hard time finding a faculty member later on to mentor them, potentially to come back and offer them letters of recommendation when they're trying to seek job placements and such. So we see a large number of places where this is creating a really insecure university foundation, and it's just been very, very challenging.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for that. I think you said that we would have to hire 16,000 new faculty. Is that correct?

Dr. Sue Wurtele: I think we said 8,000 full-time faculty by 2026, and that would move us up one step, I believe. That doesn't solve the problem in its entirety, but it certainly does a good job of capturing how dire the situation is in terms of the transition that universities have seen.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. The stats you showed around grants versus loans also tell a story of who can actually access our post-secondary education system. I hear often from students in that regard.

Thank you very much for being here. I'm going to take a closer look at your detailed submission, especially for the numbers and the investment piece. But as always, I appreciate the work that your members do on our campuses.

I'm going to move over to Michelle. Michelle, your submission from the Society of United Professionals is very detailed—I want to thank you for that—particularly on the legal aid component. I'm just going to pull it up here. You referenced the cut of \$133 million that the Ontario government made, I think, back in 2019. We've actually heard several delegations throughout this week who have detailed the direct impact that that cut has to

access to justice, the delay in the access to justice and the outcomes and particularly who that cut is affecting. So I just wanted to give you another opportunity to address this cut and really make the case for reversing that \$133-million cut.

1400

Also, in your submission, you mentioned ending the directive limiting LAO to the use of federal funds for immigration and refugee cases. I wanted to hear more about that from you, please. So go ahead.

Ms. Michelle Johnston: Thanks for that, Catherine. The cuts to legal aid were far more impactful in denying access to justice than any improvements that the government had made with their modernization bill, for example, and the pandemic, as I said before, has even exacerbated all of that. But we truly believe—and we've seen it through the folks at legal aid, the struggles they're having to go through in dealing with their clients, trying to represent them, providing them with the right avenues, because the workload has increased on the backs of the Legal Aid Ontario lawyers who are having to take care of these clients. That's important to also note: that because of the cuts, the workload has increased, which has then diminished the ability for the folks at legal aid to actually be able to service their clientele. It is a big struggle.

I might—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Sorry—you also mentioned that this increases the cost to the province. Can you make that point as well, please?

Ms. Michelle Johnston: Yes, and I think we made that in our last point. I might ask Nathan to jump in here on that one. For every \$1 spent on legal aid, there's \$6 in savings from a social perspective. Nathan might have a better breakdown of those numbers than I would.

Mr. Nathan Jackson: Nathan Jackson, Society of United Professionals. I don't have a bigger breakdown on those numbers, but I do want to highlight one other thing that we mentioned in our submission, which is, the way LAO is funded—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Nathan Jackson: —you can see on page 90, we showed the law foundation funding they receive. They actually receive additional funding from the law foundation based on interest paid off of legal and paralegal trusts. That's directly driven by interest rates in Canada and the real estate market. Real estate transactions are what fuel that trust. When you tell people that access to justice is highly dependent on interest rates in real estate, people kind of scratch their heads and wonder why. They were able to scratch by after the initial cut because that law foundation funding was so high, but when interest rates were cut during the pandemic, they lost about \$80 million in that additional revenue. That's really what has put them down into this funding crisis.

Part of what we want to see is not just the cut restored, but also to guarantee a minimum level of funding—that regardless of what interest rates and law foundation revenue would do, LAO knows they're going to get a consistent, stable amount of funding to provide access to justice.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for this presentation and this panel.

CONSERVATION ONTARIO

ONTARIO COALITION
FOR BETTER CHILD CARE

CANADIAN BEVERAGE ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The first presenter for the next round is Conservation Ontario. As we have done with others, when you start your presentation, if you would kindly introduce yourself to make sure that it's in Hansard properly. If there's more than one speaker, do that in both cases for when they speak.

Mr. Andy Mitchell: Thank you very much, Chair Hardeman. It's good to see you again. I also see that our local MPP for Peterborough, for my area, is also online. Hello, Dave. I will be sharing my time with Kim Gavine, who is the general manager.

Good afternoon. My name is Andy Mitchell. I am the chair of Conservation Ontario, an organization that represents Ontario's 36 conservation authorities. Many of you may be familiar with your local conservation authority. These organizations deliver watershed-based natural resource programs in communities all across the province. I am the chair of the Otonabee region conservation authority in Peterborough. I'm also the mayor of Selwyn township.

Over the past two years, the province has undertaken a review of the Conservation Authorities Act and has confirmed the mandate of conservation authorities. We are to undertake water-based programs to protect people and property from flooding and other natural hazards; protect drinking water; conserve and manage land; and support other activities that conserve natural resources for economic, social and environmental benefits.

As a local municipal politician and a former federal Minister of Agriculture, I can attest to just how much we need conservation authorities in Ontario. Conservation authorities provide a protective patchwork of watershed management programs that help us to adapt to the heat and extreme climate-change-related weather. They work closely with local landowners to deliver programs on behalf of all levels of government, especially the province. On behalf of the province, conservation authorities deliver the Ontario drinking water source protection program and monitor water quality and quantity in partnership with the province and others.

But it is our expertise in watershed-based flood management that often captures the attention of others. When the province of British Columbia was experiencing the devastating flood event last December, they sent out a call to Ontario conservation authorities for help. Immediately, a total of 53 conservation authority staff, and 18 authorities, quickly volunteered to help out. Fortunately, flooding impacts began to subside, and the authorities stood down.

To maintain the expertise of conservation authorities, we urge the province to consider increasing current levels of funding and to make new investments in protecting people, property and the environment. Addressing the growing climate change challenges is not just the job of local municipalities and other partners. We need the province as well.

A good example of your support is for the Ontario drinking water source protection program. I would like to say thank you for your recent commitment for two-year multi-year funding for the program. This will help us meet an important conservation authority objective: the long-term planning and implementation of drinking water source protection.

We are here today to tell you about our other provincially mandated programs which need similar attention, and for this I'm going to turn it over to Kim Gavine, our general manager. Kim?

Ms. Kim Gavine: Good afternoon. My name is Kim Gavine, general manager with Conservation Ontario. Extreme weather and other climate change impacts take a costly toll on the well-being of Ontario's residents, on our infrastructure and with the functioning of business and industry. We need only to look at the recent and tragic events in British Columbia. The disastrous flooding that took place had a major impact on people's homes and livelihoods, on drinking water, infrastructure, food supplies and the environment. The key to a more resilient Ontario lies in understanding how nature is so closely connected to our well-being and to our economy, and then doing everything we can to protect, restore and conserve it. We need to reimagine the value of nature.

Conservation authorities are key delivery agents for the province around flooding, conservation lands and drinking water source protection. Their watershed programs protect people from flooding, reduce costly damages, ensure safe drinking water, support sustainable growth and protect our Great Lakes.

Conservation authorities play an important role in how we grow in Ontario. They facilitate a provincial housing strategy by balancing growth and environmental pressures. Since April 2019, conservation authorities have been making improvements to CA plan review and permitting activities by increasing the speed of approvals and reducing red tape.

Conservation Ontario applauds the government's establishment of a streamlined development approval fund to modernize, streamline and accelerate housing applications. We believe expanding its scope to include interactions between municipalities and conservation authorities will positively enhance the impacts of this initiative.

We are asking for your attention on four items:

(1) The provincially mandated natural hazard work of conservation authorities is woefully underfunded. Funding and technical support is needed for programs, aging infrastructure, flood plain mapping and the development of natural asset management plans, as now required by the Conservation Authorities Act. The province could also top up federal natural hazards programs to assist in infrastructure and flood plain mapping improvements.

1410

(2) New funding is needed for the maintenance and operation of conservation lands. Conservation authorities manage about 500 conservation areas, and since the start of the pandemic, there has been a significant increase in the number of people visiting these areas. We've gone from approximately eight million people per year to 10 million. Improvements are needed to bridges, trails, washroom facilities and parking lots that were built years ago to accommodate far fewer users. We need to be able to help meet the demands of the residents.

(3) Provincial support needs to be provided to target programs that protect and restore Ontario's green infrastructure. Simply put, we need funding for stewardship and green infrastructure programs in order to plant more trees, protect wetlands and build shoreline resilience along the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.

(4) Conservation authorities are an important source of local watershed science, and it's this work that supports the decisions which are made around Ontario's environment. Provincial funding is needed for technological improvements in expanded monitoring and reporting systems.

In conclusion, there are all kinds of measurable outcomes when you support the work of conservation authorities. There are reduced risks and cost from flooding and erosion, there's less red tape and more sustainable growth that supports a provincial housing strategy, there are clean and sustainable drinking water sources, clean air and reduced heat vulnerability and, most importantly, there is improved public health and reduced health care costs.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Kim Gavine: Investing in conservation authorities pays off for all of us. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that presentation.

The next presenter will be Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. We ask that each person, if they're going to speak, introduce themselves. I will give you a notice when you've reached the six-minute point of a seven-minute presentation. Thank you very much, and the floor is yours.

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: Thank you very much. Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Carolyn Ferns and I'm the public policy coordinator at the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care is Ontario's central advocacy group for a universal, affordable, quality system of early learning and child care for Ontario's children. Our members are non-profit child care programs, educators, parents and community organizations from across the province.

More than 500,000 Ontario children access licensed child care every day. Every day, Ontario's families and our economy depend on child care. This has never been more clear than in this pandemic. We have relied on emergency child care for essential service workers, and since June 2020, child care programs have remained open even when schools or other parts of our community and our economy have been closed.

Through the pandemic, we have seen how child care programs are so important for our families, and child care is going to be vitally important for our social and economic recovery from the pandemic. This is a penny that has dropped for many more people, including employers and governments all across the country. I think every employer who's been on a Zoom call with an employee who has a toddler crawling on their head now understands that Ontario can't work without child care.

But while other jurisdictions across Canada—provinces and the federal government—have taken bold steps forward to support and expand child care, sadly, in Ontario we seem to be stuck in the past and losing ground quickly. While hundreds of thousands of Ontario families depend on the licensed child care system every day, right now that system is in crisis.

Child care is not affordable for many families [*inaudible*]. Child care programs are experiencing a workforce crisis so deep that they're having to limit enrolment, have rolling closures, close rooms and, in some cases, close whole programs. This workforce crisis is driven by the chronically low wages in child care—early childhood educators who realize they could make more working at Timmy's or Costco than educating our youngest learners.

It's hard for me to adequately describe the depth of frustration that I hear from those front-line child care workers. These are people who put their heart and soul into working each day with young children—children who are too young to be vaccinated, too young to know how to mask yet. But the programs that these child care workers are in are desperate for an adequate supply of PPE, N95 masks, HEPA filters, rapid tests. Child care workers and the families that they serve have now been ineligible for publicly funded PCR testing.

If we pull back and look more broadly at the financial picture for child care, provincial child care allocations for this year are flat despite all of the rising costs that everybody is experiencing. Next year, the province is planning to cut child care funding by imposing costlier changes on municipalities. And I think, critically, we are the only province not to sign on to the federal child care plan, which would provide more than \$10 billion in federal funding to help make child care more affordable, make programs more stable and increase wages and decent work for early childhood educators and child care workers.

To move forward, we need a provincial plan to make our young children's care as safe as possible and to prevent the collapse of the child care sector, and then to build and expand the publicly funded child care system. Step one must be signing on to the federal child care plan. If Ontario fails to sign before March 31, we risk losing that first year of federal funding—over \$1 billion in federal funds for child care.

In addition to signing on, Ontario needs a real plan for child care. The child care community has been busy developing a road map to universal child care in Ontario which sets out our vision and a shared path forward for Ontario child care. We've done that through consultation

with child care programs, families and communities across the province. Our road map features 20 policy interventions that can transform early learning and child care in Ontario from a market-based patchwork to a comprehensive, publicly funded system. It's a road map that the Ontario government can use to make positive change for families and the child care sector. What our road map does is to tackle the issues of affordability for parents, decent work for educators and creating enough spaces for all as three facets of one unified plan. I think that the time for dribs and drabs or one new centre here when two more close has to be over. We need to be having system-thinking—and really thinking about how we can move the whole system forward. Our road map is built with full and sufficient public funding and overarching system-building and democratic governance for child care. All of that becomes possible—we can have affordable fees for families and decent work and pay for educators and enough spaces for all children who need them, but the first step has to be signing on to the federal child care plan and unlocking that \$10-billion-plus in federal funding so that we can get to work in the child care community making positive changes for our families. Thank you so much.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for your presentation.

Our next presentation is from the Canadian Beverage Association. I believe you were here to hear the instructions—there are seven minutes, and the one-minute mark, and introduce yourself when you start speaking. With that, the floor is yours.

Mr. Jim Goetz: I'm Jim Goetz, president of the Canadian Beverage Association. Thank you for inviting me here today to represent the beverage industry in Ontario. Our comments today focus on the need to help the beverage industry improve environmental performance, achieve economic prosperity and improve health outcomes.

The non-alcoholic beverage industry directly employs 7,700 Ontarians in more than 60 production facilities, offices and distribution centres across Ontario, several of which are located in the ridings of the MPPs on this committee. It is also responsible for generating \$2.9 billion in economic activity and contributing over \$170 million in provincial tax revenue. Our industry employs a wide variety of employees, the majority of them unionized, including assembly line workers, truckers and health and safety workers, as just a small example. These numbers tell the story of the potential of our sector in Ontario. They also tell the story of a sector that has its challenges.

Simply put, we have been falling behind competitors, with decreased investment, output and jobs. Consider the following: Investment in manufacturing was about 7% lower in 2019 than it was in 2005 regarding spending on machinery, equipment and intellectual property. Inflation, of course, in Canada is at an 18-year high of 4.7%, which is leading to higher food and beverage prices, and which will likely lead to lost jobs and economic activity in the province. Together, however, we can work with the government to help reverse these trends.

Our members have a significant track record of making a substantial investment in Ontario's economy. A KPMG

economic impact assessment determined that for every dollar our industry spends on production, 85 cents of that dollar is retained in the provincial economy. According to KPMG, this is higher than the provincial average.

1420

That said, we want to commend the government for the actions it has taken to date to help our industry. The finalization of the extended producer responsibility regulations, for example; the creation of advanced manufacturing innovation competitiveness programs; and establishing the agri-food processing investment fund all have been positive steps.

Based on these themes identified by our members, we have the following recommendations for budget 2022.

A focus of the budget should be improving data collection on recycling in the industrial, commercial and institutional sector, the IC&I sector. We share the government's goal of modernizing Ontario's Blue Box recycling system. Our view is that local Blue Box programs should be transitioned to a standardized province-wide recycling system operated by producers. That is why Canadian Beverage Association members support the creation of Circular Materials, Ontario's only not-for-profit Blue Box producer responsibility organization.

We are working towards a recycling system that fosters robust competition in a waste management sector for collection and processing services. Supporting competition will deliver the best value for Ontario. At the same time, the beverage sector is preparing to launch a comprehensive public-space recycling program to complement Blue Box collection. But with as much as 30% of beverage products consumed away from home, we must collect more beverage containers from public spaces.

We are confident we can meet the target in Ontario's Blue Box regulations, however, to support these efforts, we ask the government to improve data collection on recycling in the IC&I sector. The Auditor General's report last year showed waste diversion is stalled in that sector, and that Ontario cannot meet its targets without reform. The government should require the waste management sector to report what they collect in the IC&I space, so Ontario and producers can verify recovery rates for beverage containers and other materials in our sector.

The second focus of the budget should be refraining from product-specific taxation. Our industry is under increased threat from product-specific taxes that are not based on evidence, such as the ongoing calls for a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages across Canada. Sugar-sweetened beverages are already taxed under the HST, unlike basic groceries, and the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages in Canada is declining. In fact, beverage calories overall are down about 35% since 2004. At the same time, unfortunately, incidence of obesity has continued to rise.

Taxes on our products are not a solution that reflects the reality of consumption patterns across Canada. These types of taxes have been tried in multiple jurisdictions. The results have not been good. Mexico saw an average reduction of 4.7 calories in a diet of 3,025 calories per

capita once a tax like this was introduced. However, the instability that the tax created within the industry's value chain has led to a loss of 10,000 jobs in Mexico.

Make no mistake: Our members are committed to working with the government and the public to combat obesity, but the reality is that taxes such as these are not the solution. Instead, we recommend that government work with industry on an educational awareness program, similar to our national Balance Calories program, to reduce non-alcoholic beverage calories in the diet.

The final focus of this budget should be to provide companies access to capital investment to help them innovate, make use of the beverage containers they recycle in Ontario and achieve circularity. To achieve this, the government should introduce a plastic technology fund that helps provide financial resources—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Jim Goetz: —to enhance our plastic recycling in the province and across Canada. This fund would help develop end markets, support projects to normalize the use of recycled plastic and test new technologies in pre-commercial applications.

In closing, our industry appreciates the fiscal challenges the government is currently facing, however, our industry needs to remain competitive and continue to invest in the province, and we're here to work with the government to achieve those common goals. Thank you for the opportunity to appear in front of the committee.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for your presentation. That concludes the presentations for this round.

Before we start the questions, I want MPP Anand to introduce himself. I believe he has arrived to join us. If you would say your name and where you are.

Mr. Deepak Anand: My name is Deepak Anand. I'm the member of provincial Parliament for Mississauga-Malton, and I am in the beautiful riding of Mississauga-Malton.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): With that, we'll start the questions. We start with the government. Mr. Thanigasalam.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you to all the presenters—Conservation Ontario, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and the Canadian Beverage Association—for being here, and for your presentations, as well.

I'll start off with Conservation Ontario. To Andy and Kim, thanks again for the presentation. If you could please expand on why it's so important to take stock of how much protected land conservation authorities have and what goals that helps them accomplish. If you can expand on that, that would be good.

Ms. Kim Gavine: Thank you very much for the question. I'm Kim Gavine with Conservation Ontario. There are a number of stackable benefits by protecting land in Ontario: climate change resiliency; protecting our drinking water; more recently, as a result of the pandemic, we saw just how important natural areas were for people to go out and walk and enjoy nature; and biodiversity targets. A number of things mentioned in the environmental plan are

met by the protection and rehabilitation of green space across the province.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you, Kim. What kinds of supports beyond funding can help Conservation Ontario accomplish its objectives? How do some of these challenges vary, depending on the region that you're talking about? If you can expand on that.

Ms. Kim Gavine: Sure. Thank you again for the question. One of the other things in addition to funding would be updating technical guidelines and policy direction. Criticisms have been heard about inconsistency amongst conservation authorities in delivering the programs. Many of our technical guidelines are dated. Particularly in light of climate change, it's very important that we have the direction and the updated technical guidance and policy direction from the province, so we can get more consistency amongst the conservation authorities.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Are there any other community partners that Conservation Ontario works with? Could you give us some details on these working relationships?

Mr. Andy Mitchell: I'll step in for just a second there, Kim. The 36 conservation authorities across the province are made up of member municipalities, so our primary partners are the municipalities across Ontario. They provide the majority of our funding. They work closely with us on preservation of land. They work closely with us on addressing planning issues. They are a key partner for us, and we're very proud of our relationship with municipalities right across the province.

Kim, you may want to talk about some of our other partnerships.

Ms. Kim Gavine: Yes, a number of other partners, from federal to provincial to community groups: Forests Ontario on planting more than two million trees a year across the province; many agricultural groups, working on water quality and quantity programs across the province; many First Nation groups across the province. Again, it ranges from federal to provincial to community-level groups. That is the beauty of the watershed-based model that conservation authorities work within—and Andy's quite right in that municipalities are one of those key partners.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you, Kim, and thank you, Andy.

Next, I would go to the Canadian Beverage Association. Thank you, Jim, for your presentation. You mentioned the high-calorie drink consumption and the action that your association is taking to combat that—I want to focus on that. What is the Canadian Beverage Association's plan to reduce that high-calorie drink consumption, especially by children?

Mr. Jim Goetz: Thank you for the question. The track record in Canada—I think when people talk about high-calorie beverage and sugar consumption in Canada versus the rest of the world, we need to keep it in perspective that Canada is very different than, say, the United States or Mexico or even other parts of the world when it comes to consumption. The good news is, high-calorie and high-

sugar consumption in Canada has decreased, as I mentioned in my comments, significantly since about 2004. That's not just my data, that's not just industry data—that's backed up by Health Canada and Statistics Canada as well, that shows a significant decrease.

1430

The beverage industry introduced our Balance Calories program almost—I believe it's six or seven years ago now, where the majority of the beverage manufacturers in Canada committed to introducing and bringing to market more and more options for people who want lower-sugar beverages or no-sugar beverages, more water-based—I always say “water with a splash of flavour”—that don't have nearly as many calories or, in many cases, don't have any calories.

The industry has changed a lot over the last 10, 15 years. Where the beverage aisle, as I say, used to be blue on one side and red on the other, there are many more options now available for both parents, in particular, buying for their families and for their children to reduce the calories while still enjoying some flavour, if they wish or, of course, just more plain bottled water options as well.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you, Jim. In terms of the retail fees, could you please speak to the solution—how the Ontario government and your association can work together to work on the retail fees? Because I think that's something that CBA advocated for. Could you please expand on that?

Mr. Jim Goetz: Sorry, can you just clarify, when you say “retail fees”?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Yes, to limit the retail fees, something that CBA was advocating for. Do you think you can expand on that part?

Mr. Jim Goetz: I think what you're mentioning is the cost of our products on the shelf?

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Correct.

Mr. Jim Goetz: Yes, we are concerned about that. Inflation is a large problem. It's not unique to Ontario, but at the same time, we are concerned about supply chain issues and getting those products on shelves.

Something our industry has done that we take a little bit of pride in, particularly over the pandemic, is that we have, along with other food manufacturers, kept shelves stocked. But inflationary pressure is concerning, combined with the pandemic on top of that and making sure that the trucks keep moving and keep the shelves stocked.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that. That concludes that time.

We're now going to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to all the presenters. Carolyn, I'm just going to start with you, because I can't believe that Ontario is the only province in Canada that has not been able to sign on to this \$10-billion child care deal.

We have some of the highest fees in the country, as you know and as you pointed out. In Kitchener, though, the average for one infant and one toddler is \$2,600 a month; it's more than a mortgage. Can you give the committee

some sense as to why it's so urgent for Minister Lecce and Premier Ford to get this deal done? And can you give them some sense as to what is at stake for families in this province?

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: Thank you for the question, Catherine. It is very urgent. Yes, Ontario is the only province that hasn't signed on yet. The first province signed on last summer, and what we've seen now is that provinces and territories that signed on to the federal plan are starting to move forward on child care. They're starting to lower costs for families.

Families in British Columbia, families in Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, they've been getting emails from child care providers saying, “Your fees are going to go down. Your fees will be cut in half this year, in 2022.” Meanwhile, here in Ontario, child care fees keep going up. I've heard from families who say they have gotten an email saying that their child care fees will be going up by 5% this year. So here, things are just going to get worse when other provinces are starting to take steps forward.

And the other thing that I think that we're seeing is that, without this federal funding available to improve child care—although I would also suggest that Ontario could be doing more themselves in addition to that—we're going to see the collapse of the child care sector, and I'm not overstating that. Child care programs—as I mentioned in my presentation, the depth of the workforce crisis is so bad that programs are asking families, “Can you keep your children home a day a week?” Or, “We're going to have to close the toddler room, because of staffing.” There's such a shortage.

So, again, with \$10 billion in federal funding to child care, we could start to improve wages for child care workers so that they aren't going to work at Timmy's or Costco because they can't make a living in child care anymore. Those are the changes we have to see, and we have to see them fast.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you so much for that. And I just want to say thank you for your advocacy, Carolyn. The coalition has done great work for many years. I don't know if you saw that I had to quote the old saying: The hand that rocks the cradle needs to sometimes rock the boat. I saw that you're doing a lobbying session today, which, of course, I support. Keep up the good work. There are 104 days until the election starts, so hope is on the horizon. Let's get that deal done.

My next question, Chair, is to the conservation authorities. Listen, I think conservation authorities have been a topic at Queen's Park more so than they ever have been. I want to say the Grand River Conservation Authority here in Waterloo region is well respected, a source of knowledge, and we're very fortunate to have the leadership there at that authority. I want to put that on the record.

But with Bill 229, people were very alarmed at the direction the government was taking, and the integrity and, actually, the mandate of conservation authorities was called into question by the Ford government. There was actually this one moment when I remember Paul Calandra,

who is the House leader, said that conservation authorities had moved past their mandate and were hosting weddings and fundraising, and that is why we have flooding in our basements. I think that that was a red flag for us as the opposition, because one of the major things of Bill 229—which was an omnibus piece of legislation—was schedule 6. Schedule 6 empowered the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry to approve any development project with no input from conservation authorities.

I just wanted to give you an opportunity to get on the record that conservation authorities know what your mandate is, you know what your core business is. Perhaps set the record straight on how much you have to fundraise for.

But I do say that when Jeff Yurek, who was the minister—no longer now—had said, and this is a direct quote: “Some conservation authorities were going beyond the rules and regulations of the province and instituting their own rules....”

So I really just want to give you an opportunity to set the record straight around the role of conservation authorities, the importance of conservation authorities, especially as it relates to climate change, which we all should be very concerned about.

Andy, maybe you can start, and then Kim.

Mr. Andy Mitchell: First of all, it will come as no surprise that I passionately believe in the mission of conservation authorities. Our job, put very simply, is to protect people, property and the environment, and that’s what we do each and every day.

When it comes to things like development, what we’re trying to do is find the right balance between building a home and protecting the environment. We don’t want to stop development; we just want to make sure that it’s being done in the right place in the right way. So you don’t want to build a new subdivision in a flood plain. It doesn’t make any sense. When you build something upriver, you want to have an idea of what the impact is going to be downriver. You need to take a whole-watershed approach.

But I think the most fundamental and important thing to remember is the work that we do needs to be science-based and evidence-based. The decisions that are made need to be based on the evidence. They need to be based on research.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

1440

Mr. Andy Mitchell: They need to be based on all of the things that studies and our scientists have told us. That’s what’s critically important. Kim, I’m sorry I probably—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Andy—sorry, because my time is so limited—were you surprised, then, when every member of the Ontario greenbelt authority resigned in defence of conservation authorities? They were so concerned that your mandate was going to be heavily influenced by politicians, going forward, through the regulations. Was that a concern for you? To have all of them resign because of schedule 6 was a very powerful statement. Would you agree?

Mr. Andy Mitchell: I wasn’t involved with them doing that. I can understand that men and women of passion feel strongly about issues. But I will say, MPP Fife, that since that time, the government has struck a committee that brings all stakeholders together—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that. That concludes this time. We’ll have to save the rest of the answer for the next round.

We now will go to the independent. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you so much to the presenters. I would like to start with Carolyn. Thank you for the work that you and the members of the coalition are doing to improve our child care in this province and holding the government to account. I wonder if you could talk about this \$10 billion that Ontario has yet to sign on to and what it is that you believe this type of investment would do to improving the system overall.

I’m pretty curious. You’re part of this coalition, you and your members. Are you looking at other provinces a little bit like, “They’ve already started, and we’re still sitting with no deal”? How do you feel about that?

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: Yes, absolutely, I think that Ontario families are feeling that FOMO, that fear of missing out, as other families across the country are going to be seeing lower child care fees this year. And educators are going to be seeing increases in their wages this year, which is going to be so important, right across the country, everywhere but Ontario.

So yes, the \$10-billion child care plan could do so much to improve child care for Ontario’s children and families. The federal government’s goals are to move child care fees to \$10 a day, so it would be an average of \$10 a day for families, whereas right now, as MPP Fife and others have mentioned, child care is a second mortgage for families. They’re paying \$1,000 or \$2,000 a month for child care sometimes, so to have child care at \$10 a day would be a game-changer, and so important, I think, as we look at our social and economic recovery from the pandemic.

A federal deal could also mean a wage scale for early childhood educators, which is something that’s happening in other provinces now. Here in Ontario, we had Ontario’s Early Years and Child Care Workforce Strategy, which the current government has let sit on a shelf. It called, more than four years ago, for there to be a wage scale for early childhood educators. If we had that today, we might not be seeing the depth of the workforce crisis in child care that we are right now. So that’s also something that, if we signed the federal deal, we could improve.

And, of course, the last piece is that we could be expanding child care spaces right across the province. We really need to have a plan—a comprehensive plan to expand child care to make sure that we are building child care spaces for every family that needs them.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I’m glad you mentioned that wage upscaling that is needed and was planned. It’s such an important part. The quality is such an important part, as well as the cost and the availability of child care in this province.

This government has shown a preference for tax credits and one-time lump sums to parents, but this doesn't improve the system overall. It won't build one new space. It won't provide better wages, training and working conditions for workers. It's money being put towards it, but it's not improving the system overall. Can you talk about why that's not the right solution?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: Yes, absolutely. If you look at a tax credit scheme, the way we think about it is that that's really not a child care plan, right? It might help put some money into parents' pockets, but if at the same time child care fees continue to go up, then that actually isn't getting them any further ahead, and if you're sitting on a waiting list because you can't find a child care space, that tax credit also is not going to help you. It doesn't replace the need for a child care system and really moving ahead with building that system. If we look at what the government is doing right now, you hear every now and then an announcement about how a new space is opening up, a new centre is opening up. In Waterloo, as an example, yesterday Minister Lecce announced that three new centres are going to open. Well, that's great, except five centres in Waterloo closed last year. The municipality closed them down, because the province doesn't support child care adequately and the system is underfunded.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: And who is missing out is the children.

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: It's two steps forward and two steps back right now, and we need to take five steps forward.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes that question.

We now will go to round 2, to the government. MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: First of all, I want to say thank you to all the presenters. I really enjoy being at these consultations. I have to say this: We learn a lot, we understand new things and this is a perfect way to communicate with each other.

Starting with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care: Thank you so much for being here. I know we talk about child care and, at the end of the day, we're all parents as well. I just want to ask you a quick question. One of the challenges which I've seen—my daughter right now is in grade 11, but when she was growing up, I had a basic problem with finding a child care space. Can you please talk about what have you seen in the number of spaces in the last 20 years?

Chair, I think I only have six or seven minutes, and I do need to ask Jim next.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Seven minutes.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Over to the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, on the last 20 years for the spaces.

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: Sure. In terms of the number of spaces that we need in child care, only a small portion of Ontario families can really access child care. While spaces have gone up slowly over years, the sad truth is that through the pandemic, we've actually flatlined. For the

first time in, I think, 15 years, we actually lost more spaces than we gained in the last year, so we're going in the wrong direction now, unfortunately.

As you said, for years, families have been on waiting lists for child care. When I was pregnant, I drew a circle around my apartment and got on every waiting list, and I was lucky to find a space by the time I had to go back to work. So it's very hard for families.

I think that what we need to do, and what the federal plan would allow us to do, is to build a plan to expand child care well and thoughtfully. There's a public planning process about building new schools, but we don't have that same kind of process when it comes to child care. Where a child care centre opens, and if it closes, is right now still very much dependent on the market or the decisions of a parent board to try to get things together and open a child care centre. We can't keep having that same kind of approach. We really need to build a child care system and plan it thoughtfully.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you so much. No, I totally agree with you. If we want to have good child care, we need to have spaces so that the kids can go, and it has to be sensible. It should not be 15 or 50 kilometres away; it has to be somewhere the parents are.

I know the struggle. In the early morning, you wake up, you're going to be late to your own work, and then you want to make sure your kid—your biggest strength, your biggest asset, your biggest love—is safe in the place where you're dropping them off. So I totally agree with you. Again, thank you for that advocacy.

Now, over to the Canadian Beverage Association. I just want to say that I was looking at your organization. It's pretty impressive. I actually have many of your members in my riding of Mississauga–Malton, so thank you for being here. I'm looking at—oh, my goodness—20,000 direct jobs, 60,000 total jobs, 25,000 right here in Ontario. It's great. I have to commend you.

Jim, I'm looking at your comments on the Blue Box Program: "The Canadian Beverage Association ... supports the modernization of the province's blue box recycling system and the introduction of ambitious targets to increase the recycling of beverage containers." This all came from your notes, in fact. Can you please help us to understand and educate us more on what your members are doing to increase the recycling of waste associated with their products?

1450

Mr. Jim Goetz: First of all, the beverage association and our packaging, which we fully recognize that we put out into the marketplace—as an industry, we take full responsibility on wanting to collect that back again at very high rates and make sure it is recycled.

The beverage industry is fortunate that the three main types of packaging that we put on the market—aluminum, PET plastic and cartons—are highly recyclable, recycled at high rates, recycled here in Ontario, and are some of the only materials outside of cardboard and some other products that, when you put them into the blue box, are actually worth something at the end of the day, are bought

and sold as a commodity, which helps create and fund the circular economy, which various governments throughout the years, provincially and federally, have spoken about.

I have spoken to the government about this and made several announcements that, along with full producer responsibility of the blue box—i.e. taking the costs of the blue box off the shoulders of municipalities, which we fully endorse—we will be bringing forward, in the next year or year and a half, an additional program to collect more of our beverage containers out of public space areas and the institutional, commercial and industrial sector. We know that beverages are consumed both in the home and away from home, with about 30% away from home. For us to hit our targets of, I believe it's 80% of that collection and recycling of our containers, we need to put a program forward in the public space and the IC&I sector, which we fully want to do.

Again, when the regulations and the legislation were coming forward for reforming and changing the blue box, the beverage industry lobbied in favour of higher targets, of getting to at least 80% in the next several years and trying to push beyond that.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Jim Goetz: So we were literally lobbying in favour of higher targets for us, as opposed to other packaging that goes into the blue box. We're excited to work with the government, municipalities and the private sector to achieve that goal and stimulate the private sector through the circular economy, hoping that our containers—which many of them are now—are recycled in Ontario, and again, continue to promote the circular economy—

Mr. Deepak Anand: I apologize; I didn't want to cut you off, but I just wanted to talk to Conservation Ontario as well.

I don't know if we have enough time, so I'm just going to go straight in and ask you, what is one ask you would have for the government?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): There's not enough time to answer. The time is up. Thank you very much for that presentation.

Now we'll go to the official opposition. MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I will try to get through questions for all three of you very quickly.

We will start with Conservation Ontario. I would imagine it's adequate funding—if you had one ask, but go ahead and answer that question.

Ms. Kim Gavine: Some may recall that our funding was cut in 2019, from \$7.4 million to \$3.7 million, for our natural hazards program. This is the program that protects people and their homes. The real cost of delivering this program is upwards of \$63.5 million per year. Currently, the funding amongst conservation authorities, as Andy mentioned previously—municipalities at 63%, self-generated dollars at 28%, federal funding at 4% and provincial funding at 5%. Most definitely, there is a need to increase the amount of money so we can effectively deliver on that natural hazards program, maintaining the funding for drinking water source protection, and ensuring

that we do have safe conservation areas across the province so the people of Ontario can access them.

Mr. Ian Arthur: A recurring theme throughout this—housing keeps coming up, the usual one. Every year, as you do finance committee, you see some of the patterns start to shift, and the emphasis on housing has been tremendous this year.

If we're about to embark on a huge amount of development, adequately funded and well-functioning conservation authorities are actually going to be more important than ever to protect those future homeowners, as we embark on that process. So thank you for the work you do.

Kim, I know we've spoken before. We'll continue to advocate for proper funding of conservation authorities.

Carolyn, you talked about the wage differential that's going to start to appear as other provinces institute \$10-a-day daycare. Never before has Ontario started to lose people based on either wages or particular issues—you have parents of children with autism fleeing for provinces with better supports; you have nurses fleeing for better wages; you have doctors leaving for better wages. If you add child care workers to that mix, how are we ever going to catch up with the labour shortfall that we have here in Ontario?

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: I think that's an excellent question.

Yes, I have heard from child care workers who are saying, "Maybe I should go and work in British Columbia, where they seem to be taking early childhood education and care so much more seriously."

Also, we already have this phenomenon in the Ottawa area, where parents choose to live across the border, in Gatineau, Quebec, because they have had an affordable child care system for many years and it does make such a difference for families.

So, yes, I do worry that we'll see that drain on our workforce in Ontario if we don't get this right.

The time to do it is now. The clock is ticking. I think that if Ontario does not sign a child care deal by March 31, we could be losing that first year of funding, which would be over \$1 billion of federal funding—that doesn't have to be cost-matched—for child care. It's sitting on the table, and I can't believe that Ontario might walk away from that.

Mr. Ian Arthur: We're going to lose an economic advantage, both for the parents in terms of getting them back to work—but it has to be integral for the recovery plan.

Jim, I have a couple of questions on the work you're doing. You talked about how all of your products are recycled in Ontario. Do you know what percentage of the plastic bottles your industry puts out are actually fully recycled in Ontario?

Mr. Jim Goetz: Sorry; I didn't mean to say that they're all recycled in Ontario. A vast majority of the containers that are collected in Ontario are recycled in Ontario. Some might go off to Quebec or other provinces, and some might go south of the border.

The problem we have right now, and why we are looking forward to the blue box transformation to an extended producer responsibility model, is, we don't have one recycling system in Ontario right now. We have about 270 different recycling programs, because they're all controlled at the municipal level. So collecting data in Ontario is incredibly difficult, compared to other provinces, on how many of the containers are collected and then recycled and processed and made into new material—

Mr. Ian Arthur: The number is—90% of plastic bottles put in the blue bin in Ontario actually end up in the dump.

Mr. Jim Goetz: No. I apologize; I don't know where that data comes from, but that's not at all accurate.

Again, anyone who's putting data out there—and we put ourselves in that same position, because there are 270 different recycling programs. Each municipality kind of runs their own, and they all calculate what they collect at different rates; some don't calculate it at all. As we move to an extended producer responsibility system across the entire province, we will be able to have that data.

Our best estimate, through waste audits, is that we are now collecting, when it comes to PET plastic, which is our plastic beverage containers—about 70% to 75% are collected.

Mr. Ian Arthur: And then recycled after collection?

Mr. Jim Goetz: Yes.

Mr. Ian Arthur: So 70% are collected, and then 100% of the items collected are fully recycled—

Mr. Jim Goetz: With all recycled products, there is some waste along the way that doesn't make it fully through the recycling process, but again, because we do not have a single province-wide system—which we are moving to, which we are pleased about—getting data on that is very difficult. We look forward, as we move forward over the next several years, that we will have better data.

Anyone, though, who is putting forward numbers, saying 90% of containers are going to landfill—I don't know where they're getting that data from, because it simply does not exist.

1500

Mr. Ian Arthur: Yes, I think it's really important to differentiate between the collection —

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Ian Arthur: —of those items and then the actual recycling rates of the items once they are collected, because that's where the largest discrepancy is.

Mr. Jim Goetz: I totally agree with you. We look forward to getting that data and making sure it's improved upon, but as of right now, that data in Ontario, just because of the nature of the system that has been in place for many years, is not available, which is why we're looking forward to moving to extended producer responsibility, where producers are both responsible for collection and for reporting audited numbers on what's being collected and recycled.

Mr. Ian Arthur: And just on high taxes on high-caloric foods—not sugars from beverages in particular—there's a

dual rationale behind them. There is the deterrent to help get people to buy less of those, but also, like all sin taxes, to cover the costs associated with it. High sugar content is associated with massive increases in rates of diabetes, kidney disease, liver disease and all of those other health effects—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That time is concluded.

We now go to the independent member. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thanks so much for everyone's contributions today. I want to acknowledge that the real threat to our generation is the environmental and climate crisis that we face. A community like mine in Scarborough is right on Lake Ontario, with the incredible Scarborough Bluffs, and we are within forests like Rouge National Urban Park. The Morningside Park area is a real jewel, and we have salmon that return to spawn there each year. We're within watershed and wetland. The work that you are doing and the conversation we have been having are really important to the future of our province, so I just want to say thank you for that, and we'll continue to support your work.

I do want to turn the time that I have to what is on the table. Carolyn said that we are at risk of losing \$1 billion that could come to this province, that could be invested in our child care system. We know that child care is an economic imperative, especially and mainly for women, who oftentimes bear that burden of choosing between their careers and caring for their families. It just seems to not make any sense at all that we have not—we're last, and we're just nowhere when it comes to accepting the federal government's proposal.

But it seems to me that what is at risk is more than the money. I know a family in Scarborough who are just not able to qualify for a child care subsidy but can't afford to put their kids in child care. I'm thinking of a family right now with two kids under the age of three and another child who is in school. They cannot afford it, and who's missing out are the children and their learning, their future and their education. I would like you to speak to what we're putting at stake here, Carolyn, please.

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: Absolutely. I think you're absolutely right. There are so many families who are missing out, who fall into that gap, who don't qualify for subsidy. Also, subsidies are limited, so sometimes families qualify, but they're on wait-lists for subsidies, so they can't access those child care spaces. The impact that has on parents' employment, as well as the opportunities for young children to be able to go to child care, to socialize with other kids, to take part in early learning—that's impacted as well. Those are all things that we could improve, where we could take such leaps forward if Ontario signed on to the federal child care plan and committed.

You know, it's just signing on the line, but to this point, I worry. Ontario has been sort of dragged along. They're kind of kicking and screaming. They should be running at this opportunity. They should be—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: —signing on and committing to moving forward on child care.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you.

And I just wondered about the Ontario conservation authorities' thoughts on the Auditor General's report in terms of the species at risk in terms of the policies. I know that the work that you're doing is with environmentally sensitive lands. The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority does fantastic work, certainly in my riding, because all over the place, they're looking to shore up those areas.

What are your thoughts on that? Go ahead, Kim.

Ms. Kim Gavine: Thank you very much for the question. I previously talked about the stackable benefits of conservation areas. We're the largest owner, next to the province, of conservation lands across Ontario, and many of our conservation lands support those species at risk. Again, these are areas for flood attenuation—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that section. We have completed the questions and the panel, so we will be moving on to the next panel.

Before we do, we want to have MPP Andrew introduce herself, as she just arrived, I believe. There she is. MPP Andrew, if you could introduce yourself and tell us where you are.

Ms. Jill Andrew: I am MPP Jill Andrew, and I'm in Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

TTCRIDERS

HEALTHCARE OF ONTARIO PENSION PLAN

ONTARIO NURSES' ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): With that, we go to the next panel. The first presenter is TTCriders. As they come forward and start, I'll first say you have a seven-minute presentation. I will notify you when you've reached six minutes. We ask you, the first thing to do is to introduce yourself, and if there's more than one speaker that they also introduce themselves prior to speaking. With that, the floor is yours.

Ms. Lindsey DeSousa: First, thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Lindsey DeSousa. I am a member with TTCriders. We also have Shelagh here, who is the executive director. I don't think she can be unmuted, but she is here as well.

TTCriders is a membership-based organization of transit users in Toronto. Transit matters, because every day, hundreds of thousands of people rely on the TTC to get to work in essential industries. Without safe and reliable public transit, personal support workers, grocery store workers, nurses and teachers would not be able to do their jobs.

Fewer people have been taking transit right now because of working from home, people losing their jobs, and restrictions. But because Ontario transit agencies rely on fare box revenues to fund their operating budgets,

lower ridership has created a funding crisis for transit agencies and municipalities across the province. Investing in operations funding to keep transit running at safe service levels is more important now than ever. Cutting back on service now will result in crowding on buses that people need and fewer riders in the future, which will only make the problem worse.

Emergency operations funding is urgently needed, but transit agencies also require stable long-term funding so our cities can recover from the pandemic. The TTC's 2022 operating budget, passed in December 2021, projects that the COVID-19 financial impact is projected to be \$461.2 million in 2022. That comprises \$409.8 million in passenger and ancillary revenue losses, and \$51.4 million for incremental COVID-19 expenses required to maintain staff and customer safety measures in place.

But this won't be the last year that public transit faces shortfalls. The TTC is predicting budget shortfalls due to lower ridership for years to come. Ongoing operations funding from the provincial government is needed to maintain safe service levels and to keep transit moving. Now is the time to invest so that our transit systems can recover and travel is made more affordable for essential workers.

The provincial government does provide some ongoing support to municipalities through the gas tax, which can be used for capital or operations spending. But as we have seen this year, the gas tax is vulnerable to shifts in gas consumption, which has been affected by the pandemic, as well as other factors like increased fuel efficiency and more people shifting to electric vehicles.

Revenues raised by the gas tax have been declining, which means that the transfers to municipalities for transit have also declined. We were glad to learn that the province has recognized the lower gas tax revenues and recently allocated \$120 million to enhance gas tax funding for Ontario municipalities. However, the fall economic statement announced \$345 million for transit agencies. What happened to the rest of this funding?

We have several additional questions and concerns about the gas tax transfer. We are concerned about what the planned 5.7-cent-per-litre cut to gas tax will mean for future transfers to municipalities, including Toronto. Will municipalities be receiving less transit funding in years to come?

1510

Although Premier Ford pledged to double the gas tax transfer before the last election, in 2019 he withdrew on the promise to Toronto and lost \$1.1 billion in funding over 10 years. City staff at the time said that \$585 million of gas tax funds had already been allocated to projects in the TTC's 10-year capital budget, and these projects included overhauling buses, repairing subway tracks and making subway stations accessible. Furthermore, we are concerned about the conditions that have been imposed with the latest allocation of gas tax funding.

We support fare integration, but it must be implemented fairly, such as subsidizing free time transfers between municipalities and free transfers between GO and TTC.

Charging more to travel farther under a fare-by-distance or fare-by-mode model will hurt transit users who live in Scarborough and Etobicoke who have to travel further to work.

We know that transit infrastructure investment matters to your government. We support expanding the transit network, and we would highlight an important project that has not yet been funded with provincial support, which is the Eglinton East LRT, but it is important to remember that infrastructure projects create additional financial pressure on transit agencies. To ensure the success of these new projects, operations funding is critical.

Finally, we would like to raise an important transit change coming to Scarborough that relates to the provincial budget. The Scarborough RT will shut down in 2023, leaving Scarborough residents on replacement shuttle buses. Operations funding to run enough replacement service is required. Under the terms of the transit upload agreement, the city of Toronto and the province of Ontario were meant to continue to discuss responsibility for funding costs for maintaining Line 3, which is the Scarborough RT, and/or replace transit service in Scarborough as a result of the change in scope and delivery of the Scarborough subway extension. When Line 3 shuts down forever in 2023, another key way to support more immediate travel options in Scarborough is to subsidize free transfers between GO and TTC.

That concludes the presentation. Thank you so much for your time and for listening, and for the opportunity as well.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation.

Our next presentation will be Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan. The direction, of course, will be the same: seven minutes, notified at one minute, and everybody speaking would please introduce themselves for the Hansard. With that, the floor is yours.

Mr. Tim Shortill: Thank you, Chair. My name is Tim Shortill. I'm the chief operating officer of HOOPP. HOOPP is the Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan. I want to thank the committee for holding these consultations and, of course, for agreeing to hear from us today.

There are three things I would like to discuss: First, I'll let you know a little bit more about us and our pension plan; secondly, discuss some of our recent advocacy efforts; and third, offer some assistance to the important work of this committee in the Legislature.

To begin with, our mission at HOOPP is clear and, frankly, has never felt more important, and that's to deliver on our pension promise and take care of those who have been taking care of us. We are proud to serve the health care workers of Ontario and we want to thank them for the hard work that they do each and every day.

We have more than 600 participating employers. Our membership includes nurses, medical technicians, food service workers, housekeeping staff and many others who provide valued health care services. We serve over 400,000 members across a diverse membership, including those Ontarians who don't typically have access to good

pension plans. This includes part-time workers, younger adults and women. In fact, our membership is more than 80% female. While we appreciate that far too many Ontarians don't have a pension at all, I want to underscore that this is a relatively modest pension. Our average new annual pension in 2020 is just under \$30,000 a year.

We currently manage over \$110 billion in assets, and have increased our funded status from our last recorded position of 119%, meaning that for every dollar we owe our members in a pension we have more than \$1.19 in assets.

Our costs are the lowest amongst our peers. Our last reported operating costs are the lowest, at 31 basis points, and our contribution rates—what the members and employers pay with every paycheque—are low when compared to our peer plans and have remained unchanged since 2004, including through the global financial crisis. My point being, our members and employers have access to a good plan at a relatively low price. This is something we're proud of; we know our members work hard to pay for their pensions and so we work hard for them. We pay out \$3 billion in pensions every year to retirees and communities all across the province. If you were to equate a pension cheque with a paycheque, we would be a very large employer in Ontario.

We have a significant investment footprint here in the province. For example, 34% of our global real estate portfolio, roughly \$6 billion, is invested right here in the province.

We are a private trust. We are not sponsored by the government. Our plan is not guaranteed by the government and as such, the government has no responsibility in the gains or losses in our plan. This is a point I'll come back to shortly. We are also not a creature of legislation, but we are a private trust agreement between the Ontario Hospital Association and four health care unions: OCHU, SEIU, OPSEU and the Ontario Nurses' Association, of course, who's with all of us here today.

Secondly, I want to talk about our advocacy approach. As a major pension plan in Canada, our mission is to provide pensions, but we also feel an obligation to ensure our members and the wider stakeholders appreciate the value of that pension and drive a national conversation on how to achieve this value and retirement security for all Canadians. This benefits not only HOOPP members and their employers, but also taxpayers, as they are less likely to need social programs in later years.

We continue to produce research to inform that critical conversation. For example, our recent report with Common Wealth shows that a retirement-first approach to workplace benefits may be the key to businesses' ability to attract and retain talent and improve productivity. It also helps to reduce mental anxiety for financial reasons in the workplace. We have also participated in research with our peers, describing the economic contribution that the plans make to the broader economy. As long-term stable investors, our capital can be helpful in weathering volatile markets.

Several years ago, the World Bank wrote a report about the success of Canadian pension plans, specifically calling

out HOOPP as an example. Our success, as noted by the World Bank, is a result of our strong governance as well as our independence.

I mention this point because, for many years now, the assets and liabilities of HOOPP have been reflected on the province's financial statements. As I mentioned earlier, HOOPP is a private independent trust and the government is not a sponsor. HOOPP is responsible for ensuring the short- and long-term sustainability of the plan for our members and we're concerned that the inclusion of our assets and liabilities sends the wrong message to taxpayers and the public that the government has an obligation to our plan, which they do not. It also upends the entire joint governance model that the employer and the unions have worked so hard to make successful.

Furthermore, if HOOPP is in a surplus position, as we are today, the province reverses, meaning it does not reflect that surplus. But if HOOPP is in a deficit position, the province then reflects that deficit. As a result, reflecting HOOPP on the province's books can only result in a drag on the province's financial results, even though they have no obligation to our members. This accounting result is incorrect and does not reflect the economic and, frankly, practical reality.

Now, Mr. Chair, I recognize that many stakeholders come before you seeking legislative changes to a system or funding to improve their services, so I appreciate that my message of "we're independent; please treat us as such" is a change from that, but it is nonetheless an important point.

Finally, I want to talk about supporting health care transformation and how we can help this Legislature through that. The research we have conducted over the years has demonstrated the value of pensions to the employee and to the employer. A pension, aside from one's value in their house, if they own one, is generally the most valuable asset an average person would have.

Research shows that 97% of HOOPP members feel it is important that a new employer continues to offer the HOOPP pension. We know that HOOPP is a powerful attraction and retention tool for health care organizations. With over 600 employers in our plan, a health care worker can move from one employer in one corner of the province to another and their pension will move seamlessly—again, one less thing to worry about. Mobility within the sector is part of the incredible value we provide.

Recently Ontario Health, which is an amalgamation of mainly former HOOPP employers, received direction to restrict future access to HOOPP and move certain employees—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation. We are out of time.

We now will go to the Ontario Nurses' Association.

1520

Ms. Cathryn Hoy: Good afternoon, and thank you very much for allowing me to speak. I'm Cathryn Hoy, a registered nurse and president of the Ontario Nurses' Association, known as ONA. ONA is Canada's largest nursing union, representing 68,000 nurses and health care

professionals in Ontario working in every sector of health care. We touch every Ontarian, through hospitals, long-term care, community clinics, public health units and industry. We also have 18,000 nursing student affiliates.

I'm here to deliver a very clear message: Ontario's health care system is on the brink of collapse. Without nurses, there is no health care. We have a critical shortage of nurses and health care professionals in this province, and the situation is only becoming worse with this variant. Ontario has had the worst RN-to-population ratio in Canada for years—decades. Decades of underfunding have left Ontario at least 22,000 nurses short. And what's even worse is that there is no viable plan from the government to build capacity. ONA has offered to help with that.

The 2022 provincial budget must prioritize funding and urgent measures to ensure retention of nurses and health care professionals and actually to develop a sound plan to recruit thousands more. We need meaningful action to correct the worsening conditions in the Ontario public care system—and that is not tomorrow; it was yesterday that this needed to happen.

Nurses and health care workers are overworked, burnt out and suffering moral distress because they fear they cannot give the care that is needed. It's impossible when they're looking at their workloads. Nurses are ethically and morally injured from the epic failures of our leaders. They were never trained for this amount of death, fear, anxiety, depression and PTSD. They are not an essential service; they are expendable, and they have been tragically sacrificed. Patients are flooding into our hospitals each and every day. This equals impossible workloads and dangerous practice conditions. That's what is driving them out of this profession. This also means cancelled surgeries and procedures. Emergency rooms and other units like labour and delivery are actually closing doors because they cannot staff appropriately with the number of RNs. Ambulances are waiting in ERs because the nursing staff is so short. I have never, ever seen a situation so dire.

In long-term care, staffing levels are at an all-time low. Without staffing, there's no care for our residents—and this is especially true of RN staffing, because residents have increasingly complex and chronic issues. It's alarming that the government continues to allocate thousands of new beds for for-profit companies, including operators of homes where the military actually exposed hideous examples of neglect of residents. They're putting profit over care. It's so wrong.

Public health nurses can't keep up with COVID-19 contact tracing and vaccinations, never mind their regular day-to-day duties that keep us all safe. Public health nurses play a vital role in health care. They also provide a very serious role in the pandemic response and also in prevention and health promotion. There were funding cuts in 2019 by this government that have never been reversed.

Home and community care: Government restructuring is causing job insecurity for thousands of care coordinators and direct service teams. This sector cares for a population that is at high risk. Care coordinators are fighting to protect

their jobs in the public sector against private, for-profit home care. Care will decrease, and Ontarians will suffer.

Nursing students are our future. They continue to call on the government to fix clinical placements. In some institutions, students are forced to continue their education with online placements. They do not have the opportunity to lay their hands on an actual patient. How do you think that's going to go? And then other students are placed on the front lines with very little mentorship or support. What does this result in? The students are already getting burnt out and second-guessing their career choice. They are our future.

It's not a pretty picture. Right across Ontario, nurses and health care professionals are suffering with crushing workloads, dangerous conditions, increased violence, endless shifts and overtime. They're being denied time off that they desperately need, and all while their wages are being eroded by inflation.

Government can no longer take a hands-off approach. We need you to step up. I'm asking you to listen carefully to nurses. By working with nurses and having the courage to invest in what is needed, we can find solutions to the challenges in our health care system for our patients, for our communities and for safe staffing.

Our members want to see action to keep existing nurses and health care workers from leaving by improving conditions and valuing their role in the system. This means:

- repealing Bill 124;
- restoring rights to collective bargaining;
- guaranteeing access to N95s for a higher level of protection for all health care workers to protect them from airborne transmission of COVID-19 and more funding for Ontario-made PPE;
- developing retention strategies to keep experienced nurses in their jobs. Every day, we're losing more and more nurses;
- implement 10 permanent paid sick days for all workers. They're going into an at-risk environment every single day—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Cathryn Hoy: —funding wage parity for all health care sectors;

- creating more full-time positions;
- expanding mental health supports, not online but in-person; and
- signing the federal agreement for \$10-a-day child care. It's good for women, families and the economy.

Our members want you to bolster the health care workforce and planning. That means increasing seats in RN programs across universities and funding late-career initiatives and retired nurses so that they can come back to mentor and support our nurses and improve general working conditions for all workers.

We're going to be sending you our full budget report. We're going to go more in depth about everything. These are the issues that underpin the challenges that face our health care system, and we're out of solutions. Two years into this pandemic—we're into the third—and our health care professionals have sacrificed so much to serve their

communities, which we want to do and we're committed to doing, but the government cannot continue to expect our nurses to do more with less.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for this presentation.

We now will go to—we do have an introduction. I think Rudy Cuzzetto has joined us. Rudy, are you out there?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you, Chair. Yes. I'm Rudy Cuzzetto. I'm here in Mississauga–Lakeshore.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

We will now start with the round of questions. We'll start with the official opposition. Who is—

Ms. Catherine Fife: It goes to MPP Andrew.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Yes. MPP Andrew.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you so much, Chair, for the time, and to all the presenters for very powerful presentations.

I'd first like to start with TTCriders. Thank you for your commitment to creating equitable and inclusive transportation. Throughout this pandemic, we know that most low-income earners, BIPOC earners, folks in communities that are already lacking resources were the ones who were primarily on packed buses during the pandemic. I think of the Eglinton 32 West here as an example.

I'd like to know what TTCriders would like from the provincial government to ensure that our most vulnerable passengers can ride the TTC, can travel on public transportation and not have to choose between getting from point A to B and paying for rent or medicine or food, quite frankly. Thank you so much, Lindsey. If you can share and expand on that.

Ms. Lindsey DeSousa: Yes, absolutely.

I was wondering if we'd be able to unmute Shelagh, the executive director of the TTCriders project, as well.

Ms. Shelagh Pizey-Allen: Go ahead, Lindsey, or I can take the question.

Ms. Lindsey DeSousa: Yes, if you want to go ahead.

Ms. Shelagh Pizey-Allen: Okay. Thank you for the question. The bottom line is really consistent, stable—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): If we could just ask you to give your name.

Ms. Shelagh Pizey-Allen: Oh, apologies. My name is Shelagh Pizey-Allen. I'm the director of TTCriders. We're a membership-based group of transit users in Toronto.

As Lindsey highlighted, the TTC and transit agencies all across Ontario have faced revenue shortfalls during the pandemic because of lower ridership. That's why we're calling for ongoing operations support. We know that this provincial government has provided emergency relief through the Safe Restart Agreement, but that funding has expired.

Just in the past few weeks, the city of Toronto has launched its budget process. The TTC has actually budgeted an almost \$500-million gap this year alone in fare revenue that it doesn't have. So without ongoing support, we could see further service cuts, which would result in more crowding on our buses, where essential workers

continue to take transit every day. We could see fares go up, which is going to hurt people who need transit the most.

1530

With stable operational support, we can enhance service, bring more people back to transit and also make life more affordable. It's also really an important piece to making sure that we have a fair replacement when the Scarborough RT shuts down in 2023 as well.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you very, very much, Shelagh, for that. I would certainly recommend that the government take a look at the 18 recommendations that TTCriders have in their report, speaking to equity; speaking to those who are in lower-income brackets; speaking to people who are on ODSPoverty and OW; to seniors; to the need for more COVID-19 mask distribution and education on our public transit.

Thank you, Shelagh, for your comments. As you know, we are also in full support of lower fares and funding municipal transit systems at 50% of their net operating costs, which will enable more affordable transit and more transit as well.

How much time do I have left, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Three minutes, 56 seconds.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Wonderful, wonderful. I've got time then.

Again, I want to also mention that we want to electrify all municipal transit fleets by 2040 and that we are also fighting to implement Ontario's first comprehensive zero-emissions vehicle strategy—all of this to try to make travelling safer, greener and more equitable, because we know that many folks have not been able to travel from point A to B without exorbitant costs. And during the pandemic, when we have essential workers, when we have nurses and PSWs right here in St. Paul's trying to get to work safely, it is necessary that they not be on crowded buses. In order to have not crowded buses, we need the government to invest in public transit, so thank you both. It's always a pleasure to see you all.

I also wanted to say a few words to Cathryn Hoy from the Ontario Nurses' Association. Thank you so much for your hard work, your leadership, your advocacy. Coming from a family with many nurses and friends in the health care system, I know how important paid sick days are. You would know that our member Peggy Sattler, along with myself and Sara Singh and Doly Begum—we co-sponsored paid sick days legislation, which this government has still not said yes to.

We need a retention plan for our nurses, as you mentioned. We need to scrap that darn wage cap bill, Bill 124, and we need to ensure that our health care workers, our nurses, have full-time jobs and fair wages. I wanted to just ask you to amplify and underscore the importance of paid sick days to our nurses and the importance of getting rid of Bill 124. Thank you so much.

Ms. Cathryn Hoy: Bill 124 has been a challenge. The sad part of that is it impacts the female-dominated professions, which is wrong. We should be on parity with police

and firefighters. I respect police and firefighters. They are part of our team. They are front-line, and we all take care of our community. But it is not right, and female-dominated health care is targeted by this bill. The cost of living is, I believe, 4.8%, where the government has held us steadfast at 1% over each of the three years, so there is erosion of our wages there.

Also, when you talked about the sick days: We need those 10 paid sick days. Our health care professionals are going into at-risk environments each and every day. Yes, it's with COVID, but even pre-COVID, the acts of violence—you would never believe what those nurses face.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Cathryn Hoy: They face weapons every day. They are beat up. There are gunshots within our emergency rooms. The PTSD is ridiculous. They are entitled to 10 sick days. And they're denied WSIB when they put in for it, even though their sick time is related to the incidents at work. That is not right and we all know that—

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank—oh no; I'm sorry. Finish that sentence, Cathryn.

Ms. Cathryn Hoy: We all know that WSIB had a nice, deep pocket this year, and monies were returned to employers that should have been paid out to our health care professionals when they suffered because of their workplace incidents. That is just wrong.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you, Cathryn, for your continued leadership.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The time is up for that session.

We'll now go to the independent member. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank all of our presenters. It's very important that we hear from you. This budget is an incredibly important budget for Ontario. We all look forward to the day when we are through the pandemic and we are on to recovery, but we're not there yet.

I want to direct my questions to the Ontario Nurses' Association. You talked about the burnout that your members are experiencing. Even in the face of that, they show up to provide the best care that they can and do it with such joy. Recently, I visited Scarborough hospital—the general campus of Scarborough Health Network—and talked to them. Even in the face of very challenging facilities, they are doing the best work that they can.

I really want to get a sense from you in terms of what you believe is the key priority coming up in this budget for your members, where they would see this as valuing the great work that is being done by nurses, the essential work that they're doing. What is that key priority that you want to tell this committee today?

Ms. Cathryn Hoy: Repeal Bill 124 and bring us to parity with our other male-dominated professions, counterpart front-line services.

I also spoke about more full-time employment. There seems to be a trend out there to use part-time, which is actually more expensive in the long run and irresponsible with taxpayers' dollars. Why it costs more is because most people need to have two or three part-time jobs so they can

pay their bills, and so when a facility needs someone to come in and fill a shift, the part-time people are not available to do the work because they have many jobs, so you're paying overtime to full-time people to come in and do that work. If you had more full-time jobs, you would have people prescheduled and ready to work, and that is more responsible with health care dollars. So that is really imperative. It's the same with benefits, things like that. They need to be brought in line with the male-dominated professions. They need to be respected. They are highly educated individuals.

Bill 195 also needs to be repealed, because what you're doing is, you're playing with people's lives. It gives the employers the power to dictate their schedules. That isn't favourable and it won't help you with retention, because people have children and they need to be able to arrange child care. When an employer says, "You're staying" or "You're coming in tomorrow" or "I'm changing your schedule tomorrow," it is very difficult for people who have kids at home to arrange child care. Not everyone has a support system in place.

So there are so many facets of what the government needs to look at for retention of nurses, and we're here to help any time.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes, I think that's very, very clear.

You also talked about how, in the face of rising inflation and the cost of living, this 1% cap is egregiously unfair to a group of workers that they're asking to be the shield, frankly, in this pandemic and to take the brunt of all of the impact, to keep people alive. We need to show nurses the respect that they deserve.

I want to thank you for the work and the advocacy and thank all of your members for what they do to care for people in our communities across this province.

Ms. Cathryn Hoy: Could I just add one thing to that? When you said about Bill 124—this goes deeper than this. Health care professionals have not seen cost-of-living raises in over a decade, and so—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you. The time is up for this one. If you can just add that in the next question, we'd appreciate that.

We go to the government. Mr. Thanigasalam.

1540

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you to all the presenters for being here and for your presentations. My question is to TTCriders. Thank you for your advocacy. I know you mentioned operational funding in particular, and also the gas tax. As you know, this year our government provided \$375 million in gas tax funding, and because of the low consumption of gas, the Ontario government stepped up with \$120 million in additional one-time funding to stabilize the gas tax funding to the municipalities due to COVID impacts. As you know, the funding formula is 70% ridership and 30% population, and municipalities can use the gas tax funding for various usages, including operations funding.

Yesterday, the Minister of Transportation announced a boost in funding through the gas tax program to the city of

Toronto, where the TTC operates, in the amount of \$185 million. Do you think these recent announcements will help realize some of your organization's goals?

Ms. Shelagh Pizey-Allen: Thanks for the question. We were certainly glad to learn about the increased allocation of \$120 million to enhance gas tax funding, but we do want to point out that that's just to bring the gas tax transfer up to its normal amount. That is what the provincial government would typically provide to municipalities every year.

We know that the fall economic statement mentioned \$345 million for transit agencies, and that \$120 million comes out of that. We are curious about what happened to the rest of this funding. But the point is that the gas tax revenue is something that happens every year, and we're in a funding crisis that requires emergency operations support to meet that \$461-million gap the TTC is facing this year alone and to ensure that all transit agencies in Ontario can keep service moving for essential workers.

It's great that the gas tax has been brought up to par with normal years, but the provincial government cancelled its promise to actually double that gas tax transfer, so we're sort of further behind than we would have been if that hadn't happened, and we have questions about plans to cut back on gas taxes. We're wondering if that will also in the future mean less revenue transferred to municipalities from the gas tax transfer.

So, in sum, we're really hoping to see a stable commitment to operations funding, both on an emergency basis, to get us out of the crisis, but also in the long term, so that transit agencies can boost service and make it more affordable.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you, Shelagh. From your answer, I understand that you're saying that the \$375 million is not the normal par, but from my understanding, because of the low consumption, we are putting in additional funding to bring it back to the normal rate of gas tax. That's what was announced.

My specific question is, let's focus on the city of Toronto, where the TTC operates. Do you think the \$185 million is not what you were expecting? And if not, how much did you expect?

Ms. Shelagh Pizey-Allen: That's a great question. I know we're doing lots of numbers, so to be clear: That \$185 million, the gas tax transfer, is something that the provincial government provides every year to municipalities, and the gas tax transfer can be used for capital or operations. What's happening with the pandemic is a funding crisis for public transit. That gas tax transfer—it's great that it has sort of been brought up to the level of past years, but that's not going to be enough to address the massive shortfall that Toronto's transit system and transit systems all across the province are facing.

The city of Toronto has passed a budget with a \$1.4-billion gap. A major part of that is because the TTC doesn't have fare revenues coming in. And so, Toronto and municipalities across Ontario are counting on this provincial government to keep transit running, so that essential workers can keep getting to their jobs.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you, Shelagh. I just want to make sure that we get the numbers right because,

as you know, this is part of a regular announcement. And since there was a reduction in the consumption, we have to step up and put in additional funding.

Moving on: You know that over \$2 billion was funded through both the provincial and federal Safe Restart Agreement for the impacts of COVID-19. On top of that, would you agree that Ontario's historic investment in public transit, such as the four priority subway projects—like the Ontario Line, the Yonge North subway extension, the Scarborough subway extension, the Eglinton West Crosstown extension—and the two-way, all-day GO represent a significant planned service increase for transit riders in Toronto and across the region? What are your thoughts on that?

Ms. Shelagh Pizey-Allen: Yes, thank you for asking. We certainly support the expansion of transit infrastructure. One thing we highlighted, though, is the Eglinton East LRT, which would actually run to your riding, Scarborough–Rouge Park, to Malvern, from Kennedy station. That has still not been funded by this provincial government, even though the city of Toronto has allocated \$1 billion. We would love to see an additional funding commitment to make that important project for Scarborough happen.

We're concerned that there is some spending that could go towards that line; for example, spending almost \$2 billion to tunnel the Eglinton West LRT. That could pay for the Eglinton East LRT, which would serve Scarborough residents who are underserved by rapid transit. Scarborough doesn't end at McCowan, but that is where the Scarborough subway will extend to.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Shelagh Pizey-Allen: I just want to highlight what we mentioned about the Scarborough RT. It will shut down in 2023, seven years before any rapid transit replacement is ready. That means over seven years of shuttle buses for Scarborough residents. That's why the operations funding is so important—there is an operations gap—to make sure that the bus service can be adequate. We hope that the RT can be transformed into a bus rapid transit corridor so that people have an adequate and safe replacement, but the bottom line is there are at least seven years of less rapid transit in Scarborough, so supporting the Eglinton East LRT is such an important gap that needs to be met by the provincial government as well.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you, Shelagh.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that.

We now go to the second round and to the opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to all the delegations.

I just want to say a special thank you to Lindsey and Shelagh for representing TTC riders. I grew up on the TTC; it was the only way that we got around. I just feel that if more people understood how important that connectivity was for the overall economy and the environment, then we wouldn't be debating putting money back into the TTC that they already took out and then having to

say thank you, right? So I want to say that I appreciate that message. That advocacy needs to continue.

Really quickly, Tim: Your presentation was very unusual for this committee; I think you pointed that out during your comments. My understanding is that you would like the Ontario government to remove the assets of HOOPP off of the books. I just have a question: What does the Auditor General say about that?

Mr. Tim Shortill: Sure, thank you for the question. This is really a confusion of accounting rules. Currently, the Public Sector Accounting Board, PSAB, is going through a review and is seeking consultation about the definition of "sponsor." Interestingly enough, in the accounting definitions, there is no clear definition of "sponsor." It's in this very grey area where we believe, and we feel very strongly on this, that government is not a sponsor. They do not have appointments to our board. They do not make decisions. They do not have a funding obligation. So why are we reflected on the government's books?

If this committee or the Legislature would take it upon itself to write to PSAB to support clarifying the definition of "sponsor" to make it perfectly clear that the taxpayers and the government do not have an obligation—the obligation is solely on HOOPP to present a fully funded pension promise that we committed to our members—that would go a very long way. It is an unusual request, but it's one we feel strongly about, because as I indicated, the success of HOOPP and the success of Canadian pension plans is very much founded upon governance and independence.

1550

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks for that clarification. I'll follow up with you personally on that issue.

Mr. Tim Shortill: I appreciate it.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Cathryn, as always, a very strong presentation. I think the whole committee could sense the level of frustration, which is quite rightly placed, with the state of affairs right now in our health care system.

I wanted to give you an opportunity because you got cut off in the last session. When Bill 124 was brought in—the impact of this piece of legislation will be felt for many years, I think, just like Bill 115, when the Liberals also imposed a contract on teachers, and then they lost in court afterwards. This is the misplaced ideology around the value of workers in society. We should actually all right now have clear respect that should be reflected in the remuneration and working conditions for those who are serving in the public service.

I wanted to give you an opportunity to address the systemic issues that have got us to this place, but also really the focus on the solutions going forward. As you know, we support repealing Bill 124. Please go ahead, Cathryn.

Ms. Cathryn Hoy: Thank you, and can you also un-mute Angela Preocanin and Lauren Snowball in case they have anything to add? As I was saying, health care has not had any cost-of-living increase in far over a decade, so the

wages and the net income that nurses are taking home have actually decreased and decreased over the years.

The other thing is, years and years ago, the male-dominated profession of police actually made less than nursing, and they were brought up to par with nursing for equity. But now they have continued to grow over the years, while nursing has actually decreased over the years. So I'm a little bit confused, when we're all front-line workers and we all take care of the people in our community, why a male-dominated profession has escalated so high, yet we have come down each year.

I spoke a little bit about Bill 195 also, because that is taking away a lot of our health care professionals' rights. They are working extensive shifts. I spoke to some nurses this morning. After working a night shift, they could not go home this morning. They had to stay another four hours. That's tremendous, doing that after working all night. But that's part of Bill 195, where they say, "We have no one to replace you. We have to keep you." Or they'll say, "Now tomorrow, after you've worked 16 hours, through the night and into the morning, we're going to change your schedule. Instead of being off, you need to come back in tomorrow morning." That isn't right either.

I spoke a little bit earlier about the part-time to full-time complement. We've become a casualized workforce, and that is definitely wrong. Just-in-time scheduling does not work, and it is an abuse of our taxpaying dollars. Things may look great budgeting on paper, but the reality doesn't work. That's why we've been stressing to the government that we work with the nurses, we represent the nurses. We're more than happy to come in and sit down and help you with the solution, not have a consultation where we get a call saying, "Heads-up, this is what we're going to do."

We have a lot of ideas that can help. We need money put into bringing back the retired nurses to help support the new learners, who are the new graduates, the students who are in. We've heard about the IENs who are coming in—

Ms. Catherine Fife: A mentorship program is really important. We heard that from RNAO and RPNs. Really, it's a knowledge transfer piece and a support. Otherwise, we're setting people up to fail in these conditions.

Ms. Cathryn Hoy: We are, and how sad is it that we're allowing experienced, seasoned nurses to leave because of this?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Cathryn Hoy: We need them there to support the new learners and to support the students, because the front line no longer has time to do that, because they're taking care of—sometimes it's one RN to 30 patients. I hope someone wants to touch base with me on the IEN program, because I would like to speak about that too.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. Lauren, Angela, quickly, anything?

Ms. Angela Preocanin: I would love to add that we really seriously have to look at that full-time complement. Precarious work is detrimental to our profession and it is pushing our nurses out the door. They're tired, they're

exhausted, they're demoralized, and this government needs to recognize the importance of saving our nurses and giving back to health care, supporting our nurses. It is quite frankly terrible, these things we hear every day. Cathryn is fielding calls every day—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you. That concludes the time, but if we could just have the last speaker state their name for the record.

Ms. Angela Preocanin: Angela Preocanin, Ontario Nurses' Association.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

With that, we will go to the independent. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It's great to see you, Tim. Thank you for presenting at committee. Obviously anything that I can do to assist you in that presentation to finance, to change what you've outlined to be unfair disclosure, I'm happy to do that, and to better understand what the challenge is, whether it's the definition of what a sponsor is—it may be the aggregate of who your members are and that carrying over. I'm happy to help you. Thank you for being here.

I have to use my time to talk to TTCriders. I want to thank you for your advocacy and your push, and always remembering Scarborough and the need for better connectivity and investment in Scarborough, and for us to realize the inclusion of Scarborough, frankly, in rapid transit. I just want to say thank you.

I completely support the idea you have presented here today—maybe you could restate that—in terms of the priority project for the city, which is the Eglinton East LRT extension, from Kennedy all the way to U of T and even into Malvern, which is going to connect a lot of priority communities and communities that, to this point, are on many, many, many buses because there is no other real option for them—although the Lakeshore GO does run right through that community as well, and could perhaps be more accessible to more people.

I do want you to talk about the value of these investments to communities, and, frankly, the jobs and just the benefits that they potentially could create.

Ms. Shelagh Pizey-Allen: Absolutely, yes. Thank you for the question. I'll speak a little bit about the Eglinton East LRT, because it is a project that the city of Toronto has supported. They have redirected funds from a levy towards it, so there's already over a billion dollars set aside for the Eglinton East LRT. Now it needs the support of this provincial government and the federal government.

The Eglinton East LRT would run from Kennedy station to the University of Toronto Scarborough and Centennial College and into Malvern, and would run through seven neighbourhood improvement areas. It would connect thousands of people to rapid transit and expand the rapid transit network in Scarborough. It's really important to build not just a few more stops, but a network that people can take advantage of.

I just want to go back to what's making it so urgent now, which is that Scarborough is actually going to be losing rapid transit in 2023, when the Scarborough RT

shuts down and nothing is built in the meantime. One important program—besides, of course, committing to the Eglinton East LRT—could be to bring in free transfers between GO and TTC, so that there are more rapid transit options in Scarborough for people to get around in that interim period. Unfortunately, the discount between GO and TTC fares was cancelled right before the pandemic hit, but that's something that should be brought back and actually made deeper—so, free transfers.

Of course, we'd also like to see that operations funding. There's a gap right now of at least \$60 million—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Shelagh Pizey-Allen: —to operate replacement service on buses when the RT shuts down.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I absolutely support you in that proposal. I'm happy to help you advocate provincially, as well as through Metrolinx and the TTC, to make that happen for the people in Scarborough, who cannot afford to lose any capacity right now in the transit network that is there, which is largely the buses right now. I grew up right there, taking the RT to work, to school, and it was in need of replacement then. So decades later, the fact that it's still just hanging on and that there is no viable plan—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We will now go to the government. MPP Kusendova.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you very much, Chair.

I wanted to thank all the presenters today, but I will be addressing my question to ONA.

1600

As some of you may know, I am a registered nurse, currently practising. In fact, I was on shift yesterday at Etobicoke General Hospital, in the ER. I want to thank my colleagues from ONA for sharing the current experiences of Ontario's nurses. I share some of these experiences myself. The working conditions, of course, due to the pandemic, have become very difficult for a lot of nurses in Ontario.

I want to address the comments made on Bill 124, just to lay out the context. The bill, of course, was brought in prior to the pandemic, which was a completely different context. It was in fact brought in to address some of the cost-of-living issues. As you know, inflation—which is right now at 4.8%, which is a huge rise from previous years—is driven by spending. Precisely because we wanted to be good stewards of the taxpayer purse, we brought in this bill which impacts one million employees within the Ontario public sector. It is not targeting any one specific profession or female-dominated professions; it targets one million workers in Ontario. Firefighters and policemen are non-direct employees of the Ontario government, and they negotiate their contracts through their municipalities.

I also want to say that I was proud when our government did provide the most generous pandemic pay to nurses and close to 500,000 front-line workers back in 2020.

We've also made significant investments into recruitment efforts, to the tune of \$342 million, to retain more

nurses, more registered practical nurses—with our partners at WeRPN—and, of course, our PSWs, who are critical.

Having said all of that, I hear you, and I'm putting out efforts and advocating within government to ensure that the voices of nurses are being heard, because this is an unprecedented situation that the entire world has been dealing with.

What I want to touch upon and ask you more about today is the future of nursing, because I want to be hopeful. I've been working with our nursing interns—we call them externs within our department—who are nursing students and who are helping us throughout this pandemic. I'm proud that our government has increased nursing enrolment at our universities by 20%. I'm also proud that we've introduced the stand-alone nursing baccalaureates at our colleges to allow students to have more choice.

I, myself, was a new grad initiative recipient, and I really benefited from this mentorship program that was available to us.

What other tools and what other ideas can ONA put forward in terms of the future of nursing and our new grads and how we can better support them as they embark on a very unusual time in their career? Some nurses have never worked outside of the pandemic, so clearly they're experiencing unprecedented levels of stress and difficult working conditions.

Ms. Cathryn Hoy: I'll address each of your issues.

Bill 124 came out in 2019, pre-pandemic, by maybe about one month. Historically, the increases that health care providers have received have been less than the cost of living. So we cannot blame the pandemic for the 4.8%, because the cost of living had not been met for previous years. So the difference ratio is not related—sorry, I guess I'm not explaining it right. For 10 years, historically, we have gotten less than—it's not because of the pandemic, because I'm pretty darn sure that the cost of living would have been more than 1%.

You spoke about the generosity of the pandemic pay. I will politely disagree with you on that. That pandemic pay was for a brief period of time, and it did not go to all the health care providers that it should have, and it was not rolled out right. So I respectfully disagree with you. And it was cut off very short—we're still in the pandemic, but there is no pandemic pay.

Retaining nurses: You're not retaining nurses with Bill 124 right now, and Bill 195. Those need to go if you want to retain your nurses.

And I truly appreciate what you're saying—you are a nurse, but you are working under a licence, as we all are.

The IEN program: We recognize they are all registered nurses in the countries that they graduated from. However, when I'm a nurse with 30 patients, or even 12 patients, now you're asking me to supervise four more nurses, which means that I have to review all their care, and I cannot do that. No one can do that. So that is not a plan that would work for—really, to protect your licence.

Nursing students: We're going to lose nursing students because they don't even get to do clinical placement now

through their education plan, and when they are graduating, there's no one to support them. That's why I'm saying we need a plan to bring our retired nurses back in to support them—because they're going to come in and they are going to fail. Let me tell you, I've spoken to a lot of nursing graduates now who are wanting to change careers, or are changing careers, because the pandemic—it's just killed them right off the bat.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: If I could just ask you to elaborate—and thank you for all your valuable feedback. I really do appreciate it. You asked if someone will follow up with you on the IEN program. I'd be more than happy to sit down with you and get more input.

But in terms of internationally trained nurses, I know we have recently redeployed 1,200 of them into our health care sector. I'm also hearing that at the CNO, there is an issue—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: —with how quickly or how slowly these nurses are actually being approved to work in Ontario. Do you have any feedback on that specific issue?

Ms. Cathryn Hoy: Yes. Some of it is work permits that need to be addressed, and that the CNO needs to be encouraged to speed up the processing of their applications. It can take anywhere from two years to four years, while we have registered nurses, who are here in our province, who can hit the pavement and they can work. But placing them under another registered nurse's licence for them to work is not fair to an already overburdened nurse. I know the plan sounds good, but in reality it is not, when there's such a critical shortage. I would feel that you would understand that, being a registered nurse and licensed under the College of Nurses.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you. I appreciate that feedback and I will take it back.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for the presentations. It also concludes this panel, so we will move on to the next one.

INNOVATIVE MEDICINES CANADA

CANADIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE BLIND COMMUNITY CARE DURHAM

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The first presenter will be Innovative Medicines Canada. Again, we ask you to introduce oneself as you make your presentation. It will be a seven-minute presentation. I will let you know when you have a minute left and I will cut you off at seven minutes. With that, the floor is yours.

Ms. Susan Baker: Super. Thank you so much. It's a delight to see so many familiar faces here today. My name is Susan Baker and I'm the Ontario director at Innovative Medicines Canada.

IMC is the national voice of Canada's pharmaceutical industry, representing 48 research-based companies. With an economic impact of \$15 billion in Canada, \$8.5 billion of that in Ontario, the sector supports 100,000 jobs across

the country, and 58,000 of those jobs are here in Ontario. The sector spends about \$2 billion in research and development.

Canadians can be proud of how our industry has taken up the fight against COVID-19 and the evolving challenges the variants of this virus present. I just want to say that the sector is fully committed to collaborating with both our federal and provincial governments to build a thriving life sciences sector here in Ontario, one which will protect patient access to the newest, most innovative medicines, and also one that will attract investments to Canada.

To better position Ontario to compete and attract investments, IMC has six recommendations. I'll speak to two of them that fit under what we describe as growing the sector.

The first recommendation is that the Ontario government establish a life sciences strategy working group. I have to applaud this government for their 2020 announcement to develop the life science strategy, but what we recommend now is that we immediately set up a working group, with the Ministries of Health, Economic Development and Finance and with industry leaders, to develop and implement this strategy. I also want to mention that we need to include the drugs and devices division of public health, as those folks determine the uptake and appropriate utilization of medicines and vaccines.

1610

The second recommendation is that Ontario continue to advocate for federal reconsideration of the PMPRB pricing reforms. Despite the grave concerns expressed by patients, the life science community, the innovative pharmaceutical sector and provincial governments, the federal government has not repealed but, once again, temporarily delayed the implementation of these amendments, and they are now set to come into effect July 1, 2022. IMC asks that Ontario continue to play a leadership role within Canada and work with the provinces and federal government to ensure the pricing reforms do not jeopardize patient access to new medicines or Ontario's competitiveness as a global destination for clinical trials, R&D and manufacturing.

I'll now move to four recommendations around patient access and improving patient access. The first is to support what I will call a 30-day listing. Ontario represents the largest volume of patients subject to the terms of the pCPA, or the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance, negotiations. Patient access truly begins once that product is formally listed in Ontario. In Ontario, patients are waiting an average of 144 days, or four and a half months, for oncology drugs and 113 days, or three months, for non-oncology drugs after that pCPA negotiation is complete. Quebec has a goal of 30 days and Alberta five days. IMC is pleased that the drugs and devices division is willing to work with industry to ensure that drugs are available to Ontarians 30 days after the negotiation is complete, and we look forward to working with the government on this in 2022.

The second program to support patients is what I will call an accelerated patient access pilot program. Currently,

Canada ranks 18 out of 20 OECD countries in terms of time to list. It takes almost 1,000 days to bring in innovative medicines to patients. If Ontario can contribute to reducing that time to list, it will not only be good for patients but make Ontario a more attractive destination. IMC requests that the government support an accelerated patient access pilot program within pCPA so that once a drug has been approved by Health Canada and has gone through the federal reviews, that patients have quicker access to it. We would love to be able to work with government to identify those priority areas.

The third recommendation is to provide programmatic funding for diagnostic tests. I have to acknowledge the government's announcements—and there actually have been four announcements on cancer tests that are now funded in Ontario. What we are advocating for is a streamlined review and approval and funding process. Right now, it's not transparent and we believe Ontario should consider more transparency in that process. But I again want to acknowledge these four announcements that were made since June of last year.

Finally, I just want to speak to take-home oncology drugs and recommend that Ontario consider closing the gap for patients who are above 25 and under 65 for take-home oncology drugs.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Susan Baker: Those patients now have to depend on different programs if they don't have private coverage. So I would like to suggest that be considered.

Finally, I just want to say we want to continue to work with government to grow the sector and ensure our medicines are available to patients. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for your presentation.

Our next presentation is from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. Thank you very much for being here.

Mr. Thomas Simpson: Thank you. My name is Thomas Simpson and I am the executive director of CNIB's public affairs and CNIB's Come to Work program. I just want to make sure everyone can hear me okay.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Yes, it's very good.

Mr. Thomas Simpson: Perfect. Joining me today is my colleague Wayne Henshall, who is the head of our Come to Work program. We appreciate the opportunity to present today in front of this committee.

Since 1918, CNIB has provided support for Canadians with sight loss to ensure that they live safely and independently. This includes supporting individuals with sight loss who want to enter, re-enter and advance in the world of work. That's what we're here to talk to you about today: the world of work.

As Ontario looks ahead to its post-pandemic economic recovery, employers of all sizes across all sectors and in communities throughout the province are experiencing major labour shortage. Unless employers can find and hire the employees they need, much-needed economic growth

will slow or, worse, fail to materialize. If Ontario is to compete, it is imperative that we better empower those individuals already living in Ontario who are able and willing to work but, up until now, have been marginalized.

Ontarians living with sight loss represent an important reserve of ambitious, skilled and capable people ready to work, an untapped pool of talent. There are 1.5 million Canadians living with sight loss, and nearly half of that, 681,000, are living right here in Ontario. Unfortunately, only 31% of working-age Canadian adults with sight loss are employed full time, compared to the national employment average of 65.5%. Addressing this unemployment and underemployment of Canadians with sight loss is an untapped opportunity to support Ontario's economic recovery and to help us build back better. The current labour shortage represents a tremendous opportunity to support many of these individuals in finding purposeful, fulfilling and well-compensated work, reducing their need for social assistance while contributing positively to the Ontario economy.

In 2018, CNIB proudly launched Come to Work, a specialized program that connects job seekers who are blind or partially sighted with employers. The services we offer are not provided by other vocational providers, as they're so specific to working with people with sight loss that other providers simply do not have the expertise to provide these services. An investment by the Ontario government of \$9 million over three years to support Ontarians with sight loss through our Come to Work program will ensure that we can scale up to support many more individuals and employers, and provide our tailored, one-on-one support unit.

I'm now going to turn it over to my colleague Wayne to discuss how CNIB can help individuals and employers across Ontario.

Mr. Wayne Henshall: Thank you, Thomas. My name is Wayne Henshall. I am the head of the Come to Work program. When you think about "head," I would like to amend that and say I am what we call an agent of change. I am one of those individuals living with sight loss living here in Ontario, in my little town of Brooklin, Ontario.

As we look at this and we look at the Come to Work program, the need that we focused in around is not just about the need for individuals to focus on their skills and development, but also to improve upon their confidence level, keeping current with the skills and pursuing those areas of interest that they want to go and work in. Whether it is an individual wishing to work as a PSW, a social worker, a customer service rep or a mediation expert, the talent pool—and we use that term very specifically—covers all that range. That range is not just here in Ontario, where we have over 400 such talent pool members participating, but it's also across Canada as we look at this program.

Since the onset of COVID-19, the participation rate and the demand for our services has increased over 300%. One of the challenges that we have—and the reason that we are requesting this support here today—as we go forward is so that we can continue to meet and expand our program in

support of the demand that is out there. To give you a perspective or a better sense of how we are approaching that, I want to orient you around how the Come to Work program is structured, because it really does focus in on three fundamental areas.

Area number one is around talent pool cultivation. Talent pool cultivation means how we identify, adjust and get ready for work and then go out and compete for those jobs, and then, as we get them, actually retain them and grow within those opportunities. We have established these five stages of readiness, from stage 1 being new or adjusting to vision loss, to stage 5, which is working already. Currently, we have over 960 in the talent pool across Canada, with 434 of those here in Ontario alone. Currently, our talent pool is growing exponentially, and we continue to have people coming to our door, looking for us to engage and support them through the stages of engagement.

1620

The next part of the program is around partner engagement. When we talk about partners, it's important that we all realize this is not CNIB or the individual, as we say, the talent pool, or Wayne, in this case, to personalize it to all of us here. It's not us going out and putting our hand out saying, "Do you have a job? Do you have a job? Do you have a job?"

What we're asking for is our partners to engage and become better aware of engaging individuals who may be approaching the particular opportunity within their organization to help that organization to succeed, but also for that individual then to contribute.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Wayne Henshall: And the third part of that element is around vocational partnerships, because the Come to Work program isn't here to replicate what is already out there through other employment services activities, but as Thomas called out earlier, to focus in on the specialized elements of a person with vision loss so that we can engage and support and allow them to thrive within their given environment.

In closing, I'm just going to call out that, currently, CNIB has been funding this activity through charitable activities. What we're looking for, from the support of the Ontario government, is that we can not only meet the current needs but also collaborate into the future. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for your presentation.

We now will go to Community Care Durham.

Mr. James Meloche: Thank you very much. I'm going to share my screen in a moment, if I can do that.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Yes.

Mr. James Meloche: Great. Can everyone see my presentation?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I can see it here.

Mr. James Meloche: Wonderful.

Thanks for having me here today. I'm James Meloche. I'm the CEO of Community Care Durham. I'm actually here as a bit of a representative for the entire sector, but

I'm going to speak a little bit about our experience in Durham region, which I can tell you is a lived experience across the province.

At Community Care Durham, our mission is to support people and strengthen our community. We do this through a network of volunteers and staff to help people stay at home wherever they call home. We are 360 staff, 1,400 volunteers, and we serve 14,000 clients across the region. We are a community non-profit organization.

What the people of Ontario are telling us is that 0% of Ontarians wish to live in long-term care—zero. Some 91% of Ontarians said that, if they were given the option with additional supports, they would prefer to live at home with those supports, and 97% of our clients said we are helping them stay at home and maintain their independence. It's clear Ontarians want to stay at home and they're willing to take that responsibility to live where and how they wish. They simply need some of our support.

At Community Care Durham, we're supporting all of the government's priorities, especially during COVID: seniors, food security, mental health and, of course, hospital avoidance. Supporting people in the community is a fraction of the cost of keeping someone in a hospital and half the cost of living in long-term care.

During COVID, as a community agency, we responded like most other organizations across the province. We expanded our meals delivery to 158,000 meals across the region from just under 100,000 the year before. That's almost 500 meals a day going out of our doors to at-risk seniors across the region. We created a brand new food security program, delivering 4,000 locally driven community food boxes. We didn't drop our home services to those clients living at home. We've led partnerships across the region, specifically, the Ontario health team. We provide free drives to vaccination centres. And most importantly, of all of our clients, we had two COVID infections in our people living at home. That's a 0.4% rate of COVID infection for the first year. People are safe at home.

Unfortunately, we've had a missed opportunity in the province. In the last budget, the Ontario government did not provide any additional investment into our sector. The vast majority of those investments came with targeted service expansions and no base funding increases. What's more troubling, and which is premised in the minister's fall economic statement, there is no funding to the community support services sector and to the independent living sector.

What we're seeing is a decade trend of growing attrition to our services. A lack of basic annual inflationary base adjustments has lost an opportunity of almost \$7 million in 10 years of community investment. In this year alone, we're short \$1.5 million. What does that actually mean? Without stable annual increases to our sector, we see service attrition; loss of staff; an overreliance on fundraising to cover shortfalls; increasing client fees, which pushes services out of reach for the average person; and lost opportunities to invest in areas like technology and capital that can create greater efficiencies and quality of care.

To give you a more clear example, at Community Care Durham, we serve 240 high-risk seniors living at home rather than in long-term care. Through a combination of our in-home and community support services, we're able to help those individuals for as little as \$39 a day. If our 240 clients were in long-term care, it would cost taxpayers \$5.5 million more than what we're funded for today. Unfortunately, to balance our budget, we had to reduce our capacity by 16% last year, at a time when government needs more alternatives to long-term care. Currently, we have 70 clients waiting for service, and our wait-list continues to grow.

To drill it down even further, in the next fiscal year, we're facing a shortfall of \$230,000 in our respite program, impacting 448 clients, and over \$600,000 in our assisted-living program, impacting 180 clients. These clients get six hours a day of personal care in their home to help them live independently.

So, as a sum, in our ask, we're asking the government to consider—not just for Community Care Durham's clients but for all of the Community Care organizations across the province—a \$677-million investment in our sector; first of all, \$470 million to stabilize our workforce, stemming the exodus of our workforce into other sectors which are higher-paying or going to other sectors entirely. At Community Care Durham, our staff, our personal support workers, are paid 10% less than they're paid in long-term care, 20% less than they're paid in hospitals. This is an area where our cost is more effective and with better-quality care than all those other sectors. No one wants to be in a hospital. No one wants to be in long-term care. They want to be at home. Let's help them do that.

We need about a 5% increase to our base funding to help prevent the further attrition of our services. Help us fundraise. Help us coordinate volunteers. In our organization alone, volunteers provide \$2 million of unpaid services every single year. We need help doing that. And with it, we can help prevent admissions into hospital and long-term care.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. James Meloche: Finally, \$150 million to address some of the immediate pressures stemming out of COVID, including helping hospitals reduce their bed pressures, or what we call ALC, and the surgical backlog.

Again, thank you for having me here today. I look forward to the next conversation. I'll end my screen.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for your presentation. With that, that concludes our three presenters.

But before we go to the questions, I believe MPP French has joined us. I hope that she would just identify herself and tell us where she is.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm Jennifer French, and I'm coming to you live from Oshawa.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

The questions will start with the independent member. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you so much to all the presenters.

I want to start with CNIB. I think you have been very specific in your asks of the committee today. To me, it's a funding investment, because there is a return that will be seen first to the individuals who will be involved in productive work in an area of their choice, and I'm wondering if you can talk about that.

Mr. Thomas Simpson: Thank you so much, MPP Hunter, for the question—definitely. Our approach with Come to Work is tailored to the individual. We ensure that our one-on-one training, as well as the other training that we offer, helps to identify the goals of the individual, whether or not they have previous experience, or help them to get perhaps experience to help them attain a job, if that is their goal. That's why our approach, our outreach work for employer partners, is not directed to one industry or necessarily one type of work. It is very much the approach that, if an individual is looking to, as Wayne was saying, a number of different examples—we will go to those industries and help to explain to those potential partners, to those potential employers, the ways in which people who are blind or partially sighted could do that job. So the approach definitely is very much tailored.

But perhaps I'll just ask my colleague Wayne if he has anything else further to add to that.

1630

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Wayne, while you're getting on your mike there, I want it to be specific to the opportunity—I see this as an opportunity for Ontario, that this is about adding to our labour force and giving people that choice of where they want to work because they are supported in accessing that work. So the 680,000 that are with vision loss would be part of this pool. I'm sure some of them do already have employment, but many do not because of lack of support.

So I'm wondering if you know the percentages based on age and demographic—what percentage of that would be eligible for this program? And I'm assuming that it would be CNIB, across all of your chapters, in many, many parts of Ontario, that would be taking your innovative model and helping people with vision loss to access employment.

Mr. Wayne Henshall: It's Wayne here, speaking. So, absolutely, and what you're calling attention to is we start with the talent pool, but then we orient into the partner, as Thomas was calling it. The talent pool—and speaking from my own personal experience, the vision loss journey is not just something that you can adjust to and be ready overnight. That's why we work both at a one-on-one basis with the individual but also in group sessions to help them prepare and learn based on where the economics are changing.

Just think about when we were last presenting to this committee two years ago, none of us had the crystal ball that said we were going to be dealing with COVID. So how are we going to adjust? How are we going to learn, all, how much now is driven through remote-type work activities? The use of technology: How does that technology, the adoption of Teams and how is it enabling for an individual—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Mr. Wayne Henshall: —how do they get comfortable with that? So the piece that we orient to is really to take the individuals and progress them through those stages, and work with those partners to open the doors for opportunity in an awareness standpoint. It's not, "What type of job do you have?" It's, "How can we make your business be successful with the great talent pool that we have here in Ontario?"

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I think it's making our labour force and employers more inclusive and they're looking for that support. CNIB has already done the pilot. You have innovated in this way and you just need the government to invest \$9 million over three years to expand this for more people in need of work access. Thank you so much for presenting this to us today.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Now, we'll go to the government. MPP Kusendova.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you to all of our presenters. My first question is for CNIB. I, myself, here at my constituency office, in the same building, we have an organization called the Coalition for Persons with Disabilities, and I've worked very closely with them to understand the important services that they provide to not only my constituents but persons living with disabilities across the region of Peel.

I know how difficult and challenging the journey may be for someone who is looking to access employment, and all the skills that are required to go through the interview process etc. and how the coalition has been there for these individuals over and over. Sometimes it takes a really long time to find an appropriate employer who is willing, frankly, to take this person on and all the supports that are needed.

Of course, the pandemic has impacted all industries and all work sectors, but I wanted to ask specifically if you can share with this committee how the pandemic has impacted persons who are experiencing vision loss and especially their access to employment services.

Mr. Thomas Simpson: Great. Thank you so much, MPP Kusendova, for that question. Really, here, we think of this pandemic that it's doom and gloom, but there are silver linings here. I think the silver lining here for employment opportunities for people who are blind or partially sighted especially is that technology and working from home have removed so many of the barriers that would have presented themselves.

Think of just getting to a job for a population who mostly do not have access to drive themselves, having to navigate public transit to get to their job. That has now been removed, whether that's the cost or whether that's the affordability and accessibility of that public transit system. Think about trying to get into a building that is not accessible. Think about new elevators now that are using touch screens to try to navigate people to work in an office tower. That barrier is now removed. Now, you're on an even playing field with your colleagues, because all you have to do is turn on your computer, have the adaptive equipment that enables you to do your job, similar to your

sighted peers, and you're able to do your job in a way that makes you successful.

So, in a way, the pandemic has removed several of the barriers in society that would have prevented someone from even just getting in the door and has now enabled people who are looking for a job to say, "I can do it from home. I don't have to worry about trying to find a bus, which is not accessible for me, or trying to get to a workplace that's not accessible."

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you for sharing that perspective.

I'm interested to learn more also about the Assistive Devices Program. As I understand it, not all or maybe not enough Ontarians who are living with vision loss access the ADP. Can you tell us what might be some barriers to access or why that's happening?

Mr. Thomas Simpson: Thank you for your question. The Assistive Devices Program is, I would say, widely used by the disability community in Ontario, but it is one such program that has not seen modernization in quite a significant time. Unfortunately, what we're seeing is outdated programs as part of that program and the inability, perhaps, to add new and innovative assistive devices or adaptive equipment onto that.

I think there is a myth out there that for a lot of people with disabilities, assistive devices, especially in the workplace, are going to be quite cost prohibitive for employers. That, actually, is not the case. In fact, what we've seen in research from the Conference Board of Canada is that it's usually under \$500 for assistive devices for people with a disability to be able to use the technology and tools they need to be successful in the workplace.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you.

Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Three minutes.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Now, I'd like to ask some questions to Community Care Durham. First of all, thank you so much for your services. I know that home care and community care are one of the fundamental parts of our health care system. I view the health care system as an ecosystem, and all parts have to be working together in order to provide holistic patient and family-centred care to Ontarians. That's why I was so proud when we introduced Bill 74, when we truly transformed the way we deliver health care in Ontario to form Ontario health teams.

The idea, of course, behind the Ontario health teams was to allow the patient to have one team taking care of them 24/7 and to make those ER-to-home transitions a lot smoother and allow health care providers to be communicating with each other. Of course, the pandemic has impacted the speed under which we wanted to see this health care transformation come to fruition, but having said that, we have recently made additional investments into home and community care to the tune of, I believe, \$61 million. So I wanted to ask what impact that investment has made to the care that you deliver in Durham and for any feedback on gaps or programs that might need to be addressed or considered in the future.

Mr. James Meloche: Thank you for your question, and I'll be respectful in my answer to your question. First of

all, I work very closely with the Ontario health team in our local hospital here at Lakeridge Health. I'm actually the executive lead for the team and I'm the co-lead for all of the CSS sector.

In fairness to the government, Ontario Health hasn't even distributed the one-time funding this year to the sector, so we still have no idea of the funding that's actually been committed by government, which hasn't reached the front lines. As I said in my presentation, I have 60 clients now who actually could benefit from these services if the funding was at the door. So with all due respect, it's stuck in your bureaucracy, of which I was a long-time member.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. James Meloche: The other question about Minister Bethlenfalvy's comments in the last fall economic statement: He dedicated that funding to the home and community sector, but to the home side, not the community support services side. The unfortunate reality of that is that, again, not to be ideological in my response, but we employ personal support staff to provide in-home support. We are a non-profit organization. For-profit service provider organizations provide the same service at a higher cost, and they've been given the funding by this government, but they missed us. So the reality is that you're actually rewarding for-profit providers to provide care that we deliver more holistically at a lower cost, and we've been in this community for 45 years.

1640

I think there was a missed opportunity, and I'm hoping the government might go back and look at that very, very important investment it committed to in the next budget and make sure that they don't miss our sector, because we are doing the same work while employing volunteers and other staff. I think it's great progress, but please, let's broaden that net a little wider.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that presentation.

We now go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to all the presenters; it's really interesting.

I have to say, Innovative Medicines Canada, you raised a couple of issues that we hear and we see in our constituency offices around access to certain drugs. I wanted to give you an opportunity to talk about the streamlining of—actually, it's not just streamlining. It's increasing some transparency in the drug approval process, because when folks contact us, they're usually quite desperate to access a certain drug that has not made it onto the formulary. It's either been stuck in a committee or stuck in a trial when other jurisdictions have approved it. Is there a way for you to address this lack of transparency in how drugs are approved? And if so, please go ahead.

Ms. Susan Baker: Thank you so much. I have to apologize. My WiFi was a little bit shaky there so I'm not sure if you can hear me or not.

Ms. Catherine Fife: We can.

Ms. Susan Baker: Okay, great. I'm not sure I fully caught your question, but certainly companies do provide

patient support programs prior to drugs being approved for patients in Ontario, as well as across the country. They're called PSPs, patient support programs. They're fully available.

In terms of the timelines, a lot of it I would describe as red tape. There are some things we can do in Ontario. Rather than doing them, what I would call "sequentially," we would do them in parallel, and that would help to bring these medicines to patients faster. Again, the hard work has already been done in terms of the negotiation around the price, the criteria and those sorts of things, but it's just getting rid of some of that red tape to make sure those medicines go onto the formulary and are made available.

There are some other challenges in processes that Ontario doesn't control but is part of. They are more of the pan-Canadian processes, and we certainly are working with those bodies to address some of the challenges there.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. Susan, it's a really important issue for us. We did bring forward an opposition day motion to make take-home cancer drugs available to everybody regardless of what their coverage is, because we think it's an equity issue. There are obviously problems with folks coming in to a hospital sometimes and getting to the location where the drugs are. I just wanted to give you one other opportunity to let this committee know how important it is for us to improve access to take-home cancer drugs.

Ms. Susan Baker: It's absolutely critical that we improve that access for that particular patient population, but also for all of those people who don't have private coverage and are between 25 and 65. As everyone knows, if you're over 65, the public plan covers everyone; you are automatically enrolled. And if you're under 25, we have what's known as OHIP+, which covers those kids who don't have private coverage through their parents' plan or through their plan.

What we would recommend is that we have some sort of plan which would allow patients who don't have private coverage to get those medicines they need. As I said, take-home oncology is one of the biggest concerns because of the cost to the patients in that population. I'll stop there.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think the point has been made, so thank you very much.

James, I know that MPP French is going to ask you a question. I just wanted you to—if you could pull up the slide with the comparator about how much it costs to stay in a hospital for a day versus home care. Are you able to pull that one up?

Mr. James Meloche: Sure, if the moderator will allow me. Yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Or you could just tell us. I had \$730 a day in hospital. Is that right?

Mr. James Meloche: Yes, that's right. There it is there, if you can see it. And then \$201—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Sorry, James. Where did you get this data?

Mr. James Meloche: This comes from our provincial association. It has been well validated. I would say that the \$201 is actually prior to meeting the government's commitment to the four hours of care that has been committed

to in the last round, so that cost will go up. I'm concerned somewhat that we're not truly representing the costs per day in long-term care, because of the capital costs and the increasing costs around care. So, yes, this is validated data.

I will say that I am not here to compete against the hospitals for funding. I am not here to compete about accessing the long-term care. I'm saying that if we're only investing in those two areas, actually we're missing an opportunity to save the taxpayer millions of dollars and actually help people stay at home, where they want to be.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Absolutely. We've been trying to make that case as well, which is why I wanted to see these numbers again, and I also wanted to verify where you got the data from. The really missed opportunity in Ontario is keeping people in their home, and I think that your data definitely—when you surveyed the clients and residents of Durham, where they said that people do not want to go into long-term care, they just don't. Some, quite honestly, can't afford to, because it's expensive. So the \$103 a day for a person to remain at home is good value to fund community not-for-profits to do this important work.

I also want to say that the Meals on Wheels component is actually—that's eyes on people, right? So much of our casework—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —comes through the Meals on Wheels program, because you're actually in someone's home and you're having a conversation with them. When the lines of communication are open with the respective health agencies in the community, you can actually get help to those people. I wanted to say that for me, this is your most powerful slide, and it's one that I'm going to be quoting on the regular.

I'm going to move over very quickly to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. Thomas, I think you've made the case that there's opportunity here in this changing world of work. There are a lot of big thinkers and big minds out there talking about how the nature of work will change. This is an opportunity for us to actually be more inclusive and really share a shared prosperity model, so I wanted just to give you an opportunity, please, to tell the committee—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much, but you haven't got that ability.

We're now going to the independent. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you to our presenters today for this great discussion. I want to quickly start with Innovative Medicines. How do we build back better given what we learned in the health system throughout the pandemic? I know we're still in it, but let's look ahead a little bit.

Ms. Susan Baker: Thank you, MPP Hunter, for that question. I think that in terms of building back better, what we really need to do is to be collaborating as the life sciences sector with government. I know our partners at Life Sciences Ontario have actually put a road map together in terms of all of the things we can be doing in this great province to build back. Certainly, some of the

Innovative Medicines Canada points that I spoke to earlier will help us build back better.

If we can show that we are willing to bring medicines to patients in a timely way, that will help with the desire to bring investments to this province. Ontario is a great place when you look at our education system, our hospitals, the clinical trials we can do here. But when companies here in Ontario are doing the clinical trials, doing the manufacturing, and they can't then get those medicines to patients for several years, it is a disincentive. So I've outlined some suggestions around bringing medicines to patients in a more timely way. That will certainly help attract investments.

1650

Just going back to the life sciences strategy, I really think if we can, as an industry and with our partners like Medtech Canada, Life Sciences Ontario and the government of Ontario, sit down and really go through some of these things that are important, we will build back better. We are here, and we want to work with all of you. Thank you.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, and we've got to shorten that cycle.

I want to also, just with the time I have, talk to Community Care Durham. Thank you for all the work that you do. There is so much need in Durham for your services. I hear about it in my neighbouring area, in Scarborough. I'm wondering about your call on the government to not leave out community care, independent living, because it has to be part of that continuum of care and support that we provide, especially as people age. We know our population is aging.

I just got a call from one of my constituents who is desperate—her mother, who is quite elderly, has dementia but she lives at home, and needs full-time care after hip replacement surgery—and is struggling to put the pieces together. So can you talk about that type of investment and how needed it is at this time? James?

Mr. James Meloche: I hope that, in your constituency office—you have found a client who needs additional support at home, transportation to get to a medical appointment or a cancer treatment or a dialysis treatment.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. James Meloche: They require food in their fridge. Who do you call upon? In your area, you call on Trans-Care, Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities, Carefirst. In our region, you call on Community Care Durham and we are right there the next day. This is what community does best. Community helps community fix community problems.

If there is one lesson in COVID, it's about trusting and putting your dollars and your investments in our community. I'm not asking government to fix every problem, but it's about community. To the point that was made earlier, when you have 1,400 volunteers driving a meal to a senior, eyes on eyes, "How are you doing today?"—we've found clients laying on their floor for a day with no attention because no one knew they were there. We have prevented hospital visits. We've prevented suicides, to be

frank. It's that ability to reach out to people that provides invaluable results, not for just those individuals but for our entire community.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that presentation.

We now will go to the government. MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you to all of our presenters this round. I appreciate all of your insights and suggestions. I'm going to start my questions with Susan. Susan, a really interesting presentation and thoughts today. Something that those of us in Ottawa—I represent a riding in Ottawa—are spending a lot of time thinking about these days is the plans for our new hospital that's going to be built in Ottawa. Part of the plan and the vision that's been laid out is to sort of turn Carling Avenue in Ottawa into our very own version of University Avenue in Toronto with a whole slew of new research buildings along that corridor to tie into the Ottawa heart institute, the Royal Ottawa etc.

Part of that has been a discussion around how do we leverage Ottawa's tech industry and life sciences sector and bring them together in this new corridor. I'm wondering if you could share any thoughts on what are some suggestions that you have, based on your membership, on how we can really get the life sciences sector excited and involved in this new project and make sure that we're connecting some groundbreaking research with start-ups out there and with companies that are active in this sphere.

Ms. Susan Baker: Yes, thank you so much for that question. It's a great question. Just in terms of next steps, I think a meeting to better understand what Ottawa is hoping to do.

Certainly, our members are running clinical trials in so many hospitals across this country and I know they are always looking for opportunities for collaborations. We support a number of research chairs and those sorts of things. As well, we've got those start-up companies that we do connect with. So I think in terms of next steps, probably really better understanding—and I have to apologize; I don't know exactly what Ottawa is looking to do. But I think if we could connect and really better understand that and let our membership know, and then, of course, all of those we work with outside of our membership—on how we could collaborate and support some of that work.

Certainly, Ontario and Quebec are great places for the life sciences sector. We really appreciate the collaborations we have with the hospitals, with the universities, and we look forward to continuing those relationships.

I would love to connect again with you and have a further discussion on this. Thank you so much for your question.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: All of us as MPPs, when we're down at Queen's Park, are right across the street from the MaRS facility, and we often will wander over there for coffee meetings or for lunch and see all the exciting work that's happening there. I imagine that facilities like that have been good hubs for your sector, as well, in terms of

bringing the different pieces together that are going to make Ontario a really competitive place for the sector.

Going a bit deeper on something you mentioned earlier: You were talking about how one of the big pieces you need to see is some red tape taken down in the province. I wonder if you could walk the committee through a couple of examples of some of the red tape that you see as being the most problematic—and how it could help some of your members.

Ms. Susan Baker: It's a great question.

I have to say, we have seen a number of improvements in terms of red tape reduction over the past few years. A couple of things, for example, would be submissions—when we made drug submissions to the Ontario government. The guidelines were 360 pages. The submissions were substantial, and they were paper-based. We've actually worked with government to reduce those guidelines, and we just had an announcement on January 10 that they would be reduced to 12 to 18 pages, so the members were delighted. We're now just trying to figure out how much the reduction would be in terms of submission content that we have to provide. We used to have to provide binders. We've just recently moved to electronic submissions.

When you look at the products that are waiting in the queue, what's known as the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance—that's housed in Ontario. It's a pan-Canadian body. There is a large queue there, and we really feel that there are some things we can do, probably around staffing, to make sure that we don't have 38 products waiting for several hundred days to have the review. In Ontario, there's some work we can do with Cancer Care Ontario while the pCPA negotiation is going on—so doing that in parallel versus sequential. So there are some opportunities like that. Some of it's very technical.

I do think we've made some progress in this province, and we want to continue to make progress, and just trying to reduce some of those things which I've identified would be helpful.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I really appreciate that. It's great feedback for us to consider.

Chair, how much time do I have remaining?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have 1.3 minutes.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: We're running up against the clock, but I do want to pivot over to CNIB. Thank you so much for your presentation.

I had the chance, recently, to learn a little bit about the BlindSquare program that CNIB has been involved with. One of the things that struck me immediately is, is something like that something that we should be looking at—if it's not already—getting into some of our front-facing government service offices? In your experience, are some of the front-facing government service offices like ServiceOntario etc. already meeting good-enough accessibility standards, or are there tech pieces like BlindSquare etc. that we should be looking at expanding into some of those spheres?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Thomas Simpson: I think that technology and advancements and innovations in enabling accessibility continue to grow, which is fantastic, and there's always more that can be done to ensure that access to the built environment, especially in public spaces like Service-Ontario, can be made more accessible.

1700

You mentioned BlindSquare, which is a Bluetooth-enabled beacon on a cellphone to enable someone who can't see to understand what's around them. Perhaps I'll just turn it over to my colleague Wayne, as a user of some of this adaptive equipment, to explain a little bit further.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much, but we won't have time for that because our time has been consumed.

We now will go to the official opposition. MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I really appreciated all of the presentations. Thank you for your thoughtful comments today. It's important for the committee to hear from all of you.

I know that my colleague had been asking CNIB about, basically, incentives for employers. If they wanted a chance to address that question briefly, and then I'll go on to some of the others.

Can you please unmute the CNIB folks?

Mr. Thomas Simpson: Sorry, I was not able to unmute myself. Thank you for that.

Very quickly, the move to ensuring that equity, diversity and inclusion are at the forefront of employers moving forward is quite important today. I think what our program does with Come to Work is help to bridge that gap, perhaps, for employers and partners who are just not sure how to engage with the disability community—in our case, people who are blind or partially sighted. That's where we have a history, over a hundred years of experience, in creating those partnerships to showcase and change people's their minds about people who are blind or partially sighted and what they can and cannot do. In this case, we've had almost four years of success, I would say, in helping to bridge those partnerships and to get people into jobs that they have enjoyed and that they're thriving in.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you very much. Many of us across our communities appreciate the work that you do and know first-hand and close up how important that work is.

I'm going to welcome James Meloche. It's nice to see you again. I would like to brag: I'm very fortunate, as an MPP in Durham region, to be able to have access—my office, I know, refers a number of our shared community members to you. Certainly, when we come across folks who are in a bind or don't know where to turn, you're one of the first phone calls that we make. We're very, very grateful for that work that you do, from those new community food boxes to everything else. So thank you.

Some of the things that you raised—and I know that you actually added in your response to one of the government members just how long-established you are in the community and what that actually looks like in terms

of the services that you can provide. If the government were to actually fund appropriately not just the home care part but the community care part, how much further could your reach be? What could that look like? It's not just about clearing the wait-list of the folks who you said, unfortunately, are wait-listed because we don't have the funding. If they were to make this investment, what would that return look like in a real story or a real experience?

Mr. James Meloche: I just presented this information to our colleagues at Ontario Health East. We're looking at about 3,200 clients that we could actually bring back on service, not just in our home care division, where we provide respite and personal support care in the home, but everything from transportation to social security visits to our mental health program. So the number is real.

Unfortunately, the community care organizations have done everything they could possibly do to reduce those impacts of the lack of inflationary funding through additional fundraising. The most problematic thing is not giving your staff the kinds of cost-of-living adjustments they require. That will catch up with you.

In speaking to our team, we all rely on the good work of our staff to do the good work of our organization, right? At the end of the day, our ability to keep and retain staff impacts our ability to deliver service. Right now, across the region, I can tell you that the number—not just in Community Care Durham—is 6,200 clients who are at risk of losing service in Durham and Scarborough and Kawartha Lakes and Peterborough, with a lack of just a basic 5% inflationary increase.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: That's awful, and thank you for sharing those numbers. I had the opportunity to be at committee yesterday, and I will tell you, some of the government members have been speaking quite excitedly about home care when we have heard from the private, for-profit home care companies that are competing for public dollars. So again, you had said who you're not competing with them, but I will ask, is there something you would like to make clear to this committee about supporting the non-profit world?

And you had mentioned something—sorry; I missed it—about how you haven't gotten your money yet or the private agencies were funded but not-for-profits weren't, or you have been. I'm sorry; I missed that.

Mr. James Meloche: Well, unfortunately, we've bank-rolled government on a number of instances this year to the tune of a couple of hundred thousand dollars of paying our staff the personal support wage enhancement that we never received yet from government, when the for-profit providers received it on the opening day. These are issues that we face all the time. And the reality is the for-profit providers don't do transportation service, they don't Meals on Wheels, they don't do volunteer services; they simply provide nursing and personal support care in the home. What's the benefit—and I'm not trying to complain; we work very closely with them.

The reality is that, as an entity—and someone mentioned this about providing holistic care to individuals—we see our clients as end to end: everything they need from

home to the food security, if they have anything their fridge, to their connection with their neighbours, to going out for lunch with their friends and colleagues. We see them end to end, and we're able to provide them with a comprehensive suite of services that very few can, and we do that through volunteers. So if I'm a fiscal conservative, I'd actually invest in organizations that are leveraging community assets that don't require government solutions to allow community to do what community does, which is respond to their neighbours. And in my case, I work very closely with the SPOs—the service provider organizations—but it's becoming more and more difficult for me to maintain our personal support staff when those providers are getting government-funded inflationary increases and my staff are not.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you for that.

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: MPP Fife is waving.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I just want to say, thank you so much, James, for explaining that to this committee, because I don't think the full disparity between those private agencies and the not-for-profits has been really clearly articulated in that manner. And your point about leveraging those community assets is a key piece, because people do want to help, but they're going to go to those agencies that they have a trusted relationship with, which obviously, Community Care Durham does have. That's all that I wanted to say. Thank you for that.

All right, Chair, let's move it along.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that presentation. That concludes this panel. We just want to remind the deputants that the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. on Wednesday, January 26. Again, thank you very much for making your presentation this afternoon.

CENTRE FOR ISRAEL
AND JEWISH AFFAIRS
ONTARIO BIOSCIENCE
INNOVATION ORGANIZATION
RESIDENTIAL AND CIVIL
CONSTRUCTION ALLIANCE OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Our next panel will start off with the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs. We'll turn it over to you.

Mr. Noah Shack: Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon. My name is Noah Shack. I'm vice-president with the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, the advocacy agent of the Jewish Federations of Canada, and that includes local Jewish federations in cities across the province in Ontario.

It feels like yesterday that I was speaking with you in advance of last year's budget, praising the Anti-Racism Directorate's Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant Program, which I was very glad to see receive additional funding.

Since then, Minister Gill and his team have done tremendous work in moving the anti-racism agenda forward toward a more inclusive, diverse and welcoming society in the face of rising hate.

As I speak with you, our community is reeling in the wake of the hostage-taking this past Saturday at the Beth Israel synagogue in Colleyville, Texas. This incident has once again sent shockwaves throughout Jewish communities across this province, accumulating on top of recent attacks on synagogues in other US and European cities similar to our own and a sharp rise in anti-Semitic incidents here across Canada over the last year. As the Jewish Sabbath concluded here on Saturday night, many felt horror and fear for the lives of those being held hostage at gunpoint and a sense of relief that this time it wasn't their synagogue or local community that was attacked. But what about the next time?

1710

Across this province, synagogues, Jewish community centres, Jewish daycares and schools live with a reality of which many are unaware: security guards; armed police; bulletproof glass; a front door that no one uses because it's not secure, so congregants enter from the side or the back; panic buttons; cameras; fences. These have become normal features at many community institutions due to rising levels of Jew-hatred around the world. This is true across Ontario, one of the greatest places in the world to be Jewish, a place I'm proud to call home and in which I'm privileged to be raising my children.

More than a decade of Statistics Canada data consistently shows Jews, who are less than 1% of Canada's population, to be the most frequent or second-most frequent target of hate crime. I'm speaking to you from Toronto, where police reported a 50% increase in hate crime for 2020, the last year for which data is available; 34% of hate crime in this city targeted Jews, despite only being 3.4% of the population.

The events in Texas provide a stark reminder of what can happen when an anti-Semite gains access to a synagogue, school or community centre, not just in Texas, but in Toronto. The recent incident in Texas is also a critical reminder of the importance of security planning, infrastructure, personnel and training to keep people safe. It was the training the rabbi received from law enforcement and community organizations that likely saved the hostages' lives.

The last budget allocated approximately \$2.6 million over two years for Safer and Vital Communities Grant to help communities combat hate-motivated crime. The program was designed to help 26 community-based not-for-profit organizations and First Nations chiefs and band councils, in collaboration with police partners, to implement local projects that tackle discrimination, foster greater inclusiveness and address the increase of police-reported hate crimes.

This grant program has been a lifeline for several Jewish community institutions across the province. Grants supported physical safety and security at two summer camps in northern Ontario, which were so important for

our children this summer amidst the pandemic. They supported security infrastructure for the Jewish community centre in Ottawa and the Jewish community centre right around the corner from Queen's Park in downtown Toronto. Grants also supported synagogues in Vaughan and Ottawa, including training for volunteers to combat threats and keep congregants safe, in partnership with police.

This funding is crucial and impactful, and we're grateful for the support. There's a need to continue this support and extend it to other priority institutions in need across the province. That's why we're asking that the upcoming budget include funding to support the physical security of at-risk community institutions, specifically for planning, training, infrastructure and contract personnel. Houses of worship, community centres and child care facilities need to be safe places for individuals and families. No one should fear dropping their child off at day care.

Earlier today, the Solicitor General's office announced a shift in the Safer and Vital Communities Grant. The theme for 2022-24 is "Preventing Cyber Crime through Community Collaboration." There's a pressing need to address cyber crime, something which can be motivated by hate and targets communities like mine with increasing frequency. But this shift in priority should not leave a gap in support for physical safety and security at a time when it is of such grave concern. This need not be a zero-sum proposition; both cyber and physical security are important and should be supported, and I encourage this committee to recommend the government do just that in this next budget.

In the wake of the Texas hostage-taking and on the eve of the anniversary of the Quebec City mosque shooting, we must continue supporting the physical safety of communities threatened by hate-fuelled violence. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that presentation.

Our next presenters are Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization.

Ms. Gail Garland: I'm Gail Garland, the president and CEO of OBIO. I'm here with Mary Argent-Katwala, director of strategic partnerships and development at OBIO, and she will make some remarks following mine.

On behalf of OBIO, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee and offer our perspective on the budgetary initiatives needed to get Ontario moving and out of the pandemic. Founded in 2009, OBIO is a not-for-profit membership-based organization engaged in furthering the commercialization of Ontario's human health science companies and positioning Ontario as a leader in the international marketplace. OBIO is a health science ecosystem capacity builder that has led effective partnerships before and throughout the pandemic to strengthen the health science industry. Our members are predominantly high-growth, high-potential, small and mid-sized enterprises, and we have supported their efforts to scale their businesses, attract investors to Canada and thereby grow the health science industry.

Today I would like to share with you the Early Adopter Health Network innovation procurement fund, OBIO's

answer to the many questions raised during this pandemic regarding our readiness to deal with future health crises. The innovation procurement fund I'm going to speak with you about builds on the Early Adopter Health Network, launched to address the need for technologies that could be beneficial during the COVID pandemic in early 2020. EAHN is a collaborative ecosystem where health technology companies and health care organizations work together to develop, test, refine, procure and disseminate novel technologies across the Ontario health system. Currently, the EAHN program has engaged 26 Ontario hospitals, as well as 23 companies that are currently part of the EAHN program and are either embarking on an evaluation or in partnership with a hospital, and an evaluation is already under way.

The EAHN program solves the challenge of advancing commercial-ready innovations, first into the Ontario health system and then to the world. While EAHN addresses key gaps in the health science ecosystem by providing health science companies with a proven and repeatable path to a domestic health care system eager to procure innovative solutions, the EAHN innovation procurement fund is a proposed strategic innovation procurement initiative that will both improve health care delivery and build our domestic economy. It will incentivize Ontario health care organizations to procure domestically developed, high-impact, innovative technologies that have been successfully evaluated. EAHN and the EAHN innovation procurement fund together create a health system market pull, an Ontario-unique and globally competitive economic development strategy that pays dividends.

We propose that the Ontario government include in its budget an allocation of \$20 million that will provide the EAHN innovation procurement fund with a two-year time frame to maximize value to both the Ontario health care system and the Ontario health industry sector. Each innovation health partner will be allocated \$250,000 to put towards one or more EAHN innovation procurement projects. An additional \$10 million will be available for EAHN health organization members to put towards EAHN procurement projects on an application basis. An EAHN innovation procurement fund governance committee oversees the whole process. We estimate that every dollar invested in the EAHN innovation procurement fund will return a minimum of \$54 to the Ontario economy over the next 10 years as a combination of health savings and economic development. An ROI on a \$20-million fund includes \$50 million in health spending savings per year, an ability to attract over \$300 million in private investment funding, the creation of 400 well-paying middle-class jobs, and, as I mentioned, contributing \$57 million to Ontario's GDP.

With hospitals under financial pressure from the pandemic, it is extremely difficult for them to allocate existing funds to innovation procurements over immediate needs. They understand what innovation procurement offers to patient care and long-term cost-savings, but they can't make these investments, given the unprecedented demands on current budgets. The opportunity that the

Ontario government has to support the EAHN innovation procurement fund will advance the health science industrial ecosystem to incentivize domestic companies to stay here and to grow here, to attract global capital and talent, and to create a 10-year GDP contribution and middle-class job creation that rival the Ontario automotive sector.

I now turn it over to Mary.

Ms. Mary Argent-Katwala: Thank you, Gail. In building the health science ecosystem, OBIO also incorporates training and skills development into our programming. With funding provided from the Ministry of Labour through the skills development program, OBIO's Business Development Skills Program allows companies to scale and grow by facilitating knowledge transfer and mentorship to senior management employees.

1720

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Ms. Mary Argent-Katwala: In addition, I'd like to talk about our Health to Business Bridge Program, which was recently renewed in funding, which helps companies develop the skills they need for their employees. We've heard from participants that the skills they receive open a world of possibilities to grow their careers and businesses. Without that support, they would not have been able to advance in the industry, and we're enabling participating employers to have the know-how to build their company and attract the talent it needs to grow. In this way, Ontario will be creating good-paying middle-class jobs, advancing economic development and providing the level of health care that Ontarians both deserve and require.

Gail?

Ms. Gail Garland: Thank you for your time and attention. As well, thank you for the various funding that OBIO has received for our Business Development Skills Program and the recent renewal of our funding for our Health to Business Bridge Program. We look forward to your continued support in building the health science industry here in Ontario. We have already submitted to this committee a paper describing the EAHN innovation procurement fund. Of course, we're happy to take any questions that you may have. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation. Before we go any further, we would like a name for the previous speaker.

Ms. Gail Garland: Gail Garland.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Mary, could you introduce yourself for the Hansard?

Ms. Mary Argent-Katwala: Yes, my name is Mary Argent-Katwala, the director of strategic partnerships and government at the Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

We now will go to the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario.

Ms. Nadia Todorova: Good afternoon, Chair Hardeman and esteemed members of the finance and economic affairs committee. My name is Nadia Todorova,

and I'm the executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, or RCCAO. I'm very pleased to provide you with our 2022 pre-budget asks.

RCCAO is a unique organization that represents both labour and management stakeholders from the residential and civil construction sectors of Ontario. Our primary focus is the importance of investing in core public works and critical infrastructure assets, such as transit and water systems, roads, bridges and housing. Our members, both labour and management, help build and maintain most of Ontario's critical infrastructure that so many of us rely on. As our recommendations reflect, the province must continue to focus on infrastructure investments, as it one of the best ways to help Ontario's economy in all regions grow and support the unique needs of each region across our diverse province.

There are four specific issues that RCCAO has, starting off with number 1: the fact that the province of Ontario, in partnership with the government of Canada, should continue to be ready to provide municipalities with financial assistance like the Safe Restart Agreement and other similar funding programs that took place in 2020 and 2021.

In 2020, Ontario municipalities began reducing their spending and reallocating money from their capital budgets to their operating budgets to fill the deficit gap caused by the pandemic. This was especially true for municipalities with large transit systems, such as Toronto. Through collaboration between the province and the federal government, financial assistance through the Safe Restart Agreement in 2020 and other provincial funding programs in 2021 provided the necessary financial relief to Ontario municipalities.

Given that the pandemic is still present and many of the revenue sources that municipalities rely on have yet to recover, indications are that municipalities will again face funding gaps. Thus, the government of Ontario and the government of Canada must be ready to provide the same financial assistance for 2022. Without financial assistance, municipalities, which cannot run deficits and must pass balanced budgets, will face having to delay or cancel state-of-good-repair projects and defer necessary critical infrastructure work.

Our second ask focuses on continued investment in transportation infrastructure, especially for Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass. The GTA is among the fastest-growing regions in North America and expects to welcome an additional 2.8 million people over the next 25 years, with 58% of that population growth destined for York, Halton and Peel regions. This growth will increase demand for critical infrastructure, everything from water and housing to transit systems, highways and roads. That is why Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass must proceed and create transportation infrastructure for Ontario's future. Both projects are of vital importance to Ontario in terms of reducing congestion, fostering economic recovery and long-term competitiveness, improving connectivity, supporting housing initiatives and facilitating job creation. Given the geographical nature of Ontario and the region, we will always need roads for vehicles, whether

they be gas-powered or electric. Our highways and transit must work together. It is not an either/or scenario.

Roads and highways are also essential infrastructure for the movement of goods across Ontario, which is the backbone for local and regional economies. Demand for goods has reached historic levels, especially during the pandemic, and that demand is only projected to increase as e-commerce takes a firm hold and as the population of the region continues to grow. Building and maintaining road infrastructure increases business productivity by reducing the time and cost of transporting goods and allowing products to move efficiently through the supply chain.

The construction of transportation infrastructure also brings significant economic opportunities. A recently commissioned RCCAO jobs and economic impact report found that building Highway 413 will create up to 8,000 jobs a year during construction, generate \$2.3 billion in earnings for Ontario workers, create up to 600 apprenticeships and produce \$906 million in tax revenue.

Our third ask focuses on improving the delivery time frames of underground utility locates. A key element of infrastructure projects is the timely delivery of utility locates. Locate requests are overseen through the One Call system, which allows locate requests to be made to a call centre instead of the previous practice of separate calls to each of the utilities.

Ontario has a legislated deadline of five business days for a response to locate requests. However, industry has faced chronic delays in getting locates from utility companies. It is estimated that 85% of locate requests are late. Statistics by One Call confirm that almost half of the completed excavator tickets for September 2021 took longer than 15 days.

Without receiving these locates, most of the work on site cannot proceed, and it results in costly delays. For example, each hour of idle time in the sewer and water main sector costs \$1,000. In the road sector, that price tag is \$10,000 per day.

In late 2021, a locate solution working group was convened, which included One Call representatives, government and industry. Through our weekly meetings, solutions were discussed, and we hope to see positive regulatory changes in time for the 2022 construction season.

Finally, our fourth ask is to address Ontario's labour shortage through reforms of the immigration system. This decade, more than 86,000 construction workers in Ontario will retire. Considering the projected volume of work, industry will need to hire and retain almost 100,000 additional workers.

The government's focus on the skilled trades, such as improving the provincial apprenticeship system, is welcomed. However, the scale of the issue requires that we look beyond domestic policies—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Nadia Todorova: —and also consider reforming the immigration system to help address Ontario's labour shortages. This includes designating annually 1,000 of the

9,000 allocations within the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program, or OINP, for NOC level D general labourers, who self-attest to having construction skill sets; implementing changes to the OINP, specifically for the in-demand stream, by expanding the list of eligible professions to include NOC skill level C and D positions; and finally, ensuring that the application process for various OINP streams, particularly the in-demand stream, is not overly onerous to disincentivize employers, especially small- and medium-sized ones, from participating.

Given that immigration is a shared responsibility between the federal and provincial governments, we urge the province to continue collaborating with the federal government to ensure that Ontario benefits from any immigration reforms that take place.

I appreciate the opportunity to present and I'm happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Well, thank you very much for that presentation. We will immediately start the questions, and we're going to start with the government. MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Perfect. Thank you to all of our presenters for this last round of deputations for today. Just quickly, Nadia, did you get everything in that you wanted to during your testimony?

Ms. Nadia Todorova: Yes.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Okay, I know you were running up against the clock there, but I appreciated all of your comments.

Sorry, the study that you referenced on Highway 413: What was that called again, the report that your organization did?

Ms. Nadia Todorova: Yes, absolutely. It's not a very interesting name, but the report is called Jobs and Economic Impact of the GTA West Corridor, and it was published in November 2021.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Okay, excellent. And I assume that's gotten over to our Ministry of Transportation already.

1730

Ms. Nadia Todorova: Yes, absolutely. It has been shared very much with your government.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Perfect; good stuff. I appreciate that.

I'm going to pivot over to CIJA if I can. Noah, Sophie, it's good to see both of you. Of course, I had the chance to meet with CIJA earlier this year. It was one of my first meetings of 2022. It's always great to get that chance to engage with you.

I want to touch a little bit on the grant that you were speaking about. Obviously, the last bit of funding closed off at Q4 in 2021, so now you're looking at a new grant for this year. Could you walk me through a couple of examples of ways that this grant could be used by organizations within your umbrella, on both the capital side and the cyber side? I'm curious to get some input on how that grant would be used.

Mr. Noah Shack: Thanks for the question. I think that's one of the things that we're looking to figure out in

terms of what was announced today, in terms of what the details are going to be.

On the cyber side of things, we've seen an increase in cyberbullying, in attacks on community institutions, holding data for ransom, things like that. There's no question that that is a challenge that communities like ours face.

But I think the key here is to make sure that the shift towards that focus doesn't leave any vulnerability when it comes to physical safety and security. That continues to be a pressing challenge. It's wonderful that six Jewish community institutions, alongside many others, were able to benefit from the previous round of the grant, with its previous focus on those measures, but there are dozens and dozens of others that weren't prioritized for that round of funding and remain vulnerable. I think it's critical that they're able to access the support that they need in order for people to go to synagogue, go to summer camp, go to a community centre with peace of mind, and knowing that every step that can be taken to keep people safe is being taken.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Absolutely, for sure. Oftentimes, when I have the chance to meet with CIJA, we often touch on education as well, so I would like to pivot there for a second. Obviously, over the past year we've seen, as you mentioned, unfortunate incidents of anti-Semitism abroad and here in Canada. Last year, we saw investments made in the education system to make sure that we were tackling issues like anti-Semitism, like the anti-Asian racism that had popped up during pandemic—or “flared up” is a better word to use. I'm curious whether you guys have any requests for this year's budget in terms of investments that should be made in the education system to help us combat anti-Semitism and anti-hate.

Mr. Noah Shack: I'm glad you asked that question, because the investments that were made in that regard by the Ministry of Education have been really, really valuable. Most people fall prey to the ideologies of hate, initially, out of ignorance. If we're able to intervene at younger ages and stages, to give children and youth the tools that they need to recognize the recruitment techniques, the misinformation and the propaganda that can lead them on that path, to reject that and stand against it, we're going to be so much better off as a society 10 or 15 years down the road.

So I think those investments in education are crucial and should continue. We're talking about two different things, in terms of the reactive response of infrastructure requirements to keep people safe today from hate, but we also need to invest proactively in uprooting hate from our society, so that those costs don't need to continue to be borne down the road in the same way.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Absolutely. The last event that I had the chance to attend in person before Omicron really took hold was at the Jewish Federation of Ottawa, for an event for Tamir there, which is an organization really close to my heart. Of course, they benefited right there from investments in infrastructure, so I know how important those are. It's definitely a message that we'll bring forward, so thank you for that.

Chair, I'm just wondering how much time I have remaining. Do I have time to talk to our friends at OBIO as well?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Okay. Mary, you were talking about the health skills bridge program, and you said you had gotten some funding for that. I'm just curious if you could elaborate a little bit more on that program and what it's doing, because I'd love to hear more.

Ms. Mary Argent-Katwala: The Health to Business Bridge Program, which has been running since 2018, is a program that helps people enter the health science workforce, and recently, we got further funding through the Skills Development Fund.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: That's good to know. I'm glad that that's continuing to be funded. We definitely need to look at ways that we can continue to attract skilled workers into this sector in Ontario so we can remain competitive.

Noah and Sophie, my thoughts definitely have been with the Jewish community after the unfortunate events in Texas recently. Thank you for the phenomenal work you guys are doing.

I think I'm probably at the end of my time. Thank you so much to all of our presenters.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We now will go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to all presenters. I have a very little bit of time.

I just want to be clear, Noah: Based on what you said today, you don't want the cyber security funding to eat into the Safer and Vital Communities Grant. You think that those are two separate issues that should be funded independently. Is that clear?

Mr. Noah Shack: The Safer and Vital Communities Grant was providing for the physical security and safety measures. The announcement today shifts the priority towards cyber crime. It's important that the physical safety and security don't get lost in the shuffle there and that the support that community institutions require in order to maximize that safety continues to come.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's good clarity for the entire committee to have, so thank you for that. It's good to see you.

I'm going to move to Gail and to Mary. Gail, it's good to see you. It has been a while. I miss our all-party caucus OBIO group where we actually get to hear about innovation in Ontario. One day, that will happen again.

The return on investment for the innovation procurement fund: I think it's important for us to hear that so we can make the case for it when we go to clause-by-clause.

Ms. Gail Garland: It's nice to see you, MPP Fife.

The return on investment for the \$20-million innovation procurement fund includes \$50 million in health spending savings per year. It contributes to the ability of participating companies to raise capital, and it will allow them to attract over \$300 million in private investment. This is important because this is a key ingredient to helping companies stay here and grow here, and if investors know that companies can sell their technologies here,

they're going to invest in these companies. As these companies grow, this innovation procurement fund will support the creation of 400 middle-class employment opportunities—and these aren't just jobs for scientists; these are jobs for everybody. As these companies continue their growth trajectory, they build labs, they start manufacturing facilities, and they create really good middle-class jobs for everybody.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Gail, you must feel like a bit of a broken record; you have been saying this now for nine years in total.

I do want to say that I think this pandemic has taught us how important it is for us to have some independence, to be more resilient in the life sciences, and we certainly will be making that case as this committee's work moves on.

I'm going to pass this over now to my colleague MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you to all the presenters. We really value your input and your very thoughtful comments.

Sophie and Noah, I had a chance to meet with some of your colleagues recently at the advocacy day, and I have a private member's bill coming up—cat's out of the bag—on long-term-care accountability. Of course, that was part of the conversation around [*inaudible*] care and culturally appropriate care. I really have appreciated building those relationships. It was terrifying watching Colleyville unfold. We stand with you against anti-Semitism. Thank you for your presentation today. I'm glad my colleague MPP Fife had a clear understanding there of that announcement today.

1740

Following along with what Catherine was saying, Gail and the folks from OBIO, I've been meeting with the life sciences people here and there as the critic for infrastructure for the NDP. There's money that goes into the seed stage. The funding and development investment—we just don't see what we need to, I guess, to keep folks here. I think they use the term “the valley of death” when it comes to prototypes and testing for these new technologies. There's a high degree of risk that people aren't willing to invest or spend the money or to commercialize. Anyway, without that ribbon-cutting, there isn't that money or investment.

They had laid it out for me, for a clear understanding of the need for a strategy. Is there anything you'd like to add to that concept or to clarify for the committee around what that could look like, to show leadership, so we that could indeed keep some of those success stories here in the province and grow them, as you talked about?

Ms. Gail Garland: Sure. Thank you very much for your question. Indeed, this is the challenge this industry has had: finding and creating an ecosystem that allows companies to stay here and grow here. We view it as a virtuous circle: attracting capital, developing talent and creating markets. With the work that we do, we touch each of those strategic areas of focus. The challenge that the companies that we work with face is that as they develop their technologies and attract capital, if the investor, which

is often a foreign investor, isn't confident that a company can get to market here, that there will be a customer for their technology here—and historically, that has been the case for companies. They can get their technologies commercial-ready but can't find a customer within the Ontario health care system. So the investor is not incentivized to lean to a company here.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Gail Garland: That's what this e-innovation procurement fund addresses. It gives companies the opportunity to get their technologies that add benefit to the patient, to the system and to the economy to market here, and then they can go global from here, and the investors are quite happy to park their money here in these companies and leave them here.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I think probably all the MPPs on this call, I would wager, have been hearing from different folks with great ideas, it would seem. They kind of peddle them to us, saying, “Can you please connect us with the government? We've got a great idea for COVID,” or “We've got an up-and-coming technology or therapeutic” or something like that. We're not the right portal to get it to the market or to get it into government or the Ministry of Health or whatnot. You would be, obviously, far better acquainted with that process. Do you have recommendations for this committee and for the government on—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time, right on the button. That concludes the time for that presentation.

We will now go to the independent member. Mitzie Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you so much to all of the presenters. It's just so important, each realm. I do want to start with Noah, and it's also good to see you, Sophie. I think my first response after hearing your testimony is to wish the community well and to do all that we can to make sure that Ontario is safe and inclusive and that it has the freedoms that we are ensured happening here.

But we know that there are challenges, and we know that when there are incidents that occur like what happened in Texas, which was broadcast out, and Christchurch, New Zealand—we saw what happens after those types of incidents. You would think that incidents of hate would sort of take a pause, but they don't. They actually increased. Many cases will migrate online, as you rightly pointed out, in terms of cyberbullying and just awful things that are shared.

I'm wondering if you believe we've done enough when it comes to either the laws or even the technology and the capability of combatting online hate.

Mr. Noah Shack: Online hate is a very tricky subject. I know that the federal government is working on putting something together to address the challenging landscape of an online space that transcends geographic borders. I think whenever we're talking about online hate, it requires a partnership between government, communities and the online companies that are moderating the space.

I do want to point out that one of the most concerning things about online hate is the way that it manifests in real-

world violence, and that it's crucial that there are government programs in place to protect community institutions and facilities, like child care facilities, houses of worship and community centres, from those acts of violence. It's absolutely critical, and we can't allow that to be set aside. Those needs have only increased over the last number of years, and it's really important that support for safety and security in these places where people gather is bolstered, not misplaced.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I appreciate that. I know you've explained to the committee about the importance of that \$2.7 million and the physical need.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'm just wondering—we don't have a lot of time, but what about education and really rooting this out at the get-go?

Mr. Noah Shack: I think it's crucial. School boards have started to gather data on hate incidents in schools, which will help to make sure that appropriate interventions are moving forward and that they can measure the effectiveness of those interventions. I know that the Toronto District School Board has a couple of years of data under its belt now. York region has started to collect that data, as have other school boards across the province. I think that's an encouraging sign for what's to come.

Again, the more interventions that can be made at a younger age to help people think critically and help people navigate the online space without falling prey to these things—online gaming is another vulnerability where people are getting sucked into hate movements. This is all—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes the time for this round.

We will now start the second round. The government: MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to all three presenters for being here today.

Actually, for Noah, just to finish up, you were talking about data collection. I understand that the various police forces across the province have different ways of actually collecting the data on hate crimes. I'm wondering if you just could give some thoughts on that.

Mr. Noah Shack: Absolutely. The Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, just before the pandemic hit in earnest, came out with a list of recommendations on how to establish some best practices for dealing with hate crimes across the province. It's a great document that has some really important recommendations in it, and the pandemic has sort of overwhelmed it or swallowed it up.

Having common definitions for hate crimes and hate incidents across the province is helpful. Making sure that police are not only recording hate crimes that happen, but also hate incidents—those are things that happen that don't necessarily rise to the criminal threshold, but are important data points for police to be tracking and important things for people in the public to be validated on, that police take them seriously. Having uniform guidelines and rules for that would be really helpful and having a streamlined set of expectations when it comes to reporting

hate incident data. The Toronto Police Service does a great job, as do a number of other services across the province, but it's not equal. They give different sets of data, so it can be difficult to compare sometimes. I think each service is trying to address these things, but I think, yes, there's a lot of work that can be done relatively quickly, relatively easily, and a lot of great recommendations contained in that report.

1750

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay, thanks. I only have a few minutes, so I'd like to ask questions to both of the remaining organizations.

In terms of the Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization, I think biotech, bioscience is something that is critically important to the growth of Ontario's economy. I know that it's been a smaller component of the Canadian and Ontario economy relative to the US. I mean, you just have to look at the number of companies, the market capitalization of biotech companies in Canada versus the US. It's tiny in Canada. So I guess from a bigger perspective, what are the obstacles as to why Canada, but Ontario specifically, has not been more innovative in this space? Is it government policy? Is it not having the right people here? Is it the right business environment? What is it, and what can we do to enhance that? I know your innovation fund is one smaller idea, but from a bigger level, what can we do?

Ms. Gail Garland: Thank you for that question, MPP Crawford. I guess the short answer is all of the above. But with respect to what we can do, just to summarize on the EAHN innovation procurement fund, fully deployed, this contributes to Ontario's GDP in a way that will rival the auto sector. That's not insignificant. Just a \$20-million fund will contribute \$57 million to Ontario's annual GDP.

The landscape has changed for the health science industry in Ontario, and the pandemic has created a situation where every person in Ontario is incredibly sensitive to health care right now and very aware of supply chain issues and the need to have our own domestic health science industry. I don't think, pre-pandemic, people would have articulated that with quite as much of a sense of urgency as they do now. I think that's our opportunity as an industry.

Prior to the pandemic, we did have a hard time getting companies to stay here and grow here. Good companies got sold. Investors took them home to Boston or to the Valley. They didn't leave them here. Our opportunity now is to create a favourable ecosystem so that investors look at these companies and look at these technologies, see that there's a market here, see that there's talent here and see that there's the capacity to grow companies here and have them manufacture their technologies here and export them to the world.

In a few weeks, OBIO is holding the OBIO Investment Summit. We've run this since 2018; 101 companies have presented over the years and collectively they've raised over \$1 billion in investment following their presentations. Our challenge now is to keep each of those high-potential companies here. That's why we're recommending this

innovation procurement fund, because if an investor knows the company can get their technology to market in their home market, they'll let them stay and grow in their home market.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: And just a specific question on the fund, did you say it was \$250,000 per company?

Ms. Gail Garland: Per hospital. Per health care partner. What the program does is that there's a push and a pull. It partners commercial-ready technologies with, predominantly, hospitals that are interested in evaluating that technology, making a determination of value. And if the technology saves the system money, benefits patients, makes a contribution to the economy, then they can move forward to procure that technology. That's what the innovation procurement fund will be used to support.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay, thank you very much. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. We'll be very quick and go to the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario. It's great to hear your proposals for infrastructure.

Transportation is key, I think. As the GTA population grows exponentially over the next couple of decades, we do need to have better transportation. That includes subways, GO trains, highways. Nobody likes highways in their backyard—it's kind of like going to the dentist—but we need them. We need to get goods, obviously, quicker to market. We know that's going to improve time for families. It's going to create jobs. What are you hearing about how this is going to benefit businesses specifically?

Ms. Nadia Todorova: Thank you very much for that question, MPP Crawford.

When we discussed the report that we commissioned earlier—we actually got quite a few chambers of commerce to offer supportive statements in terms of how transportation and transit infrastructure, and specifically Highway 413, would impact their businesses, especially in York, Peel and Halton regions, which are such hubs for business activity. So a lot of the—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that presentation.

We now will move to the opposition. MPP Arthur.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I've got questions for OBIO and the RCCAO.

For OBIO: When you're selling into a Canadian market with public health care set up in a way—overall, it's a good thing, but it comes with its limitations, and the lack of nimbleness and ability for domestic procurement can become very difficult. So I fully hear what you're saying in terms of the need for that domestic—both for investors coming in, but even for those initial markets for the products. It must be incredibly difficult to get a new product to market in a public health care system like we have. That's something we really need to consider as we modernize the health care system, that we set it up in a way where it can have the flexibility to take in those new products to demonstrate to the world how good they are, and then to bring them out to further markets.

There's not really a question in there, but if you care to comment, go for it.

Ms. Gail Garland: I couldn't agree with you more, MPP Arthur. You've got it; that's exactly what we need to do. Companies need to be able to sell here and then go global from here if we're going to build the industry here.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I'll move over to the RCCAO and Nadia, because we haven't had a whole a lot of time.

Could you elaborate on the One Ontario coalition, and what the impact would be of an online portal for permitting site plan approval—all of those sort of steps that ground new development to a halt, frankly—and the sort of bonanza that could come out of the online portal?

Ms. Nadia Todorova: Thank you for that question, MPP Arthur.

Do you mean Ontario One Call, in terms of the—

Mr. Ian Arthur: You spoke about modernizing development approvals by adopting and funding One Ontario as an e-permitting platform.

Ms. Nadia Todorova: I don't believe that was me. I apologize. One of our members is involved in that, and we do support the streamlining of the program, but that wasn't part of my deputation.

Mr. Ian Arthur: I apologize. I had the wrong note here.

Ms. Nadia Todorova: That's okay. I know the names are similar.

Mr. Ian Arthur: Go for it, MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm happy to take over. I was excited to hear the answer, though. Nadia, just hold that thought for a second.

Gail, I won't actually go back to you because you were able to expand a lot on the point that I was trying to get to. But certainly, any specific recommendations on how we capture our local brilliance and refer it to government to actually get to the next stage—please share with the committee, maybe in your written submission.

For the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario folks: The Safe Restart Agreement—have you already been discussing that with the government? Are they understanding just how much municipalities are going to be reliant upon that support—some municipalities more than others? But have you had the discussions with them before? Did they seem receptive?

Ms. Nadia Todorova: Thank you very much for that question, MPP French. As I mentioned, this really is of great importance to us.

1800

We have had conversations with the provincial government in terms of how important it is to be aware of the fact that municipalities may need financial assistance once again. I do have to commend both the province and the federal government for moving very quickly and pivoting last year and making that financial assistance available to municipalities, both through the Safe Restart Agreement and also through individual programs from the province. It was over a billion dollars in assistance to municipalities, and it really helped them to get the capital works going and make sure that those critical infrastructure projects that we

all rely on got out the door, got out in time, and we didn't have to suffer any undue consequences, both in terms of infrastructure falling apart but also us having to lay off any workers.

We are definitely keeping tabs on this issue once again, for this year. We're keeping tabs on the volume of work that's coming from municipalities in those infrastructure tenders, because, as you're all very much aware, infrastructure projects don't happen overnight; there needs to be a lot of leeway to plan these projects. So we're keeping tabs on the volume of work that's coming, we're having conversations with the federal and provincial governments to raise that awareness again that the need will be there, and we're keeping tabs with AMO and other municipalities to make sure that if the need is there, the aid is provided very quickly once again.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate when we think of the construction season and how much of it we've missed and how regularly we miss it, from all sorts of different factors.

Your comments about the locate solution working group: I'm not sure I've actually seen that, so if you could send that to me.

I have the opportunity to serve the official opposition as the critic for infrastructure, transportation and highways. I'm not going to go match you toe to toe on the 413 and the Bradford Bypass today, but certainly, on the issues that we're hearing from the construction industry, we would be glad to see any of those reports, to make sure that we see yours as well as the ministry's.

A long time ago, at the beginning of this government, I used to serve as the critic for citizenship and immigration, and so I would love to know, if we still have time—you had mentioned about the provincial part of that partnership in ensuring that application streams, as we've said, are not overly onerous. We definitely want to make sure that jobs can be filled by folks who are looking to help build Ontario and work here. Could you highlight what you mean by—like, where is the tripwire, or where are some of the challenges that the province could be helpful on?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Nadia Todorova: Absolutely. We really want to make sure that employers that are going through the program are not overburdened with a lot of documentation that has to take place.

But taking a step back from that—and I know we're pressed for time—I would just say that the specific proposals that I outlined in terms of the changes to the OINP really reflect the need for there to be an expansion and shift in consideration in terms of the immigration system. The express entry system in the OINP currently only recognizes immigrants with formal education, with certificates, with licences, while most of the construction workers in the voluntary trades don't typically hold licences or certificates or formal education. So despite being very highly sought skill sets and the lucrative economic prospects that are awaiting them, foreign construction workers are really ranked low within the currently designed immigration system—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes that time slot.

We'll now go to the independent member. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: OBIO, I think that your proposal is very interesting. It really ties well into the Innovate Cities pitch that we heard, about making government the first customer and having a procurement that validates not start-ups, but those that want to expand in scale. So rather than them being here—because we've got lots of start-ups and we've got lots of research and innovation happening, but in terms of getting to a marketable product, that's where we fall down. So that was their proposal. I think it dovetails very nicely into your specific-to-health-sciences innovation and is worth an analysis. I'm wondering, is it enough? Or maybe it's a place to start and evaluate, but please provide those details and the push that is needed to get this through.

I do want to ask the RCCAO about a couple of things. I want to make a comment, though, because we have to make choices: Do we build schools, hospitals or high-ways—which, frankly, I think just incite more sprawl when we need to actually focus on density and the land use planning that supports that, in terms of intensification. You can't do everything; you've got to choose your priorities. That would be my comment when it comes to Highway 413.

But I wanted to actually spend my time with you, Nadia, on the 100,000 future need in the skilled areas—and that's in its broadest sense, I'm sure—the fact that you talked about immigration, and you were just about to talk about how we need to elevate that in terms of, I think, the OINP program. I also wanted to ask you about women or racialized people who are looking for a way in as well, and how your organization, which is so influential, could help to urge the industry along to make it more accommodating for those groups.

Ms. Nadia Todorova: Yes, absolutely. Thank you very much for the comment and for the questions. The only thing I would say just for the 413 and general infrastructure investment is that, from our perspective, infrastructure investment is really one of the best ways, as I said, to spur the economy and make sure that there's a lot of growth. That's just kind of our priority.

In terms of the question around immigration, as I was saying, really there needs to be—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Nadia Todorova: Oh, gosh. There really needs to be more of a consideration for changing the overall nature of the immigration system and really broadening it to address the needs of the labour market in a very prudent way.

In terms of getting women and racialized communities into our industry, that has definitely been something that we have been focusing on. We have partnered in job-producing videos which feature a lot of women and people in racialized minorities working in the construction sector and sharing their stories with us. I'll be happy to share the link to those videos, because they've been very influential in terms of getting people into the trades and showing their perspective in terms of why they love the job, what is it

about the job that really stimulates them, why they would recommend the job to other young people and women, and really kind of broadening that experience.

We're also really working through OCCA to go into different educational institutions—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for your presentation.

I thank all the presenters and all the people today for participating, particularly, of course, the last group that we

were listening to. This concludes our business for today, and I thank all the presenters.

As a reminder, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. on Wednesday, January 26. The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. on Friday, January 21, 2022, when we will continue with pre-budget consultation 2022 for the southwestern region. With that, the committee stands adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1809.

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