

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

F-19

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

F-19

**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Pre-budget consultations

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Tuesday 14 February 2023

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

Consultations prébudgétaires

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mardi 14 février 2023

Chair: Ernie Hardeman
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Président : Ernie Hardeman
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<https://www.ola.org/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7400.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7400.

House Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

CONTENTS

Tuesday 14 February 2023

Pre-budget consultations	F-503
Canadian Standards Association; Alliance for Healthier Communities; Coalition of Concerned Manufacturers and Businesses of Canada	F-503
Ms. Faith Chipman	
Ms. Sarah Hobbs	
Ms. Catherine Swift	
Ontario Federation of Labour; Ring of Fire Metals; Ontario Public Service Employees Union.....	F-513
Ms. Patty Coates	
Mr. Stephen Crozier	
Ms. JP Hornick	
Ms. Thevaki Thevaratnam	
Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association; Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres; Lansdowne Children's Centre	F-522
Mr. Mike Chromczak	
Ms. Suze Morrison	
Ms. Rita-Marie Hadley	
Mr. Mike Gatopoulos	
Ms. Beth Boros	
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association; School Bus Ontario; Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.....	F-532
Ms. Barb Dobrowolski	
Ms. Nancy Daigneault	
Ms. Karen Littlewood	
Mr. Rob Murphy	
Tourism Industry Association of Ontario; Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario division; Canadian Bankers Association	F-541
Dr. Jessica Ng	
Ms. Camille Quenneville	
Mr. Michael Anhorn	
Mr. David Smith	
Mr. Anthony Ostler	
Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care; Ability Members Group; Ontario's Big City Mayors	F-550
Ms. Carolyn Ferns	
Mr. Jamie Church	
Ms. Bonnie Crombie	
Ms. Lanie Hurdle	
Hospice Palliative Care Ontario; Ontario Nonprofit Network; Ontario Craft Brewers	F-560
Mr. Rick Firth	
Ms. Cathy Taylor	
Mr. Scott Simmons	
Ms. Jennifer Mossop	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Tuesday 14 February 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

Mardi 14 février 2023

The committee met at 1000 in room 151.

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Good morning, everyone. I call the meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to order. We're meeting today to continue the public hearings on the pre-budget consultation 2023.

As a reminder, I'll ask everyone to speak slowly and clearly, and please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak.

Each presenter will have seven minutes to make an opening statement, and after we've heard from all 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, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition members, and two rounds of four and a half minutes for the independents as a group.

Any questions? MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Before we begin, I just wanted to thank the committee and the travelling staff—broadcasting, Hansard, research. We travelled to 11 different locations, and it felt like a marathon sometimes. So on behalf of the official opposition, I just wanted to thank the team for supporting us in these pre-budget consultations.

Thanks for the indulgence.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that, and I would just add a thank you to the staff, now that you've brought it up, for a great job done.

I also want to welcome the new members, who haven't been on the road trip with us—to help us today.

CANADIAN STANDARDS ASSOCIATION
ALLIANCE FOR HEALTHIER
COMMUNITIES
COALITION OF CONCERNED
MANUFACTURERS AND BUSINESSES
OF CANADA

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We will start with the first panel. We have panels, and we will introduce them. The first presentation today will be from the Canadian

Standards Association, the Alliance for Healthier Communities, and the Coalition of Concerned Manufacturers and Businesses of Canada.

The presenters will have seven minutes to make their presentations; at six minutes, I will say "one minute." Don't stop talking because I said that. Keep going. You'll have one more minute. At seven minutes, I will say, "The next presenter will be"—I don't want to sound tough, but I hit it right on the minute.

At the start of your presentation, please put your name on the record to make sure that the great comments you make will be attributed to you and so somebody else doesn't steal them in the meantime.

With that, the first presenter will be the Canadian Standards Association.

Ms. Faith Chipman: Good morning, committee members and fellow stakeholders. My name is Faith Chipman. I'm the manager of government relations for CSA Group, also known as the Canadian Standards Association. It is a pleasure to join you today to review the recommendations contained in our pre-budget submission.

CSA was established over 100 years ago and is Canada's largest accredited standards development organization. We also provide product testing, inspection and certification to ensure product safety here in Canada. Our headquarters are located on Rexdale Boulevard, in the heart of the Etobicoke North riding of Premier Ford. We are a non-profit, member-based association serving business, government and consumers, with over 3,000 published standards and codes in more than 54 subject areas.

The recommendations that will be presented today complement the government's current initiatives and priorities and align with our organization's mission, which is to enhance the lives of Canadians through the advancement of standards in the public and private sectors.

Our first recommendation addresses the needs of Ontario's LTC or long-term care sector. CSA Group offers standards that align and complement many of the priorities identified in the Fixing Long-Term Care Act. In light of lessons learned during the pandemic, we have recently published a new standard: CSA Z8004, Operation and Infection Prevention and Control of Long-Term-Care Homes. In addition, we are currently developing a new standard, CSA Z2004, Mental Health and Well-Being in Community Residential Care Settings. Our IPAC, or infection prevention and control, standard focuses on safe operating practices, design requirements and IPAC practices and training in long-term-care and congregate care settings.

The standard is intended to enhance the safety of long-term-care homes and improve the quality of life. I'd like to take this opportunity, on public record, to clarify that this is not a federal standard, but a nationally created standard independently created by expert members of our organization as a standard that can be used across all provinces and territories. Beginning this month, CSA will be offering online, self-directed and instructor-led courses to inform stakeholder groups about key aspects of our standard, including infection prevention and control in long-term-care homes; operations, management and maintenance of long-term-care homes; and person-centred care in long-term-care homes. Our mental health and well-being standard will address social isolation and loneliness for community residential care staff, residents, informal caregivers and broader care teams. These new long-term-care standards are developed based on the input of many stakeholders, including long-term-care-home residents, staff, family members and experts in this field. We believe the incorporation of these standards through reference in regulation can help augment existing long-term-care regulations and support the government's long-term-care priorities. We look forward to continued conversations with the government on how these standards can assist the province's long-term-care expansion, making existing homes safer and protecting the mental health of our elderly and most vulnerable.

Our second recommendation addresses the growing need for water management and flood mitigation measures for flood-affected communities in our province. Government support for the continued development of flood-related standards, and their implementation through incorporation by reference in regulations, is vital to protecting the flood-prone communities across Ontario. The Winnipeg metropolitan region has already referenced CSA standards in its draft 2050 regional growth and servicing plan. In addition, Infrastructure Canada has also mentioned our standards under its Climate-Resilient Buildings and Core Public Infrastructure Initiative. Highlighting the need for consistent regulatory guidance at the municipal level, in August 2022, CSA released our first how-to guide for CSA community water standards at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference. With participation from over 10 pilot communities, three of which are here in Ontario, this free document provides guidance to municipalities on best practices and guidance related to implementing CSA flood resilience standards in municipal plans and strategies. The how-to guide can help support provincial guidance on municipal policies related to standards implementation and best practices for flood mitigation and prevention. The adoption of our suite of standards in this area and the application of our how-to guide can help support the government's mandate to protect flood-prone communities, contributing to safer and more well-prepared communities across our province.

Our third and final recommendation addresses the urgent need for housing in the province. CSA's standards in modular construction help address the urgent need for housing, including affordable housing, while helping ensure

the safety and integrity of structures are maintained. As a solution to this need, the government of Ontario should consider mandating the use of CSA modular construction standards through reference in the Ontario building code. We are pleased that this past year our CSA A277 standard, Procedure for Certification of Prefabricated Buildings, Modules, and Panels, was referenced in the Ontario building code, but there is more work to do. With the province's support, we look to expand our modular construction standards, which will help ensure consistency in modular construction practices across the province. It is also recommended that the government collaborate with CSA in the development of guidance documents and eventually mandate their use for "authorities having jurisdiction" as a tool to support them in approvals processes. Current guidance documents being developed will address applicable code requirements, permitting and inspections for building officials, as well as guidance for coordination between local and provincial AHJs and much more, creating much more harmonization across all AHJs. Lastly, we also look to the province to support training in this area to grow the knowledge and skills of workers and building officials so that modular projects can be built quickly and safely.

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

Ms. Faith Chipman: In summary, standards reduce the need for excessive regulation and red tape, setting a benchmark that provides confidence to the government, industry and the public. In short, our ask of you today is to support standards development and reference of these standards in regulation, as they can help deliver stronger, more harmonized legislation so that a resilient and sustainable Ontario can be built in the years ahead.

Thank you for your time today. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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

The next presenter will be the Alliance for Healthier Communities.

Ms. Sarah Hobbs: My name is Sarah Hobbs, and I'm the CEO of the Alliance for Healthier Communities. Thank you for allowing me to present to you today.

From NorWest Community Health Centres and Dilico Anishinabek Family Care in the north, to Windsor Family Health Team in the south, to Centre de santé communautaire de l'Estrie in the east, to Waterloo Region Nurse Practitioner-led Clinic and South East Grey CHC in the west and Rexdale CHC in the GTA, Alliance members make up a network of more than 110 community-governed primary health care organizations. Our members serve communities in every region of Ontario, providing access to family doctors, nurse practitioners, mental health workers and other health and social service providers, and serving people who are vulnerable and marginalized and who face the greatest barriers to care and the biggest risks for poor health outcomes. Alliance members deliver evidence-informed, team-based models of care that support the Ontario government's Plan to Stay Open and Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care. We do this by helping to

ensure people are provided with primary care, mental health care, chronic disease prevention and social services—for people who need them most, so everyone can get the right care in the right place.

1010

The work that our members do makes a difference to the experience and health outcomes of the people they serve, and we save the acute system money. Our members see people who are, on average, 70% more complex than the average Ontarian, and despite this complexity we are keeping them out of hospital, with conservative estimates suggesting cost savings to the acute system of \$27 million per year.

The alliance and our members propose investments in three key areas:

Number one: Ontario needs to keep people healthy and well in their homes and out of hospital now by sustaining community primary health care organizations through base budget funding increases. That means being the first government in a generation to invest in the foundation of primary health care. Congratulations to the government and thank you for the recent announcement to invest in the sustainability of team-based care in Ontario. Community-governed comprehensive primary health care organizations have not had a single base budget funding increase in over 10 years. In order to address the increased costs of providing care, we need to invest in base budget increases of 8% or \$35 million for community-governed primary health care organizations so that they can maintain and improve service levels, keep their lights on and meet the needs of clients and the communities they serve. And it means we need to make this funding sustainable and adequate to maintain our capacity to deliver services to keep people healthy and well in their communities, in their homes, and to keep medically and socially complex patients out of emergency departments.

Number two: Ontario needs to keep people healthy and well in their communities and out of hospitals in the future by investing in new and expanded inter-professional primary health care organizations. We're pleased to see the government's recent announcement to begin this work, but we need more investment to ensure everyone in Ontario has access to a team. To meet the needs of people in Ontario, we need to invest \$750 million over 10 years into team-based primary care across the province by expanding inter-professional primary health care teams. Family physicians are leaving the profession, and new doctors are choosing not to pursue the role. If family physicians in Ontario had access to teams for their patients, this would enable them to see more people, attract new physicians to the position, and ensure the right person is providing the right care at the right time and working to full scope of practice. Ontario needs to make a further investment of \$75 million over five years to support Indigenous primary health care team expansion. These investments will pay off for Ontario almost immediately with improved health outcomes, fewer emergency visits, better discharge experiences, and cost savings ranging from \$10 to \$90 per patient per month.

Number three: Ontario must urgently address the health inequities that impact hospital system use. The community health care sector requires a modest investment of \$10 million to address health system inequities. Our members provide culturally competent primary care services, including interpretation services, health promotion and community development services that help address the social, economic and ecological determinants of health. Addressing health inequities will impact the overall system use.

We know that investments in team-based primary care will help to reduce costs and strain on Ontario's acute- and long-term-care systems in the short, medium and long terms. Investments in community health help to ensure providers, including alliance members, can continue to provide safe, quality and comprehensive primary health care services to the clients and communities we serve, and in meeting the goals of the Plan to Stay Open and the vision of Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care.

Thank you for your consideration. I welcome any questions.

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

We'll now go to the Coalition of Concerned Manufacturers and Businesses of Canada.

Ms. Catherine Swift: Thank you very much. Good morning, and happy Valentine's Day, everyone.

The Coalition of Concerned Manufacturers and Businesses of Canada is a not-for-profit organization. We're a relatively new business organization—we've only been around a few years now—and we represent primarily manufacturers, but also businesses in other sectors. My name is Catherine Swift, and I'm the president of the organization.

I just want to go through some of our top priorities for the budget. Number one is affordable energy. Energy has been a big problem in this province for a very long time, as I'm sure you're well aware. When our coalition members were canvassed, this issue came up as one of the very leading issues. Some progress has been made by the current government, but there's a long way yet to go, and we remain uncompetitive with other jurisdictions, notably in the US and even some Canadian provinces.

Furthermore, the ways in which businesses can achieve lower costs are very complicated. They add to their own costs in terms of such things as, they have to pay overtime to employees to run the business on an abnormal schedule, and require businesses to organize their affairs in a way that is frequently not sensible for their business, such as running all night, for example.

The government should also seek to phase out unnecessary, costly and unreliable wind generation when contracts expire and not commission more if it's not needed in the future. We've seen over the years that we produce power when we don't need it and we end up dumping it at a massive loss, usually into US states. So we would like the government to consider imposing a tax on wind and solar power producers for the excess power produced, to provide

a disincentive to do so, as it costs the province an awful lot of money when we have to dump it at a loss.

The government should also consider enacting legislation to limit the length of contracts that future governments can enter into. The notion that any government can put in place a 40-year contract and tie the hands of future governments really is unacceptable and shouldn't be permitted to happen.

More recently, it does seem the current government has reversed its earlier opposition and actually bought into the so-called green agenda, with more talk by ministers about promoting electrification, subsidizing the production and consumption of electric vehicles, phasing out natural gas, and other initiatives. Things such as the ESG regimes that are being proposed—so-called environmental, social and governance—are very subjective, impractical, expensive and especially harmful to small and medium-sized businesses. This current approach is a far cry from what the Conservative government was discussing when they were first elected in 2018, when they promised to get rid of the many problems caused by the green energy policy that is costly and doesn't really accomplish a great deal for the environment.

As well, better systems need to be established to measure the impact of government policies; green policy being a good example. Proper cost-benefit analyses need to be done, notably for climate policies, because I think if citizens understood the massive downside and cost of many of these policies for their lives, they would be a lot less likely to support them. Eliminating policies that don't achieve their goals will alleviate red tape and improve efficiency for businesses as well as reduce government costs. As experienced with the many problematic aspects of the so-called net-zero carbon agenda increases, it's becoming clear that the impacts of these policies are largely negative and the upsides not very significant. Any reduction in greenhouse gas emissions Canada may achieve will have no impact on global trends. Claims about the creation of green jobs have been greatly overstated, and these jobs typically need to be subsidized by government. The current so-called just transition policy of the federal government will impact all of Canada. I think a lot of people think it will just hit the western provinces, but many members of ours in the manufacturing sectors are already quite integrated with the energy sector in western Canada, and the so-called just transition—which is anything but just—is going to impact the entire country very negatively.

I'd like to move on to taxation and government spending. Considering the massive debt that has been built up by all governments, a lot of governments are going to be looking to increase taxes in the future and, naturally, we don't think that's a way to go. Research has shown quite compellingly that if a government seeks to balance its budget, it should do so by reducing spending, not increasing taxes. Increasing taxes usually leads to governments spending that additional money, not having it go towards debt and deficits.

One anomaly that exists in the Ontario personal income tax system that a lot of other provinces and the federal government have gotten rid of is that the top two tax brackets are not indexed to inflation. This is unfair taxation; people are bumped into a higher tax bracket only because of inflation, so these top two brackets should be indexed to inflation, as other governments have done.

We know that governments have been forced to spend a great deal more than they otherwise would have because of the pandemic. Naturally, now all governments should be looking at ways to downsize and reduce their spending; one way to do so would be to freeze public sector compensation to bring it more in line with private sector norms. Again, research has shown that government employees earn anywhere from 15% to 40% more than the same job in the private sector if pensions and other benefits are included. This is financially unsustainable and obviously inequitable, and we should fix it over time to be fair to everyone concerned.

1020

During the pandemic, no government worker missed a paycheque, while much of the private sector was financially devastated. The true income inequality is that which prevails between the public sector and the private sector businesses and employees that finance government. This situation has existed for decades, and a post-pandemic policy framework provides an opportune time to address this unfairness and benefit the government's fiscal position.

Trade issues are also very important, both internal to Canada and external.

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

Ms. Catherine Swift: In Canada, we've never achieved free internal trade, unfortunately, and being faced with a very protectionist US administration right now, that's something that Ontario has also done some work on, but we believe can do more. The post of Ontario's trade representative in Washington has remained vacant for some time and should be filled ASAP, given the kind of measures that we're seeing coming out of the US government that are punitive to Canada.

Just to close, a couple of notes about health care and education—they are the largest spending envelopes, I'm well aware. I don't mean to give them short shrift—but just a couple of brief comments: We welcome the recent changes the Ontario government has made to health care to permit the entry of more private sector providers into the mix, while still being part of the universal public system. The best health care systems in the world have this as a model, and there's no reason we shouldn't emulate them.

With respect to education, we would also like to see structural changes to—

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

We will now start the round of questioning with the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you, Faith, Sarah and Catherine.

I'm going to start with Faith. It's interesting that you have brought some of these concerns to us, because as I mentioned in the opening statements, we have travelled throughout the province, and standards of care in long-term care and health care have been the primary issue, as has housing—because we should have a common knowledge that housing is health care. It's impossible to stay healthy if you don't have shelter. Also, flood mitigation was a topic.

You mentioned in your brief that you would like the government to mandate the use of existing CSA Group long-term-care standards—and you know that if they mandate it, they'd actually have to fund it. That's part of the problem, I think, in many regards. You also mentioned that standards reduce red tape. So I wanted you to close that gap on that, please, Faith, and then I have another question for you.

Ms. Faith Chipman: The consistency and the harmonization that standards provide across all jurisdictions is what provides the reduction of red tape. If you have multiple long-term-care homes that adopt the same standard, then they have the ability to utilize that bar, to ensure that they reach it based on the details associated with that standard.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And if you have standards, then you actually have to have oversight on those standards to hold those homes accountable. Would you agree with that?

Ms. Faith Chipman: Yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Has the CSA Group delved into some of the other issues that are affecting long-term care around standards and around where we need to take long-term care in Ontario?

I follow the research of George Heckman, the Schlegel research chair in geriatric medicine at the University of Waterloo. There is a movement in long-term care to move away from institutional care, primarily because the pandemic showed us how viruses thrive in large institutions as opposed to smaller models such as the Green House model, which actually is a home. In those smaller homes, more intimate homes, caring homes, COVID mortality was much lower. In that regard, the ongoing construction of large institutions really is contributing to the spread of viruses, and COVID will not be—the pandemic is not over, and COVID is still spreading through large, institutional homes.

Do your standards address where we need to take long-term care? Are you forward-thinking, as a group, in that regard?

Ms. Faith Chipman: Our infection prevention and control standard, the one that was recently published in December, addresses the design of long-term-care homes and also the renovation of current, existing ones to address both infection prevention and control, but to also assist in ensuring that, as you were mentioning, the residence keeps as a home for these residents and ensures that homeliness feel is still within the home itself.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, there are some models like the butterfly model, which is a more compassionate, staffing-resourced model as well.

Could you forward that December report to us?

Ms. Faith Chipman: Absolutely. I can forward you the report that informed the standard, and the standard itself—I can look at getting you a private copy of the standard.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That would be great. Thank you for that.

You also mentioned in your opening comments that this is different than what the federal government brought forward. Would you say yours are more stringent? Do they go further? How do you compare?

Ms. Faith Chipman: Our standard is a national standard, and I think unfortunately when the standard as well as the HSO standard were presented, they were presented as if they were created by the federal government. Our organizations are independent organizations. We're accredited by the Standards Council of Canada, and these standards were created independently with participation from over 10 provinces, academics and experts in the field. Particularly, the standards at 8004, which addresses infection prevention and control, were created by our organization utilizing the expert opinion of those committee members.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm glad you clarified that, because that's an important clarification.

In your opinion, and based on your work, is there a province in Canada that is actually doing long-term care well?

Ms. Faith Chipman: In my own personal opinion?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes.

Ms. Faith Chipman: I can only comment on the opinion of my organization.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Perhaps it's not a fair question. It's okay.

I think that there's agreement across parties that long-term care can be done better and more compassionately, especially given where the demographics are going.

Thank you very much, Faith.

I'm going to move on to Sarah. Thanks for your presentation.

Primary care: We've heard from doctors, we've heard from nurse practitioners, we've heard from nurses. Primary care is broken in Ontario. Obviously, this doesn't help with attracting doctors, because doctors and medical professionals will not be attracted to a system that is underfunded, that is under-resourced, and that is really held at bay. And unless there's a huge redesign in health care in Ontario, primary caregivers are that gatekeeper to the whole system.

I want to give you an opportunity to address where the strategic investment would have to happen, because when we write our report to the finance minister which hopefully informs the budget after all this work—that's our hope. So I just wanted to give you a moment to address that key strategic investment that needs to happen.

Ms. Sarah Hobbs: I think that we'll never have enough money to hire the number of doctors everybody will need in Ontario. But if we're strategic about the funding and invest in inter-professional primary health care teams that surround a doctor or a nurse practitioner, especially teams like CHCs' nurse practitioner-led clinics and Indigenous

Primary Health Care Council organizations that focus on the needs of those in the communities that face the most barriers, that's how we're going to be able to save the whole system funds, because people will have access to health promotion—

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

Ms. Sarah Hobbs: —and community development programs that keep people out of long-term care, keep people healthy in the community—

Ms. Catherine Fife: And out of hospital.

Ms. Sarah Hobbs: —and out of hospital, absolutely.

That's why we need to focus on the expansion of teams, and a full team that includes the health promotion activities that ensure people can stay healthy and active and everything else.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I have toured the nurse practitioner clinic in southwest Kitchener. I'm on the list to get into that, because that is exactly the kind of care—where you have a team that can actually meet your needs. We heard from nurse practitioners that that is—to take a caseload of 900 patients off a wait-list, potentially, really will improve access to that gatekeeper into the system as a whole.

Thank you very much for the presentation today.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We will now go to the independent. MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Faith, I represent an area along the shore of Lake Erie, and it's very flood-prone.

Can you tell me a bit about what you are asking for with respect to flood mitigation from this government? Is it money? Is it a framework? What is it?

Ms. Faith Chipman: Well, we have a pre-existing suite of flood mitigation standards that address riverine flooding, bioretention—a whole range of issues that could possibly assist your community in preventing further flooding, but also preventing flooding in newer developments, if your community is expanding. The list goes on, so I'm happy to get into further detail and provide that information to you.

1030

In terms of funding, of course, new standards are always needed to be developed. Right now, our suite of standards addresses a lot of these issues perfectly. The example of Winnipeg already utilizing our standards within their regional plan is a great example. We would like the province to assist us in helping municipalities utilize our standards to address these issues—because I think it's that trickle-down effect. If these standards are regulated at the provincial level to be used at the municipal level, I think that would be the best win-win, essentially. It would also teach the municipalities how to use these standards efficiently.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Thank you.

Sarah, you were talking about family physicians leaving the profession. Just over the past few days, there have been some articles with respect to the number of medical student allocations in each province, and apparently in Canada the provinces are being a bit tight with respect to opening up those positions in medical school. Do you have any comment on that?

Ms. Sarah Hobbs: I can't speak to other provinces. I know that this government has invested in new family physician seats in medical schools, but it's a longer-term solution. We're developing new medical schools; it's going to take time, and it's going to take time for people to get to the other end and graduate. That's why I believe that investing in team-based care will help physicians stay in the profession now, who are already active but are suffering because they don't have access to the resources that their patients need. It's very stressful and it's hard for them to work in that kind of environment.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: The article actually goes on and talks about the fact that there is not a shortage of physicians in Ontario; it's a shortage of licensed physicians, so that time frame could actually be shortened if we just licensed those folks up.

Catherine, I agree with much of what you've presented, and you've presented very well.

I agree with you with respect to the government's reversal on green energy. Green energy is great, if we can afford it and it's practical; total electrification is not, in my opinion.

I want to move over to your piece on education. You say, "When social justice objectives take priority over basic skills, student achievement declines, universities are forced to offer remedial courses in literacy"—and it goes on. I've heard this. I've heard it from students. I've heard it from parents. I've heard it from union reps and union members. And I've seen it in my own home, when my kids come home and talk about these things. It's getting in the way of education. You talk about vouchers. You talk about charter schools. But I'm wondering, is this just a simple curriculum change?

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

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: If we tell folks, "We're not teaching these things; these are conversations for around the dinner table," would that work?

Ms. Catherine Swift: Well, it would absolutely be a good start. You're right; there's no simple solution.

I think providing some competition into the system in the way of charters—other provinces do it. It's not like this is a non-Canadian thing; it's just a non-Ontario thing. I think that would be a good way.

Yes, imposing a curriculum that is more consistent—because there seems to be way too much choice at the local level, for school boards or whatever, to implement sometimes some pretty wacky stuff that certainly isn't helping kids. So I totally agree with that. That's something the province could do.

If I could make a really quick remark on the health care thing—I don't think we should buy into the fact that the system is underfunded. If you look at any international comparison, we spend more than most other universal countries—

Ms. Catherine Fife: No.

Ms. Catherine Swift: Yes, we do. You really should read this research. We spend more per capita than most countries in the world with a universal system, and we get poorer results than they do. So we need—

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

We'll now go to the government. MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It's great to be here today. Thank you to all the presenters. I enjoyed listening to all of you, and I have questions for each of you, if time permits.

I'll start with the Coalition of Concerned Manufacturers and Businesses of Canada. I agree with much of what you said as well.

No doubt, Ontario—I think you would agree with me; I'd be curious to get your thoughts. We were in a black period of manufacturing in Ontario for many, many years. We lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs in the last decade.

I believe we are undergoing somewhat of a manufacturing renaissance in Ontario, for a number of reasons, some of which are just global issues and concerns and robotics, but I also think creating the right environment for manufacturing is key.

You touched on energy being an issue, and that was most definitely an issue in the riding of Oakville, which I represent, where Ford of Canada was very close to leaving the country for good. That was one of the issues that they brought up. Fortunately, Ford is going to be staying here for decades to come, building electric vehicles. So there's a great future for them, and manufacturing, in Ontario.

Manufacturing is important, and I think it is having a little bit of a renaissance.

I want to get more specific to the manufacturing side of what you represent, in that—what more can we do, specifically, to incent manufacturers to set up shop in Ontario? As you are probably aware, we did also allow a quicker depreciation of assets. What are a couple of key points, specifically, that we can do to incent manufacturing in Ontario?

Ms. Catherine Swift: The energy issue is a big deal. We really have to do more on electricity costs. It's an issue for everybody, obviously, but it's a really big issue for manufacturers.

Anything one can do on the red tape side—again, most of our members are small and medium-sized independent businesses. There are a few that are larger, but most of them are on the small side. Red tape is very pernicious for small firms.

We're very concerned about a lot of the green energy stuff—and it's not not wanting to do something for the environment; it's wanting to do something that's measured, that has positive impacts. We know that a lot of what we do—we're not meeting goals anyway—is doing an awful lot of harm. So measuring these policies would go a long way to be able to just get rid of the ones that aren't working at all and hopefully put something practical in place.

Recycling: We have a lot of plastics manufacturers in our membership. They've made some real strides with recycling. We need to do more, no question. Focusing on those kinds of things instead of—you didn't ban plastics, but the federal ban on plastics is pure virtue signalling. It isn't a substantive way to do things. I'd reinstitute another red tape exercise where that was being looked at.

Anything on the payroll tax side, as well—you have a health payroll tax in Ontario which is dubiously used for health purposes, often, and so on.

Obviously, taxation is a big issue, too.

The very welcome change was, a lot of the labour issues that had become so very onerous for the smaller business community were alleviated when this government first came in. That was positive.

Also, a lot of the tight union rules that require, say, procurement to use unionized companies and whatnot—the province has moved away from that, and that saves taxpayers a lot of money, as well as being much more fair to the vast majority of businesses that are not unionized.

Anyway, there's a quick list of some of the things.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: The government wants to support businesses, be it union or not union—and they have a place in our society, of course, but we should be getting, from the best providers—

Ms. Catherine Swift: It should be even-handed. That's all.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Second to that, you mentioned the 40-year contracts. Many energy deals that are signed, typically, are fairly lengthy. Could you explain what you meant by that? You would ban 40-year contracts?

Ms. Catherine Swift: I think there should be some kind of rigour around that so that no government can tie the hands of a future democratically elected government, basically. I'm not a lawyer, so you'd certainly have to speak to the lawyers as to the best way to do that. But I know with the whole green energy approach, there were 40-year contracts, and that's terrible.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Some of that has handcuffed our government in order to do further—

Ms. Catherine Swift: Of course it does. Even 20-year contracts—but I understand there are practicalities that mean you can't have a one-year contract for something. It's not sensible. So there has to be some middle ground. But I think it's wrong, no matter how you do it, for one government to tie the hands of another subsequent government.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you.

How much time is left, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have 2.4 minutes.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I'll move to the Canadian Standards Association. I want to touch a little bit on long-term care. As you know, our government has made some legislative changes with respect to long-term care in terms of hours of care, mandated air conditioning—which I think was really critical, as we had some very hot days last summer, and we saw what some of the regular people without air conditioning went through.

How does what you propose tie into a government legislative agenda with respect to long-term-care?

Ms. Faith Chipman: In terms of our Z8004 standard, which was recently published, that particularly addresses infection prevention and control and how you design a space in a long-term-care home—for example, for any new long-term-care homes that are designed, how can we

best address the infection prevention and control issue within those long-term-care homes? So it doesn't necessarily touch on any of those two subjects, but it does touch on something that we feel could be augmented within the Fixing Long-Term Care Act.

1040

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Yes, that makes sense, and I think the member opposite touched on that as well, about the new types of home that may work better for—

Ms. Faith Chipman: And renovated homes, as well.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you.

Lastly, we only have maybe a minute and a half or so with the Alliance for Healthier Communities. I want to touch on the new primary health care organizations you touched on. Obviously, we've been doing a lot, as a government, to hire staff. Now we need nurses, doctors, primary care physicians. We are bringing in a new medical school in Brampton. We are trying to get more nurses through the system—it's particularly a problem in the north, as we travelled through the north. Are there any ideas you have in terms of what our government can do in order to get these—

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford:—organizations and facilities staffed? At the end of the day, we can put money into facilities, but we need staffing.

Ms. Sarah Hobbs: Yes, I think that we need to think about recruitment and retention funding. I think that it has been flatlined for a long time. Unfortunately, in primary care, they're competing with hospitals, and hospitals are better-funded and can support their staff with better compensation packages.

We need to think about a primary care HHR strategy that is consultative with the associations that represent primary care, and it needs to expand to the other allied health professionals, so that we can ensure that everybody is there doing the things that ensure that the people who are physicians are working at the right scope; that they're not doing things that other team members in a community of care could be providing.

I also think that we should think about rural incentives and things for francophone folks out in places where it's very hard to get—I think we need to think about different kinds of subsidies and things for people to be able to compensate, to attract—

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

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to all our presenters who have come to committee today.

My first questions will be for Sarah. You've really said to the committee something that we've heard time and again—which is the need for the province to have a health care human resources strategy. This is something we've heard again and again—the need to not only recruit, but also, as you say, retain. In fact, many have also said they need to return nurses who have left as a result of Bill 124 and the wage suppression.

Also, just to repeat some comments from AMO, who also mentioned that Ontario continues to have the lowest per capita spending on services of any province or territory in Canada—"In fact, Ontario's spending of \$11,800 per person is almost \$2,000 per person less than the average expenditure of the other provinces and territories at about \$13,800."

Your comments about the need to invest in primary care are quite timely, as well.

I've had the opportunity to tour a nurse practitioner-led clinic, and the holistic care they provide is wonderful. They care for the entire person. We are dynamic organisms, and we need to be looked after as such.

Also, I met with community support services organizations, and it's scary to think that organizations like Meals on Wheels, Cheshire homes, St. Joseph's Hospice and Hutton House, who deliver wonderful care in our community, are facing reductions. They're going to have to change their targets if they don't have increased funding. So thank you for saying that funding has been stagnant for a number of years.

I wonder if you could speak to the administrative burden that many health care practitioners are facing as a result of a very fragmented system.

Ms. Sarah Hobbs: I think that my colleagues at the Ontario College of Family Physicians talk about this in relation to physicians having an administrative burden. That's the beauty of having an inter-professional primary health care team surrounding a nurse practitioner or physician—so that the primary care providers aren't having to do that themselves.

I will also say that our inter-professional teams that I represent at the alliance are serving, I think, the hardest-to-reach folks in Ontario, and if they weren't there doing that, then the cost to the systems would be atrocious and we'd be in a much worse place than we are today.

With that, it's very challenging for medical secretaries, for front desk reception, for the people who support the organizations on the back end, when they can—quite literally, we had a centre where the McDonald's down the road was hiring at a higher rate than for the receptionist. A primary care team can't exist without a receptionist.

So I think that ensuring that we're not just focusing on the physicians and nurse practitioners, who are an important part, but thinking about the whole system that makes that health care happen in a holistic way, as you say, and making sure that the funding and the retention and the recruitment and the HHR strategy—I know that this government is working on an HHR strategy for hospitals and for long-term care. I'm part of those conversations, and that's great. But I have not seen a primary care strategy in a way that includes that whole system of primary health care. I think a strategy like that is needed and would be very important. I know they're working on it, but I just think that we need to step that up a little bit.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Absolutely. It needs to happen as soon as possible. In dealing with community support services agencies, they were saying how because of the increased inflation, increased product costs etc.,

they were losing staff, whether it was HR—they were losing opportunities to train and develop staff, and then with wage disparity, people moving from one organization to another creates yet another financial burden.

Thank you very much for your comments.

My next questions will be for Faith. Faith, I appreciated the fact that you mentioned the urgent need for standards with modular homes, the modular construction standards. I think it would be a great way to address the homelessness crisis that we now face, but it's important that we do so in a safe, logical manner.

I did want to ask some questions about, in particular, the building code, and specifically about HCRA and the Ontario Builder Directory. I was speaking with an organization called Canadians for Properly Built Homes. They mentioned that they had reached out to HCRA, and HCRA has said they do not have the authority to end the practice of builders secretly selling newly built homes with used and damaged furnaces, which is a very strange opinion for them to have. I don't think that would be something the CSA would support. Do you have any comments on that in particular?

Ms. Faith Chipman: I'm so sorry; I wouldn't have any expertise in that particular area, so I wouldn't be able to comment on it. I'm not aware currently of any standards that would be able to address that.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Yes, I understand.

It is really quite shocking.

As you know, a newly built home, or any home whatsoever, is the largest purchase that anyone can make; it is something where you're financially responsible for many years to come.

When people are going to purchase a home, often they will rely on the Ontario Builder Directory to make sure that the person they're buying from is one they can trust and one who has the public's trust as well.

Interestingly, in their 2022 report, HCRA said that they received 808 complaints about builders, but only about 10% resulted in an inspection. It's curious, because the complaints about HCRA are handled by HCRA. Would you like to see Tarion or HCRA be responsible for the Ontario Builder Directory? Do you have any opinion on that?

Ms. Faith Chipman: Our organization doesn't have any association with the Ontario Builder Directory, so I wouldn't be able to comment on that.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Understood.

It is deeply concerning, because there are folks—we want to make sure that there is oversight, we want to make sure there are standards. But when someone is responsible for having complaints about themselves, we wonder whether that's effectively handled.

I know they're some interesting questions. I just wanted to see if you had an opinion.

Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll now go to the independent. MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to all the presenters today—very, very informative.

I'd like to start with Faith. Faith, standards is obviously a very broad field, and you've zoned in here on a few really important and relevant topics that the government is looking at and that all Ontarians should be concerned about.

I wanted to—again, help educate me, anyway, about the gap between what some of the long-term-care homes would have today and your standards. Are any of them voluntarily following the standards? Would some of their other regulations have already gotten them to a certain point? I'm just trying to understand the gap.

Ms. Faith Chipman: Our Z2000—I think it's Z2000. Again, correct me if I'm wrong; we have 3,000 standards and codes. We have a health care facility standard that quite a few health care facilities—not necessarily long-term-care homes—already adopt in terms of HVAC, in terms of plumbing, in terms of the innards of a health care facility, and they do already voluntarily adopt those standards. It's in some organizations' best interests, just based on wanting to be of a higher standard, of course, to voluntarily adopt our standards. In terms of the gaps between current long-term-care homes, we definitely think there's room for improvement, and these standards can augment what the Fixing Long-Term Care Act already addresses.

1050

In terms of infection prevention and control, we obviously saw throughout the pandemic that there are some gaps we need to fill, and there's always room for improvement in that particular area while maintaining, as MPP Fife mentioned at the beginning, that this is someone's home. This is where someone lives, and we need to ensure that they feel comfortable, that it's not an institution and that they feel comfortable in their home—but, of course, addressing those really, really big concerns with infection prevention and control.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I get that HCFs are different right now—

Ms. Faith Chipman: Yes, and there are some long-term-care homes that voluntarily adopt that standard as well.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Tell me more about those. What kind of homes are following your standards, and how did they do throughout COVID?

Ms. Faith Chipman: I'm not quite sure on those particular homes, but health care facilities in general have fared well. There are quite different facts—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Sorry; the long-term-care homes—I thought you said some are voluntarily following your standards.

Ms. Faith Chipman: Yes, health care facilities, long-term-care homes. We have data that suggests, within that group of those health care facilities—including long-term-care homes—that have voluntarily adopted that particular standard that addresses HVAC and plumbing and whatnot, that certain viruses and diseases have been lowered by adopting that particular standard. I'm happy to share that

information, but it's very particular research that, unfortunately, I don't have off the top of my head.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: So some of the long-term-care homes, either by definition of being an HCF or something or by, again, another definition, are following your standards?

Ms. Faith Chipman: Yes, voluntarily.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Do you know how many long-term-care homes, approximately?

Ms. Faith Chipman: I don't know off the top of my head, but I'd be happy to get that information for you.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: That would be interesting to know, to see how well they did during the pandemic.

If the government were to consider this—which I think is a good recommendation—certainly homes, particularly the for-profit ones, might say, “Well, it's too costly for us,” or it's too big of a gap in terms of their current facilities. So I'm just trying to get a sense for—

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: That was really what I was trying to get at—how big a gap it is to close. Obviously, it's a safety issue, and that should be prioritized over profits.

Sarah, you talked about the 8% increase to get to just the base level that you need. Would that do things like make sure that the caregivers, the PSWs who, today, are travelling from place and place and don't get paid for those hours—would that help cover that kind of thing, to close that wage gap for them? We know that's part of why they move on to other roles.

Ms. Sarah Hobbs: Yes, I think that the 8% would go a long way in helping with some of the compensation issues, but it would also just, quite frankly, ensure that people aren't having to make decisions about cutting services to pay for bills. That's where our members are at, because they haven't had an increase in 10 years.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll now go to the government. MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank everybody for your presentations today.

Before I begin, I just want to tell Catherine that I know your comments on workforce readiness are well received. With the small family businesses and manufacturers in my home community, I've heard many concerns for the state of readiness of our workforce and a feeling that the Ontario curriculum is not preparing students for a good future because of a lack of emphasis on career skills. So thank you for that. It's well received.

Ms. Catherine Swift: It's not even as complicated as that. We know that in universities—there's a very good study; I don't have it with me. A number of universities—McMaster was one; Queen's; I think U of T was one. Anyway, four of them got together about three years ago to talk about how unprepared kids were, coming in—that they offer remedial English, remedial math, remedial problem-solving. That was never there in our day—that we had to jump through some more hoops in university. So it's not even business that's saying, “We're not getting skill-ready people”—it's even other parts of the education

system that are saying there's a problem here, when a kid hasn't got a basic level of literacy or numeracy.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you, Catherine.

I want to move to Faith. I'm very intrigued by some of your recommendations. I think of a project, the flood mitigation management standards, and especially for bioretention—some of those are long overdue. There's a lot of trial and error that has been happening in industry, and obviously standardization of construction practices can help a lot of designers going forward.

I just had a question related to mandatory use. I know we have ASTM and it's used in industry. There's certainly OPSS/OPSD for the province of Ontario. Are you looking at getting away from those types of standards and uniting under CSA for construction practices?

Ms. Faith Chipman: In terms of construction practices under—is there a particular standard that you wanted to reference?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Yes, just for the standards that you're recommending become—mandatory use of CSA standards. When those standards exist from other standards associations or municipal and provincial officials—you're looking to phase those out in favour of CSA?

Ms. Faith Chipman: No. We're looking to augment what's already existing. We'd like to address any gaps that already exist, and we're happy to work with government on developing standards in particular areas. We are working with the government right now on quite a few different standards in different ministries that augment existing standards that maybe the ministry has created, or another SDO, standards development organization.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I have a follow-up with respect to the modular construction standards. I know there are countless articles saying how great it is that we can convert, for example, a shipping container into a building. However, when you get to building officials, they're saying, “Well, we can't certify that you cutting a hole in the shipping container is keeping the structural integrity of that facility alive.” So you have the concept versus the actual practical application.

On the work that you're doing: Do you see a realization of that promise that we can reuse older or previously enjoyed materials in order to achieve the goals of modular housing and that you'd be able to say, “If you've done this, this, this, you don't need to have a sign-off from the original designer; this will work”? Is that your vision for what the standard would incorporate for modular housing?

Ms. Faith Chipman: Separate from our modular construction standards, we actually have a standard and we actually certify for use of prefabricated structures.

In terms of a shipping container, we actually already certify for that, and we also have the standard that addresses that.

Separate from that, however, our modular construction standards—we're just beginning in that field. It's such a new and innovative field. The first step to that was our A277 standard, which the Ontario building code has already adopted within the code itself.

So, yes, we would like to continue work in that area to address all of the variety of different approaches to modular construction. We work with our stakeholders, our technical committee members, who are from multiple different areas of the industry, including the government, to address any particular issues or any opportunities that particular sector may see that need to be standardized to ensure that the safety and the quality of these structures are maintained.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thanks very much.

Chair, I'll pass my time to MPP Byers.

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

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you to all the presenters for your information this morning. It's very helpful to us.

Sarah, I want to ask you a couple of questions on the CHC. You mentioned the South East Grey Community Health Centre in your presentation. I was pleased to be on the board of that organization for three years recently. It serves Markdale, Dundalk, Chatsworth. It's a great model, particularly for rural health care, I would say.

In your presentation, you emphasized the team approach. You talked about having family physicians giving access to teams etc. Can you explain a little bit more what your concept is there? Are you working with family health teams? I'm just curious about the model.

Ms. Sarah Hobbs: It's not a new model. It's something that could be scaled and spread quite easily, and we have research and data that has evaluated some of the pilot projects that have already happened in the province. Windsor Family Health Team is an example of that. It's a community family health team and community-governed. Right now, in a family health team or a CHC, there's a team of people who are available to the patients of that organization. They include dietitians and chiropractors and mental health workers and whatever that community may need. This idea is to put more members on those teams—so not new organizations, no new capital builds, those kinds of things; just more members in those organizations that then could accept referrals from family physicians who don't have access to teams.

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

1100

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you. During the pandemic, the focus, of course, was on the acute-care sector, hospitals. The association for hospitals tends to be a more centralized approach, if you will, whereas primary care has so many different players in so many different communities. Obviously, it is a government priority, and we've seen some announcements.

Is there a way, given all the different players in the various communities, to gather the information from the primary care providers in a way that works? I don't know whether your organization can help us with that or not—just curious.

Ms. Sarah Hobbs: We already have organized ourselves into the Primary Care Collaborative, and we represent all the primary care associations in Ontario. We are available; we have our own pre-budget submission that we submitted,

which includes some of the things that I've spoken about today, and we would be more—

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

We thank the panel for all the effort you've put into preparing to come here today and delivering your message. We very much appreciate it, and we look forward to forwarding that to the minister for his budget preparation.

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR

RING OF FIRE METALS

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYEES UNION

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll now announce the next panel: first, Ontario Federation of Labour; second, Ring of Fire Metals; third, Ontario Public Service Employees Union.

As with the previous panel, you will have seven minutes to make your presentation. At six minutes, I will say, "One minute." Keep talking, because at seven minutes, you can't.

We do ask that as you start your presentation you introduce yourself for Hansard so we can make sure your comments get attributed to the right name.

First, we will hear from the Ontario Federation of Labour.

Ms. Patty Coates: My name is Patty Coates. I'm president of the Ontario Federation of Labour, representing 54 unions and one million unionized workers. With me is Thevaki Thevaratnam, the OFL's director of research and education.

For far too long, working people have paid the price for crises they didn't create. Wages have been frozen or cut while the cost of living soars. Eat or heat—many in Ontario can't do both. Ontarians can barely make ends meet, while corporations and the banks are making record profits. Enough is enough. The Ford government can no longer turn away from the realities that the people of this province are experiencing, and I'm here today to give voice to those realities.

Instead of making it easier for Ontario families, the Ford government is holding onto Bill 124, which the Superior Court struck down on the basis that it violates workers' rights to collectively bargain and to strike. The Ford government is appealing this decision, spending public dollars to fight workers in court. This government must accept the court's decision and make resources available for employers and unions to negotiate remedies for impacted workers.

Then there are the workers who were on the front lines throughout the pandemic. Many of them earned minimum wage while putting their own health at risk. As the cost of living skyrockets, making the minimum wage is far from making a living.

It's time to increase the minimum wage to \$20 per hour immediately, with no exceptions, and it's time to make things better for workers across the board by making it easier to join a union, introducing card-check certification,

and introducing first-contract arbitration and anti-scab legislation. This is what truly working for workers looks like.

Too many people are being left behind, including the 863,000 Ontarians living in deep poverty who can't keep up as inflation soars. The recent 5% increase to ODSP is only \$58 per month per person, and Ontario Works has been frozen at \$733 per month since 2018. The government must double rates immediately.

Last week, the Financial Accountability Office showed us that this government is overstating the deficit, understating revenues and starving public services. Don't be fooled; there's money—\$12.5 billion in additional funds that are not earmarked for public services. And yet, there are still shortfalls in some sectors, including \$5 billion in health care and \$1.5 billion in education. The government has enough money to cover these shortfalls. It just needs to act, and it needs to act now.

Public hospitals are in crisis. Years of underfunding and funding cuts have led to this moment. Ontarians cannot afford to wait any longer. Health care funding must increase by 15.1% to account for inflation, population growth, COVID-related costs, and to address the capacity crisis. Health care crises will not be fixed with private, for-profit clinics and hospitals. Private clinics can and will upsell. Stop the privatization of our health care and invest in public services that take care of all of us.

Last year, the Ford government claimed to have made the biggest education investment in Ontario's history, but education funding was cut. There was only a 3.4% increase compared to last year, significantly below inflation and enrolment growth. Since 2018-19, Grants for Student Needs have increased by only 2% while real spending per student dropped by 6.7%. Stop shortchanging education. Ontarians deserve real investments in our well-being.

There is also a housing affordability crisis across Ontario. Ontarians are being priced out of purchasing homes, and some are even being priced out of housing altogether. We need a province-wide public housing program that builds decent homes in every community and one that doesn't threaten the environment. Bill 23 removes 7,400 acres from the greenbelt to build homes, yet the government's own task force found there are plenty of places to build homes without destroying the greenbelt. Why is the government opening up the greenbelt? Lobbying records reveal connections between Ontario's PC Party and five of the landowners who will benefit most from the proposed changes. Not only does Bill 23 weaken protections for people and properties, but it is about making the rich richer. This government must repeal Bill 23 and protect people over profits.

In the first two quarters of 2022, Canada's grocery conglomerates made nearly twice as much as they made in 2019. While large grocery stores were raking in record profits, Ontario food banks saw a 42% increase in use over the last three years.

Stop the price gouging of oil and gas companies and grocery conglomerates. It's time to make the rich pay for their share.

Ontario is home to the highest concentration of billionaires in the country. Canada's highest-paid CEOs and other top executives shattered records for compensation in 2021, earning an average of \$14.3 million.

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

Ms. Patty Coates: They made an average worker's entire salary less than an hour into the first working day of this year. This inequality is not inevitable; it's a political choice.

Ontarians require leadership that improves the lives of working people. We deserve stable working conditions, strong public services, affordable homes, and healthy communities for all, and we need it now.

Thank you for your time.

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

We'll now go to Ring of Fire Metals.

Mr. Stephen Crozier: My name is Stephen Crozier. I'm vice-president of sustainability for Ring of Fire Metals. I just want to express, on behalf of Ring of Fire, that we're very pleased to have the opportunity to make submissions before this committee.

As many of you know, Ring of Fire Metals is the successor to Noront Resources, and we hold the bulk of the mineral claims in the Ring of Fire. We are excited to partner with Indigenous communities and with the province in advancing and expediting the development of these critically important resources.

As part of my submissions, I'm going to cover three main priority areas. One of the main themes that I want to emphasize is—and Ontario is already committed to this—continuing to invest in the infrastructure that can help advance development in the Ring of Fire. The model that has been selected sees the communities play a leading role in their capacity as proponents in advancing the road network into the Ring of Fire. Our view is, that is a model that should be continued and explored in collaboration with the communities and maximized to its full potential—meaning that for the communities that wish to have a robust role as proponents in terms of the permitting, construction and management of those roads, we would encourage Ontario to consider that possibility to the fullest extent possible and to marshal the resources necessary to support the communities in their pursuit of economic self-determination. That's ultimately a decision and a discussion that involves the province and the communities in a nation-to-nation dialogue, and we respect that it is their decision and the province's decision and not Ring of Fire Metals', but we did want to signal our strong support for that model. We think it's in the best interest of the province and of the Indigenous communities in the north to lead that development themselves.

1110

Secondly, as a complement to that, it is important for the province to consider how to effectively resource the necessary investments, beyond direct investments in building infrastructure itself—the processes that are required in order to facilitate development in the north. It will involve a number of complicated processes to be advanced in order

to expedite development. It will require a high degree of engagement and additional capacity in order to support those discussions in an effective manner. As part of our submission, we would encourage the province to consider resourcing dedicated resources in order to support those conversations. Currently, there's quite a lot of work that's being done by various ministries in advancing these discussions, but they're reliant on resources that have a number of other responsibilities that they have to discharge, and that creates pressure—when you have a large project that really warrants a dedicated team in order to advance it, that also has other priorities that are equally important that are pulling them in multiple directions. So we would encourage the province to actively consider how to resource dedicated teams to handle these issues. It will be very difficult, I think, to expedite development that requires balancing a number of competing and compelling interests, and doing that in a timely fashion, with shared resources. So we would encourage the province to consider resourcing to that effect.

Thirdly, as part of that—and it's a priority when we think about development in the Ring of Fire—there's discussion of the importance of this region in terms of critical minerals and the broader geopolitical rebalancing in terms of supply chain that is under way in which Ontario can and should play a leading role. There's obviously a discussion about how Indigenous interests and economic self-determination can and should be advanced as part of this development. And I think a third area which should be prioritized or elevated to the same level of importance is how we can advance that development in a responsible manner that equally prioritizes conservation and reinforcing biodiversity. There's a growing trend of treating natural capital as something that should be added to everybody's balance sheet—for government and for the private sector. We think there's an opportunity for Ontario to consider how to resource that—not in place of commitments that private investors such as Ring of Fire Metals might make. We should be part of that discussion as well, and we would like to be part of that discussion, but we would encourage the province to consider how to prioritize that and how to structure investments that can reinforce the natural capital. We can't advance a model to expedite development if the trade is to impair the environment in order to advance economic development. We don't think we need to do that. But it does require resourcing, and it does require planning. We know the province is thematically supportive, but we would encourage a specific set of policies and resources to support further discussions and specific initiatives to be advanced in connection with this large-scale development in the north. Thank you.

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

Our next presenter is the Ontario Public Service Employees Union. Welcome. The floor is yours.

Ms. JP Hornick: Thank you so much. I'm JP Hornick. I'm the president of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, OPSEU/SEFPO. I'm really glad to be here today

to speak to the standing committee and to be part of the process.

It's my hope that these hearings will have an impact on the budget decisions that are made by this government going forward, because people are hurting. People are struggling to pay the bills. They're struggling to pay for basics like groceries and gas. They're struggling from out-of-control rent increases and from unaffordable housing. People are struggling with skyrocketing inflation, employers that push back against real wage demands, and a central bank that believes that wage increases are the problem rather than the solution. People are also struggling to access public services and a social safety net—one that was supported and built by generations past and that has been cut and left to suffocate deliberately. This is because of an ideology that believes that public resources should go instead to private, for-profit corporations with no public responsibility or real accountability. To echo Patty: Enough is enough.

This budget is an opportunity to reverse the years of funding cuts and understaffing that have plagued our public services, but it will take political will and political choices that are hard. Public services are facing a major staffing and retention crisis that needs to be addressed.

As front-line workers, the 180,000 members of OPSEU/SEFPO have unique insight and experience necessary to identify the ways we need to rebuild our public services, to truly innovate with the public in mind. We can do that while addressing the cost-of-living crisis and increasing the quality of life for all Ontarians. We can make real progress by bridging the wage gap, addressing understaffing, improving working conditions, and reforming the taxation system to make Ontario a place where everyone has access to the support and resources we need to thrive.

OPSEU/SEFPO has practical and achievable solutions in the package in front of you:

- investing in good jobs, which leads to better public services;

- addressing the cost-of-living crisis and making life more affordable; and

- ending the privatization agenda while tackling climate action.

I'll start with the solutions to the major staffing and retention crisis. Our members have been clear: They are facing burnout and mental health injury due to extreme short-staffing across the public sector. Many have left behind or are leaving behind beloved jobs in public service because their working conditions have become intolerable. The reality of Ontario's staffing crisis cannot be overstated and neither can the harm done to our invaluable public services as a result. Even worse, many experienced workers are retiring, and this trend exacerbates the challenge of recruiting and retaining workers. The increasing reliance on part-time, precarious employment—or the “gigification” of work—is contributing to an unstable workforce that is just making the staffing shortage worse. Also, the overreliance on temp agencies to fill the gap at higher prices is

actually costing Ontario taxpayers and is a short-sighted approach to solving the staffing crisis.

Addressing this requires the provision of more full-time employment opportunities in the Ontario Public Service, the broader public sector and Ontario's public colleges—jobs that have comprehensive benefits and pensions to them, as well, and that allow people to fully contribute to an economy that works for people. This will enhance the capacity of our public services and reduce wait times for the vital public services people rely on.

It also means dropping the appeal to Bill 124 and putting an end to public sector hiring freezes. Bill 124 was short-sighted, it was unconstitutional, and it's ultimately more costly due to the effects on retention and training issues. Capping compensation creates a barrier to redressing these issues through bargaining, but it also creates a generational divide in income. It is unconscionable to ask public sector workers to accept three years of pay cuts, especially when inflation is hovering around 6% to 8% per year and we're coming out of a pandemic that asked us to do more for increasingly less. The government must immediately drop its appeal of Bill 124, approve pay increases for positions whose pay rates have fallen below their comparators, and take the necessary steps to rectify the harm that has been inflicted by Bill 124.

We also need to address workplace health and safety. Ontario's staffing crisis has put workers at risk. No one should go to work afraid of getting sick or seriously injured, yet we're seeing more incidents of mental health injury and exposure to workplace violence. It's taking its toll on workers' mental health. The government must take action to ensure that all work environments are safe and that employees have the resources and equipment they need to do their work safely. The government must ensure that workers have access to WSIB, or Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, coverage so that they are protected in case of injury. The government must commit to ensuring that workplaces are inclusive, diverse, anti-racist, equitable, accessible, respectful, but free from discrimination and harassment.

Public services are, frankly, the great equalizer, ensuring Ontarians have access to what we need, regardless of our income or ability to pay. Investing in high-quality public services helps to address the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. It is an investment in today, but also in our future.

1120

In 2022, consumer prices in Ontario rose more than twice as fast as wages.

We need real solutions, like a raise of the minimum wage—

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

Ms. JP Hornick: —to \$20 an hour. But we also need a commitment. There have been deliberate choices to starve the system of funds. We need to actually invest in our system. We need to get profits redirected back into the public. We need to eliminate the temp agencies that are gouging us. These were decisions that were made that allow us to starve public services and exacerbate problems that increase.

Today at this committee is your chance to rectify those errors and set us on the correct course with a budget that actually invests in people. Economies work for people; people do not work for economies. Thank you.

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

We'll now start the questions with the independents. MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you for your presentations—very informative. I only have four and a half minutes, as you may know, so I'm going to quickly go around.

Stephen, I'll start with you. I appreciate the themes that you talked about, in terms of having Indigenous communities play a leadership role. We're all getting smarter, I hope, in terms of how we advance truth and reconciliation etc., and I'm really happy to hear that your company is in support of that. I'm a business person. I respect both the need of businesses to make a profit as well as the need for workers to be treated fairly, so I want to state that up front.

I'm really seeking to learn here, so tell me how mining companies can continue to make the profit that they need while also making these new investments in things like environmental standards and developing relationships with Indigenous communities. How can they do that and satisfy their shareholders as well as meet these other obligations to the greater social good?

Mr. Stephen Crozier: I can respond to that generally. I think it varies in terms of the opportunity that is presented by a given asset. Some assets have more slack within them in terms of upside returns that can be apportioned for community benefits.

In terms of how mining generally orients, the wages that are paid within mining tend to be well above average for the general economy, and as such they're typically a positive contributor in terms of local economic development, in terms of sharing benefits with workers. I think how to robustly pursue that—and it is a model that we intend to advance in terms of our proposed development on our Eagle's Nest project. In the design of the operations, we're all assisted if the conversation with the communities can involve them at the earliest stage possible so the design incorporates their values and perspectives but also incorporates a planning priority—that opportunities for developing business opportunities for the communities are identified at the design stage, so that we look for ways to take parts of the operation that could be run by the mining company itself but could also be run in partnership, where the communities get more of a direct benefit. So there's a top-line component to a lot of accommodation mechanisms that have been built over time, where there's a financial sharing of benefits from what comes out of the mine, and I think increasingly—and a lot of companies have been doing a lot of great work in this area; we are certainly not the first. We're also learning from others' examples that the more that we bring the communities into, so to speak, the cost line, where it is the investments in the capital, it is the business opportunities that grow out of it—that is another important multiplier where, from an

ownership perspective, they can directly participate, from a labour force planning perspective. That can be incorporated into your engagement model with communities, so that we can have a pipeline not just for mining jobs but for other jobs that are part of that service sector that supports the ecosystem around a given mining operation.

So those would be some of the areas that we can advance in terms of furthering those objectives.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you.

I'll move to JP and Patty now.

Certainly, the previous Liberal government announced increases to the minimum wage—we would already have been at \$20 an hour. So I certainly support that and the call to repeal Bill 124.

JP, I want to talk a little more about the innovation that you're talking about—

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: —that public sector union workers can bring, because I think that is an important part for all of us to improve productivity, overall, for Ontario and the country.

Ms. JP Hornick: Yes, absolutely. One of the things that you need in order to communicate the ways to best innovate would be to actually talk to those front-line workers, involve them in consultation, but also give them the time and the space they need to do the work, to think and to bring those ideas forward. What we see is exactly the opposite of that. It's a terrible business plan to remove workers from the workplace, to drive them into private interests, to actually strip them of the working conditions that allow them to perform well. Innovation happens when we ensure that public accountability is present, that there's a responsibility to the public to make sure we are delivering the services they need, but also to do so in a way that prioritizes care over profit.

Patty, I don't know if you want to—

Ms. Patty Coates: I think you did a very good job. I think it is important that—

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

We'll now go to the government. MPP Hogarth.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you to everyone for their presentations.

This is my first time at finance committee to talk about pre-budget consultations.

Sometimes I am surprised when I hear—we talk about government money, but we always have to remember that governments don't have money; it's all of our money, it's taxpayers' money, no matter if it's municipal, provincial or federal. So, JP, when you're talking about some of those people—money comes out of their pockets too. We have to remember that, and we have to find a fine balance between what's right and what's wrong and building an Ontario that's prosperous and attracting business, and making sure that people want to move to this province because it's a great place to live and work and raise a family. We always have to find that fine balance when we go across, so always remember that it's taxpayers, people

watching and people in this room—it comes out of their pockets.

Actually, my interest is in the mining field because I used to work in Sudbury for a while, and I worked for the mayor of Sudbury, and we worked on the Ring of Fire project. I remember working on the Ring of Fire project, and there was a lot of red tape that we were going through. So I would love to hear a little bit from your perspective on what particular areas of red tape Ring of Fire Metals faces and if there are different ways that all three levels of government can work together to move this project forward. This started way back when—oh, my goodness, I can't even remember when I was there—2014, 2013? And we're still just kind of moving forward now. What can we do to make this project move forward faster?

Mr. Stephen Crozier: I'll speak to a couple of priorities, and one of those priorities, actually, would, I think, align thematically with the co-presenters in front of this committee. I think there is a resourcing discussion in terms of what we're seeing within the different line ministries that are having to tackle some challenging files. We have noted that the throughput capacity of some of these ministries has come under pressure. We have seen the retirement of deeply experienced individuals and rotation to other staff who are less experienced. It takes time to train up resources, and some of these files are difficult to advance without a deep technical understanding and a practical knowledge as to how you make those trade-offs. So I think there is a capacity issue there that warrants evaluation and reinforcement.

In terms of broader-picture regulatory—this is obviously a discussion we're advancing at the federal and provincial level. We think there's a tremendous opportunity to advance responsible resource development in a way that does big projects, does them well, does them sustainably and does them transparently, with benefits for Indigenous communities, the private sector, working people, and the environment. It can be done.

However, I think our current existing default regulatory process is—there are two things I don't think they do very well. One is that we have a lot of line ministries with a dedicated or specific focus on a particular portion of a whole-of-project approval cycle; what we don't have is—and I guess it's two aspects of the same thing—major project offices that act as Sherpas to lead a project that has multiple touch points with regulatory through those processes in a contextualized manner. That's a noted deficiency. I think it's something that we can implement in partnership with private sector interests and, frankly, the Indigenous communities that also want to have a say in those conversations. I think, increasingly, Indigenous communities will want to be part of the assessment and decision-making process. We think that actually is the logical path forward for robust development within Canada.

At the same time, in addition to having a major project capacity to support, those individual process-specific approval processes—whether it's an environmental assessment or it's a permitting process that follows—also tend to lack

context, and they are implemented without that wider context.

So you really need to come at it from both ends of the system. There needs to be sort of a major project support. There also needs to be a renewed look at how those individual permits are assessed within the context of a larger project. I'd say both of those are deficiencies—broader picture, bigger picture—in terms of where we struggle, but there's a tremendous opportunity, we think, to partner on fixing that, and we think a lot of it can be done without legislative changes. It's orientation, perspective and staffing.

1130

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Our government is actually investing heavily in EV. We want to have the clean cars of the future built right here in Ontario. Can I get your thoughts on some of the important steps that we need to take to enable this clean type of production in Ontario?

Mr. Stephen Crozier: This is a good question.

We're obviously a primary materials producer, or an aspiring one, and so I think there's that part of the supply chain into which we can contribute. There's obviously a bigger picture; there's a larger ecosystem that we can feed into where you go right up to the battery metals plant itself.

I think part of it is in terms of attracting that investment. It is having a view not only of the positive story on the investment side but the regulatory processes that might precede an investment. In terms of attracting all of those potential investors to Ontario, it's important to have a sober look at what kind of approvals processes you are subjecting them to and what other jurisdictions they are engaged with, in terms of knowing whether or not you're competitive. I think that's a lens which we frequently see is not applied, and when we look to jurisdictions where we could cite—Ring of Fire Metals is evaluating, "Should we invest in a battery metals plant? Could we put it here?"

We also have our chromite projects, which will come down the line. Then there's the possibility of a ferrochrome smelter being put in the province, which is something that we would very much like to do. But when you evaluate from a jurisdictional standpoint the competitiveness of Ontario, from a regulatory standpoint, in terms of how quickly that might unfold if that facility is put here versus somewhere else—when you shave years off of a process by putting it somewhere else, that's very persuasive to capital when they're making decisions about allocations. I think that is something that should be looked at, not for the purposes of—

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

Mr. Stephen Crozier: —cutting corners, but for the purposes of being maximally attractive. How do we advance responsible resource development across all parts of the value chain, while at the same time doing it quickly? Keeping that lens in mind and looking honestly at competitor jurisdictions is—I think it's an important lens to maintain.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Well, as Ontario has a lot of supply and service for the mining sector, I certainly hope that you put your ferrochrome plant right here in Ontario.

Mr. Stephen Crozier: So do we.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to all presenters.

Stephen, thank you for making the point of one-stop negotiation or information that would actually help projects move along faster. I do remember the Premier said that if he had to, he would get on a bulldozer himself. If you see that, can you please take a picture? Thank you very much for being here.

I'm going to move over to OPSEU. Thank you very much for the extensive brief. You make a lot of good points.

I do want to get to one issue that you make around children's aid societies and child treatment. You say that we need to establish a fully public and accountable housing system for youth. I can't agree with you more. Global News did an investigation called Profiting Off Kids, which examined the many risky operators in the province that take care of our foster children. In fact, there are over 12,000 children in Ontario in care. These for-profit agencies' goal is to make money, and we know that care comes second. This has actually led to the death of a number of kids in care—David Roman, Kassy Finbow, Amy Owen, Courtney Scott, just to name a few. This is important stuff. There has also been the connection to human trafficking that was recently reported, in the fall, in Hamilton and in Waterloo region, my home riding. These are the most vulnerable children. In fact, local F&CSs—when medically fragile and complex children come into care, there's no place to put them, and so F&CSs have actually had to create their own homes to provide some care.

JP, I want to give you an opportunity to address this very serious issue. It hasn't gotten the attention that it needs. The Liberals started the outsourcing of this care; it has not gone well, and I need the government to understand that this is untenable—in fact, it's unethical.

Ms. JP Hornick: I would argue that what we see happening in youth housing and the privatization is something that we see reflected across the board in public services. I think that children are the clearest example of what happens when systems fail, when we fail to invest in publicly supported and public services for all of our Ontario citizens.

When we look at the stories that are told by workers in these facilities, we hear the same thing again and again: They're told that they have to strip down their staffing levels because funding is cut, that the same people they've been working alongside of who have left the agency due to workplace violence, burnout, low wages—or artificially suppressed wages, I would call them—they're brought back in via temp agencies and being paid twice the rate. We just saw another study come out on that this morning in the Star—in long-term care.

I think that what we are looking at is the tip of an iceberg that will only get bigger and worse as time goes on. When you starve public funding and public services, when you privatize it, it has a direct impact on the health of communities, on children's ability to thrive, to rehabilitate, to participate. Then what we see is a generational divide that is exacerbated for these kids. We've taken away the

possibility for them to step up before they've even had a chance to start.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Exactly. That's excellent. This is something that the government can reverse.

Ms. JP Hornick: Absolutely.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's absolutely doable.

Thank you also for—you moved in the agency nurses area. The finance minister was sitting exactly where you are right now when I asked him, "How is it fiscally responsible to underpay and under-resource our health care professionals in the systems that we have and force them to go to for-profit agencies at three or four times the cost of a nurse you would have in the system?" We heard that sometimes those hourly wages are \$200, up to \$300. Plus, the agency takes their cut. Also, it doesn't contribute to quality care.

Then, of course, it leads to Bill 124.

Patty, I'm going to say something that will not surprise you: Throughout these delegations—not one person in this province believes that Bill 124 is a progressive or helpful piece of legislation to our health care resources crisis. In fact, they have called it a slap in the face that the government is actually fighting it in court, even though they lost and it was found to be unconstitutional. The word that strikes me the most is that they call it "humiliating." It's a humiliating piece of legislation, and yet this government holds onto this piece of legislation. Really, it is a slap in the face to the very people who are working.

I want to give you an opportunity to talk about the importance of retaining staff. The government will come back and say, "We're recruiting nurses. We're recruiting doctors." But we now know, and we've heard first-hand from them, that they don't want to come into the system. Recruitment is hindered by Bill 124. The government itself is working at cross purposes. Please tell the government how important it is to retain the experienced and talented staff we have in our health care system.

Ms. Patty Coates: Using the words "slap in the face"—it's exactly what it is. During the pandemic, we had our health care workers; they were at the front line. They gave 150% of themselves every single day. Many of them are reaching burnout. Many of them have left. Many of them did not have time away from the work to be with their families. To then have Bill 124 pushed onto them—just 1%, when we know that the cost of living has increased greatly—a lot of people just can't afford it anymore.

I want to talk a little bit about tax dollars. I think tax dollars are incredibly important. Governments must be accountable. They're using millions of our tax dollars to fight workers in courts to—

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you for making that point. It's very powerful.

I want to get to price gouging. We heard from farmers, the Beef Farmers of Ontario. They said they're not passing the high cost on to the consumers in Ontario. The stopgap is right where you said. It's the corporate grocery store lines. This government refuses to address price gouging. They're getting a lot of money from the high cost of services.

Give one last word on why it's important to address price gouging for the people of Ontario.

1140

Ms. Patty Coates: As I said, there's a 43% increase in using food banks. People can't go to the grocery store. They can't afford a \$30 piece of chicken. They can't afford a \$50 or \$60 piece of steak. Fruit is incredibly high. Where they have to go right now is to food banks—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you. That concludes that question.

We'll now go to the independents. MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Thank you to Patty, Stephen and JP.

I concur with what my colleague was saying with respect to CAS and child treatment. We need a better housing system. I recently met with my local child and family services. They're paying up to \$2,500 a day for hotel rooms for young people, which is a really, really bad situation for most of these kids. We've seen the headlines and we've heard these things on the 6 o'clock news, and it's not the government that gets beat up with respect to these bad headlines; it's the actual organization or the service provider, and their hands are tied. So I just wanted to make that comment.

JP, you mentioned doubling the rates for all Ontario Works recipients. I'm wondering if there's a second part to that. As you know, we have a huge labour gap in most sectors. What would the second part to that be, in order to get some of these folks back into the workforce so that they can feel the pride that comes along with a job and we can fill those labour gaps?

Ms. JP Hornick: I think there are a couple of things that go along when you're looking at any kind of social safety net, in order to ensure that people can fully participate in the workforce. Affordable daycare is an aspect of that, and ensuring that we are stopping price gouging.

As a taxpayer, as someone who may not have been elected to steward my own money but is looking to you all to actually ensure that occurs, I want to make sure that my neighbours can actually fully participate in the workforce. I want to make sure that they can do so knowing that they have a health care system that will back them up; that they have access to WSIB should they become injured in the workplace; that they have access to safe and quality public daycare to ensure that their children are well looked after; to ensure that if their family is struggling and they have a child who goes into care, that child is taken care of and has a chance to succeed.

What I hear from my members again and again and again, from conservation officers who are forced to work in remote locations to youth service workers and health professionals, is that what we see is a deliberate starving of the very systems that they participate in that disallows them from bringing their best into that workplace. If you have a robust social safety net, you have an opportunity for workers to not just work—I'm a college professor. There is no shortage of people willing to work. There is a shortage of investment in high-quality, good jobs with fair

wages that provide working conditions that are safe, that do not exacerbate mental health issues.

So the second part to Ontario Works is to make Ontario Works unnecessary by providing a social safety net that is robust and equivalent and accessible to all.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I hear the same thing: For most people, it doesn't pay to work right now. There's no incentive to go out there and work because child care and everything else has become so steep.

Patty, the previous presenter said that money in health care is not the problem at this point in time. As we've travelled the province on these pre-budget consultations, I've heard from a number of different people who have different takes on this, and I've come to the conclusion that money isn't entirely the problem, but rather mismanagement.

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

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: You're asking for a 15.1% increase in the health care budget. How would that be allocated if you were in control of that money?

Ms. Patty Coates: I think we need to be speaking to the front-line workers; we need to be speaking to their representatives. They can tell you where those dollars are needed. We need to ensure that we have money to retain the workers we have and also provide them with supports. We haven't even hit the tip of the iceberg with regard to mental health with our health care workers, and we know that funding for mental health has been lagging again and again. People in my own family have not been able to access good mental health support. Again, speaking to the front-line workers, speaking to their representatives—they know best how to use that money within the health care system.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll now go to the government. MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you to the witnesses for their presentations.

Stephen, recently the committee was in Timmins, and we had witnesses from the mining industry. Even the mayors came to those hearings and presented their concerns with the mining industry. They told us that the mining industry is facing a renaissance right now, but they are facing challenges, and they mentioned some of these challenges. As you mentioned, infrastructure is one of them. Our government is aggressively addressing that issue—infrastructure in the north—to help the industry.

The other challenge they mentioned to us is that they are facing difficulty in hiring and retaining human resources in their industry. Even though they pay premium minimum wage salaries, they are still facing difficulties. In your opinion, what are the things that we can do to help them hire and retain their human resources in the mining industry?

Mr. Stephen Crozier: I think there are certain public sector initiatives that could be advanced. It's a complex challenge, and it obviously will vary by project, by community, in terms of the available labour pool and how you can help prepare those who might want to compete for those positions to be able to take advantage of it.

Collaborating with the mining sector on project-specific skills upgrading so that it is possible to build a bigger pipeline for certain jobs coming into the sector is an area to look at. I think it's beneficial to look at that as a shared initiative. There are some in the private sector who view that as a job for government—some; not all, certainly, and I'm not sure what was specifically mentioned during the Timmins consultation sessions. But I think it's a shared problem. Companies need to lean in and invest and show that orientation, because ultimately what you need in order to make it saleable to individuals to take time out of their lives in order to commit to a process is—they need to know that there's a commitment and a potential for an opportunity at the end. If you can make commitments like, "If you come out of this process, then we're going to grant you an apprenticeship, we're going to grant you an opportunity"—the public sector can't really do that with confidence, unless they're going into the public service in some way; the private sector can, though. So the private sector needs to participate in that and be prepared to devote resources to on-board individuals who can be on a path to their own personal development before they're maybe the most productive version of their future selves. We have to be part of that. So I think mining and the private sector and the public sector need to collaborate on that to be able to give people a view to, "If I do this, I'm going to have an opportunity, because this company is going to be there to meet me at the end."

The other thing I think our sector doesn't do a very good job of yet, and it's something that we are going to be advancing—we're proposing to develop an underground mine in the very Far North, and we know from our colleagues in Sudbury that they're having a lot of challenges attracting underground miners with those skill sets that the industry has relied upon for a long time in order to do that work. We cannot continue to design our operations in a way that depends on that limited skill set or that limited labour pool who has that skill set. It's very difficult to instill that skill set in the labour market; it's not easy to get new entrants, and it's a declining pool of capital.

We have to rethink how we do our business—and that includes incumbents. That is certainly a design principle we're advancing in our project design—how do we build to provide on-ramps to make relatively unskilled labour highly productive in the shortest amount of time possible? We have to look at what it is we are doing, and I would submit that the rest of the industry needs to do the same. It's not an answer that a lot of the industry would—it involves capital, and it involves making decisions that potentially lower the returns to capital, but I think it's a necessary part of that challenge. We can't simply blame the labour pool for not doing it or ask government to make up for it. We've got to be part of that discussion on how to fix that challenge.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Another issue that we heard about in the north was the issue of provincial tax breaks. Comparing Ontario to Quebec and Alberta, ours is lower than the other two provinces, and many of the investors are preferring to go to these two provinces to invest there.

As we know, investing in the mining industry is a long-term return. You have to spend 15 years, probably, until you see the result of your investment.

How do you address that issue of the provincial tax break for the investors?

1150

Mr. Stephen Crozier: This is a great question.

I must admit I'm not a tax specialist, so I don't have any specific recommendations for this committee.

There are obviously incentives that are provided by different provinces, and that's going to drive certain activity. I think the exploration credits that are offered by Quebec do allow for greater issuance of flow-through shares, and that moves a lot of exploration activity into Quebec.

That said, our parent company, Wyloo Metals, bought us just last year, so there's still a value proposition for Ontario. I think it's important to always be evaluating the fiscal regime, the tax burdens on all sectors to ensure—a complement to regulatory efficiencies—how attractive we are from an investment standpoint, while balancing other priorities, such as how we can't just lower taxes if that's not also enabling us to fund other priorities, like we've heard today from my co-witnesses in front of the committee.

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

Mr. Stephen Crozier: I think it's worth a look. Is there anything that's stopping us from moving forward, from a tax perspective? I would say no. But is it worth evaluating to ensure competitiveness? Yes, but I don't have any specific recommendations on what it is that we might need in order to advance our projects.

Mr. Aris Babikian: How can we entice newcomers? Recently, we've seen the federal government is going to bring 500,000 newcomers to Canada, 60% of whom will settle in Ontario. How can we redirect incentives to these newcomers to go to the north?

Mr. Stephen Crozier: That's a great question.

I think offering a stock amount of winter gear would certainly help. But I must admit it's a bit beyond me in terms of how it is we can help make those communities—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): It might be a good question, but there's not enough time to answer it.

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to our presenters today.

I want to start off by thanking you, Stephen, for speaking about your commitment to reconciliation, and also the caution around extractive economies without keeping long-term environmental protection and sustainability in mind. I think it's very well said.

Patty, you've outlined measures in your presentation which, if the government were to adopt them, would show a government that actually worked for the people. Governments must support people in thought, word and deed. They're not able to just make claims without actually having the legislative changes that you have outlined. Those two cannot coexist. So thank you for that.

You also pointed out how Bill 124 violates workers and workers' rights. We've further learned on this committee

that it's poisoning workplaces because of that disparity, because of the timing of hires or organizations that have become commingled.

I want to also thank you for pointing out something that we've heard time and again from the FAO report. We've heard about how public services are being starved, as directly outlined in the FAO report—how health care institutions are being kept at 2%, and the unallocated contingency fund.

When you look at the unallocated contingency fund and the dramatic cuts across services at the exact same time, how is this poor fiscal stewardship?

Ms. Patty Coates: Again, it goes back to our tax dollars. We've done polls, and the majority of people in Ontario do not want their dollars going to for-profit corporations or organizations. They want their tax dollars to be put into our public services, education and health care.

I come from the education sector, and I've seen, as an educational assistant myself, the number of students we have to deal with on a daily basis, or the number of students who don't have the supports, or where parents have to wait outside the school to be called in to deal with their child's hygiene needs because there isn't enough staff. That's happening in our hospitals, too.

I'll turn it over to Thevaki, and she can add more to that, MPP Kernaghan.

Ms. Thevaki Thevaratnam: Thanks, Patty.

The FAO report that was released late last week showed that we have about \$12.5 billion in excess funds over three years. It's a question of what the choice is. What do we want to do with that money? Why are we hoarding that money as opposed to funding public services that we so desperately need, especially now, in health care and education and post-secondary education?

And to second what Patty said about privatization, we actually did a poll alongside Environics Research that found that 59% of Ontarians oppose relying on private, for-profit health care to solve the health care crisis, and in fact—sorry; 48% oppose the Ford government's plan to start paying private companies to provide surgeries and other health care services. So we can say the Ford government doesn't have a mandate for this.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: This is something that we've heard grave concerns about.

Thank you very much, Patty and Thevaki.

My next questions will be for JP.

I think we've seen that there's a false dichotomy that often confuses political discourse—important for business cannot exclude people. It's not a balance; it's one consideration. If government focuses on people, business thrives. I want to thank you for elaborating on how economies cannot and do not exist without people—good for people is best for business, quite simply.

Public services are the greatest attraction to business and investment. Robust public services make it a desirable place for businesses to invest. The workforce has strong education, the ability to learn new skills. The workforce is healthy, they're happy, and they want to work hard. Also,

it's an affordable place and a safe place to live, to stay and to grow a family.

Can you explain for the committee the privatization formula that you outlined in your presentation?

Ms. JP Hornick: This is a historical formula—I'll beg your indulgence, as a labour historian—that we've seen come up time and again.

You see this happen in the United States around water in Detroit—where you starve the water system, you drive people out, and then you privatize it, which invariably results in costs to community. You can look at Hamilton: When they privatized their water source, they lost a whole bunch of public service employees who actually had the expertise to do it. I believe Enron ended up being one of the investors in that system at one point. And then you have hundreds of thousands of gallons of sewage in Hamilton Harbour that require cleanup.

It's called starving the beast. You take the money out; you drive people out through worsening working conditions. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, because there are fewer and fewer people. And I would argue it becomes a fiscally irresponsible choice. Whether this is a matter of competence, of not being able to see something coming that is so obvious, or if it's a matter of planning—in either case, it costs the public in the longer term, but it puts profit in the pockets of shareholders in the short term.

There is a delicate balance to be had in any economy between attracting business and making sure people are supported. As you rightly pointed out, an economy doesn't exist without people. You can build roads, you can add beds, but you need workers to actually build those roads, and you need health care workers who are trained professionals to actually staff and care for the patients in those beds. We cannot have an economy that is simply built on stuff. Someone has to tend that stuff, and that stuff is there to serve people. So when we look at it, any ecosystem seeks stasis. We seek balance. When we are too far in the hands of private shareholders, business will eventually collapse, but some people will get rich meanwhile.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: You also pointed out—one thing I think it's important for the committee to recognize—that the government has rewarded some of the very worst for-profit operators in the long-term-care industry. It's not a sector. It's an industry. It's a money-making venture in the way in which it has been treated by this government and past governments. They've rewarded places where the army had to go in and rescue seniors. They're being given 30-year contracts.

Why is profit harmful to care?

Ms. JP Hornick: Because it drives up the upselling. It drives up profit over people. It makes people a commodity and people's health a commodity that is to be traded and bartered on an open system—rather than for the moral principle of having a healthy workplace, healthy communities, which allows us to thrive. In the same way that once precarity gets out of control—if profit is the motive, then care will never be the appropriate outcome.

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

We want to thank the presenters for all the time you took to prepare for being here and for helping us understand your presentations. We look forward to forwarding them to the minister to help him develop the budget coming up.

I would also like to remind everyone that the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, today, February 14, Valentine's Day.

The committee will now stand recessed until 1 p.m.

The committee recessed from 1200 to 1300.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome back. We'll resume public hearings for pre-budget consultations.

As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation, and after we've heard from all the presenters, there will be 39 minutes for 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, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the opposition members, and two rounds of four and half minutes for the independent members as a group.

ONTARIO FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GROWERS' ASSOCIATION

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF INDIGENOUS FRIENDSHIP CENTRES.

LANSDOWNE CHILDREN'S CENTRE

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We will now start the first panel and call the presenters. The presenters on the first panel will be Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, and Lansdowne Children's Centre.

As we begin the presentations, I remind you that you have the seven minutes. At one minute, I will say, "One minute." Don't stop talking, because between the one minute and when I say, "Thank you very much for your presentation," that's where you put your punchline. And if you miss that point, it never gets heard.

So with that, we will start with the first presenter. It's the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association.

Mr. Mike Chromczak: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Mike Chromczak. I'm the safety nets section chair for the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association. I'm also an asparagus and watermelon farmer who proudly grows in Oxford, Elgin and Norfolk county, near Tillsonburg.

Joining me today, virtually, are Charles Stevens, our board chair, and Shawn Brenn, our vice-chair of the OFVGA.

The OFVGA represents more than 3,500 fruit and vegetable farmers in Ontario, with our sector generating more than \$2.7 billion in economic activity while employing nearly 100,000 people directly on our farms and through-

out the value chain. Thank you for giving us the opportunity today to outline the perspectives of Ontario's fruit and vegetable growers during the 2023 budget planning process.

We're here today to highlight how Ontario's fruit and vegetable sector, with appropriate investments, can play a vital role in protecting our critical food supply chains. In addition, this support can also help our sector contribute to meeting the growth targets outlined in the government's Grow Ontario Strategy, including growing local production and consumption by 30% and exports by 8% by 2032.

Even with the supportive actions taken by your government throughout the pandemic, fruit and vegetable farmers continue to face significant challenges related to historically high production costs and market pressures. Costs like nitrogen fertilizer have increased by 70%, diesel fuel by nearly 50%, and natural gas by 110% between October 2021 and October 2022, with pressures continuing into 2023. While growers prefer to have these costs offset by returns in the marketplace, instead, we face a market dictated by prices set by large retailers and international competition during our peak growing season. Last year, it was not uncommon for growers to have received essentially the same price in 2022 as they did in 2021 for their produce, and in some cases, prices that were even lower despite escalating production costs.

In recent months, consumers are asking the question, what is driving food prices higher and higher? As a grower, I ask the same question because, by and large, it is not the farmers who are reaping the benefits of these high food prices; rather, we are also being squeezed in this inflationary environment.

Prices paid to growers of fruits and vegetables are driven by factors largely out of the control of the grower. These include fiscal policies of countries exporting into Canada, like the United States; the cost and availability of transport to market; domestic fiscal policies, including the federal price on carbon; as well as pressure from a consolidated grocery retail sector to pass their cost increases down through the value chain rather than sharing them equally.

To counter these risks, continued government investment is crucial to the long-term viability and success of our sector. This includes a strong Foodland Ontario marketing program; ongoing investments in infrastructure to support efficient access to resources, including energy, water and transportation of production inputs; as well as connectivity through high-speed Internet. In addition, growers need strong risk management programming to weather the storms, such as the one we are currently experiencing. Strong, predictable and well-funded programs give growers the confidence to invest in their farms in the long term.

There's one specific investment that would significantly help farmers in this regard. That is the Risk Management Program, which includes the self-directed risk management program for fruits and vegetables. We've recently had the program independently examined by economists to help quantify the benefits. The study found that SDRM generates between \$2 and \$2.30 in economic activity for

every \$1 invested into the program. That supports over 47,000 full-time, part-time and seasonal jobs in the province. It leverages additional private sector investment into our farms because the access to financing from banks is enhanced by the presence of the program. The study also found that over 50% of participants shared that the program has positive impacts on their mental health, and young and new farmers find the program important for their long-term sustainability. The program plays an important role for farmers in addressing many of the costs that are affected by the current inflation crisis. Three in five participants say they use the indemnities paid by the program to cover production costs, such as fertilizer, fuel, labour and crop protection products. However, the study also shows the program is critically underfunded at the province's current funding cap of \$150 million per year. Between 2016 and 2020, the program was only able to pay 40% of calculated indemnities.

We therefore recommend that this budget make an additional \$100-million investment into the RMP and SDRM programs' annual budget.

In the absence of increased support for the financial impacts of the pandemic, major interruptions and cost escalation in the supply chain will continue to challenge Ontario's fruit and vegetable farmers and hamper efforts to meet the Ontario government's Grow Ontario targets.

With that, on behalf of Ontario's vegetable sector, I would like to thank you very much for the opportunity to share our perspective. It's our hope that the Ontario government and fruit and vegetable farmers can continue working together to benefit the people of Ontario and the economy. At this time, I'd welcome any questions.

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

We will now go to the second presenter, and that's the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you so much. Good afternoon, committee members. My name is Suze Morrison. I'm the chief engagement officer at the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, or OFIFC. I am joined virtually by my colleagues: our chief program officer, Sean Longboat; our chief learning officer, Beth Boros; and our director of policy and government relations, Chelsea Combot.

The OFIFC is a provincial organization that represents 29 member friendship centres all across Ontario. Friendship centres were born out of a nationwide movement and have been serving Indigenous people who live in towns and cities and rural communities for more than 50 years.

Today, 88% of all Indigenous people in Ontario live in urban centres. This represents an overwhelming majority of the Indigenous population in the province. The friendship centres that serve this population are gathering places, as well as sites of healing, education and culture. Friendship centres are the most significant off-reserve Indigenous service infrastructure in Ontario and, as we learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, they are essential front-line service providers to urban Indigenous communities.

Today, we are here to elaborate on the five key priorities provided in our written submission to this committee for consideration in the provincial budget; specifically, in the areas of child care, child welfare, long-term care, and education.

To begin, I'd like to start by outlining our plan for Indigenous-led affordable child care and early learning. Before us is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to effect generational change and ensure that Indigenous children can grow up to be proud of who they are. To that end, we have submitted a proposal to the Minister of Education that lays out our plan for Indigenous-led affordable child care and early learning. This proposal calls for an investment of \$66 million to expand program delivery across the province, as well as transfer administrative responsibilities from the municipalities, as it is currently structured, to the OFIFC for delivery to the friendship centres. Our proposal can deliver an increase to the number of Indigenous-led child care spaces from a little over 500, as it currently stands, to more than 1,700. We can create 600 new jobs and address current issues with Indigenous services being managed by non-Indigenous service providers at the municipal level. Our overarching message to members of this committee is that friendship centres are ready and able to do this work quickly. We need investment, and we need a new framework that restores Indigenous management and oversight over the care of our children.

1310

In the second part of our submission, we outlined the need to advance a redesign in child welfare that lifts resources from harmful and intrusive child protection agencies and shifts those resources upstream to community-based prevention. The overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in care remains a growing crisis in Ontario. This is contributing to the intergenerational harm caused by removing children from their families, from their communities and from their culture. Failure to make progress in this area will have devastating effects for several generations and impede meaningful progress towards reconciliation. Ontario's public accounts indicate that provincial spending on child protection transfer payments has increased by \$100 million over the last five years. We believe that instead of continuing to throw money at a system that is actively causing harm to Indigenous families, we have an opportunity before us to shift a small portion of those resources upstream into investments in prevention to prevent Indigenous kids from ever being apprehended out of their families in the first place. An annual investment of \$38 million in Ontario friendship centres—again, that's across the province—would create 189 full-time positions in urban Indigenous communities to deliver prevention services, and it would also enhance an additional 73 positions that are currently in place to address recruitment and retention challenges.

The third part of our submission calls for the expansion of Life Long Care Programs currently being delivered in friendship centres. Friendship centres have been operating Life Long Care in urban Indigenous communities for seniors

and people with disabilities since 1995. The programs allow community members to live independently with dignity in their own homes, rather than in costly long-term-care facilities. With growing demands on this program because of our aging population, as well as increased program delivery costs, including salaries, food and transportation, this program is now in urgent need of additional investments. Simply put, our communities can do a lot with the resources that they're given, but this is one example of a program that has simply been stretched far too thin, going back to 1995, when it started. We are requesting just under \$5 million annually to meet the needs of the urban Indigenous seniors and people with disabilities that this vitally important program serves.

Fourth, our submission addresses Indigenous education reforms that are required to reflect the needs of urban Indigenous communities. While the OFIFC has a long history of working with the province to advance urban Indigenous education programs and policy, these advancements have been made despite an Indigenous education policy that is largely outdated and requires some reorientation. Our specific ask in this area is to earmark capacity funding in the 2023-24 budget for urban Indigenous community consultations to inform the necessary reforms to the province's Indigenous education policy, again, to be specifically inclusive of urban Indigenous communities.

Last but certainly not least, I'd like to draw your attention to the final section of our submission that calls for the expansion of urban Indigenous post-secondary education. The Original Peoples Learning Centre, the OPLC, is an institute that has been created by friendship centres and the OFIFC and that's focused on post-secondary education, continuous learning and research that is distinctly urban Indigenous.

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: The OPLC currently offers two college certificate programs and partners on a master's of social work program in Indigenous trauma and resiliency through the University of Toronto. We are currently in the process of advancing accreditation for the OPLC under the Indigenous Institutes Act. We are requesting a small investment of \$300,000 over two years to accelerate the business plan development and accreditation readiness, as well as \$450,000 to develop new post-secondary programs in partnership with the friendship centres.

I'd like to thank the committee for taking the time today to consider our submission, and I look forward to answering any questions that you may have. It's certainly a joy to be on this side of the table for the first time, I have to say.

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

We'll now hear from the Lansdowne Children's Centre.

Ms. Rita-Marie Hadley: Good afternoon, Chair and committee members. My name is Rita-Marie Hadley. I am the executive director of Lansdowne Children's Centre. Thanks for the opportunity to present to you today.

I'm joined virtually by Mike Gatopoulos, who is a member of our board of directors and a parent of a child

who uses services at our children's treatment centre. In a moment, Mike is going to share his family's story, but first, we'll tell you why we're here.

We're one of Ontario's 21 children's centres that cover the province, and we deliver services to over 3,000 children annually who live with physical, communication or developmental needs. We're calling on the province to help Lansdowne reach stage 1 planning approval for redevelopment of our main site in Brantford. Our existing site is at capacity, it does not meet accessibility standards, and it's increasingly costly to maintain it in good working condition. We've worked collaboratively with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services on a business case for our expansion. We've made concessions to de-risk it and to contain the cost of our project, and we're now ready to move ahead with our much-needed plans.

But before I get into the details, I want to pass the floor to Mike to share his family's story and the importance of our services to our community.

Mr. Mike Gatopoulos: First of all, thank you, everyone, for taking the time to listen to our delegation.

As noted, my name is Mike Gatopoulos. I'm a small business owner. I'm a member of the Lansdowne Children's Centre board of directors. I'm a resident of Brant county. And I'm the parent of a special-needs child.

Rather than just tell you impersonal statistics, I'd like to explain the reality of those statistics. At one year old, my son Jack was diagnosed with Williams syndrome, which is a lifelong genetic disorder. As a parent, it was a tragic moment. Your hopes and dreams and plans for your child change in an absolute instant. Jack's diagnosis was easily the most stressful and tragic moment of my life. This meant developmental delays. It meant specialist therapies. This meant more things than we felt we could handle. In the blur of the diagnosis and bombardment of information, parents in my position are told that early intervention is key—"The earlier you get him into therapy, the better his outcome will be."

Immediately, we were referred to Lansdowne Children's Centre for occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech therapy—the whole gamut. The time being on the waiting list is filled with helplessness and hopelessness. Families in that position are dealing with a life-altering diagnosis and are being told "early intervention" everywhere that they turn. These families have Lansdowne Children's Centre, who are eager to help and have the expertise, but who at this point have to say, "I'm sorry. You have to wait." These families, like mine, sit and wait. Every day is absolutely excruciating.

We finally got the call, and we were able to exhale. Professionals who understood were now finally helping Jack, which meant we were finally helping Jack. We were finally admitted, and the first thing we worked on was Jack learning to swallow food. We narrowly, narrowly avoided Jack needing a feeding tube thanks to Lansdowne. Had we not gotten in when we did, the financial impact to a health care system already strained would not have been negligible. Not only do these early interventions allow for kids to have the best chance of reaching their potential, but

they can help prevent draining both resources and dollars of a health care system that can ill afford it.

Had Jack needed a feeding tube, or had Jack not worked on his balance in physio appointments and fallen and broken his leg—which he tried his best to do—the hypotheticals just go on and on. I hate to use an old trope, but it holds true that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure in this scenario. The impact of wanting to do best for your child and trying to do best but having circumstances beyond your control standing in your way is the most helpless feeling a parent can have. Right now, 2,300 families in our area are sitting in that position. We simply cannot let that number grow to the projected 13,500 by 2041. We cannot have 13,500 families miss that early intervention window. We can't have 13,500 families feeling hopeless and helpless.

On top of the immediate impact this has on families on the wait-list, the impact doesn't stop there. The draw for families to Lansdowne reaches far beyond existing residents. When I started my own business, I had the option to move to another municipality to pursue this endeavour, but that option was immediately crossed off. We had to stay near Lansdowne. Lansdowne is an institution. It's part of the fabric of our community. As the wait-list grows, frustrations grow for both staff and the community.

A state-of-the-art facility that isn't significantly over capacity is a draw for families with special-needs children. This has obvious economic impacts. This government has the opportunity to directly improve the lives of thousands upon thousands of families in our area. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our community to build an amazing treatment centre that will change the trajectory of kids like Jack.

I'll leave you with a quote that I firmly believe: "The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members."

We ask that you please support our request for stage 1 planning support. Thank you.

Ms. Rita-Marie Hadley: Thanks, Mike.

Given the rapid growth of our community—you've heard what we're expecting in terms of the growth that's going to even exacerbate the current number of kids who are waiting for our services. We have optimized the space, and we have adopted virtual services where possible, where that works. It has allowed us to more than triple the number of kids we can serve annually and more than double the staff we can fit on our site, but our demand continues to exceed what the physical capacity is.

Today in Ontario, one in three kids receive community-based rehab within the clinical standard; however, in our community, it's only one in four who can get speech and occupational therapy within that guideline. The majority of kids will be waiting three years for these services. They're not going to be kids anymore. It means our children are missing developmental milestones, and many are at risk of significant long-term health problems because of early intervention windows being missed.

We're pleased to see that the province has supported other communities with new children's treatment centres,

a number in your communities. The Durham, Chatham, Ottawa, Sudbury, Hamilton and Halton-Peel centres are definitely centres of excellence. Our 4,000-square-kilometre catchment area has experienced growth that is, believe it or not, six times greater than that of Toronto, four times greater than the provincial average. COVID has contributed to that. In fairness and equity, we would request the same level of support for children—

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

Ms. Rita-Marie Hadley:—infants and young people living in Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk, so that they can receive the care that meets that provincial standard.

1320

Together, we can impact change in the lives of many families in our community in pursuit of what our mission is: to support infants, children and youth to reach their potential. Whether they live with a physical, communication or developmental challenge, it's the potential that's the common thread.

We look forward to working together with the province to make Lansdowne's vision a reality and build Ontario's infrastructure, because we know there's excellence in it. Thank you very much.

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

We now will start with the questions, and the first round starts with the government side. MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: The question I have is for the Ontario growers' association. We know that your industry depends a lot on the federal Temporary Foreign Worker Program, so we've seen, through COVID and even now, some of the challenges that temporary workers are facing. What are some of the pieces you would want to talk about in regard to improving that particular part of the workforce, because it's very dependent on it, and how would the province be able to help address some of those labour shortages?

Mr. Mike Chromczak: That's a great question.

Labour is a critical component to our industry. A part of this ask and a part of the stable funding in self-directed risk management is, as I mentioned, investments into our farms. COVID brought a lot of attention and awareness to living conditions on farms and how we can do better. I can speak for my farm and countless of my neighbours and my peers: We have made significant investments into the housing and the work-life balance and health and safety of our workers. It's something that we're very proud of and something that is a great investment for us socially and economically.

When it comes to the provincial role in helping, the federal government dictates the rules and the implementation of the program, but having provincial support certainly helps. Right from the beginning of the pandemic, we had support when the borders were closed. We had advocates on the provincial side that helped us to get our workers here—the workers who wanted to be here, who need to be here to support their families. We were able to navigate

some extremely difficult times because of those partnerships and that support. It's something that I think has really strengthened the level of communication and support between farms, farmers, the government—provincially and federally—and the homes of our workers, as well, obviously with their best interests in mind.

The provincial support to help us improve federally funded support nets has been strong. The provincial government has been a leader in reinforcing an update to the federal AgriStability program, which is an incredible support. The federal government and our peers in other provinces aren't quite there yet, but Ontario was there at the table, making the offer to improve the program to help us with those long-term supports.

In the meantime, we have our provincial-based program, the Risk Management Program, as a supplement or to fortify those supports, and it's something that we're hoping we can see an increase in investment in.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: You've talked about the BRM and the fact that it exists in Ontario, and one other province is the only one that offers that. Are there some specific things that you see that are missing in the BRM now that you think needs to be improved? You talked a bit about what funding would be required, but what would be the impact?

Mr. Mike Chromczak: Again, it's a great question.

BRM—going back from the pandemic, we had some very timely and effective programs that your government put into action quickly and efficiently that helped us with on-farm support, PPE, facilitating isolation costs and outbreak costs, and improvements in the workplace and in some of our housing. As well, a major component was the extension of labour peril insurance on our fruit and vegetable crop insurance, so in the event of losing your workforce due to an outbreak or a COVID-related matter, there was insurance in place during the pandemic. Those were great steps and great reactions.

The provincial Risk Management Program is something that has always been there and been very valued, but the economic reality of our markets now with inflation means that that cap of \$150 million can't cover the indemnities of the program. It requires an update to reflect the modern and more current farm gate sales and economic reality of our farms. When we ask this, it's a part of our coalition—it's not just the fruit and vegetable farmers of Ontario; it is all or most non-supply-managed farmers. Our coalition includes grain, beef, veal, pork, sheep and ourselves, and that represents over 50,000 farmers in our province. So that ask to increase the cap from \$150 million to \$250 million represents protection and coverage to all those farmers, and we're a part of it.

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: just want to say I'm in the home of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, which houses the food terminal, the largest food producer centre in Canada. I'm very proud that it's in Etobicoke. I know the Chair has been there many times.

In earlier presentations, we had some people here talking about the price of food and blaming the grocers for

the price of the food. You mentioned some other things like the US exchange rate, the federal carbon tax, the cost of transport—can't find pallets anywhere, and other things.

Do you believe that right now a minimum wage increase would lower the price of food in grocery stores?

Mr. Mike Chromczak: Well, at this point, with the amount of inflation that we have experienced throughout the pandemic, it seems shocking to say, but the increased cost of labour is one of the smaller increases that we've seen on our farm, with shocks like doubling of fertilizer cost, doubling of fuel cost. I don't see a direct correlation between a reduction—

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

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to all presenters.

Mike, I just want to say that smart employers, which are farmers, are holding on to their labour force by paying them respectfully. That is my understanding. Would you agree with that?

Mr. Mike Chromczak: Most definitely. It's a reason why, whether it be local help or help through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program or Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program—it brings those workers back every year.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Also, we heard from the Beef Farmers of Ontario, and they were very clear in their presentation that they're not passing on their inflationary costs to the grocery stores. The grocery stores are increasing their costs at that point.

Are your members passing on high costs of fruit and vegetables?

Mr. Mike Chromczak: We're a sector with 140 different commodities. There are a lot of unique situations. I can speak for myself, personally, that one particular commodity that I grow saw either a complete price freeze last year—or even many growers in our sector saw a price decrease.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's consistent with what we're hearing from farmers, so I appreciate your bringing that to the table.

Suze, it's good to see you. Thank you for the work that the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres is doing.

Earlier today, we heard, on the child welfare front—you'll know from your time here at Queen's Park that the government has private residential group care in our F and CS systems, meaning that they contract out the care of foster children to private, for-profit agencies and companies. This has proven deadly for children across the province, including Indigenous youth who were put in care and whose rights were not upheld once they were received there. OPSEU called for a return to a public system of foster care.

1330

Regardless of that argument, I want to give you an opportunity to say how important it is that culturally appropriate, responsible caring options are needed for Indigenous youth in Ontario.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you so much for the question.

The culturally competent piece is absolutely critical. By the time we get to a child being apprehended into the system and into foster care, that is an absolute failure of the system. That is, actually, entirely what our ask is about—preventing that apprehension from ever happening. We are trying to get upstream to do the prevention and family-based healing work in community and in spaces where there is trust.

As it currently stands, you've got an apprehension agency that is trying to do prevention work. If you are a family engaged in any sort of prevention programs and services, you are directly facing with the same people who can take your children away, so there is no trust of that system. And when you take into account the historical contexts of the Millennium Scoop and the Sixties Scoop and residential schools, there's no trust of that system, and those programs inherently cannot be successful.

So our proposal looks at lifting a small portion of those resources from child welfare upstream and into community-based organizations and friendship centres that have the relationship with community. The families trust the friendship centres. They come there for programs and services. The kids are in youth programs; they might be in the alternative secondary school program. They're getting food programs there, cultural programs. They're going there for drum nights. And the trust that's built up in the workers in the friendship centres is immense.

Ms. Catherine Fife: You're actually making too much sense. That reallocation would save money down the line but also offer more compassionate care options. I see that your presentation and also Lansdowne connected on that early intervention and prevention piece.

I do want to thank you, Mike, for sharing the story of your family. When you face a family health crisis, as you did, that's when you find out how few resources are there for people in our community, and it is a race against time. So I think that the Lansdowne centre—you've made a very compelling case for that investment. We'll see how the government responds to it.

I want to go back to the education piece, because we've heard some really powerful deputations. One of them came from the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, which has an Indigenous Trustees' Council that serves with them, because there are trustees across the province who are from First Nations. They quoted the Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair, who was chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission—I don't need to tell you this. They point to education as the key to reconciliation, and the quote is: "Education got us into this; education will get us out." And it is very true. They have a proposal—because you've asked for some specific things around education. They came to this committee in Sudbury, I believe, or Sault Ste. Marie, and their idea is to establish a compulsory legacy piece of the curriculum which is mandatory around a residential school curriculum—much like the civics course. So in order for you to graduate, you actually have to learn the real truth of Canada's history as it relates to residential schools and the treatment of Indigenous peoples.

Do you think that the federation would be supportive of such a move?

Ms. Suze Morrison: I think that educating on the history of residential schools and the history of colonization is absolutely something that needs to be a part of our curriculum and in our school boards.

Our specific ask related to some of the policy frameworks—the Indigenous policy framework with the Ministry of Education. It’s also specifically around refreshing that framework to, additionally to those pieces, also include an urban Indigenous lens and urban Indigenous histories, recognizing that the friendship centre movement has a 50-year-plus history of serving—

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: —Indigenous people in urban centres. That’s a history that I think is often overlooked when we’re telling the history in Ontario and across Canada.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I’ll forward the proposal to you.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Please do. Thank you.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Rita-Marie, Bill 124 has really put huge cost pressures on our labour force, especially the not-for-profit sector. You have 30 seconds to tell us how important it is to compensate those front-line workers appropriately so that you retain them in this sector.

Ms. Rita-Marie Hadley: We do compete with the education sector, with the health care sector. Community-based pediatric rehab really is a labour of love of people choosing that they want to work with kids with disabilities. It’s that competition that we find ourselves challenged for constantly recruiting. We are fortunate to have lifers, people who will dedicate their careers to us. Compensation is just part of it. We need the bricks and mortar—

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

We’ll now go to the independents. MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Thank you to Mike, Suze, Rita-Marie and Mike, virtually.

I don’t have as much time, so I’m going to whip through this very quickly.

Mike, I thank you and our farmers for the work that you do. You are correct in saying that you’re not the only group asking for an increase to RMP and SDRM. We’ve heard it right across the province. I do support that additional \$100 million, and I’ve actually written about it. It will be coming out this week in newspapers.

I do want to circle back to the question that MPP Barnes had with respect to temporary foreign workers. You would represent a lot of growers in the Norfolk area, in the Leamington area. I’m continually hearing about the harassment of our farmers with respect to the audits and the farm visits that are occurring, from the federal government. I know that’s the federal government, but my suggestion—and I’m wondering if you would concur—is that our Ministry of Agriculture and this government lean on the federal government to stop this harassing behaviour. It’s in the best interest of farmers to treat their labour well.

Mr. Mike Chromczak: I agree. Thank you for the comments.

I think we can go back to education being a key component. There are members of the federal government who implement policy and who dictate the audits and the red tape in the process. If more of those decision-makers were to come to our farms and see our operations, see our workers, they would have a better understanding and better trust in our system. We would be very open to and proud to be a part of that process and having the provincial government’s support. The provincial government can count on our support, in return, to ask that some better processes be put in place to better protect the interests of our workers as well as our industry.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Thank you, Mike.

Rita-Marie, I’ve known you for quite some time. You’ve done a fantastic job as executive director at Lansdowne. You’re always clear in your asks. You’re always very professional. I do support your ask this time around as well. I know that you’ve outgrown your space.

This is a government that boasts about newcomers coming to Ontario, needing to build 1.5 million new homes. That’s all great, but we have a jurisdiction that has 2,300 children on a wait-list. Those are services that are only going to suffer more if we don’t invest in them as we bring newcomers to Ontario and we build new houses. Can you describe to me what the risks are to the broader community when these 2,300 children are not receiving the vital services that they require?

Ms. Rita-Marie Hadley: It’s back to early intervention. There are upstream impacts in terms of the health care system, as young people will go into the adult system. There are economic impacts of the local businesses not attracting individuals who would otherwise be the brains and the operations of the employers who are looking for this as part of the local infrastructure. It’s both getting the people there but also—

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

Ms. Rita-Marie Hadley: —the impact on kids being able to participate in education to benefit from it. Parents can’t participate in the workforce if their children aren’t getting the services they need. Respite, recreation and rehabilitation are the main planks of the government services we offer. If the kids are waiting, parents aren’t working, and that’s just not contributing to the economy as it should.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Can you tell me how long you have been waiting to move on to your next stage in this process?

1340

Ms. Rita-Marie Hadley: This has been a long process. We are on, hopefully, the final version of iterations of our business case. We have sharpened the pencils. We’ve pulled square footage out. We’ve made it the leanest it possibly could be. It’s hard to count the—it’s counted in lives of kids who have grown up and aged out of our services and being on wait-lists. I’d rather put it in lives and kids as our numeracy.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Well put.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We now go to the government. MPP Byers.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you to the presenters. I very much appreciate you being here this afternoon, and thanks for all you're doing.

I want to start with Mike. I appreciate your comments on costs continuing to drive prices for you. You mentioned fertilizer and fuel. I guess diesel is still—the industry is not really seeing much moderation in those commodity costs in the last while?

Mr. Mike Chromczak: We've seen some reprieve in fuel, potentially. Again, it has a trickle effect throughout the whole value chain. However, fertilizer, those high-cost inventories are still in place at our retailers or in our system. There's little to no opportunity for those prices to come down anytime this spring or soon. So it's something we have to account for, moving into this spring. Other component major costs: obviously, carrying costs, interest costs, packaging—packaging has been a major component, everything from pallets to boxes to everything along the chain. Those costs are compounded, for sure.

Mr. Rick Byers: You also mentioned fiscal policies in the US. Can you give me a sense of what those are that we need to be mindful of?

Mr. Mike Chromczak: Well, there are farm bill packages in the US that move substantial amounts of money into the agriculture industry. It is something that we're not fully aware of or able to account for every dollar—the full impact—but the sheer size of the farm bill itself and its impact on US prices and their ability to export is significant.

Another major one, obviously, is the import of products from Mexico and South America and the competitiveness or lack of competitiveness against those jurisdictions.

Mr. Rick Byers: You also mentioned Canadian fiscal policy. I think you mentioned the carbon tax. Did I hear that you produce watermelons?

Mr. Mike Chromczak: We do.

Mr. Rick Byers: Would your watermelons be cheaper without the carbon tax?

Mr. Mike Chromczak: Our watermelons would. Our cost of production would certainly be less without having to pay the carbon tax.

Mr. Rick Byers: I was just curious.

Suze, thank you very much for the presentation. I must confess not to have heard about your friendship centres, so thank you.

My first question to you: Is it more fun on that side of the table or this?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Well, I think I get more of my weekends on this side of the table, so I have to say, I'm having a good time.

Mr. Rick Byers: Fair point.

You mentioned child care in your model, and I must say, I was struck by the percentage of Indigenous communities that are in urban environments—I think you said it's 88%. Your facilities help with those urban services. On the child care initiative—obviously, child care is a big issue for the government. We've got a program coming. Have you had a dialogue sufficiently with the relevant folks in government on your model, do you feel?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Absolutely. We've been engaged, historically, for years with several ministries on several files.

The child care piece: The proposal is currently on the Minister of Education's desk for the child care and early years learning proposal. We are eagerly awaiting a response to that proposal. Like I said, it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to address child care for urban Indigenous folks. And our one message there is that we're ready to go. We are ready to get seats open for child care in friendship centres. We are ready to implement. We don't need to wait for the mainstream service provision to get figured out first and then do the Indigenous model second. We are ready to go now. What's good for Indigenous kids is going to work for the mainstream kids, but what works for the mainstream kids and families isn't always going to work for Indigenous families. So we don't want to be put on the back burner while the mainstream piece is figured out.

Mr. Rick Byers: That's great. Message received. Thank you.

I'll pass to MPP Smith.

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

Mr. David Smith: First of all, I'd like to thank all of the presenters here this afternoon.

My first question is to Stephen. I'm very concerned with what you've talked about here today. While you were saying that, you were also saying some situations about fertilization and the fuel costs—as you know, our government has removed the gas tax to allow some savings there. I'm hearing an ask of about \$100 million to deal with a number of things as costs go up and all those things go up. If you don't get coverage, then those costs of fruits and vegetables will go up in some form or fashion.

What do you think of the minimum wage? It's something that I've heard across the tour across Ontario—with regard to an increase in minimum wage to \$20. Could you tell this committee what impact that would have on fruit and vegetable farmers—if you don't get that money that you're requesting?

Mr. Mike Chromczak: An increase at that level rapidly would have a dramatic increase on any business. We frequently discuss minimum wage as the base rate, or primary rate, in primary production of agriculture. However, on our farms, we have several costs to support our workers that go far beyond the minimum wage. So I don't know what the exact calculation would be or what the wage equivalent would be.

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

Mr. Mike Chromczak: It might be different from farm to farm, but when you factor in transportation and housing and support mechanisms that we give to our workers who come from abroad, that wage is essentially much higher than the prevailing minimum wage.

Mr. David Smith: Thank you very much.

I have a little bit of time, so I have to move over to Suze. You spoke about needing about \$5 million annually to deal with the long—

Ms. Suze Morrison: Life Long Care.

Mr. David Smith: Life Long Care Program. Could you tell us what that is?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Yes, it's much a part of the aging-at-home models delivered by other community service organizations. We call our program Life Long Care. It serves urban Indigenous seniors and people with disabilities. As I said, this is a program that has been in operation since about 1995 and has become literally stretched to the limits—

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

We'll now go to the official opposition. Mr. Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to all our presenters today.

Welcome back, Suze. It's wonderful to see you.

My first questions will be for Mike. Mike, I just want to thank you for your answers with regard to minimum wage. It can become a very politically charged issue. I know that farmers pay extremely well and are very good to their employees, so I want to thank you and all farmers for that.

You mentioned the expansion of the Risk Management Program—and that is something that we have heard across the province. We've also heard about the Farmer Wellness Initiative and the importance of that for farmer mental health. As well, we've heard advocates wanting to expand that service to their employees. Is that something that the fruit and veg growers' association would also be in favour of?

Mr. Mike Chromczak: Most definitely. We've participated in initiatives on farmer mental health. I feel like each farm does have a role to play in ensuring that that mental health is extended throughout the entire culture on the farm and the entire workforce, and it's something that, yes, we will definitely see as an ongoing focus.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you very much.

My next question is for Rita-Marie. I want to thank you for the services that you provide. As a former educator and having worked with children with exceptionalities, I think it's really important, life-changing work that you do, because you do set them up for their entire future. Early intervention is key, and it's really upsetting that you're unable to provide even the provincial standard. That's why you deserve this funding.

Could you please explain for the committee the importance of early intervention when it comes to, let's say, occupational therapy and speech-language pathology?

1350

Ms. Rita-Marie Hadley: The partnership with educators is key. Occupational therapy may give kids the ability to use tools; it may allow them to address sensory issues that otherwise would prevent them from sitting in classes, from using pens and pencils, from communication. So our speech-language pathologists—the ones that our kids aren't meeting the standard for getting access to the service. They need that to communicate, to be able to benefit from the education system. And while child care settings are important but not mandatory, when kids are in

the education system—they lose out socially as well as from the ability to benefit from the education.

To the earlier question: I wish I'd come up to be able to respond with what happens when kids don't get care. We have kids who have very fragile lives. Not one of our board meetings goes by that we're not having a memorial statement for kids who have passed. And there's that reality that we're talking about kids living with medically fragile and technologically dependent positions. Educators also serve a very important role for that, but we aren't able to help the education system do its job if we can't get kids that early intervention so that they arrive ready to learn and to be included.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Absolutely. It fundamentally changes lives, so thank you so much for your work.

Suze, my next questions are for you. I want to give you the opportunity to explain for the committee the importance of Indigenous-led management. Why is that important?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Particularly with the child care component, what we're currently seeing is municipalities, through the DSSABs and other municipal service organizations, get the administrative dollars for child care, and then that flows down to the friendship centres. What that means is that we don't actually have Indigenous authority or management over the care of our own children, and it really replicates a model that isn't self-determined and isn't reconciliatory.

What we're looking to do is to move those transfer payment agreements to the OFIFC, where we can then service the TPA for the 29 friendship centres in Ontario, but more importantly, have the management and control over the design and delivery of the programs. That's specifically incredibly important in child care.

One of the pieces I would note as an anecdote to why it's so important is, because we don't have access to the management of the lists for the child care spaces—those are managed through the municipalities—we don't necessarily have good data collection on Indigenous families accessing those spaces. And because we don't have the data, we can't show that all of the child care spaces we have are actually being allocated to Indigenous families, because the lists are managed by the service providers. We've heard that some centres may have as few as just a few Indigenous kids actually in those child care spaces. So we need to have the sovereignty over the management of our kids in urban Indigenous spaces, and we have the capacity to do that. That's largely our ask.

I don't know if Sean or Beth or Chelsea had any other pieces to add to that. I did want to give you a chance. No? You're good? Okay.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I think, as well, your comments in regard to your application for the child care spaces were quite apt. Something that I hope the committee takes important note of is that you're not requiring to remake a system. You have everything ready, set to go. All you need is that investment from the province.

Would you be able to describe for the committee how friendship centres are best equipped to deliver lifelong care in communities?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Friendship centres grew out of a movement to support Indigenous people who were migrating to cities and towns and communities. We have a history of taking care of our community members. We have the trust of the communities. We're connected to those communities. We're cultural hubs in those communities. So doing the work of caring for our elders and people with disabilities is incredibly important work to the centres, and they take it very seriously. It's an excellent program that does things like friendly visits and meal services and transportation and all of those pieces that help seniors and people with disabilities stay in their homes. It's an incredible cost saving to the province when those folks are not ending up in long-term care, where not only is it more expensive to the province, but they're also not getting the culturally competent and safe care in community that just simply cannot be provided in an institutional setting.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Absolutely, and this committee has heard multiple times about the problems with investing in institutions—

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan:—rather than investing in communities.

You were mentioning that you're seeking accreditation. Would you like to expand on that in any way, shape or form?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Yes. The OPLC is seeking accreditation as a post-secondary institute through the—there is a legislative framework for that, and we are hoping to proceed with that.

Beth, do you want to add anything?

Ms. Beth Boros: Yes. We are currently in the process of getting ready for accreditation through IAESC, the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council.

We have been providing post-secondary training to friendship centres and urban Indigenous folks for decades now. We usually have about 3,000 learners come through our door every single year, for which we receive no operational—

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

We'll go to the independents. MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to all the presenters for being here today. I always learn a lot in these sessions.

Mike, I'll start with you. You talked about the 30% increase in production that the government has set as a goal. Of course, again, costs are rising on many fronts. You've identified that. Could you talk about what the industry is doing to achieve that 30% and also how the loss of 319 acres of farmland a day will help or hinder us in achieving that goal?

Mr. Mike Chromczak: The industry itself is historically resilient and innovative. We always strive to increase productivity. We explore and expand into new markets, and we innovate into new and better yields. I think that's

the cornerstone of our industry in particular, as well as of all agriculture. A lot of our crops are grown on very specific types of land. That's something to keep in mind. There are obviously certain areas, microclimates and soil types, that are best suited for specialty production. I think that should be something that we keep in mind, moving forward, to ensure that no matter what the policy, we continue to maintain our domestic food supply.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: For sure, we know that farmers feed cities. Thank you.

I'll move on to Rita-Marie. Holland Bloorview is in my riding, so I've toured there. I understand a little bit about what your centres do. I appreciate that work.

I just want to come back to MPP Brady's question around how long you've been waiting. When did you first begin this process?

Ms. Rita-Marie Hadley: Around 10 years ago, quite honestly. We have gone through several iterations. We have gone through blueprints at two different possible hubs. During COVID, we have opened four different locations so that we can have services closer to home, just to try to take the pressure off. We've just maxed out what we can do, and we aren't meeting the standard. We're ready, and we've shown that we're able to be lean. And the kids can't wait.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I hear you. Thank you. I hope your message is heard.

Suze, over to you—really interesting. Again, as you've highlighted here, 80% of Indigenous people are living in urban or town areas, so these friendship centres are very important to building and sustaining and enhancing cultural connections.

We've heard from some of the other Indigenous institutes throughout these hearings. To me, they really represented a really great model for how we advance truth and reconciliation. As MPP Fife said, education is key there. Could you talk a little bit about how the OPLC would work with these other institutes to make sure that you're in the best place to make the impact that you want to make?

Ms. Suze Morrison: I'm going to defer that question over to Beth Boros, our chief learning officer.

Ms. Beth Boros: Every Indigenous institute—

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

Ms. Beth Boros:—is offering culturally grounded post-secondary opportunities based on community knowledge. The OPLC really is an opportunity to transfer that knowledge for the 88% of urban Indigenous folks living off-reserve. There is no other post-secondary institute that is rooted in that urban Indigenous knowledge. That's what we're really looking to advance. We've been doing it, like I mentioned, for decades already, and serving that population with about 3,000 learners who get either training, professional development or post-secondary certificates from us. So we're looking to really mobilize that in a more formal way and, of course, we're always working with our other Indigenous partners across the province to do that in a good way for the broader community.

1400

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes the time for the question, and that concludes the time for the panel.

We thank the panel very much for taking the time to come and speak with us—both those at the table and those who are speaking to us virtually. We thank you for your participation, and we appreciate your contribution to our pre-budget consultation.

ONTARIO ENGLISH CATHOLIC
TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION
SCHOOL BUS ONTARIO
ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL
TEACHERS' FEDERATION

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The next panel is Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, School Bus Ontario, and Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

As with the previous delegations, the presenters will have seven minutes to make a presentation. At six minutes, I will say "one minute." That doesn't mean stop; that means just keep going. That's one minute for the punchline of the presentation.

As you start to speak, please put your name on the record with Hansard to make sure we can attribute the comments to the people who made them.

With that, the floor is for the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, being first.

Ms. Barb Dobrowski: My name is Barb Dobrowski. I represent the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today. I'm here representing the 45,000 professionals who teach kindergarten through to Grade 12 in publicly funded Catholic schools across Ontario.

Around Ontario, people are finally talking about a return to normalcy—a chance to go back to the way things were. As we consider the way forward, our message to the government is simple: to not go back to your normal. Far too often, since coming to office in 2018, the government's agenda has been gutted by ideology rather than evidence. Policy decisions have been made with little thought, foresight or genuine consultation with stakeholders and experts, the consequences of which have been to destabilize public services. Enough is enough. Teachers want nothing more than to do the job they love in a productive and safe learning environment, but to be at their best, they need support. Specifically, they need a government that respects their judgment, that puts in place the necessary investments in resources that students need in order to recover and thrive.

I don't want to dwell today on the many misleading statements that government officials offer in public, like when they claim to be making historic investments in education while conveniently ignoring that funding does not keep up with inflation. I do not want to dwell on the

government's tendency to pursue legislation that is ultimately deemed by the courts to be unconstitutional, like Bill 124, or the shameful assault on workers' rights through Bill 28—legislation that targeted some of our lowest-paid, predominantly women workers in the education sector and attempted to take away their constitutional rights.

Instead, I want to focus my comments today on one thing, in particular: what students need in order to recover from the pandemic and to thrive.

Ask any educator in the province of Ontario why they do what they do, and you'll inevitably get the same response: It's about the students. I hope all of us here today agree that every student in Ontario deserves the opportunity to realize their full potential.

What does a real learning recovery look like? Above all, it requires proper government investments directed towards the classroom for mental health and well-being supports, more professional services and smaller class sizes so that students get the individual support they deserve.

Despite the best efforts of educators, the COVID-19 pandemic magnified and exacerbated issues of student mental health and well-being and negatively impacted student learning. This is especially true for our equity-deserving students from vulnerable communities, including students with special education needs, those with social and mental health concerns and English-as-a-second-language learners.

As part of our Know More public campaign, we've spoken to parents across Ontario. Some of them told us that their children have been on a mental health services wait-list for more than three years. This is simply unacceptable for a province as wealthy as Ontario. And while the government continues to claim that they're providing more supports and more professional services, my members, Catholic teachers, have one question: Where are they?

The fact is, whether a student needs special education supports, extra assistance with literacy or math, or resources to address behavioural issues, their school should have resources to provide the needed support in a timely manner. This is made all the more critical given the rising number of violent incidents that we're seeing in society, broadly, and in schools. If we're going to address this issue at its root, we need a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach, which ranges from providing students with the supports they need through to fulfilling the requirement to report incidents so that we can monitor the situation over time. We do a disservice to everyone if we do not take proactive measures to address this.

Closely linked to promoting a safe and supportive learning environment is the issue of class size, and you've heard our association many times on this topic. There's a mountain of research on the benefits students enjoy from smaller class sizes, such as increased peer engagement and more one-on-one interaction with teachers, which improves their success. A real learning recovery demands a commitment from the government to lowering class size averages in elementary and secondary schools. It also requires students to be in class, learning from their teachers.

Schools are more than just desks. They are a community, a source of identity and opportunity for socialization. And research tells us that in-person learning is ideal and the most equitable learning model for students. And yet, the government is pushing for more online learning, which, quite frankly, is absurd. The pandemic confirmed what teachers already knew: that online learning fails the overwhelming majority of students. It decreases interaction, it widens learning gaps, and it increases inequalities. Teachers don't like it. Students don't like it. Parents don't like it. So we must ask, who benefits other than companies that are attempting to profit from privatization?

In the end, governing is about making choices, and so my members, 45,000 Catholic teachers, are imploring the government to make a different choice, to establish a new normal. If the government is serious about addressing pandemic-related learning loss and the mental health and well-being of students and educators, it must properly invest in a real plan that provides the necessary in-class resources and supports to ensure every student gets the learning environment they need and deserve.

Ontario's front-line teachers and education workers have shown time and again that they know what's best for students to succeed. It's past time the government listened, as our schools work best when the government listens to and respects educators' experience and expertise.

As the 2023-24 budget is developed, my members are calling on the government to immediately and significantly enhance mental health services in schools; expand school-based resources, supports and services; invest in lowering class size averages in elementary and secondary schools; cease the expansion of online learning and any efforts to privatize publicly funded education; commit to engage in meaningful collaboration with front-line educators and their representatives, especially as to how we can address the growing epidemic of violence in our schools—

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

The next presenter is School Bus Ontario.

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: Thank you very much, Mr. Hardeman. My name is Nancy Daigneault. I'm the executive director of School Bus Ontario. School Bus Ontario represents over 100 school bus operators in the province—small, medium and large-sized bus operators—and we are in every riding in the province.

Mr. Hardeman, we have a very close working relationship with your colleague Minister Lecce, who has been very good to us over the last couple of years. He helped us keep the buses on the road during the pandemic. Our 18,000 school bus drivers were the real heroes during the pandemic, getting our kids to and from school every single day.

But we're here today to tell you that student transportation in Ontario is in a crisis. Skyrocketing inflation; cost of buses, oil, gas, insurance; rent increases; and, of course, the carbon tax are making operations untenable.

There's approximately a 20% to 25% gap in funding as most school boards, through their transportation consortia, are offering operators a 0% to 2% increase in this current

school year—that's 2022-23. Operators, unlike many other businesses, are locked into multi-year contracts, and they have no wiggle room to renegotiate their contracts while they are locked into those contracts. So unlike restaurants and other small businesses out there that are feeling the pinch because of inflation, school bus operators cannot renegotiate. So it's making the school bus driver shortage worse. And how is it doing that? It's doing that because there's downward pressure on drivers' pay.

1410

School bus drivers have the highest class of driver's licence in Ontario. They have to have first aid training. They have to have EpiPen training, racial sensitivity training. They have to pass multiple yearly certifications, a school bus driver improvement course, hazardous driving courses every year. And yet, they're paid, on average, between \$19 and \$22 per hour. It varies throughout the province; it depends on the region. As a result, the school bus driver shortage continues to worsen, with no end in sight. And what happens? Drivers take on multiple routes, causing delays, cancellations, making students late for class, which can be very stressful for the younger students. Parents have to take time off work to get their kids to school, and that also impacts the economy.

Consider the following story of one parent who called me up most recently, upset because in the middle of the school year, his daughter's school bus route was just cancelled outright by the school board consortia. His 12-year-old daughter would have to take the city bus to school. He's in Ottawa, and she would have to take two buses and transfer at a busy transit depot. He wasn't happy about that, and his daughter was very stressed about it, so what they did was they started alternating driving her to school so she wouldn't have to do that. He said it was a very stressful time. The times that he and his wife cannot drive her, she takes the city bus, and very often she can't make the transfer in time and she's late for class. That's just one story. We get those stories all the time.

What I'm going to do for you now is—on page 3 of the handouts that I gave you—I'm going to show you some of the gaps in funding and how it affects operators.

The Grants for Student Needs, since 2018-19, have averaged around 2% to 2.5%, and again, it varies depending on the region and the local school boards. So the GSN has been about 2.5%, and minimum wage, as we know, has gone up.

The driver retention program has helped: That's two \$1,000 payments that all school bus drivers receive just for showing up for work. That has been a wonderful thing from your government—thank you very much—but it isn't enough, and it hasn't increased.

The cost of a 72-passenger school bus has increased from about \$103,000 to about \$140,000 since 2019, and similar increases have been for the smaller school buses as well.

Maintenance costs—if you look at the graph here on page 4, you will see that coolers have gone up almost 40%; dry fans about 20%; injectors about 10% or 15%. Other costs: Bus radiators have gone up 30%, and tires have

doubled. The average price of a tire in the last year was \$750; now, it's \$1,500 per tire. So these maintenance costs are very significant.

One school bus provider in the Toronto area has reported that he rents parking space from the province, and in 2022, the rent was \$7,000 a month. They received notice in January that their rent would go up to \$24,000 a month for renting space. Obviously, this is quite a serious situation. We have anecdotal reports from some operators across the province that are saying they just can't do it anymore.

So without emergency funding, school bus delays and cancellations will continue. The stress will continue to plague the system for drivers, parents and students alike. We need your help. We've asked for emergency funding for this current school year to help us close this gap in funding, and we want to continue to ensure that school busing remains the safest way to get to and from school every day.

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

Our next presentation is the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: My name is Karen Littlewood. I'm the president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. Thank you to the committee for allowing us to speak with you today.

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, founded in 1919, represents teachers and education workers in all four publicly funded school boards and in six universities. More than 60,000 educators, including educational assistants, psychologists, office staff, social workers, public high school teachers, occasional teachers and many other education workers, make up our membership.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Premier has stated that nothing is more important than keeping students in school. This was followed by the government's plan to catch up. Despite these promises and plans, though, the government has repeatedly shortchanged Ontario's students across all levels of education, from early learning to post-secondary.

OSSTF/FEESO's written pre-budget submission contains 24 recommendations that call on the government to invest in our greatest asset: the students in Ontario's publicly funded education system. While I won't be able to focus on all 24 recommendations today, I will focus on five themes that help to frame our recommendations.

The government must invest in and enhance publicly funded education, centring schools as integral parts of their community; increase education and post-secondary funding annually in all areas so that, at minimum, funding keeps up with inflation and other cost pressures; increase student-centred supports and services by providing funding for staffing models that support student and worker opportunities for success; increase funding to improve learning conditions to help students succeed and address their complex needs related to mental health by increasing board-employed professionals, student-support personnel and education workers; and improve the learning and

working conditions in all schools and learning environments by investing in proactive, sustained programs and staffing to reduce violence in schools.

The Financial Accountability Office of Ontario, the FAO, projects that through 2027-28, there will be a \$6-billion shortfall in education and a \$2.7-billion shortfall in post-secondary education. Continued underfunding and underspending in the education sector will jeopardize student outcomes and negatively impact Ontario's future. When you take out the temporary funding that was provided for learning recovery, the 2022-23 Grants for Student Needs only provided a 1.5% increase. School boards are now experiencing financial pressure as enrolment increases and inflation balloons to nearly 8%.

In reality, this government has significantly reduced funding to school boards. In post-secondary education, nominal funding increases do not keep up with inflation, nor did those increases address the growing need for educated professionals and skilled workers to fuel Ontario's economic growth. Research shows that performance-based funding for post-secondary institutions will do little to improve accountability or student outcomes.

OSSTF/FEESO recommends that the government abandon performance-based funding of post-secondary institutions, provide stable, predictable annual funding, and provide increased financial assistance for the students. OSSTF/FEESO recommends the government increase education and post-secondary funding annually in all areas to keep up with inflation and other cost pressures—at a minimum, to ensure school boards can continue to offer existing programming.

Bill 124, Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act of 2019, has created a crisis in Ontario's public service. The 1% cap on compensation has directly contributed to worker burnout and an ongoing labour shortage in the sector.

OSSTF/FEESO calls on the government to immediately repeal Bill 124, to end the appeal of the unconstitutionality of the bill, and to engage with affected unions on a remedy that corrects the injustice done in limiting increases of wages to 1%.

OSSTF/FEESO believes that all students deserve every opportunity to reach their full potential. To properly address the inequities that exist in every classroom, funding should be directed to improve learning conditions where it is most needed. The current funding model, developed nearly 25 years ago, continues to create disparities in funding that have been exacerbated over the years.

OSSTF/FEESO recommends reducing class size and increasing school-based supports; increasing classroom supports such as education assistants in secondary school classes; ensuring that all students, including those who are at risk and students with special needs, get the supports they need to be successful; funding and support for culturally responsive curriculum, learning materials, assessment and evaluation, testing, learning environments and professional development; 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.

1420

OSSTF/FEESO recommends that the government increase mental health supports for students in every school, work site and campus. The government must fully fund and support mental health services provided by board-employed professionals.

OSSTF/FEESO recommends that the government establish a specific education sector regulation within the Occupational Health and Safety Act to address increased incidents of violence; increase the number of qualified and trained adults in our schools who all provide a high level of care—

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

Ms. Karen Littlewood: —to our students; provide mandatory enhanced, culturally responsive and proactive training to prevent and appropriately respond to, and report, all incidents of violence in schools; and fix the \$16.8-billion repair backlog and establish stable funding that is necessary to increase board-employed staff to main schools and prevent further disrepair.

OSSFT/FEESO urges the government to move beyond the status quo and invest in tomorrow. There is no better way to set ourselves up for future success and to fuel economic growth than by investing in a robust, publicly funded education system supported by the whole education team.

Please, my message: Stop shortchanging students. Invest in the future.

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

We'll start the first round of questions with the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to Barb, Nancy and Karen for your presentations. They're much appreciated.

I'm going to start with Barb from the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. You did mention in your comments that the government has been misleading the public about education and education spending. It's a strong statement, and I just wanted to give you an opportunity to unpack that a bit.

Ms. Barb Dobrowolski: Thank you for the question.

Yes, it's true that the government rhetoric doesn't always reflect reality. That's seen in both how much money the government invests—for example, when they speak of historic investments, they're conveniently ignoring the reality of inflation. In the end, what's happening is that there is significant underfunding, both in the medium and in the long term.

As my colleague stated, the FAO projects that the government is going to be underfunding education by \$6 billion in the next six years. That \$6 billion would have just maintained the status quo, and we're at a point where we are really needing to invest for the learning recovery. There's also a disconnect in terms of how the government invests this money. Money is being siphoned off of education and funnelled out of the classroom into what we're

calling boutique initiatives, and these initiatives aren't doing anything to improve learning conditions.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Can you give an example?

Ms. Barb Dobrowolski: Yes. For example, the tax credits and vouchers that we saw during the pandemic, or the tutoring payments to parents. And then they get bundled into the education budget, making it seem inflated, when really it has been taken out.

The government is talking about reining in spending. In fact, we know the FAO is actually predicting small surpluses through to 2028. So we really feel that those monies should be reinvested into public services like education. These are the services that Ontarians rely on. We don't appreciate these accounting tricks or shell games. What we need is real investments and real actions.

Ms. Catherine Fife: There is a huge lack of transparency. It was a week ago when the FAO did reveal the amount of underspending every year in education. The government will come back and say, "Well, that's just a snapshot in time," but when it's a pattern, it's not a snapshot. Where you put the money demonstrates where your real priorities and values are.

Karen, I want to move over to you. You've made some compelling cases for strategic investment. One of your recommendations I see here is near the end of your brief, which is comprehensive. You say, "Increase investments in community training and education for newcomers to Canada, as well as improved skill retraining opportunities for people entering or transitioning back into the workforce." Can you tell the committee why that investment is so important, please?

Ms. Karen Littlewood: When you consider education and the fact that we represent workers from JK to career—we have members working in universities, but we also have members who are working with adult learners within the high school system, getting those really necessary credits to move forward. When we consider, as well, the need to make sure that we have adequate funding, really, throughout the lifetime of a student—not just from one source, but from multiple sources over the years—a lot of those community supports aren't there anymore.

As a teacher of a special education class where my students had developmental disabilities and/or autism, when you look at what their future would hold at age 21, when they had to exit the public school system—I taught in Alliston, and there aren't a lot of supports that are there. Parents would be told, "You can have half a day of supports and that's it."

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, and that's a really good point for rural and northern communities, as well, where the community resources are not as rich. School boards are currently going through their budgets right now. It's a pretty contentious time because they're making unbearable choices.

Last night, Waterloo was discussing ending a program for special needs and children on the autism spectrum because the money just isn't there, and there isn't anything else in the community.

In the OSSTF brief, you also mention the importance of providing paid sick days to allow workers the ability to

stay home. You would have thought, after the pandemic, when we learned the impact of sick people going to work—on the economy, on the health care system, on productivity—that this government would have learned their lesson on this. Can you just really bring home the importance, especially in a learning environment? It's a working environment, but it also is a learning environment with vulnerable children in it.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: That's right. It's such an important point to bring up, because we're not just talking about the workers. We are in a situation right now where jobs go unfilled on a daily basis. I had a report that in the Thames Valley District School Board, in the month of November, there were 1,000 unfilled jobs for educational assistants. When a teacher is away, you must have someone in the classroom, but for an educational assistant, that's not the case. So the students aren't getting the service that they need. We need equitable, stable service across the entire province, as well. Some communities will come in and say, "We can provide more supports," but that's not the same across the province, either.

When we're talking about paid sick time, it's not just for the workers in the public school system; it's also for the parents. I think we've learned over the last few years that the spread of—

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

Ms. Karen Littlewood: —a communicable disease or COVID that's airborne—we need people to stay home when they're not feeling well. But parents don't have a choice. Parents have to pay the bills. Parents have to buy the groceries. It's incredibly challenging for them. So I don't just speak for our members; I speak for the entire community—that we need to be respecting each other and staying home when we're sick.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Just on the funding—because this is part of this process: When you follow the money here at Queen's Park, you can see where it's not going. And now we actually have a true lack of transparency about these unallocated contingency funds, which the FAO has said have never been higher. So there's a lack of trust on where that money is going. When you see education being underspent by \$1 billion, and this slush fund, which will in 2025 be \$19.7 billion—that's a huge amount of money that should be invested in public services.

I thank you both for driving home that message today.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The next question is from the independents. MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you, Barb, Nancy and Karen, for your informative presentations. You've clearly put a lot of work in, and there's a lot to digest and process.

Barb, I have to say, this is great data, compelling. I also heard a little bit, with all due respect, of frustration in your voice. I think that's because, again, you and your members are working really, really hard to provide the best education you can for your students with limited resources, and we've talked about that in terms of the investments here.

Could you talk a little bit about how you're feeling about the profession and how you're feeling about what

your members are feeling in terms of how they can really make an impact, which is what we know they want to do?
1430

Ms. Barb Dobrowolski: I think that there have been some studies done by the Canadian Teachers' Federation, for example, that indicated that 70% of teachers are really worried for their own mental health and well-being. The studies also showed that 75% are feeling like they're really not able to keep up with their own personal and professional expectations. It's very difficult when you are there for the students that you don't feel like you're getting around to all of them and doing what they need to really thrive and succeed.

The working conditions are getting difficult, especially with the occasional-teacher shortage that was mentioned. I understand that, almost on a daily basis, teachers are not being replaced in certain jurisdictions like in London, for example, and teachers don't have their prep and planning time—they're giving it up—which means that they have to prepare for their classes over and above all of the afterhours extracurriculars. It becomes very difficult, and our members are parents as well, have family obligations as well. Trying to manage all that is very, very difficult. We want to do what's best for students, and it's becoming trying.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I think, again, we all know that some of society's problems are getting more complex and that a lot of those do show up in schools where kids are spending their days. So I want to thank all of you who work with kids to make sure that they're getting the best education they can, and I hope you stick with it.

I know Bill 124 and Bill 28 were really demoralizing, and you all stood up for that to fight that. It's still of course a work in progress, but Karen I wanted to know—again, just expanding a little bit on what you think it would do for your teachers, for the workforce, if the government were to cease and desist on the Bill 124 appeal—what that would do for your workforce.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: It would be a sigh of relief, just to know that you could move forward after that. Three years at 1% is challenging, and I hear a lot about, "Well, you know, teachers make a lot of money," but a third of our members are education workers, and they don't make a lot of money. They're having a really hard time, and many of them have two or three or even four jobs, so it's really challenging.

Prices are going up for everybody; that's the reality. In 2019 we were doing transparent bargaining and talking about a cost-of-living increase. That didn't come, and of course, now look at the prices.

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

Ms. Karen Littlewood: Thank you.

Yes, so it is incredibly challenging, but we're looking at attraction and retention of employees, and we're not able to do that. We have vacancies and absences, and this is across the entire province. There are 40,000 teachers in the province qualified to teach who are not teaching right now. They are choosing to not teach. They could really

help to solve the absences, but they are saying, “I don’t want to be in a public school right now.” That’s a problem.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you.

Nancy, I haven’t left enough time for you, but, again, just quickly, talk about your members and how difficult it is for you to attract people into the workforce right now.

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: It’s enormously difficult. The labour landscape has changed significantly. The majority of our drivers are over the age of 60; 60% are over the age of 60. It’s a part-time, split shift, seasonal job, and it tends to attract retirees. During COVID, a lot of them retired—

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

We will now go to the government side. MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you very much for your presentations today.

I’d like to start with Nancy. I think I might actually use most of the time for you, Nancy, because I’m very interested in your presentation, particularly, and my understanding of the operation.

I began school in 1986. My bus said, on the side, “Essex County Roman Catholic Separate School Board.” A couple of years later, it was painted over and it said “G&L Stevenson Transport.” Ultimately, I took that to be that the school bus service went from a public sector delivery model to a private sector delivery model.

So I’d like to ask the question of you: Is private sector delivery a bad model or a good model for school bus transportation?

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: We think it’s a very good model. The problem that we’re having right now is, we can’t figure out how the funding formula is working. The government invests \$1.1 billion into school transportation every year, which is a significant amount of money, and we’ve been very thankful for it. The problem is, it goes from the Ministry of Education to the school boards to the transportation consortia, which are the transportation planners, and along the way, because it’s not enveloped, we cannot trace where the money goes. We’re not even certain the \$1.1 billion actually ends up in student transportation, so we would like a little bit more transparency in that regard. The bottom line is, we’d really like to have the funding enveloped to make sure the \$1.1 billion does go into student transportation, so it’s enveloped, so no one else can stick their fingers in the proverbial pie to get at that money.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I know in my past career as a municipal councillor, often I would get school board issues and a lot of finger-pointing. The school board would say, “It’s the consortium that covers the decision-making,” but the consortium is made up of the school boards. So a parent is just pulling their hair out as to these issues about stops and how much service, or elimination of service, which often happens, for proximity of a school, and what the dividing line is. So there’s a lack of clarity for parents as to when one would qualify for a school bus versus not.

I know you have highlighted some concerns about procurement of equipment. How does it operate today? Does

every local or every private sector company delivering the service buy its own?

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: Yes.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Okay, so that is the case; there isn’t a centralized procurement where you can benefit from economies of scale.

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: No.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Has that been attempted in the past? If so, what have the barriers been?

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: I’m going to have to turn that over to my colleague Rob Murphy, who has been in the business a little bit longer than me. Rob Murphy is the president of School Bus Ontario and president of Murphy Bus Lines, from London, Ontario. He has been in the business for 75 years, and he could certainly go back further than I could—or his family has been in the business. Sorry, Rob.

Mr. Rob Murphy: Hopefully, I don’t—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Excuse me. Before you can speak, we need unanimous consent from the committee to have an extra person at the table.

Hearing no objection, go ahead.

Mr. Rob Murphy: Thank you.

I’m not 76 years old. Our family has been in business for 76 years. I’m third-generation.

The request for a proposal procurement directive came into effect in 2009, when any contract over \$100,000 had to go out to procurement. Prior to that, we negotiated our contract with the school boards—privately owned companies did, and the large firms.

Fast-forward: Since 2009, over 130 small family companies have gone out of business because of the procurement directive. What happens when contracts have expired is, then the contract goes out to procurement or to RFP, as I said. So then it becomes a bidding war in our industry. Unfortunately, in our industry, we’ve lost good, long-standing family operations that—some have been in business for 50, 60 years. The issue becomes that it becomes a race to the bottom, or the lowest dollar gets the winning bid. And what happens in a company is, when you lose a bid, you’re losing those assets that you can’t just transfer over to another area in the province, because, as you’ve heard this afternoon, all those contracts are basically in all separate regions of the province. So when you lose that bid—I can’t go out and sell my school bus to the guy down the road, because he’s also got a contract with another school board.

So we’ve lobbied for the last—since 2009, anyway, to try to get that changed, and we’re asking the ministry to look at a change that—basically, we’re asking the consortiums to be able to look at a different procurement model than what’s in place, because, as I said, when our contract expires, then we have to start bidding against each other or the other companies. The theory was that the market would open up when the procurement started in 2009, but there haven’t been any new companies—or new players, as we say in our industry—that have come from any other provinces, or even the States, to try to take over some of those contracts. So we continue to bus students, we continue

to try to fairly work with the Ministry of Education, but we need this emergency funding, as you heard this afternoon from Nancy, to continue to operate safely for the students of Ontario.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Chair, how much time is left?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We have 1.3. 1440

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Okay.

A final question for you, Nancy: Do other jurisdictions in Canada have a model similar to Ontario, or do they operate differently?

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: Some of them operate differently. The closest comparison with the largest population is Quebec. They do not do RFPs in the same manner that is done in Ontario, and they have over 350 operators there. Like Rob said, we used to have over 200 operators in Ontario, and it has diminished greatly because of procurement. The procurement has ended up in court because many different RFPs have ended up in court. We've estimated that the court costs alone, to fight the small business operators, have cost the government over \$50 million, which we don't think is money well spent in the transportation sector. It would be far better spent to put it into the system so that we can continue to attract drivers and increase driver pay. Driver retention then wouldn't be a problem.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Interestingly enough, some of my bus drivers are my most long-standing colleagues, I suppose. I rode their bus as a young person, and I'm still in touch with them today, particularly Darrin Drouillard and Bob Hamilton. The relationships that school bus drivers build with students are incredible and long-lasting memories.

I want to thank all the bus drivers for their service to the students of Ontario. We do remember, as we grow up, all the good things that they bring every single day for us.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you. Hold that memory.

We'll now go to the opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you, Barb, Nancy, and Karen, for your presentations today.

Barb, your presentation really mirrors what a lot of people have been saying—the disconnect between words and actions with the government. We hear words like “for the people,” yet we see actions that really show an anti-worker agenda, as you've quite readily pointed out.

Thank you, as well, for pointing out the unconstitutionality of Bill 124 and the attempt to be unconstitutional with Bill 28—something that has been described as fiscally imprudent, to continue to fight a losing battle in court with public resources, just to attack workers.

In your remarks, you mentioned that the government has been focused on ideologically driven efforts to privatize public services. Can you speak about how the government's efforts are impacting education?

Ms. Barb Dobrowolski: What we're seeing is that over the last couple of years, as I mentioned, there have been cuts of almost \$3 billion in education. We know that the FAO is projecting a further \$6 billion in cuts over the next six years.

We also see, at the same time, plans to commercialize and expand mandatory online credits. We all know that

students don't like them, parents don't like them, teachers don't like them. Really, to whose benefit is it? Is it to the benefit of companies that are really trying to make profits? That's ideological; it's pushing toward privatization of education.

The pandemic confirmed for us something that we already knew, which was that online learning fails the vast majority of students. It decreases engagement, it widens learning gaps, and it increases inequities. We know that in-person learning is ideal. It's the most equitable model. Pushing for more is really counterintuitive.

What we are calling for is an end to mandatory e-learning credits, to cease trying to engage third-party entities to deliver education. Certified teachers should be the ones who are delivering online learning, if it exists.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: As a trained educator myself—online learning has always been an option for students who choose to do it. And as an educator who took many online courses for additional qualifications, I can readily attest to the fact that online learning is not for most adults, as well. It takes a certain type of learner, and it's not something that should be forced upon anyone.

My next questions will be for Karen.

Karen, you've also said some things that we've also heard from this committee—that Bill 124 has created a crisis across many sectors.

I did want to ask about the education payment. We've heard about historic investments in education; the FAO would paint a different picture. In terms of that education payment, would you call that an “investment” in education or would you characterize it in a different way?

Ms. Karen Littlewood: I appreciate the question.

I think there are a couple of ways to look at it. For a lot of people, during the pandemic, that money was very welcomed. It was something that was a little bit of relief for them, so that was great. But what people don't connect to is the fact that that is money that came out of the education budget. You say, “Well, it's only \$200 per family”—in a class of 30, multiply that in a school of 500, multiply that in a board across the province, and it has added up to be over \$2 billion. When you look at the ability to pool resources, you're able to deliver much more; you're able to provide the supports that are needed. It's great to have \$200, because I can go to Sylvan and get a couple of hours of tutoring, but if the money is pooled within a Grade 9 class, that could be another person in the building to support—it could be an educational assistant; it could be a child and youth worker. We're in a crisis right now with mental health issues, but we're also in a crisis state right now with violence in our schools, and we need to be addressing that. We need to be looking at what could be done, and that does take money.

So when you consider \$2 billion-plus coming out of the education system when we need more supports in—I'm not looking for more members. I'm not looking to line our union pockets. I'm looking to serve the students of the province, and I think that's what we need to be doing.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I think your words were quite right: We've seen not only an attack on workers but a short-changing of students. When you consider an additional

person in a school—that one-on-one time, where another student might just be overhearing, then it’s also helping them with their learning process. When money is spent on the front lines, it is money well spent.

The epidemic of workplace violence and violence against education workers is at a crisis level. Would you be able to speak to how that impacts a classroom, how that impacts education, and how that impacts all of the children within a classroom and within a school, when incidents like that happen?

Ms. Karen Littlewood: Violence in the classroom, sadly, is not a new phenomenon. This has been going on for many years. In 2019, we lobbied some of you here at Queen’s Park, talking about the violence that exists in the classroom, asking our members to stop the silence and to end the violence. At that time, the Liberal government committed to an education-specific portion for the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

What you have to consider is that in the classroom—and I’ve worked in the classroom—it changes the tenor of the classroom.

You should be able to be confident going to work, going to school, knowing that you’re going to be safe, knowing that the supports are in place.

I think we have to be looking before the problem happens—I think we have to be looking at the supports that can be provided: early intervention, being able to provide those supports for—

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

Ms. Karen Littlewood: —mental health, child and youth workers. It’s a whole education team that provides the supports for the students.

In the case of incidents that happen, people don’t forget it. I can tell you about incidents myself—injuries, lost time from work. I know people have been off work for a year and a half. A dear friend of mine totally missed the second year of her son’s life because she suffered such a serious concussion at work in a school.

I think we have to be providing the supports at every level, not just when a crisis happens. But we have to be proactive.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: And to think that we’re not providing mental health supports for students in an efficient way—that there are educators who have to go to work with Kevlar suits which keep their arms raised, and then they end up having impacts on their health and their body as a result of that, when we’re not getting the supports to the kid who needs it. It’s a dire situation, and the government needs to take note.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: And supports that are equitable across the province. This is not just a Toronto issue. This is across the province. This is JK to Grade 12 and beyond.

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

We will now go to the independents. MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Thanks, Karen and Barbara, for your presentations. I do have questions for you both, but I want to start with Nancy and Rob.

MPP Dowie did a good job of kind of leading me down a path here. If I have this right, the previous government

opened up the contract with school boards to go to RFPs with bus drivers. As I understand it, prior to that, these businesses would sit down with school boards and negotiate contracts. Correct?

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: That’s correct.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Okay. There have been many people—lots of professionals, justices—who have said that the RFP process is a horrible process.

1450

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: The process has been determined to be very unfair, yes. There have been two justices who have looked into it in the last 10 years, and both have concluded that the system is not working for school bus operators.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: As a parent, I want the most qualified person and company operating a bus line and driving that bus to cart my kids around. That’s what I would have to say on that.

This is a government that says it supports small business. Am I correct that a simple return to what we saw before the RFP process would make kids safer and would protect small business and help school boards and families all together?

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: I think the best thing that could be done right now in terms of procurement would allow the school board to have a choice as to whether they’re going to go to an RFP or they’re going to negotiate. That can be simply done with a B memo that is sent out to the education sector and to the school boards—that under the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act and the accompanying directive, they can negotiate with the school bus operators in particular regions. And that would certainly make it a lot more equitable across the province.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: It seems like an easy fix to me. I’m going to move on to Karen and Barbara.

Earlier today, we had a presenter who—and I’m going to quote her presentation. She said, “When social justice objectives take priority over basic skills, student achievement declines, universities are forced to offer remedial courses in literacy, numeracy and problem-solving,” and it goes on. I think you get my gist here.

I have spoken to members of OEETA and OSSTF who tell me that some of the agendas in the curriculum are getting in the way of their teaching, and I’m wondering if it’s time to revisit the curriculum and go back to reading, writing and arithmetic. Would you guys care to comment on that?

Ms. Barb Dobrowski: I’ll be happy to start.

I disagree with that statement. As Catholic teachers, we imbue everything that we teach in our curriculum with the value lens, and I think that’s important for making holistic citizens who participate in society in a good way. I don’t think that imbuing those values and social justice teachings in any way detracts from the curriculum. If anything, it enhances it, and I think it engages students in a way that dry reading, writing and arithmetic can’t. We want good citizens. We don’t just want accountants and politicians. We want people who are really caring—

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: But there has to be a balance because—

Ms. Barb Dobrowolski: Sorry, I just want to say, I don't mean to imply that politicians are not—

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

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Many of the teachers I speak to—and they are from OECTA, they are from OSSTF—believe that they are required to teach too many things that should be taught around the kitchen table.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: I will speak to that briefly, in the seconds that I have.

If you don't feel safe at school, you're not going to learn. So I think that's what we have to be looking at, to begin with. The curriculum does need to be reviewed, in many cases.

One of the first things that happened when the government was elected was, they cancelled the review of the Indigenous curriculum and cancelled Indigenous elders who were headed to Toronto to work on a writing team.

We need to look at the curriculum. We'd like to be consulted. Teachers used to be a part of that curriculum review. They used to be part of writing that curriculum. Things have changed over the last number of years. I think we can work together as a team. We know what's happening in the schools. We know what's needed.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes that question.

We'll now go to the government. MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I just want to clarify that we do still work with the Indigenous council around curriculum, to write Indigenous curriculum.

We've talked, Karen, about the sick leaves, and I just want to clarify, because, right now, we know that there are 120 days that OSSTF members get at 90% salary and 11 days at 100% salary. So I just wanted to clarify the piece around the advocacy for more paid sick days.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: I'm not asking for that for OSSTF members; I'm talking about across the province, for the parents of the children, who feel that they need to send their kids to school when they're sick, or parents who are going to work when they are ill.

Our sick leave was negotiated. It was actually changed by a prior government, and there was a plan in place that allowed us to—there was an incentive for not using the sick leave, but I strongly believe that when someone is sick, they need to be at home.

What we're finding right now, sadly, is, the highest number of reasons why people are off, and the reason they go on long-term disability, is for mental nervous conditions. That's talking about the working conditions in the school and the inability to address the needs that many members have. It used to be cancer.

I'd rather not have people off at all. I'd rather have stability in the school for the students every day.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: We have advocacy for increased funding for school right now.

When we talk about priorities and values—more than 80% of the education budget is salary. When you're advocating for an increase in the education budget, how do you see that break down?

Ms. Karen Littlewood: We are an industry that is humans dealing with humans. Yes, you have salaries.

What we need is to make sure we have all the supports in place.

The majority of students really don't need us there, but we are there for the students who have the needs. I was told years ago by a principal, "You're not here for 90% of your students." My own daughter could have learned on her own, no problem. My son? He needed lots of supports.

We provide a caring environment that's supportive. We want it to be equitable across the province. We want to make sure that that whole team is there, so when my children are suffering with mental health needs, there's somebody at that school level who's going to help them, and I don't just have the option of going to the hospital with them and trying to have them in the hospital.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you.

I'll share my time with Aris.

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

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you to all of you for presenting your opinions, your ideas, so that we can look at them and consider them.

My question is to Nancy.

I have to say that I sympathize with the bus drivers. My next-door neighbour is a bus driver, and she always discusses issues of concern to her and her colleagues with me.

I am quite interested to get more details from you. Earlier, you mentioned that \$1.2 billion is allocated from the ministry to the bus drivers. And \$1.2 billion is not pocket change, but you mentioned that it goes to the school boards—from the school board to the consortium etc. Can you elaborate a bit more on that process?

After that, what opinions, ideas or suggestions do you have to improve that system, make it more transparent, and allocate the money where it is necessary and where it is required?

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: Every year, the government sets the amount that they're going to be spending on student transportation, and they set the GSN, the Grants for Student Needs. This current year that we're in, it was approximately 2%, but that is not necessarily what ends up happening on the ground, because the money is allocated, and it's up to the local school boards and the transportation consortia to negotiate or to amend contracts with the various operators, to determine how much they're going to give them.

There are some operators in the province right now who have received 0% this current year, and as you saw in the presentation, some of their costs have gone up 20% to 30%, so it's very, very difficult for them, and it puts downward pressure on school bus driver pay. We're at a point now where there is no wiggle room left. The cost of fuel, oil and bus parts have all gone up, and there is no way to increase driver pay without an increase to the Grants for Student Needs, because the school bus operators are locked in contracts with the school boards for a fixed period of time. That's the way the RFPs have been set up. We're asking that the amount of money that goes to student transportation be enveloped, so that the school boards and consortia know exactly how much money they can pass along to the school bus operators. We're also

asking that it be a little bit more uniform across the province, because it doesn't make sense to us if the government says, "We're going to give you 2% more in the GSN," and then some transportation consortia turns around and says, "Well, 0%." That doesn't make sense to us, because we don't understand where it goes. If it were enveloped for student transportation and all of the local school boards had the ability to pass that along completely to the school bus operators, it would make things a lot more clear about how the money is actually spent.

Mr. Aris Babikian: How much time?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): It's 1.4.

Mr. Aris Babikian: As one of the two representatives of this committee from Scarborough, I am quite intrigued with that portion on the parking in Scarborough, when you brought the example of the increase in driver-paid parking to the province of Ontario—I am quite interested to find out which department or division, because I know my neighbour parks the bus on the street, which is fine. Can you elaborate on that?

1500

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: It depends on the local operator. That's called a park-out. That's when the school bus is parked really close to the school bus driver. They do that to eliminate what's called deadhead. Deadhead is the amount of time it takes the school bus driver to go to the very first school bus stop. They don't usually get paid for that at all. There's no pay for the deadhead. School bus operators find places where they can park their buses that are really close to the local drivers—some of them, in their own driveways. A lot of them have parking lots. Some of them rent out church parking lots. Some of them rent out parking lots on vacant land. This one particular operator in the Toronto area rents out land from the province, and the rent for that land for the park-out went up 200% this year.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Would you know, for example, if there is something we can do to help those bus drivers, to relieve a little bit of the parking cost?

Ms. Nancy Daigneault: We would definitely welcome that, yes.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That does conclude the time not only for that question but for this panel. We thank you very much for the time you took to prepare to be here and the efforts you put forward in bringing your message here. We'll ensure that it is passed on to the minister as we negotiate through the process of the next budget.

TOURISM INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION
OF ONTARIO

CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH
ASSOCIATION, ONTARIO DIVISION

CANADIAN BANKERS ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Our next panel is the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario; the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario division; and the Canadian Bankers Association.

Everybody will have seven minutes to make their presentation. If I don't forget, I will remind you of the one minute left—I will just say, "One minute." And when that is expired, I will say, "The next presenter, please."

As you start your presentation, we would ask you to put your name on the record to make sure Hansard can credit the right person with the right presentation.

We'll start with the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario.

Dr. Jessica Ng: My name is Dr. Jessica Ng. I'm the director of policy and government affairs for the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, or TIAO, as we like to call it. I want to thank the members of this committee for the opportunity to be here this afternoon. For those members who are unfamiliar with TIAO, we are recognized by government as the voice of tourism in the province. TIAO works on behalf of its membership, collectively representing 200,000 businesses and 400,000 employees.

The tourism industry in the province is on the path to recovery thanks to a combination of the innovation, dedication and skill of those working within the industry and a successful collaboration with government to mitigate the worst impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the pandemic, TIAO has worked closely with government to protect the foundations of a \$36-billion industry that is not only a significant economic driver within the province but is at the heart of our social and cultural identity and serves as a window for the rest of the world into our incredible province. Together, we work to keep small businesses open and protect jobs in every corner of the province. The Ontario Staycation Tax Credit, Ontario Tourism Recovery Program, Skills Development Fund, and the Ontario Tourism and Travel Small Business Support Grant are just a few of the examples of where industry and government have worked in collaboration to create programs that have ensured our industry is best placed to move forward as we emerge from the pandemic.

However, the tourism industry faces unique challenges to recovery. Almost three years of closed borders, capacity restrictions and lockdowns have exacerbated structural issues that have left the industry far from pre-pandemic levels. As a result, while the rest of Ontario and Canada moves forward, businesses that rely on the visitor economy are still dealing with lasting impacts of revenue losses of up to 93%, staggering six-figure debts and the displacement of tourism workers to other industries. New and long-standing challenges further hinder recovery, as tourism businesses struggle with recruitment and retention, supply chain disruptions, inflation, rising taxes, reduced commercial insurance coverage, and gaps in transportation infrastructure.

Moreover, not all visitor markets and regions are rebuilding at the same pace. Business travel and events have yet to fully return, northern Ontario is still hard hit due to the slow return of the US visitor market, and as many as four in 10 Ontario tourism operators do not expect to be profitable until at least 2024. Alarmingly, according to the latest economic report from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, business confidence has dropped to a new low,

with only 16% of organizations expressing confidence in the outlook of Ontario's economy in 2023.

Thanks to the support of government programs and the entrepreneurial spirit that exists in Ontario, we have managed to mitigate the very worst of the pandemic.

As the members we represent are looking to the future, hoping to hire more Ontarians and help our economy rebound as quickly as possible, our global competitors are already moving forward and capturing a growing share of visitor spending. At this critical juncture, it is imperative that we invest in a provincial tourism growth strategy that unleashes the full potential of our industry. We cannot be left behind.

TIAO therefore recommends that the Ontario provincial government consults on and releases a comprehensive tourism growth strategy for Ontario by the third quarter of 2023. To enable our industry to overcome barriers and fully leverage the opportunities to recover and prosper, now and for the future, we need a provincial tourism growth strategy that best positions our industry to move forward. This includes tangible economic investments that take destination marketing to the next level, enable businesses to rebuild and grow made-in-Ontario experiences that are incredibly innovative and support the capacity of Ontario's tourism offer to remain globally competitive.

Together with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, TIAO has laid the foundation for such a strategy in our State of the Ontario Tourism Industry Report, which each of you have a copy of today. The insights and recommendations of this report are informed by two policy round tables held in the summer and fall of 2022, bringing together tourism operators, industry experts, associations, chambers of commerce and boards of trade from across the province. This report contains 74 recommendations to the provincial government on helping to reduce the costs of doing business in Ontario. This includes tackling soaring debt and unaffordable commercial insurance, exploring tax changes and incentives to attract conventions and business travel back to Ontario, and implementing a series of targeted support measures to create the sustainable workforce that our visitor economy desperately needs. This report contains recommendations on how to build the infrastructure we need to ensure the tourism industry can grow in the next decade, become sustainable, support Indigenous tourism and outdoor and nature-based tourism, and ensure that we deliver the recommendations of the Tourism Economic Recovery Ministerial Task Force led by former Minister Lisa MacLeod. The report offers many opportunities where the provincial government can work with municipal and federal counterparts to ensure Ontario is the most attractive place to visit, work in the tourism industry, and invest.

Tourism and hospitality matter for Ontario. Its economic impact and return on investment extend beyond our own industry, with tangible benefits for other businesses, sectors, communities—

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

Dr. Jessica Ng:—and the economy through tax revenue, community infrastructure and creating vibrant

communities to work and live in. Tourism is therefore not only a key economic driver as an industry; it is an indispensable component of broader economic development across the province. Thank you.

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

The next presenter will be the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario division.

Ms. Camille Quenneville: I'm Camille Quenneville, CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario division. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. I'm here on behalf of 27 CMHA branches in Ontario that deliver high-quality care for thousands of people living with mental health and addictions challenges. Joining me virtually to co-present are Michael Anhorn, CEO of CMHA Toronto, and David Smith, CEO of CMHA Peel Dufferin.

1510

On your travels across Ontario, the committee has heard from other CMHA branches, and there are common themes we're raising. Our commitment to people living with, and impacted by, mental illness and addictions does not waver. We are providing the supports and services needed on their journey to recovery. But the lack of budget increases and historical underfunding makes it impossible to meet the demand for service. As my colleagues can articulate, it's extremely rare that the community mental health and addictions sector receives base increases. For most CMHAs, a one-time increase of 2% to 3% over the last 10 years, or sometimes 20 years, is the norm.

This is the impetus for our budget ask this year, which is \$125 million for the community mental health and addictions sector, and we advocate for ongoing annualized funding so that we can continue to help people in need. A lack of annualized base funding erodes our ability to support Ontarians. Our government allocation does not account for increasing demand of service, rising operational costs and inflation. The lack of annualized base increases also means that we can't compensate our staff appropriately and we have extreme difficulty hiring new staff. We have an approximate 5% vacancy rate across Ontario, meaning hundreds of CMHA community mental health and addictions jobs are unfilled. That puts greater strain on the dedicated staff who remain.

I'd like to take a moment to recognize one of those talented CMHA staff who is here in the committee room. Lauren Hord is employed full-time at CMHA Waterloo Wellington and supports individuals in what can only be described as emotionally difficult work. She's deeply committed and chooses to remain at CHMA, even though it's a financial hardship. I urge you to take a moment to read Lauren's story in our pre-budget submission, which you have. Lauren is precisely the type of dedicated, passionate and committed person to be working in the field, and I'd like to formally recognize her in Hansard.

I'd now like to pass along to Michael Anhorn, CEO of CMHA Toronto.

Mr. Michael Anhorn: Thanks, Camille.

As Camille said, my name is Michael Anhorn. I'm the CEO of Canadian Mental Health Association Toronto.

At CMHA Toronto, we provide supports for mental health recovery that are evidence-based and range from primary care, mental health care and support for the social determinants of health, such as housing, employment, income and social belonging. We also promote positive mental health for all through a variety of educational and social programs. But it's getting harder every year, as Camille mentioned.

In the last fiscal year alone, we experienced a 170% increase in our wait-list for people needing urgent, intensive mental health supports. The wait times last year increased from 30 days to three months.

And our staff turnover has tripled in the last three years. In exit interviews, our staff who are leaving express regret over leaving CMHA Toronto, but two thirds of them said they simply can't pay their bills, their food and their rent with the compensation that we're able to offer. To provide a specific example, registered nurses doing the same work at CMHA Toronto as they would do in a hospital at an Assertive Community Treatment Team make 33% less because we're funded less than hospitals are for the same position.

You've heard this from CMHAs across Ontario: The funding model for community mental health and addictions work is broken. But there is an opportunity to fix it and to work together with us to ensure people get the supports and services they need. The Financial Accountability Office reports that they are expecting a \$5-billion shortfall in health care spending over the next three years, so there is money available.

We urge you to commit the \$125 million for the community mental health and addictions sector and then commit to dependable and predictable annual increases after that, to assist with our long-term planning.

I'd now like to turn it over to David Smith, the CEO of CMHA Peel Dufferin.

Mr. David Smith: Thank you, Michael.

As Michael said, I'm David Smith, the CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association of Peel Dufferin.

The story in Peel Dufferin is much the same as it is in Toronto. Peel Dufferin serves Mississauga, Brampton and the surrounding areas. One difference is, the rate of growth in the areas around the GTA has meant that our region now receives about a half of the provincial average per capita for mental health funding. Again, since 2014, we've received just a single 2.4% base increase and, in the meantime, inflation has gone up at least 24%—cost of living, 21%. It makes it extremely difficult to provide key services to our community.

Take our Assertive Community Treatment Team, for example. ACTT offers intensive community supports to individuals experiencing serious mental health concerns. It's an international best practice, and the evidence shows that it significantly reduces hospitalization and emergency department use. Yet with Peel's population growing by 12% and the inflation against increases that we've already described, our ACTT teams have lost 35% of their capacity

per capita against this inflation and population growth over the last 10 years, so we now provide 35% less service for each individual in Peel-Dufferin. The data indicates that the program continues to be accessed at very high volumes, not only in Peel-Dufferin but across the province.

In closing, I'd like to thank the committee on behalf of myself and my colleagues for the opportunity to share the challenges and needs of our community. We'd be happy to take any questions.

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

We'll now go to the third presenter, the Canadian Bankers Association.

Mr. Anthony Ostler: My name is Anthony Ostler. I am the president and CEO of the Canadian Bankers Association. It is a pleasure to be with you today. I want to begin my comments by thanking each and every one of you and your staff for all that you do on behalf of your constituents.

Today I want to talk about the significant impact the CBA's more than 60 domestic and foreign bank members have on the province's economy and securing the financial future of everyday Ontarians.

The banking sector accounts for 5.6%, or approximately \$42 billion, of Ontario's GDP; employs roughly 176,000 hard-working Ontarians in 2,400 branches across Ontario; provided \$114.3 billion in credit to Ontario businesses, including small and medium-sized businesses, as of June 2022; and contributed more than \$13.5 billion in taxes to all levels of government in 2021.

Banks have been and will continue to be with Ontarians every step of the way, from helping Ontarians and businesses weather the storm from the pandemic to providing over \$800 billion in mortgages to make the dream of home ownership a reality for regular Ontarians, protecting seniors from financial fraud and abuse, promoting financial literacy for students and seniors, and committing to the principles of pay equity and building representative workplaces.

By being there for their clients across the province—millions of people turn to banks every day for services and advice to help them achieve their financial goals and build a bright future. This is where banks' financial literacy work begins—in their daily interactions with their customers, providing a wealth of educational material, information, tools, services, and by providing advice that's geared toward helping them make the best financial decisions for their unique circumstances.

Banks go well beyond this, too. Across Ontario, they are providing financial support and volunteers for a variety of financial literacy programs run in communities across the country by educational and not-for-profit groups, they are creating their own financial education programs and services for clients and the general public, and they are providing financial and volunteer support for the important work that not-for-profit credit counselling agencies do in local communities across the province.

We commend the government of Ontario for making financial literacy a mandatory component of the school

curriculum. We are hopeful this will only become stronger, as it is a vital educational element.

We must also continue to support the important education for older adults against financial abuse.

A story appeared on CTV Guelph recently in which an older adult attended their bank branch to withdraw thousands of dollars, thinking that their grandchild was in serious trouble. Because the teller they spoke with was educated in detecting financial fraud—in this case, the “grandparent scam”—they were able to take the necessary steps to stop the withdrawal and protect this vulnerable senior against being scammed.

This is just one of many examples of the important work these regular Ontarians do in branches across the province to protect and assist their customers.

1520

There’s certainly much more I could say today about the supports our members provide, but I do understand time is of the essence today, so I will come to my concluding remarks.

As the Premier and other leaders across the country have continuously said over the past three years, we’re all in this together. We could not agree more. The Canadian Bankers Association and our over-60-plus bank members are here to work with the government and all MPPs on a shared goal of inclusive economic prosperity. We are here to work with you all to address the real concerns of climate change and accelerating clean economic growth. We are here to work with you all to eliminate barriers where they exist to diverse populations. We are here to work with you all to provide financial support for our most vulnerable. You and all Ontarians can count on banks to be with you each and every step of the way.

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

That concludes the three presenters for this panel, so we’ll start this round with the independent. MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Thank you, Jessica, Camille and Anthony.

I’ll start with Jessica. I was looking over your recommendations. How many jobs are there to fill in the tourism industry right now, at this time? Would you have a number?

Dr. Jessica Ng: In terms of the number of jobs that are unfilled?

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Yes.

Dr. Jessica Ng: I can tell you that this number does fluctuate from month to month, but in an alarming statistic, there were 81% more job openings in spring of 2022 compared to spring of 2019. It does speak to the significant recruitment and retention challenges that the industry has had post-COVID, but also long-standing. These are long-standing challenges that the industry has dealt with in recruiting front-line service positions, but also middle management, managerial, and it’s just exacerbated by COVID, through displacement of workers. As a result, in our state of the industry report, we do recommend a tourism workforce strategy that addresses these long-standing

challenges and ensures that the industry can recruit and retain the workers it needs.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Thank you.

Camille, we have heard this across the province, and I definitely hear it from my own mental health experts in Haldimand–Norfolk. As we travel this province—last week, we were in Peterborough—from one corner to the next, you see the results of underfunding. You see folks lined up for different things on each corner. It’s really sad. It’s like a dog chasing its tail, with respect to mental health and addictions. So I support your ask, and I do hope that we can get these issues under control.

Anthony, my last question is for you. What are our Canadian banks doing to help—or our Ontario banks, I guess, in this case—our consumers to cope with inflation right now?

Mr. Anthony Ostler: It’s a great question.

There’s a number of different elements. Specifically, with inflation, the knock-on effect, from a banking perspective, is higher interest rates. The biggest impact would be for people who have mortgages that have variable rates. A key thing that our members are doing is reaching out to their clients with variable-rate mortgages with educational pieces, so either via email, outreach and phone calls. They’re also engaging with those clients to have them come into the branch and meet with their representatives so they can talk about the impacts of a higher interest rate and what that may mean, when and if their payments may change or their scheduling may change. And then there’s just broader credit counselling.

One thing that’s important to note is, mortgage arrears are 0.15%, and the reason they’re very low—people are making their payments—is because there’s a very high correlation between employment and mortgage payments. If people have higher payments to make because of their variable-rate mortgage, it tends to impact other things, unfortunately—things like tourism. So the discretionary spending may be reduced, but if they have a job, people generally are able to make their mortgage payments even if it’s—

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

Mr. Anthony Ostler:—more of their paycheque.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I do support a further uptick in financial literacy in our schools. It’s a great first start, but we have a long way to go to teach kids about interest rates and credit card debt and things like that. I worked previously for MPP Toby Barrett, who was very hot on financial literacy in our schools, and I’m glad to see that has been implemented, but I think we could take that a few steps further.

Mr. Anthony Ostler: We have great programs, Your Money Students and Your Money Seniors, that our members actually do volunteer training for. So it’s not just in the schools. We have retirees and existing employees who do volunteer work and go out in the community and educate both students and seniors on financial literacy items.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes that time.

We'll now go to MPP Byers.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you to the presenters for being here this afternoon. I very much appreciate your thoughts for the committee.

Camille, I want to start with you and thank you for—you're right; whether it's a finance committee or Ministry of Finance consultations we've been doing, CMHC has been very active, and I really appreciate that. In fact, in my community of Grey Bruce, I met with Clark MacFarlane several times at CMHA Grey Bruce. I really appreciate all the work you're doing.

You and your colleagues have made the point about the labour challenges, and I get it, and the request for base funding is understood. It's very helpful to hear it clearly.

The employees you say are leaving—are they going to other elements of the health care network, or are they leaving health care? Can you give a little more colour on that?

Ms. Camille Quenneville: First of all, I want to say that Clark speaks very highly of you, so thank you for your engagement with CMHA Grey Bruce.

With respect to the employment, I really would love my colleagues who run branches to have an opportunity to speak to this.

I'll just briefly say that we have, at the moment, more than 250 jobs unfilled across Ontario. Those are people who otherwise would be helping your constituents with their mental illness, with their addictions issues. So this is very significant. Every community obviously has its own pool of people who can work in the health care environment. And quite truthfully, we're about 30%, on average, behind what a hospital pays for any given role. Needless to say, we can't compete.

Let me just stop there and see if either Michael or David wants to comment further.

Mr. Michael Anhorn: Thanks, Camille.

We know we are losing people to hospitals, to public education, to central government and Ontario Health—and then also to the private sector is where we're losing people, primarily.

Mr. David Smith: Yes. I was going to say similar. I think in our exit interviews we see three things happening: One, they are going to hospitals that have higher-paying jobs within the health sector; two, many are leaving or going back to school to try to change their career; and we also have a number of staff who are doing things like moving back in with their parents in order to make ends meet so they can continue to do the work in the sector. So we see a variety of bad outcomes for mental health.

Mr. Rick Byers: Other presenters we've had talked generally about the primary care network, and we've had many presenters on that topic. The primary care network is very diverse, with many, many different, important participants. Is it fair to say you're part of that network? And how can we as government continue to work to make sure the network is operating as well as it can be to support overall health care and communities in the province?

Ms. Camille Quenneville: That's a great question. Thank you for asking.

We try to work very hard with primary care, work hand in hand with them, because very often, primary care providers tell us that 40% of the people who walk through their doors are struggling with their mental health. That's a high number of their caseload and their rostered patients. So what we try to do is to make sure, in our communities, that those physicians or nurse practitioners know where their CMHA branch is. In some cases, we are co-located with a community health centre and have a single governance body with them. So we have tried very hard to make sure those linkages exist so that that patient journey is as seamless as possible.

1530

We've also worked across all of the community-based sectors to build a document on primary care so that all health care providers have the right path to their mental health and addictions providers. That would be a document or a tool that would be used at Ontario health team tables, as well.

My hope is that the government—as you say, “What can we do?”—will help and assist and encourage that connection, as well.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you very much.

I have one more quick question, and this is to Anthony.

I spent 16 years of my career as a banker, and I've now found that my current job is about as popular with the public as when I was a banker.

I'm just curious about what you're seeing and what your industry is seeing about the economy on the ground. You mentioned mortgage—

Mr. Anthony Ostler: The arrears are tiny.

Mr. Rick Byers: That's good.

Are you encouraged by the signs of economic growth that you're seeing from the lending practice, or otherwise?

Mr. Anthony Ostler: At the high levels, what we've seen is that the economy is amazingly resilient so far. Obviously, the Bank of Canada is doing its best to address inflation and increasing interest rates. But we're still seeing job creation.

Where we've seen slowness in our industry is that mortgage creation has slowed down because people aren't buying as many new homes or buying homes. The volume of sales in mortgages have dropped dramatically. That has probably been the biggest difference. Otherwise, things are robust. Payments are strong, and there's new job creation and businesses being created. It's a decent environment, but people are cautiously optimistic.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): It's 1.2.

Mr. Rick Byers: Perhaps I'll pass it over to—

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Anthony, I met with a number of companies across Ontario in the advanced manufacturing sector, and they all largely identified access to capital as being a barrier to economic development in the province. Neither their owners nor lenders in the province were willing to forward them the funds to expand their operations domestically.

I was wondering if you have any recommendations for us, from a policy perspective, to address this so that our businesses can access the capital they need to grow.

Mr. Anthony Ostler: Just one thing to think about: In your riding, in Windsor, there are 18 bank branches there—I'm not sure you know that—and there are actually 513 bank employees in your riding. So one of the things that's great to see is how our banks have employees and branches all across the province.

Specifically around your question, there's a number of different policy elements. If we look holistically, what we have found is, 90% of small businesses are able to access financing and were approved from that perspective of applications. Of the remaining 10%, a number of them decided that they didn't actually need it when they were just testing to see if they could get it, and then 2% felt it was too expensive.

Specifically, in the fashion sector, I don't have statistics on that, but if we think about—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that. That's the end of the time for that.

We'll go to the opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to all presenters.

Camille, it's always good to see you, and thanks for bringing in the other CAMH folks. I want to say a special thank you to Lauren for the work that you do. I think the emotional labour of being a front-line worker in mental health these days has never been more challenging, and I just want to say thank you for the work that you do.

The fact that two thirds of employees who are leaving CAMH cannot pay their bills is really disturbing. This is actually a theme around labour shortages in the caring sector—being health care and mental health. The government has been bringing in and recruiting, but we're trying to get the message across that we also have to retain those workers, because they have expertise, they have caring, they have experience in the sector.

I just wanted to give all of your folks an opportunity to talk about the importance of investing in the health human resources sector so that we can actually meet the needs of the communities in Ontario.

Ms. Camille Quenneville: Just for the interests of Hansard, I'm going to correct: We're not CAMH. It's the Canadian Mental Health Association.

To answer your question, I would say, we did a lot of public opinion polling through the pandemic just to get a sense of how Ontarians were doing in terms of their mental health, and we saw that decline.

And I will say this personally: I witnessed what my colleagues went through during that time. I am often humbled when I travel the province and I see these amazing people who work in shelters at night to make sure the homeless are cared for. But during the pandemic, I saw colleagues who, without PPE, made sure their doors stayed open, because they knew they were the only food source for their clients, and others who helped out in other sectors, including long-term care, because there were staff shortages there.

We know also, at the end of the pandemic, that, after nurses, mental health and addictions workers were the second most burned out. We heard a lot about nurses. We didn't hear a lot about our sector. But the truth of the matter is, it has been very hard to retain staff—not because they don't love the job. In fact, they do love the job. It's just exceptionally difficult for them.

I will now ask my colleagues—maybe Michael could start.

Mr. Michael Anhorn: Thanks, Camille.

Yes, we've witnessed this. Not only has the emotional labour gotten harder as people's stress has increased and often their symptoms increase, but we're also starting to see increased violence—not yet towards our staff, but in the vicinity of our staff, which increases their stress and their concern for their physical safety.

I think a number of things are coming to a head, and we're seeing that there is an echo pandemic of mental health. So although we may be mostly emerging from the pandemic in terms of physical health, people's mental health is not improving yet; in fact, we're seeing it get worse. People in the caring professions are known to be some of the last to feel the full impact of stressful events like pandemics, and so we're anticipating that we'll see our staff's mental health decrease even more before it starts to get better.

Ms. Catherine Fife: David?

Mr. David Smith: Yes, similar—when you think about during the pandemic, we had 60,000 calls a year to our crisis line; another 17,000 reached out to the organization for help. We get a call every seven minutes in the region of Peel—24/7, 365—in order to support someone's mental health. The drain on people of that burden, especially as people's stories are becoming heavier—during the pandemic, there are more people sharing—with about a 30% increase in the number of people calling. And then the impact on staff when we're not able to hire people to back them up, to give them adequate time off, where they've had to do overtime to cover the gaps, because of the low pay—those are the things that are bearing most heavily on our staff.

Ms. Catherine Fife: So you're worried about the mental health of your mental health professionals. Is that fair to say?

Mr. David Smith: Oh, 100%.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Last week, we did learn through the FAO that there's going to be \$5 billion lower than expected over a three-year period, with similar shortfalls—\$1.1 billion in education and \$800 million in justice, which obviously has an impact on mental health as well. These shortfalls mean that the province has not allocated sufficient funds for these sectors to support existing programs and that, over the next three years, the government was going to be putting \$19.7 billion in excess funds into other programs which the FAO noted would be mainly kept as an unallocated contingency fund—essentially, a slush fund. I'm sure you have some good ideas of where that money should go; they're in your brief. Hopefully, we can redirect

the attention of the government back to investments in the health care sector.

I'm going to move on to Jessica, around the tourism industry. Yesterday, we heard in Barrie that pink tourism is making a comeback for the LGBTQ community. You think gay pride and the economic return on that—also Caribana. So I wanted to give you an opportunity to talk about the need to invest strategically to diversify tourism, because people want to go where they feel safe and where they feel welcomed.

1540

Dr. Jessica Ng: Thank you for the question.

Absolutely, there is a need to diversify that income. As we've seen during the course of COVID, tourism businesses have lost significant revenue. They've taken on significant debt.

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

Dr. Jessica Ng: To improve the resiliency of businesses and organizations, there is a need to support businesses in diversifying, and so part of that is investing in a tourism growth strategy that does enable these businesses to leverage those opportunities—so things like outdoor, nature-based tourism; Indigenous tourism; sustainable tourism. There is significant consumer demand in that, and so that is something that would absolutely support sustainability and growth.

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

Anthony, thank you for raising the issue of the fact that elder financial abuse is on the rise. It is certainly something that Canadian bankers have raised with governments for a number of years. Hopefully, the government recognizes that when you put those strategic investments on the front line, you can actually avoid that abuse, and your story clearly articulated that. So thank you very much for sharing it.

I think I've run out of time.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll go to the independents. MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you all for being here. Michael, we met virtually—it's nice to see you, and Jessica, Camille, David and Anthony as well.

In Kenora, we heard about the links between tourism and mental health, so it's interesting that you're here today. The community there is concerned that the lack of mental health supports, which are exacerbating the homeless problem, drug addiction—that it's actually affecting their tourism. I don't want to exaggerate and say that's happening everywhere. But I guess it just brings home, for me, the integration of all these things, all of these different files that the government—any government—has to think about. So I wanted to just open it up—about how you see these things working together and, again, your advice to government on how to tackle these problems that are kind of codependent.

Ms. Camille Quenneville: I'll begin, if that's okay.

We've worked really closely with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, because most municipal councillors and mayors are extremely concerned about what you described, which is homelessness in their downtown

core, and oftentimes, those individuals have drug use—not always—so any time that that is the case, it's certainly tourism. It's also the local BIA that might say, "We want to make sure this is an issue we can deal with so that we're continuing to attract people to the downtown core." I worry a lot about the stigma associated with that, so I'm often reluctant. But the truth of the matter is that it is just a reality today in many downtown cores. You travel the province and you see it, for sure.

I will pause there and see if you'd like to carry on in terms of tourism.

Dr. Jessica Ng: This is an issue that we have heard, as well, from our stakeholders and that does affect downtown cores—not only in dense urban cities, but as you've mentioned, in Kenora and in other rural areas. So it does require a whole-of-government approach in collaborating between ministries to ensure that there are sufficient resources available to support mental health support, addictions support as well, because it is an issue that affects the entire community and the entire economy.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Anthony, I guess big picture—again, having been a banker, and Rick and I have talked about that, our experiences—where do you see this intersectionality in banking? For example, I think about the number of workers not working in downtown Toronto anymore, in the banking sector—or we think about the shifts in how we're all working.

What kind of factors would you ask the government to consider as they're preparing this budget, related to how our world is changing?

Mr. Anthony Ostler: It's interesting; your riding, of the group that's here, has the most amount of bank employees—5,900 almost, which is quite amazing. I imagine that many of them now are working from home. That has changed the dynamic, because if you think about Don Valley West, many of those people would have been coming into downtown. So that has changed how things operate. What that shows us, holistically, is the importance of the social determinants of health—

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

Mr. Anthony Ostler: So what we'd advocate is to think about the importance of proactive funding of social programs, because if we're not doing that effectively, the risk is that people end up in acute situations. We care about our communities. Our employees do a lot of volunteer work. We do a lot of donations programs—obviously, mental health, hospitals, education are areas that we do a lot of donations to. But it's important to think about that proactive element and the value of that investment in social services, because it stops things becoming more acute.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: We've heard from I think only one presenter who feels like ESG has—I'm not quoting her—gone too far; to me, it's back to that intersectionality.

What's your view on ESG and how the banks are thinking about it?

Mr. Anthony Ostler: It's a significantly important issue. We've committed to things like the 30% Club, with the point of view of having 30% of our directors and 30%

of senior executives—all of our large members have hit those targets and gone beyond that.

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

We'll go to MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: My next question is for the TIAO. I'm fascinated by your presentation as well as the document.

I want to pry a little bit on the matter of US visitation.

I don't know if this is good news: I renewed my Nexus card about two weeks ago, and it has already been received in the mail. So maybe this gives us hope that things are turning around.

Certainly, the loss of US visitors has affected my community dramatically, as well as—I've been in northern Ontario. In fact, I've gotten some good deals in northern Ontario because of the loss of the US visitors. They're doing everything they can to incentivize people coming to visit.

Unfortunately, with a lot of these things, I'm not quite sure how we can overcome them—the passport requirements. There are different opinions on vaccination status, for example, and the fact that our border was physically closed to land travel for a number of years. It truly was devastating for our economy. I know Windsor's mayor, especially, was pretty vocal about the importance of reopening it. It did happen eventually, but only after a lot of pain.

I'd like to inquire about what you believe Ontario ought to do to restore confidence in the American visitor—"You're welcome here."

There are a lot of good opportunities to be found in tourism in Ontario. I know Destination Ontario, for example, is airing advertisements. I hear it in my market and in the Detroit market all the time.

Meanwhile, Pure Michigan is also in our market and they're saying, "Here, Canadians, go on over. You can ski over here. You can't ski on the Canadian side."

I would love to get your further thoughts on that.

Dr. Jessica Ng: Thank you for the question.

The loss of US visitors, of course, has been substantial. It has been significant in northern Ontario, as you mentioned. Resource-based tourism economies there—hunting, fishing and lodging—rely on up to 60% to 100% of their clientele from US visitors. When the border closed, it meant no revenue for a lot of those businesses. So it does require government and industry to work together to create solutions for more seamless cross-border procedures for US visitors, to ensure that, in the case of future disruptions to the border, US visitors do have the ability to travel to Canada to support those tourism economies that do depend on that.

As well, I think there is the need for destination marketing supports. This is something we mentioned in the State of the Ontario Tourism Industry Report—the need to enhance the capacity for destinations across Ontario, but also at the borders, to bring these major events to cities and towns; during COVID, the capacity for these destinations to do so saw a significant drop in revenue. As a result, it's a lot more expensive to put those events on—business

events, cultural events and sporting events—so we do think there is a need to have an enhancement fund to bring those events back and to amp up that destination marketing.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you.

Chair, I'll pass the remainder of my time to MPP Barnes.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have four minutes left. MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I'm just going to refer to you, Anthony.

We talk about financial literacy and we talk about not just saying it in regard to youth, with putting that in education—but also along with seniors. So my question to you would be: How would we implement an effective strategy that rolls out across Ontario at a faster rate than what we're doing now? Now we are seeing that there are some gaps in that piece, where it's just sort of happening in places. So what are your thoughts around a more fulsome strategy?

1550

Mr. Anthony Ostler: It's a great question.

Although it's a federal agency, we work closely with the FCAC. The commissioner, Judith Robertson, has been leading the charge on coordination of financial literacy. The Canadian Bankers Association and our members work closely with her on financial literacy. One of the things that she's championing, going forward, is actually measurement, to get a better understanding of who we're educating, if they are learning lessons, if we are changing their behaviour, so that we can see if—what programs we've been doing, how effective they've been. We've been piloting work on measurement so we can see how our program is working, how we can improve them—but also thinking more holistically about working with our members to expand the coverage. It's either retirees or volunteers in the branches who are delivering these services. So can we get more of them to do that? The reality is that we may need more than just us doing the education. There may be other pillars of the community that could be valuable in that: media, maybe other forms of delivery, financial services—not just the banks, so some of our partners in other parts of the broader industry.

I think that the challenge we have is—there's a number of different criss-crossed things, but a lot of these people who are victims are getting phone calls that are masked or other things. They may be having other issues like early onset of dementia or other things. Maybe they're in their home on their own, but their children aren't regularly checking in with them. So there are gaps in checking in or whatever, and they think it's maybe a family member—because of technology, people can spoof phone numbers and that kind of stuff. They can be victims, and they can also end up on lists; if they've been a victim once, they can be re-impacted.

There are a lot of broader and other different issues, but we definitely want to work with the FCAC and others—especially the province of Ontario—to think about how we can improve on what we do, because it obviously significantly concerns us to see our clients being impacted by this.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: When we're talking about technology, because you talked about that—

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

Ms. Patrice Barnes: We have talked about online learning and that sort of stuff. I wonder if there would be an appetite in the industry where, if you have an account of any sort, you have to do a module on credit or how credit works or something incorporating technology in the mandatory piece of—when we're talking about mass education.

Mr. Anthony Ostler: That's an interesting question. I can take that back to my members; I obviously couldn't answer for them. I've never been asked that question before. It's an interesting idea: You're getting an account, but to qualify for it, you have to actually understand the responsibilities of having an account. It's a great idea. We'll have to look at it.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have 22 seconds.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay, if there are no further questions, we'll go to the opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to all our presenters who have arrived at committee today, both in person and virtually.

My first questions are for Jessica.

Jessica, before I begin, I just wanted to pass along regrets from members of the official opposition. We introduced a motion in Peterborough to extend committee hearings by another day. Unfortunately, I know that the Ontario Chamber of Commerce was not selected to appear. Please pass on our regrets to them. But we're very happy that you are here.

We heard from folks down Windsor way about the need for increased tourism dollars. They brought up the example of Kentucky whisky tourism. Is that something you would like to see in your tourism growth strategy?

Dr. Jessica Ng: The potential for agri-tourism, the expansion of agri-tourism—so things like whisky tours, wine tours—offers significant opportunities for the future of tourism. It's an area that we also elaborate on within the report itself. We would like to continue working with the government to ensure that businesses can leverage those opportunities to fully expand into agri-tourism, because that is something that would help to diversify those revenue streams but also ensure that Ontario's tourism offer is competitive, can compete with other Canadian global destinations.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: There have been some great examples in my area, with Tourism London and their offering of a Stay a Little Longer tax credit throughout the pandemic, and great examples of how they're working with the London Arts Council to promote the vibrant arts culture.

I want to get your thoughts about the need for infrastructure, whether it's through tourism or agri-tourism, but also the important business that could be realized getting

people from urban centres out to rural areas, whether for jobs or for tourism.

Dr. Jessica Ng: This is an area that we also mention in the report—the need for expanded transportation infrastructure. At the moment, there are gaps in that infrastructure between regions, and it makes multi-destination travel that much more expensive for visitors. It also makes it that much more difficult for workers to access job opportunities. So that is something that would definitely help with the recovery, growth and sustainability of tourism and unleashing its full potential.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It impacts everything, and it not only creates vibrant local communities; it creates that neighbourhood pride and is really something that builds up so many small businesses.

My next question is for Anthony. Thank you for your presentation.

When you mentioned that story about a grandparent withdrawing thousands of dollars—it should give us all chills, because this sort of terrible treatment of seniors is on the rise. Thankfully, someone was able to step in. There have been ideas brought forward about increased consumer protections. The concept of a consumer protection watchdog—it was great that there was an individual at the bank who was able to step in prior. But there has been a rise of HVAC scams, for instance. Door-to-door sales are banned, but there are ways around that—by sending an email, making a phone call, setting up an in-person appointment—and seniors are still being scammed yet again.

Would you like to see increased powers for empowering government agencies to investigate, to enforce and to educate?

Mr. Anthony Ostler: It's a great question.

I think what's really important, for sure, is that we need to help protect consumers more—but one of the challenges is if that protection is to say, “Well, the bank should provide money back,” it's not necessarily that that's the end of the result. What we need to be doing is making sure that bank employees are trained, that other employees in other elements—that phone companies make sure that spoofing isn't occurring. There's a bunch of other things that are going on there. It's a broader value chain of issues.

The key thing that we're doing is making sure we train our employees, and we're also encouraging our employees to do volunteer work in the communities, to educate seniors and youth. But the reality is that there are victims and issues, but protection isn't getting them their money back after they've gotten got. The protection comes from making sure that they're not being subsumed to it. So how do we better educate them, put better controls in place and stop them from being victims through either the Internet or through their phone?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I think it's high time that the government does take its ability to enhance protections for seniors seriously.

I'm really glad that you gave that example, where your folks were able to step in.

My next questions are for Camille.

We've heard time and again the issues with Bill 124, with what has happened in different organizations that amalgamated. It created that tension amongst staff who were treated in a very different way, and a completely unfair way, really, when you look at it.

You talked about the need to recruit, retain and return mental health care practitioners, because it's such a vital role. Mental health is health. Without our mental health, not much else matters.

I want to get your thoughts about supportive housing, in particular, and how CMHA can provide value to this government through funding. What can you provide with supportive housing in that model?

Ms. Camille Quenneville: That's such a huge, important issue, and we know that recovery is not possible without housing.

This is a perfect question for my colleagues on the ground to jump in, so I might start with Michael for this.

Mr. Michael Anhorn: Thanks, Camille.

We provide supportive housing in a few ways. One is that we do own and operate some, and we get subsidies for that. We also rent a lot of units in the private market. We don't have capital and the government doesn't have capital tied up in it, but we're leveraging existing units to make sure that the people who most need housing are able to access it. There are some challenges with that. The rent subsidy rates have been frozen since they were given to us, some of which were over 15 years ago and are set at \$500 a month. That doesn't work in today's market.

1600

The newer rent supplements are more—we can leverage them better for housing. And we pair that housing with support services, sometimes through our own staff, and often through partnerships with other support organizations in the community.

Over to David.

Ms. Camille Quenneville: I think David is frozen. You've covered it well, Michael.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Yes. Thank you very much.

These are the wraparound services that we often hear about, that are so vital and so necessary, and they help people get their life back together.

Thank you for everything you do.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes the time for this question and the time for this panel.

Again, we thank all three of the panellists and those on the screen here, seen virtually. Thank you very much for the time and effort you have put in to come and explain it to us. I very much appreciated that.

ONTARIO COALITION FOR BETTER
CHILD CARE

ABILITY MEMBERS GROUP

ONTARIO'S BIG CITY MAYORS

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Our next panel is the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, Ability Members Group, and Ontario's Big City Mayors.

You will have seven minutes to make your presentation. At six minutes, I will say, "One minute"—don't stop talking, because one minute later I'm going to stop you from talking.

We also ask everyone who's making a presentation to give their name at the start so Hansard can record that.

With that, the first presenter will be the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: Thank you so much for your time this afternoon. My name is Carolyn Ferns. I'm the policy coordinator for the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. Our coalition is Ontario's central advocacy group for a universal, affordable, high-quality system of early learning and child care. We've been around since 1981, and our coalition brings together non-profit child care programs from across Ontario, as well as individuals and organizations who care about the issue of child care. Our members are early childhood educators, they're parents, they're grandparents. Most importantly, we're people who care about child care.

I want to talk a little bit about the Canada-wide early learning and child care system and the difference that it's making. In just one year, Ontario's commitment to \$10-a-day child care, under the Canada-wide early learning and child care plan, is already making life more affordable for so many Ontario families. It's not an understatement to call it a game-changer for families. At a time when every other household expense is going up, in 2023 child care fees have been cut in half for hundreds of thousands of families using licensed child care. But the truth is that we're only scratching the surface of what this program can do. We need to reach more families and ensure quality programs for young children. To do that, we have to respond to an urgent challenge, and that's the child care workforce crisis. We have a workforce retention and recruitment crisis in child care that predated the pandemic and has only gotten worse.

Right now, few child care programs around Ontario can actually operate at their full capacity because of the crisis in retention and recruitment of staff. Around Ontario, many programs are closing rooms or having to limit their enrolment because of the staffing shortage. That means that if you went to any child care program here in Toronto or you went to Sault Ste. Marie or down to Windsor, most child care programs might have a room closed—a room full of toys, nicely built, a space ready to go, gathering dust and with the lights off, because they cannot staff right now.

As Ontario tries to meet its goal to build 86,000 new child care spaces, the Ministry of Education estimates, "Without interventions related to recruitment and retention, there could be an estimated shortage of 8,500 RECEs by 2026"—and that's just to meet the planned spaces under the Canada-wide early learning and child care plan.

That's why we're making a workforce strategy and salary scale our number one budget priority this year. We recommend that Ontario invest an initial \$300 million to develop and implement a province-wide salary scale in early learning and child care, starting at \$25 per hour for

all staff and \$30 per hour for registered early childhood educators. A salary scale and decent work standards will reverse the child care workforce shortage and ensure enough qualified workers to better meet the anticipated demand for \$10-a-day child care. Our coalition thinks that is the issue that needs to be tackled with the most urgency when it comes to child care.

But I also want to talk a bit about the future of the \$10-a-day child care plan, because this is going to be a popular program for families. It's going to be a legacy program for this government akin to the pride that we have in the creation of our health and education systems. But Ontario's Financial Accountability Office has estimated that, as child care fees are lowered under CWELCC, demand from families is going to significantly exceed planned supply.

Over time, as fees are lowered to an average of \$10 per day, Ontario is going to need approximately 200,000 additional child care spaces over what we currently have planned. To meet this estimated demand from families for affordable child care is going to require a long-term and ambitious plan for expansion of spaces, and that's going to include capital funding, public planning and a long-term workforce-training strategy. While the federal child care funding is significant, it cannot relieve Ontario of its provincial responsibility for child care. Families don't care where the money comes from. They don't care whose plan it is. They need every level of government working together to realize the promise of \$10-a-day child care.

So our second budget priority is that Ontario should begin immediately to increase its provincial general allocation to child care by \$240 million, to at least keep pace with inflation. Since 2018, the provincial child care allocation to municipalities has been flatlined at near \$1.67 billion. But while CWELCC funding from the federal government has increased the overall child care budget, federal funds are tied to really specific objectives: to lower fees and expand those spaces. The province needs to increase its general allocation to child care just as a starting point.

Then, Ontario really should convene a really transparent, publicly accountable advisory commission that can engage public bodies, municipalities, school boards, non-profit operators and the community to help develop a public expansion and funding plan to meet the diverse needs of Ontario families. This is going to need a long-term and ambitious plan to make this happen. We're talking about needing 200,000 new spaces and the staff to work in them and lead those programs, to really make sure that this is a program that's equitable, available and affordable to all families across Ontario.

That brings me to our final budget priority, which is that Ontario should adopt and implement the child care community's Roadmap to Universal Child Care in Ontario, which sets out our vision—

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

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: —and shared path forward for Ontario child care. A copy of the road map is available on

our website, and there's a link to it in the written brief that I submitted to the committee and to the Ministry of Finance.

Thank you very much for your time this afternoon, and I'm happy to take any questions at the end of the panel.

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

We'll now go to the Ability Members Group.

Mr. Jamie Church: My name is Jamie Church. Thank you to the standing committee for inviting me to this session today. The purpose of the document that's in front of you is to highlight the importance of the Ontario government's expired Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit. The focus of this presentation will impact investing in Ontarians' health, financial resilience and financial well-being.

Background on the Ontario Home Medical Equipment Providers Association and Ability Members Group: The sector is accredited by the Ministry of Health Assistive Devices Program to dispense wheelchairs, power chairs, walkers and scooters to eligible patients. The sector accounts for over 9,500 direct jobs in Ontario manufacturing—made in Ontario—in small business and the health care sector. There are over 260 accredited home medical equipment providers located in the province of Ontario.

The province of Ontario is a market leader in the manufacturing of durable medical devices and accessibility products—products such as home care beds, stairlifts, custom wheelchairs, ramps, and patient handling. The sector works closely with allied health care professionals—physical therapists, occupational therapists and respiratory therapists—to assess, dispense and educate families and patients on durable medical equipment, to support aging in place, provide guidance to caregivers, and support the needs of those living in assisted-living facilities.

Our sector acts as a navigator within the health care ecosystem, helping caregivers, families and patients to determine the correct device to maintain safety, independence and self-reliance. Our goal is to reduce hospital readmissions; reduce the direct cause of hospital readmissions by reducing falls in the home; improve system efficiencies by training health care professionals, patients and caregivers on product use; and redirect patients to alternative-living care arrangements, improve accessibility within the homes, and deliver affordable aging-in-the-right-place strategy.

1610

Today's focus will be discussing the home safety tax credit and recommending reducing the eligible age to 55 and creating an opportunity for families to modify their homes and have parents and caregivers living together.

Although the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit was a refundable credit worth 25%, up to \$10,000 per household in eligible expenses, to a maximum credit of \$2,500, it was shared by people who lived together, including spouses and common-law partners. The extension assisted seniors or those living with senior relatives to renovate their homes to make them safer and more accessible. According to the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, the data suggested that 27,000 unique households applied for this credit while it was in use.

The rationale: This is a strategic fit with focus number 2 of the Plan to Stay Open—“Supporting Transitions to Long-Term Care and Preventing Hospitalization”—expanding access to specialized supports that will help people living in their own homes before their admission to long-term care, including upgrading equipment to match patient needs in the home. There’s a high need to address fall-related injuries for patients and caregivers, to ensure that Ontarians may live barrier-free in their home and reduce falls in their home. Improving the affordability of home accessibility modifications for Ontario, reducing the payment of stairlifts, ramps, wheelchair lifts and bathroom safety such as bath lifts—products that are not covered under the Assistive Devices Program—this program will support, and has supported, the financial security of seniors, making it affordable to modify their home. It aligns with aging-in-place priorities and provides choice to stay in their community. It promotes healthy and active aging, and it removes barriers within the home, supporting Ontarians who are balancing the stress and cost of caregiving and employment. There are over four million caregivers in the province of Ontario right now looking after a loved one.

A step towards a solution to our housing crisis and affordability of homes, noticing an increase of multi-generational households—a recent study in 2021 noted that 79% of seniors wanted to stay at home; however, 26% stated that they cannot afford to stay in their home.

Our recommendation in this approach is to rename the tax credit the home safety tax credit. It’s a forward-thinking approach rather than focusing on the stigmatizing-a-senior approach. Reduce the eligible age to 55 to include caregivers and include seniors, to begin planning ahead, which is a focus of our sector in terms of swimming upstream and making sure that their homes are ready as they continue to age in place. A permanent tax credit of 25% for home-modifications equipment that would expand to patient healing and fit within the strategy of hospital-to-home—stairlifts, wheelchairs, as I mentioned, bath lifts and bathroom safety would be programs.

There’s constant education that is taking place at this very moment to educate seniors, therapists, community members and municipal leaders in terms of making sure that their homes are accessible in their community and their constituents are aware of the opportunity and the devices that exist outside the scope of the Assistive Devices Program. Thank you.

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

The next presentation will be from Ontario’s Big City Mayors. I believe the head of Ontario’s Big City Mayors has just arrived.

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: My apologies, everyone. Hello. It’s nice to see you all. Of course, I’ve just come in from Hazel McCallion’s funeral, so it took a little while to get here.

Thank you for allowing me to be here and for this opportunity to address the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs today. I’m here today as chair of

Ontario’s Big City Mayors, or OBCM for short, and on behalf of the mayors of Ontario’s 29 largest single- and lower-tier municipalities who collectively represent nearly 70% of the province’s population. So we’re 29 municipalities and 70% of the population—that’s the important take-away.

Joining me virtually today is Lanie Hurdle, the CAO from the city of Kingston on our OBCM CAO working group and the lead for our Health and Homelessness Strategy, to take questions on this topic for you.

Our role is to advocate on issues and policies that are important to Ontario’s largest cities, and I’m happy to share with you today the key priorities for OBCM for the 2023 provincial budget. We look forward to working with the province to advance our shared priorities.

OBCM is supportive of the government’s goal to build 1.5 million new homes over the next 10 years, and we understand the critical role cities play in the building of new homes. Although cities do not build homes, we play an important role in facilitating building through the approvals process and in building services and infrastructure for new developments. So we really shouldn’t be held accountable for things that are not in our control. We provide the permits, but we don’t build the housing; let’s be very clear.

OBCM would like to thank the province for the Streamline Development Approval Fund, SDAF, announced last year, which has allowed us to modernize and accelerate the approvals process for housing applications. For many municipalities, the system changes being asked of municipalities to meet the government’s new requirements, along with the MMAH’s proposed reporting regulation that is currently being consulted on, are onerous to both staff capacity and city budgets. SDAF helped address both of these concerns. That’s why OBCM is requesting a second round of SDAF funding or that a similar program be put in place in this budget to assist us to continue to streamline the housing approval process even further.

With the housing targets outlined in Bill 23 affecting 26 of our 29 municipal members—those are the ones who have been given the housing targets—we are also asking to see a commitment to a partnership between the province, municipalities and other key stakeholders to address the rollout of the housing supply action plan, and that is largely because municipalities were not consulted on the road map and on the task force. OBCM believes the best way to ensure that this takes place is to fund and activate the Housing Supply Action Plan Implementation Team announced by the province in August, which will bring together a table of municipal leaders, industry experts and technical expertise to ensure that we work towards our shared goals of building more homes for Ontarians. Municipalities play a critical role in the building of new housing, facilitating approvals and building the necessary key infrastructure needed for new homes, with the responsibility of other critical parts of the process falling to the province and the development and home-building sectors. We would also like to see this include the creation of an accountability framework under the Housing Supply

Action Plan Implementation Team that would regularly review the role of each partner and address with that partner any delays that occur. As I mentioned, the building of housing is not in our control, but those stakeholder groups should be held accountable.

OBCM welcomed the government's announcement to keep municipalities whole after the impacts of the development charges and parkland fees—which are very significant, in Mississauga's case—from Bill 23 are seen. However, this is not a long-term solution, and we are asking for a discussion with all levels of government on the creation of a new, long-term, permanent municipal infrastructure funding program, and that this request is acknowledged in the budget. It is of critical importance that the province keeps its promise to keep municipalities whole, dollar for dollar, from the unintended consequences of revenue reductions from Bill 23.

OBCM also requests that this budget continues to support the most vulnerable in our communities by funding affordable and supportive housing needs and programs to help those most at risk of homelessness.

Municipal infrastructure: OBCM appreciates the province's assistance with pandemic recovery, including the safe restart program and the top-up for municipal transit systems, helping to ensure local transit is safe, accessible and affordable. Municipalities are at the forefront of supporting our local communities post-pandemic, and it is critical that we continue—

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

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: —to receive provincial funding in 2023-24 to continue to cover the significant additional costs of recovery and the continued loss of revenue. Our mayors understand that this is not solely a provincial responsibility, and we're also asking the federal government to continue their support for cities that are still working towards returning to normal numbers for our fee-based revenue sources in community centres, libraries and community programming.

1620

Again, we're asking that the province and the federal government both work with municipalities to reopen the discussion of a long-term, permanent municipal funding strategy to maintain services and fund critical infrastructure projects. Long-term funding like this is needed to eliminate the need for property tax increases to fund needed infrastructure for new development and reduce growing municipal infrastructure debts.

The next section is on the mental health and addictions crisis, and it seems like I won't have the opportunity—

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

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: —but I will certainly pass it along—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The time is up. Maybe the rest of your presentation can be added to the questions that are going to be asked.

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: Absolutely, and I do have a colleague on the line, as well.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We will start with the government side. MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Carolyn, my first question is for you.

We have just completed consultations with 61 stakeholders around our child care strategy. We have implemented and talked about a few strategies so far, so I'm just going to lay them out and then you can tell me what some of the other things are that you think we can do.

Right now, we have implemented the fast track for the ECE training because the workforce was definitely an overall—for everybody in every sector. We have also done the Learn and Stay grant, so we have expanded that a bit, as well.

What are some of the other pieces that you think would be vital to increase the workforce strategy?

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: I and our coalition were really pleased to take part in those engagement sessions. Certainly, we've heard the workforce—from everybody across our coalition—as being so important.

I think that both of those strategies are good. What I would say is that it's tempting to focus on the recruitment of more early childhood educators into the sector, but the truth is that right now, college and university programs graduate lots of registered early childhood educators, but they either don't go to work in licensed child care or they only stay working in licensed child care for an average of three years before they burn out, or they simply cannot make a living or cannot make a career in licensed child care.

Interventions need to focus on wages and working conditions in licensed child care. That's why we're suggesting that there be a workforce strategy, including a salary scale that starts at \$25 per hour for everyone working in licensed child care and \$30 an hour for registered early childhood educators—who are those with degrees and diplomas, who lead that pedagogical work in child care.

We're building a new system of child care, and we need to be able to recruit people into it. We need to show them that there are good jobs in licensed child care to get them to come and to get them to stay.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you for that.

My other question is to Jamie, on the organization around the home safety tax credit. My question for you is: For your organization, how do you see that impacting the supply chain or some of the pieces that we are experiencing now, post-COVID, for seniors in homes?

Mr. Jamie Church: Certainly, it would impact, as we're seeing with the network of providers in the province of Ontario—seeing inflationary prices on material costs increase. We're seeing those costs, unfortunately, having to be passed down to the end user, whether it's seniors or caregivers.

Just recently, I had an exposure prior to December 31, where a family was struggling to install a stairlift and find the affordability to install a stairlift, to keep the family and mom in their home longer. The tax credit actually played a significant role in terms of reducing the actual cost of a stairlift—which, in a curved standpoint, which is custom, could range up to \$22,000 in terms of a modification, simply for a curved stairlift.

The impact of the supply chain in 2021 and early 2022 had a significant impact in terms of access to the equipment that is domestically made—North American and Canadian. As we moved closer into the third and fourth quarter of this past year, the supply chain stabilized, but material costs continue to increase, thus impacting the consumer and caregiver, as well the senior.

The tax credit had a significant impact on the reduction of that cost, and it's all-encompassing, not exclusive to one device, if you will, which is a stairlift. It included bathroom safety—where we see falls in the home continue to increase, and where risks of falls can be a significant impact. Supply chain was impacted, as well as access to equipment early on. Affordability now is the impact that the tax credit has made on Ontarians.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you so much.

I'll share my time with MPP Hogarth.

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Jamie, my question is for you.

As somebody who is going through purchasing many of these items over the last couple of months, I'm just wondering, on the supply chain issue—obviously, it has been an issue for many, many companies on many issues.

I actually was not aware of your organization, so I wonder if you could share a little bit about your organization and what makes up your membership and if there's any red tape that affects this type of business.

Mr. Jamie Church: There are two organizations today that I would represent.

Ability Members Group is an independent network of providers, so consider it the Home Hardware of home medical equipment providers. It's Canadian, locally owned and operated, and serving Ontarians, whether it's through the old LHIN/home care equipment and supplies as well as serving the Assistive Devices Program.

There was red tape that was in place prior to the government coming into effect. Red tape was reduced, in terms of the ability to access equipment as well as funding for the devices and making sure that seniors and those who require equipment were able to access equipment much faster. Red tape was reduced when the Minister of Red Tape Reduction was in place. Prab Sarkaria reduced the red tape that existed. Now Parm Gill is working closely with our sector to ensure that we're reducing the red tape in our space.

Supply chain continues to be a challenge.

I said I represent two organizations. I'm also on the government affairs association of home medical equipment providers. It's called the Ontario Home Medical Equipment Providers Association, and we do extensive work in terms of educating and creating awareness of our sector. The majority of the providers are independent, family-run organizations that do great work and rewarding work in the communities that we all live in and serve and enjoy—the province of Ontario.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I just have to say, whoever helped out my family—

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth:—they turned it around pretty quickly. I didn't realize how much the government of Ontario actually does cover these costs. So it's good for anybody of any income level. Thank you.

My second question is for Ontario's Big City Mayors.

Your Worship, my condolences to you. On our break, I was able to listen to a little bit of your speech, and it was heartwarming but also with some humour. I'm sure Hazel is looking down with a smile on her birthday.

You mentioned that municipalities play a critical role in building houses. I'm wondering how the big city mayors are prepared to help the province in our goal of building 1.5 million homes.

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: That's a great question.

Of course, we are on track, because we want to assist the government in building more housing. We recognize that there are many newcomers coming to our country who have to be housed. Unfortunately, with the rules that are set up as they are, it leads to our inability—not to build houses, but infrastructure. Maybe I misspoke if I said we aren't able to build housing. We aren't able to build infrastructure, because of course—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I hate to do this again, but that's the end of the time for that question.

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you, everyone, for being here.

I'm going to start with Carolyn.

Carolyn, the issue of worker retention has been a common theme across all of our delegations, primarily around wages. You make a very good point around implementing a wage grid that would have standardized pay and working conditions, as well.

We know the return on investment for early learning and care, and we know that it is, in many ways, the great equalizer, particularly for women who are looking either to go back to school or re-enter the workforce. I want to give you an opportunity to talk about how important it is that the government understands that.

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: Retaining skilled workers in early childhood education and care is so important. It's important firstly, as I said in my presentation, so that those programs can run, because right now we have rooms that are shuttered.

Over the fall, I think there was a program down in Essex; there was one in Manitoulin Island—the entire program, the whole centre, was closed because they couldn't staff. That's an issue.

1630

The other thing I want to touch on is how important it is that we have qualified early childhood educators working in licensed child care programs, because that's what shapes the experience of the child. When we talk about “retention,” it's a very dry term, but for a young child—when my son was an infant, I used to drop him off. I didn't say that we were going to school or we were going to daycare. I said, “We're going to see Julia,” because Julia was the early childhood educator he had bonded with and looked forward to seeing every day. But if Julia is not there

because she couldn't make a living in licensed child care and she has gone to work at the Costco, what does that mean to the young child on a Monday when he shows up and his favourite ECE is no longer there? It means they don't make that connection over the years that they're in child care with a loving caregiver every day. So it couldn't be more important.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's a really key point. That's one of the reasons I removed my children from for-profit care—because the turnover was so high, and you want your child to have a connection with that caregiver. So your presentation resonates with us, and there's obviously a strong economic argument for this. Hopefully, the government refocuses on this, because it took a long time for Ontario to get this deal, which is unfortunate.

Jamie, I think you make some really good points around keeping seniors at home. They don't want to go to long-term care. They want to stay in their community. There's also a strong local economic argument for the refurbishing and renovating and upgrading of homes. That's money that stays in the local community and employs skilled trades, as well.

One of your recommendations is to reduce the eligible age to 55 to include caregivers and encourage seniors to begin planning ahead. How did you come up with age 55—because for me, that's in one year, and it's coming up fast.

Mr. Jamie Church: Thank you for the question.

I'll take a step back in terms of our sector. Our sector does operate in a lot of blind spots, in terms of the work that we do with health care professionals as well as caregivers. There are often caregivers who can't afford nursing care as well as private health care coming into the home. Our sector actually plays a significant role in terms of educating caregivers on the safe use of product and equipment. In that case, it's a passion of many of the providers that there's a unique individual who will go into the home and provide that compassion and care to a caregiver.

The average age of a caregiver, frankly, is in that, so to speak, wheelhouse, if you will—in that age cohort. I believe there need to be plans in place to prepare seniors from a frame of mind to ensure that their homes are accessible. Not necessarily—installing a stairlift is not the rationale, but there are subtle devices that can prevent falls. All of us, frankly, are at risk of a fall, and if a trained organization such as within our network, if you will, and individuals who have expertise on assistive devices can walk through a patient's home or caregiver's home and identify the risk—I'll give you another example. The 911 points of care that the Minister of Health has introduced—we encouraged our network to work with paramedics to ensure that we are coaching them on what to look for, to avoid any unnecessary 911 calls.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, and that makes a lot of sense since their scope of practice has also been changed so drastically. We also need them not to be waiting in hospital bays, lined up.

Mr. Jamie Church: Absolutely.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I like the way that you've tied that all together, and the fall prevention piece that you referenced in your delegation—that's the smart money; it really is. And there's a way to make that very community-based and to address social isolation.

Mayor Crombie—as well, condolences. I know that today is a tough day for you and for all of Mississauga, so I appreciate you being here.

AMO gave a really good presentation yesterday. I'm really happy to see Lanie here. The mayor of Kingston presented to us on the impact of homelessness and housing, and that this is one of the number one issues that cities are facing. The city of Waterloo just delayed 800 homes because of Bill 23, and I don't think that they're going to be the only one.

Those development charges, as you point out, are a key factor in the infrastructure piece. You can't build a subdivision without the sewage, the roads. Honestly, it feels like the government is working at cross purposes.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: You have the last word on this.

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: Thank you for that. That does allow me to spend a bit of time on the mental health and addiction crisis that I wasn't able to communicate.

We've asked for—may I turn to the government members—an urgent meeting with the Minister of Health, Sylvia Jones, to sit down with us and talk about—this is about mental health; it's about safety; it's about addictions; it's all tied into the homelessness crisis, and it continues to grow at a really rapid rate in our communities. Let's be honest: The cities weren't funded—our budgets don't allow us to deal with these kinds of issues. We don't even have the expertise to do it or the capacity or the resources to address it, and we're diverting funds from other priorities to address these issues that are out of our realm of scope, that aren't our responsibilities, frankly.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. Kingston spent \$16 million.

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: Yes, millions of dollars.

I'll leave it there, because I'm sure you have another question that I'd love to get some—

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think I'm out of time. But yes, Kingston, \$16 million—that's a big price tag.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll go now to the independents. MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you all for being here.

Carolyn, you've hit the nail on the head. You say 200,000 spots—that's a lot of people, and we know we're already having trouble keeping them. I think, as you said, pay and good working conditions—so thank you for reinforcing that message.

Jamie, I mentioned in the earlier session about the integration of services. We talk about mental health being connected with tourism. A lot of these things are interconnected, and so, as Mayor Crombie said, things get tied in together. So I really think that the home care credit—get the right phrase—is part of the plan to keep people in their homes longer, which is what we want.

Mayor Crombie, thank you again for being here. I know you're busy and you had a big day, so thank you for taking the time.

We've heard from AMO. We've heard from ROMA. We've now heard from you, and I think you're now on the record saying you were not consulted as part of this. So you think about these development charges—again, it's part of the reason I ran, in terms of infrastructure in our city. In Don Valley West, huge towers are going up, and the city of Toronto talked for years about the need for infrastructure. Kids won't go to school in their neighbourhoods. Water pressure is a problem. These infrastructure challenges that are now going to be, it sounds like, compounded by this new Bill 23 and the lack of funding—where do you think that money will come from? You're talking about the provinces and the feds working together. There is one taxpayer.

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: Obviously, these are things that go hand in hand. We can't build more housing, whether the development community is incentivized to do so or not—we're not even guaranteed that these savings will get passed on to the home purchaser. But we can't build these homes that the government would allow us to if we don't have the infrastructure that accompanies it.

For instance, public transit has to be built at the same time we're building new housing, whether it's a new subdivision or it's the infill that you will see in Mississauga. What I don't want to see is mega towers lining MTSAs, which are transit routes, that are single-bedroom. These have to accommodate families.

We have to provide incentives so that this new housing that is coming down the pipeline will incentivize housing, but we can't do it on the backs of municipalities. If we're going to provide incentives to the development community, it's the government that needs to fund these incentives, not defund cities. This is the problem; it doesn't allow us to build the necessary infrastructure that accompanies the growth of housing. At the end of the day, we can't be held accountable for the numbers that are built or not built. They're out of our control. There are supply chain issues, labour shortages. There are interest rates that aren't set by us. I have 20,000 permits that I have issued that haven't been pulled that could speak to some of this housing delay as well. We want shovels in the ground.

Last year, we had 6,500 permits pulled; the year before that, 5,500. If you go way back before I was mayor, we weren't embracing intensity and densification as we are today, so the numbers were lower, as the government has pointed out, when you average it out over time. But now we're focused on building, and we want to build. But it can't be done on the back of municipalities, because we're responsible for the infrastructure that has to accompany it.

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

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: And if you want to provide incentives, let's be sure that they get passed on to the homebuyer. There are no guarantees in place right now that those savings will get passed on. They could very well go into the pocket of the development community; they won't

get passed on to the homebuyer. We want those guarantees in place.

1640

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I think, again, with Bill 23, there are elements, like the co-op housing—they're in favour, they support it, because it does help those. So I think there are places where development charges being reduced makes sense. But I think when you talk about the million-dollar home or the one-bedroom condos where, basically, they're investors—we know that 20% of those condos are being bought by investors.

What do you think would be the right next step now, in terms of where we are now with Bill 23, for the province to help Mississauga?

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: I would like to see it stepped back so that municipalities can talk about the unintended consequences to us and how we want to incentivize the building of attainable—which I would prefer calling affordable—housing, but it not be done so on the back of municipalities.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll have to go to the government side now for the next question. MPP Hogarth.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I'm going to continue on with you, Mayor Crombie, Your Worship, and Ontario's Big City Mayors.

At current rates, development charges add an extra \$127,000—you mentioned there is no incentive for the buyer. We have found that it's about \$127,000 to the cost of building a home in Mississauga—that's in your community.

Through Bill 23, we are eliminating development charges for affordable, attainable and not-for-profit housing.

Do you agree with eliminating those development charges for affordable and non-profit housing?

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: I agree that affordable housing has to be built; what I don't agree with is that it has to be on the backs of defunding cities. I think there are other ways to incentivize this.

For instance, I know for a fact, in Ottawa, that there were two development communities with similar product being built. For one of them, the DCs were waived, and for the other one, they were not. At the end of the day, you would have expected that the price to the market on the units where the DCs were waived would have been that price—let's call it \$120,000 cheaper—than the community that was built without waiving the DCs. And guess what? The market controls the price, not the cost to build. So they went on the market at the same price. This is well documented.

Back to MPP Bowman's question: How are we going to make up the difference? Tax increases or perhaps—

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I just want to go on and ask a couple more questions. I only have a little bit of time, because I have to pass it off to my colleague here.

We have made a goal of building 1.5 million houses; we have to. We all know, all three levels of government—municipal, provincial and federal—that we all have a role to play in making sure these houses get built. As you said, cities don't build houses, the province doesn't build houses,

and the feds don't build houses. Developers build houses. We need to incentivize them to build these houses.

How can we incentivize our developers so they will build purpose-built rentals? That's what we need—we need more affordable; we need more attainable. How do you see us doing this so that they will choose to build that kind of housing? We need all types of housing—not just the mansions, not just the houses. That's why our government has put forward this proposal. It's tools in the tool box to encourage people to build. What would you suggest that we do?

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: I have lots of suggestions, but you don't have enough time for me.

We, too, want purpose-built rentals. I think that's critical. We have many newcomers here who have never dreamed of home ownership. They come from countries where they know nothing else but rental. We have many pension funds in Mississauga that are building, because that's what the patient money does. Pension funds build purpose-built rental, and that is fantastic.

But when you put on targets such as you have that we have no control over, as I have said a couple of times, what you get is not in keeping with the character of communities and neighbourhoods in the cities that we have built. I do not want to see a city full of mega towers with one-bedroom units to accommodate the numbers that are being demanded of us.

I will tell you, in Mississauga, we're ahead of the curve here. We are coming forward this month—in fact, next week—with our housing plan on how we are going to accomplish our goals. You will be astounded, because we're going to accelerate our 30-year plan into 10 years so we can get it done. But we prefer gentle intensification. I don't want to see a city lined with mega towers and one-bedroom units, so we're going to find a way to do it with medium density, low density, however we can—

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Your Worship, excuse me. I just want to add one more comment here.

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: I know I'm animated; I'm sorry.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I know this is an exciting conversation.

In 2021, the city of Mississauga had approximately \$271 million sitting in a development charge fund. Yet, over the last two years, you've increased development charges by 27%. This is not encouraging news—that you're sitting on money, but you don't want to help out these communities. Is that money not for servicing the land?

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: This is a great question. This is kind of a misunderstanding. This is municipal finance 101.

First of all, the province approves our development charges, and we don't have the ability to increase our development charges any more than we're going to spend and that we need. Let's make that very clear. We need this money to build communities. Where do you think that money is going?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: With all due respect, Your Worship—

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: It's into pipes, into the ground, into the building of—

Ms. Christine Hogarth:—that money is to build your infrastructure.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One at a time.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: That money is to build your infrastructure.

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: That's correct.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: That's what that money is for, so we're not leaving you. You have that money in the bank to build infrastructure, to build sewage, to build your lines. That money is in a bank account to build that infrastructure.

What all levels of government know, what everyone knows, is that we are in a housing crisis. We need to build housing today. We can't wait 10 more years. We should have done this 20 years ago.

Anyway, that's the end of my questions. I'll pass it off to David.

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: I don't get to respond? If there was a question, I need a response.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: There was no question there.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The committee asks the questions, and the panel tries to answer them. Thank you.

Mr. David Smith: How much time do I have, sir?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have 2.2 minutes.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I'm sorry. I was supposed to give you more.

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

Mr. David Smith: I'd like to pose my question to Jamie.

I really think that your organization and your programs are pretty good. It's good to keep families together. Building those models in homes ensures that it's working.

Has the medical equipment—due to the pandemic that we've had and all that, are you able to still meet the market demands in terms of costing that will keep families together?

Mr. Jamie Church: Cost pressures from the provider and our manufacturers are squeezing margins. We are having to be creative, if you will, in terms of dispensing those devices. We're seeing wage increases, material costs increase in terms of our servicing the equipment and delivering the equipment to patients. Patients aren't seeing the impact, frankly—we are a small network of equipment providers. So the patient isn't seeing it with respect to funded devices. They are seeing it with respect to retail, if you will, such as a stairlift, as I mentioned before, or other retail items that would be installed in patients' homes. So they are seeing the impact. The Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit would have a significant impact and has had a significant impact—

Mr. David Smith: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. David Smith: I'd like to pose my last question to Mayor Crombie. You talked about looking for a long-term strategy of affordable housing, transportation. I know that these things are very important when you're building new infrastructure. Could you talk more about what that strategy is that you're talking about?

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: Thank you for that question. That's a great question.

I just want to wrap up a few loose ends on how we would fund all this. Of course, we would have to increase property taxes, or we would reduce programs and services. The first thing that could be cut would be public transit, because that's an easy one to do. That's exactly what we shouldn't be doing. We should be increasing the level of public transit.

There's a misnomer about our reserves. The reserves are allocated over 10 years. They help us build our city. We know which years which roads will be paved, which years we can afford to build that new bridge. We accumulate money over time, like a homeowner would. If you need to build a new roof, you would put money aside until you have the money you need, rather than debt-finance at the current rate—

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

The official opposition: MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you very much to all of our presenters who came to committee today.

Carolyn, I think a salary grid is something that should be very much supportable.

What is the disparity in pay between a school board ECE and one who works for your organizations?

Ms. Carolyn Ferns: It's significant. Right now, even under the new Canada-wide early learning and child care plan, the government just set a wage floor of \$18 an hour. It's very low, and even that only goes to registered early childhood educators. It's minimum wage work for a lot of people, and that's why we can't keep people working in the field. It is something that has been put out there—that there should be parity with the public education system, with early childhood educators working there. I might say, I don't think they make enough. We need to be doing more. There's a huge conversation going on right now about the undervaluing of care work that has been happening for so long. It's time to change that.

1650

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: As a former educator myself, I've worked with some very talented ECEs who—education would be so greatly impacted without their assistance. It takes a really special, caring, patient and dedicated person.

Thank you very much for your comments.

Jamie, we've heard from a number of delegations about this movement to keep people at home and how important that is. People are happier, healthier—it's body, mind and soul.

I'd especially like to thank you for your focus on the care partners who are helping facilitate that care for their loved one.

We heard from the Alzheimer Society and how they're requiring funding for their First Link care navigator program.

I want to also thank you for changing the—your “home safety tax credit,” from the “Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit.”

I was just at an event over the weekend for the Alzheimer Society—it was a daughter and her mother who, unfortunately, was diagnosed with dementia. She said she doesn't like the word “dementia.” She wants it to be known as “cognitive challenges.” She felt that was a more interesting and better term, and I thought that was kind of fascinating.

Also, I think the government could increase their expenditures and have a model more like Denmark, where it's not institutionalization; it's actually keeping people within their homes.

Mayor Crombie, my condolences on this day. I know it's very difficult. Thank you so much for being here.

You made some interesting comments. Thank you for, again, reflecting calls to fund and activate the housing supply action plan. It's so incredibly important.

We've heard some vague commitments from this government about making municipalities whole as a result of the loss of development charges. Have you received that commitment physically in writing—something that you can hang on to and something that you can entrust and go to the bank with?

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: Not yet, but I'm very confident, very hopeful that we will. I understand there will be a process and auditors will come in and look at our reserves etc., and there has been a commitment.

In Mississauga's case, it's \$85 million a year, so it's almost a billion dollars over a decade. That's a pretty significant loss, and it's actually even a greater loss on the parkland fee-in-lieu—parkland fees that we won't be contributing because the development community now can contribute less parkland in the most densely populated areas of our city than they previously did, as well as the DCs.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: London is set to lose \$97 million per year, as well. It's significant.

We heard from the mayor in Kingston, who talked about the importance of the province doing the right thing and actually funding mental health supports and supportive housing and addictions services. I wondered if you wanted to expand on that, hopefully reminding the province of its responsibility to deliver that.

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: I'm going to ask Lanie to come in on this, but I just want to say one thing: Our housing targets are 12,000 a year; 120,000 over 10, and that's terrific. We can do that, but it's like building Cambridge. Along with building this great, new little town—120,000—we need fire stations, paramedic stations. We need to increase our transit network. We need to build more transit, put more pipes in the ground. They will require community centres. This is the kind of money that the DCs would have paid for—growth. They would have paid for this growth, and that's what we'll be lacking in this new town of Cambridge being built in Mississauga.

Lanie, can you come in, please, and discuss the mental health issue?

Ms. Lanie Hurdle: Thank you, Mayor Crombie.

What we're seeing on our streets and in our parks in our communities are individuals who are struggling with addictions and mental health. Our typical shelter system

cannot actually respond to the need. We're not properly equipped; we're not properly funded to do so. So the request that we're making to the province is to work collaboratively with the municipalities to provide funding, starting with street outreach programs, low-barrier shelter services—and when we say “low barrier,” we're really trying to target addictions and mental health needs here—more funding for rehabilitation beds, stabilization beds, as well as supportive housing. Those are all very critical services in order to get people stable and independently housed.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Most definitely.

I want to thank you, Mayor, for your words that the province should fund incentives—and don't defund cities.

Is there anything else you'd like to add for the benefit of the committee before the time is up?

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: I had this conversation with the Premier, and he asked me how I would have done it if I didn't feel that we should give the development community the incentives—which I didn't, because you can't defund municipalities. I said there are lots of options on how to provide incentives to the end purchaser. We need guarantees that whatever savings go back to the end purchaser—but at the same time, we can't defund cities, and maybe there needs to be a fund created, as well, to help those homebuyers purchase funds with that money. But the government needs to step up and fund the incentives.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Absolutely, because we know that there is literally no guarantee that the removal of those charges is going to be passed on at any time to the consumer.

Also, I want to thank you for your recommendation that they make sure that they're creating family units, not just single-bedroom units, because that is not what is needed in this province—

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: Well, we see our new immigrant population—newcomers to Canada come with the family. They don't come as individuals; they come with two, four children. So the single-family units that are being built in these mega towers that will line the transit corridors is not ideal. It doesn't build character into a city.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Absolutely. And they need child care.

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: Yes, they do. And I'll certainly support that.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll now go to the independents. MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Mayor Crombie, I love your passion. I want to thank you for being genuine and not just jumping on board and saying what some folks want you to say about Bill 23. I think this committee has only run into one mayor in our travels who actually thought that Bill 23 was a good idea, and he had no problems with it. I'd love to see the two of you go nose to nose on that.

Interjections.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Well, we can talk about it later.

Anyway, I believe—and we all say this when AMO and ROMA come around, that we believe our municipal partners

are good fiscal managers who do their utmost to respect taxpayers' dollars. Yet here we are with Bill 23. I've had councillors and a few small-town mayors say to me that they feel that Bill 23 is an example of, “You couldn't get the job done, so we're going to do the job for you.” That's how some of my smaller municipalities feel in my neck of the woods.

I'm from Haldimand–Norfolk. We hope that you guys build all these houses, because our farmers are very worried about agricultural land being taken up by developers. In my 23-year role working for a former MPP, we had never met with a developer until the past year and a half. So it's very concerning to my farmers. It's concerning to people in Haldimand–Norfolk.

We talked about infrastructure this afternoon. You touched on it a bit in the last question, I think. Not only is there sewer and all of that infrastructure, but my constituents say, “Who is going to build the school? We can't get new schools built in our riding. Who's going to build a fire hall? Who's going to build all of those things—hospitals?” You alluded to it earlier—that there are only two ways to deal with this: tax increases and reduction in services. Are your constituents aware of those two things, and are you hearing from them? What are they saying? We've talked about municipalities. We've talked about those decision-makers. What about the very people who are going to be left holding the bag?

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: Those are great questions.

This is an education process, and we did put a flyer out to our communities, to our residents, advising them that if there weren't changes made and communities weren't being made whole, they would face significant tax increases, 6% to 8% per year, just to accommodate the lack of DCs and the lack of parkland fees that we'd be facing as a result of Bill 23. So that's very significant. Of course, any investments I want to make into our city, into our infrastructure, or an investment into the city for any aspirational projects would be on top of that; and of course, we always have a 2% or a 3% debt repayment, interest payment surcharge on top to ensure that we're meeting our commitments in a responsible way, because we're very strong fiscal managers at the city of Mississauga.

You also touched on the rural areas. These should be protected at all costs—the wetlands, the farmland etc. Building out in those communities does encourage sprawl, when you build those infrastructure projects through those communities. It's better to intensify the municipalities that exist now, in responsible ways—

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

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: Okay—and in the ways I've described: not through mega towers, but through gentle intensification, through duplexes and townhouses and stacked towns and gateway houses and laneway housing, and whatever we can to intensify without changing the overall unique character of our communities and neighbourhoods. People don't want to see that shift—people don't want corridors lined with mega towers to accommodate. We have to be permitted to build character in our cities.

Defunding us, not allowing us to build—the necessary infrastructure that accompanies this new growth is vital.

1700

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes the time, not only for the questions, but for the panel.

I want to thank you. You have gone to great efforts to prepare to help us with our deliberations, and you're likely the most lively panel. It's the first time I've had to call the panel to order. So with that, thank you very much for your presentation—and it does take nothing away from the value of your presentation.

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: Can I ask a question? It's a process question. Obviously, I didn't complete my presentation, so there are a couple of pages—they'll be included in our pre-budget submission. Or should I leave them behind?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Yes, you can leave the pages here. We'll make sure they get entered.

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: You received our pre-budget submission, I'm sure, as well, so it's—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I apologize; I was going to mention that. If you want to leave written submissions, the deadline is tonight. So you can get it in right now.

Ms. Bonnie Crombie: Thank you so much.

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

HOSPICE PALLIATIVE CARE ONTARIO
ONTARIO NONPROFIT NETWORK
ONTARIO CRAFT BREWERS

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The next panel is Hospice Palliative Care Ontario, Ontario Nonprofit Network, and Ontario Craft Brewers. This is the last presentation of the day. I'm so happy to see that the craft brewers will be here. They will be bringing some of their wares, I'm sure—but maybe not.

The presenters will get seven minutes. At the six-minute mark, I will say, "One minute," and at the end of that one minute, I will ask for the next presenter to start.

With that, we thank you for coming.

The first presenter will be Hospice Palliative Care Ontario.

Mr. Rick Firth: Thank you. My name is Rick Firth. I'm president and CEO of Hospice Palliative Care Ontario, representing all 135 hospices in the province and the people who work and volunteer in palliative care.

The good news I have for you is that Ontario's hospices are already delivering on the government's five-point plan to stay open. Hospices preserve hospital capacity, reduce surgical wait-lists, ease pressure on emergency departments, and absolutely provide the right care in the right place. In fact, our 85 in-home hospice programs support over 25,000 patients as well as their family caregivers in their own homes.

In a province-wide survey, 50% of caregivers said that volunteer hospice care at home prevented at least one trip to the emergency department, and that equals savings of at least \$10 million annually.

Seventy-six hospice residences care for 6,000 in-patients annually, with 46% of admissions coming directly from the hospital, getting people the right care in the right place, with an unrivalled excellence in patient and family experience and at one third of the cost of hospital care. The other 54% of patients are admitted directly from their home, thereby avoiding expensive hospitalization altogether.

Hospices free up about 143,000 hospital bed-days annually for patients needing surgical and other curative care. Hospices provide the right care in the right place. People don't want to die in a hospital bed or in a hallway—and often, they don't need acute care but have no other options, so they end up in hospital. They want to be at home or in a home-like setting where they can receive medical, practical, psychosocial and spiritual supports. This is what hospice care does.

COVID-19 shone a spotlight on grief and bereavement. The demand for bereavement care far exceeds capacity. Hospices are the largest provider of bereavement supports in Ontario, both for families of hospice clients as well as people who have experienced a loss in other care settings or due to a sudden death.

The not-so-good news is that hospices are in a funding crisis. Government funding used to cover 60% of operating costs, but with no annualized funding increase in seven years and new, permanent costs caused by the pandemic and compounded by inflation, the government's share of funding has now declined to between 35% and 40%. Hospices must now fundraise over 60% of their budgets, and that's untenable. Deficits—rare before the pandemic—are becoming the norm and are unsustainable.

Hospice Palliative Care Ontario has submitted our pre-budget request for the coming fiscal year. We submitted the same request last February, and since then, deficits have continued to grow and reserves are further depleted.

Hospices are asking for government action on four points:

(1) Fund all the clinical costs, which equals about 70% of total operating costs in a hospice residence, by investing an additional \$43.2 million annually. These are costs that will be fully funded in hospital and at three times the cost.

(2) Improve funding for in-home hospice services with a new investment of \$4 million annually to keep people out of emergency departments. Once people enter the hospital, they're subject to unnecessary tests and they often become so physically deconditioned that leaving the hospital or returning home becomes impossible. It is best that they never have to go to hospital, and in-home hospice care can make it possible for most people to stay at home for end of life.

(3) Address the pandemic of grief by investing \$10 million in hospices providing grief and bereavement care throughout Ontario. We're all going to experience loss and grief multiple times. The right intervention at the right time, which is often a trained hospice volunteer, means less likelihood of escalating to complex grief or the need for clinical interventions. Good grief and bereavement services keep people out of the medical system and functioning well through a difficult phase of life. These supports

are currently funded by donations, and hospices are asking for help to continue these crucial supports.

(4) Work with us to begin planning for the development of up to 500 new hospice beds by 2030, to meet the growing demand for community-based hospice care and to keep the dying out of hospitals. We can't stop the rush of people heading to the exit as the aging population nears end-of-life, but we can definitely make that experience a positive one for the patient and family.

After almost three years of pandemic and seven years without funding increases, Ontario's hospices are fast approaching a breaking point. Reserves are depleted, and fundraising to cover 60% or more of cost is unsustainable.

People in communities highly value their hospices—their donations demonstrate that—but costs are outstripping fundraising capacity. Small but significant investments in this sector will lower the overall health care cost and provide excellent and unique patient care and caregiver experiences. We must shore up community hospice care now or we'll lose the care setting providing the highest quality of palliative care in the province, and hallway medicine and hallway dying will be the only options to manage the needs and suffering of those nearing end-of-life.

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

The next one is the Ontario Nonprofit Network.

Ms. Cathy Taylor: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that it has been a long day, so thank you for having us at the end of the day.

Committee members, my name is Cathy Taylor. I'm the executive director of the Ontario Nonprofit Network. It's good to see many of your faces here today. My colleague Pamela Uppal, our policy director, is joining us virtually.

As you know, ONN is the network for non-profits and charities in Ontario—58,000—and our job is to engage with our network to bring their diverse voices to government and other stakeholders.

I'd like to start off by recognizing that it's Non-Profit Sector Appreciation Week. Thank you to all of you for unanimously passing Bill 9—which was the first-ever week to appreciate non-profits, last year. So this is our second annual week. Our sector is very excited about this, and we've already seen a lot of engagement with MPPs and their local non-profits. We really appreciate your acknowledgement. I would be remiss, as a stakeholder and advocate, if I didn't encourage you to consider how timely this week is, and what some of the ways that you can further appreciate our non-profit sector can be. Of course, I'll share a few ideas of what that could look like.

1710

As you know, non-profits are critical to Ontarians, their communities and our province. We're an economic driver and ready for government investments. What do I mean by that? The sector contributes \$65 billion to our economy's GDP, employing 844,000 people. The GDP of our sector has increased 43% from 2010 to 2020—43%—and it's scheduled to increase even more because the future jobs are in the care economy.

Our workforce reflects Ontario's population. Two thirds of our workforce are women, almost half are immigrants, and nearly a third are racialized.

We are a key part of the solution to continue Ontario on the path to prosperity. I think we all understand that vibrant, healthy, supportive communities make good economic sense, but we know that vibrant, healthy, supportive communities are not possible without a strong and resilient non-profit sector.

Let me share a snapshot with you of what we're hearing and what we are experiencing.

Last week, Catholic Family Services of Hamilton announced its closure. It ensured Hamiltonians without the means to pay have access to counselling services, among many other programs. This is the third family service agency to close during the pandemic.

Just today, the People and Information Network in Guelph announced its closure—a 20-year-old volunteer centre in that community.

A sports organization in our network recently shared with us, "As we try to recover from the pandemic, our costs have increased, staff have left. Our revenues are far from what they were pre-pandemic... We are looking at another two years of deficits before we can become whole again."

And an arts group recently shared, "For the arts, it remains an open question if, when, and to what extent public programming might return to pre-pandemic levels. So, for us ... the next few years look ... murky."

Based on our recent survey, 74% of organizations reported an increase in demand for service, so demand is going up. Some 83% reported a significant increase in costs, including inflation and a decrease in donations as the most significant factors challenging them. Also, 65% experienced recruitment and retention challenges—we've heard that, I know, from many of your stakeholders today—and 62% have lost volunteers, which is very concerning for us. Overall, 86% of organizations reported having to scale back programs and services, having longer wait-lists or discontinuing programs or services, reporting that the HR crisis of both the paid workforce and the volunteer workforce is significantly delaying service delivery and impacting the quality of programs and innovation.

We know we're not alone. I know you've heard from many other industries that the human resource crisis is real; it's facing many industries. And yet what makes the non-profit sector unique is our business model. Our sector puts service and community-based missions first, rather than profit. Revenues under this model are put back into staffing, expanding, innovating or improving the services, all that drive the quality of care. Accessibility is top of mind, as service provision is based on individual needs, regardless of the ability to pay or the complexity of the care. And because non-profits are governed by community members and volunteer directors, they can be subject to higher levels of accountability in the imperative to improve.

We know that Ontarians rely on our sector every day, from arts and culture that bring communities alive to minor sports leagues that bring neighbourhoods together,

to child care and mental health and addictions support and home care and hospices that support Ontario's well-being. The erosion of our sector is not only going to hurt Ontarians, but it's going to cost the government more, because the pressure increases on secondary and tertiary services as people fall through the cracks and need more extensive, intensive, expensive care.

Although we have a number of recommendations in our pre-budget submission that's before you, I want to highlight only one that we encourage you to consider for budget 2023: an associate minister-level appointment within the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, supported by a deputy or assistant deputy minister in an office representing non-profits, charities and innovation. Functioning as a home in government for non-profits, this appointment will ensure the relationship between the sector and government is efficient and effective, enabling much-needed information, innovation and transformation. For Ontario non-profits, this means doing more complex, collaborative, innovative work, without the red tape. Our sector deals with more than 16 ministries for policy planning, program delivery, regulatory compliance, and transfer payment administration. One idea that recently came up around building mixed-use development requires more than one ministry to be involved, and policy and funding alignment isn't happening across ministries. The lack of a home in government is creating a myriad of inefficiencies and lost opportunities.

We also have recommendations around bolstering—

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

Ms. Cathy Taylor:—our labour force, volunteerism and leveraging community benefit agreements, procurement and building community amenities, which we'd be happy to discuss further.

What I want to leave you with is a sense of urgency. As our folks at the hospice have said, as we see every day with articles about non-profits closing, there are changes that we can make today. As a sector, we own responsibility for some of that. As governments, how you can support the sector—some without cost, some with investments—is to really consider where you're putting your dollars and priorities. It is a choice, and community-based, non-profit-led service delivery is the right choice for Ontarians.

We remain committed to working with government towards ensuring communities can thrive and prosper beyond the pandemic.

Thank you for your time.

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

Now we'll go to Ontario Craft Brewers.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Good afternoon, committee members. Mayor Crombie is a tough act to follow in this chair, but I'll do my best. My name is Scott Simmons. I'm president of the Ontario Craft Brewers Association. Our association is the voice of craft beer in Ontario and represents breweries in every riding. On behalf of these 339 small businesses, I come to you with a simple message: The government must take immediate action to reduce the tax burden on this important sector to help it survive right

now and set the foundation for another decade of record growth. Let me explain.

Ontario's craft brewing industry was the fastest-growing segment of Ontario's manufacturing sector from 2010 to 2019. It grew from under 40 craft breweries to over 300 during that time and employed 4,600 people, representing 80% of all brewing jobs in Ontario.

The pandemic stopped that growth dead in its tracks. Craft breweries lost 50% of their sales with bars and restaurants closed, followed by record inflation and skyrocketing input costs. Volume has declined, profitability has disappeared, and debt burdens have soared. Under this weight, breweries are closing their doors, and behind each of them are families and local communities in our province being hollowed out. But we can and must act now, because with the right supports, the industry could be bigger and stronger than ever.

A recent study by the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis found that Ontario's craft beer industry could grow by a minimum of another 40% and, in turn, create 1,000 new jobs, \$380 million in capital investment and \$2.35 billion in economic activity if the right regulatory structure and tax changes are put in place. Making that a reality depends on the Ontario government making changes in this budget to immediately lower the tax burden and set in motion structural reforms to the tax system to unleash the next phase of this industry's growth, benefiting consumers, the industry and the economy. We recommend three simple, yet highly impactful changes, to do that.

First, remove the punitive and outdated nine-cent-per-container beer can tax. This can tax was introduced in 1992, at a time when most beer produced in Canada was sold in bottles. Its goal was to limit the import of canned beer from the United States. While couched as an environmental measure, it is not. It is just a tax borne primarily by small brewers, as it does not apply to other canned beverages, like soft drinks or energy drinks. It is also not collected on industry-standard bottles, which the foreign-owned multinational breweries use for most of their products. It is interesting to see the concerns about the new tax on soda cans that could soon be charged to consumers at grocery. If it does happen, it makes the inequity compared to craft brewers even greater. Here's what I mean: That soda tax would essentially be revenue to the soda manufacturers to offset the municipal recycling costs. Meanwhile, the 8.9-cent-per-can tax on beer cans is charged to the craft beer manufacturers by the Ministry of Finance for every can sold in every channel across the province. On top of that, the Beer Store also charges these same manufacturers another 2.2 cents per can to recycle them. That's 11.2 cents per can, or \$2.69 a case. These taxes and fees should not be confused with the 10-cent deposit per can paid by consumers, which is completely separate. The impact of the nine-cent can tax levy was made worse by the pandemic, as brewers were forced to shift their sales away from draft beer, due to bar and restaurant closures, and ended up selling close to 100% of their product in cans. This means the tax burden on craft brewers has gone up substantially since the pandemic began. This tax needs to go. It does

nothing to improve recycling efforts and has a large negative impact on local producers, and it is not paid by any other can manufacturers.

Second, eliminate the triple-indexing of tax increases imposed on Ontario craft brewers. The current tax structure for beer in Ontario, and specifically the micro-brewery tax rate introduced in 2008, has been critical in allowing the craft sector to grow and thrive. It is critical to our industry, and we are greatly appreciative of it. That said, the current method the government uses when implementing a beer tax increase results in a rate increase two to three times higher for Ontario's local producers versus the large multinational brewers every time the rates are increased. This has cost the province's craft brewing industry \$68 million in extra taxes over the last 10 years—money that craft brewers could have otherwise invested to create jobs, build efficiency, and that would have generated \$200 million in GDP and added tax revenue for the government.

1720

We thank the government for the recent decision to freeze beer taxes and ask that any future tax increase results in the microbrewer tax rate rising at the same percentage as the overall beer tax increase, not two to three times higher.

With supply chain costs rising faster than inflation, vanishing margins and high interest rates squeezing brewers who took on debt during the pandemic, we saw a historically high number of craft brewery consolidations and acquisitions in 2022. We are sadly now seeing craft breweries being forced to close their doors, and the unfair and debilitating tax burden on small producers is a major reason why, as is the antiquated retail model driven by the Master Framework Agreement, which we haven't even talked about today.

The current tax system also makes it extremely difficult for Ontario brewers to merge with or acquire other Ontario brewers without a punitive tax increase. As a result, breweries are being bought by international companies and economic benefits are leaving Ontario.

Craft breweries in Alberta, BC and neighbouring US states are paying far less taxes than here in Ontario, and the rates do not increase nearly as fast as volume grows. We need a similar model here. This year will be a pivotal moment for Ontario's economy and the Ontario-made craft beer manufacturing sector, which contributes thousands of jobs, capital investment and economic benefit—not to mention culture and character—to communities across the province.

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

Mr. Scott Simmons: Craft breweries are ready to grow and thrive, and by enacting these three simple, low-cost and effective changes to Ontario's beer tax structure, craft brewers can grow by a minimum of over 40% over the next decade and, in turn, create 1,000 new jobs, \$380 million in additional capital investment and \$2.35 billion in economic activity.

Ontario Craft Brewers thanks the government for its efforts and support over these past two years, and we look

forward to working with you on these changes to deliver a bright future for Ontario.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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

We'll now start with the questions, and this round will start with the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's the last presentation after hundreds of delegations, so it's a good way to end, although, Scott, I do wish you would have brought some of your product. Some of us deserve a cold one.

Rick, in your presentation, you referenced that 46% of clients go into hospice via hospital. We do know that people obviously do not want to spend their last days in an institutional hospital setting. We have a pretty amazing hospice in Waterloo. However, what remains in question—some communities can raise the money, they fundraise, but the operating costs always remain a bit of an issue.

Do you want to talk about some of your cost pressures in the hospice sector? This is certainly a very compassionate model that should be expanded across Ontario.

Mr. Rick Firth: First and foremost, we're suffering the same increases in costs that everybody is due to the pandemic. Starting with operating dollars, we haven't had an increase in seven years, so even before the pandemic we started to fall behind. There are increased human resources costs; we're now competing with hospital wages that we can't compete with, so we're losing people to those settings. Most of the hospices do not have the pension plans that the hospitals are offering. And overall costs for things like infection control, maintenance, food and the day-to-day materials used are up dramatically compared to pre-pandemic. So those are the pressures that the organization is facing.

With the cost of operating a bed—it's about \$260,000 per bed, per year, and we're getting \$105,000 in funding right now, so we're looking to address that.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm sorry, can you say that again? It's about \$265,000 per bed per year, and what do you receive?

Mr. Rick Firth: We're currently getting \$105,000. It has been the rate since 2016.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. Jennifer, did you want to also reference anything?

Ms. Jennifer Mossop: I'd just echo what has been said. We have been flagging this imbalance for a number of years now, prior to the pandemic, as Rick pointed out. And the pandemic really slammed everybody so hard, as everybody knows. There are additional costs, though, that have come in—not just the increased cost of existing services and needs, but also those extra things that everybody has to do now in hospices and everywhere. So it has just gotten to a serious tipping now—and we aren't people who have ever come in to cry wolf, as Rick pointed out.

This is a service that is highly valued by its communities. The donations and the volunteers in communities demonstrate that viscerally—how much people value this service and having these homes and the in-home service in their communities.

We really just need to drive home, at this point, that we're getting to a tipping point, and making the sector sustainable by covering in-residence hospice residents at 100% of clinical costs—which is what they would be paid if they were in hospital. Those costs would be covered.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's exactly the point I want the government to hear—that there are so many pressures right now on capacity in our hospitals. With Bill 7, they moved ALC patients out of those sectors. So the smart money, the smart investment is this compassionate model, and certainly that's my take-away.

I want to talk to Cathy a little bit about your presentation. Is this the first time that you've ever come to the committee to ask specifically for the creation of an associate-minister-level appointment? The government is already very big—bigger than the Liberals, which is saying a lot. So can you make the case for this in a very streamlined way?

Ms. Cathy Taylor: I had the privilege, during the pandemic, of sitting on Minister Sarkaria's small business advisory council. He put together a small business advisory council during the pandemic to advise him, as Associate Minister of Small Business, on what the needs were during the pandemic, and it was such an "aha" moment, having all the voices around the table and having an associate minister within an existing ministry—we're not talking about a new ministry; we're not talking about a lot of infrastructure. We're talking about an office, a unit with some political and bureaucratic responsibility. We could see the difference it was making having a champion in cabinet, even at the parliamentary assistant level, and having staff who would support that role.

If you think about the economic impact of our sector, it's more than some of the big sectors, like the mining sector and the agricultural sector, in Ontario. Those sectors have ministries responsible for them—agriculture, mining, northern development. We're not asking for a big ministry. We're not asking for a big bureaucracy. What we're asking for is some accountability and a place where we can really connect the dots, where if the Ministry of Housing wants non-profit housing built, we can talk to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services about supporting developmentally disabled supports in that affordable housing.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That makes a lot of sense. Obviously, I don't think that we as a province have leveraged the power of the not-for-profit sector on a number of issues, like welcoming, inclusion, housing.

We've certainly heard how the sector has been struggling. We've heard that Meals on Wheels, for instance, is looking at a 30% reduction across the province. And how unfortunate is that? That service is multifold; it puts eyes on seniors who are isolated—

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: —it's a nutrition issue, and it's also building the capacity of the community to recognize the issues that seniors are facing. So I really appreciate that.

It would be interesting to see how the government responds to this—but please know that, for us, the potential of the not-for-profit sector is underutilized in Ontario. It was a major part of our last platform to partner in true partnership and with funding and with resources to amplify the power of not-for-profits in Ontario.

Thanks very much for being here today.

1730

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll now go to the independent. MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Rick, I see hospice care as an integral aspect of a modernized health care network.

I have a few hospice facilities in and around my riding, but I don't have a hospice in Haldimand–Norfolk. I'm hoping that changes real soon. We know that death impacts us all. My constituents who have had loved ones in some of the surrounding hospice facilities all describe it the same way: that it's the most caring and beautiful experience at the most difficult time in their lives. They can't say enough about it.

You are probably aware of a group in my riding of Haldimand–Norfolk called the Norfolk Haldimand Community Hospice. You talked about wanting some additional beds. We hope that you support some of those beds coming to Haldimand–Norfolk, because we have an aging population in that area, and a hospice is badly needed. I look forward to someday helping to cut the ribbon at the grand opening of that hospice.

I want to thank you for all the work that you are doing. I support that work wholeheartedly.

I'm going to move over to Scott.

I'm all about cutting red tape. I'm all about cutting taxes when it makes sense, and this is a situation where it makes sense. I'm sure it's not the first time that you've appeared before this committee asking that that antiquated nine cents per can be removed, and here you are in 2023 probably asking for a multiple time.

Why do you think that tax remains in place? I understand that some of the other asks you were referring to are kind of new because of COVID, but the nine cents has been around since 1992. Why is it lingering?

Mr. Scott Simmons: It's a good question.

This government has been very supportive of our industry over the last couple of years.

We decided to put this issue on the docket starting pretty much after the election last June, so we've really only been talking about it for eight months now. It is outdated and it's time for it go, because as I said, it's really a tax on craft brewers and nobody else. It's punitive. It amounts to about \$18 a hectolitre, which is the equivalent that the industry uses. It's an unfair burden that really reduces their profitability and doesn't give them a chance to invest and grow.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Can you explain to me again about the triple-index tax structure?

Mr. Scott Simmons: There is a basic tax rate that all brewers pay. To get to the microbrewery rate, you simply deduct \$50. That has been in place since the microbrewery tax rate came into effect in 2008. Any time there's a tax increase, the increase—let's say it's 3%—is done to the

major rate, and then to get to the craft brewery rate, you deduct \$50. So, in essence, the increase on the smaller microbrewery rate is two to three times as high as the major rate. Said another way, the \$50 hasn't kept up with inflation. It was a \$50 break 15 years ago. It's still a \$50 break. So it has really been eaten into by inflation and has hurt the craft brewers a lot.

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

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Can you remind me how many craft breweries there are across Ontario?

Mr. Scott Simmons: There are 339 bricks-and-mortar craft breweries in literally every community in the province. Most of them opened in the decade 2010 to 2019. As the economic impact study I referred to earlier states, we are still underdeveloped on any metric compared to BC, Alberta, the surrounding US states.

This industry still has a lot of growth—we just need to help them get through the results of the pandemic, and this industry can double again. That's more great jobs for Ontarians, more economic activity for the province, investment. It's a great industry. It's a great success story, but we've still got a long way to go until we get to the finish.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Why do you think Ontario is late to the game?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That completes the time.

We'll go to the government. MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to all three presenters for being here today. It's great to see you here as we wrap up our submissions for the finance committee.

My first question will go to the Ontario Craft Brewers.

Certainly, you are correct; I think our government has been a friend of craft brewers. We did cancel a three-cent-per-can proposed tax the previous government had put in. And we certainly want more homegrown companies right here in Ontario to do well.

My question, which we haven't really touched on, relates to distribution. I know we touched on taxes and some of the issues you're facing, and we've made some notes on that. But in terms of distribution, my first question is, what are your thoughts on beer, for example, being in corner stores, and how does that affect your industry?

Mr. Scott Simmons: That's a great question, and it kind of ties into the question I got previously.

The Master Framework Agreement that governs how beer is retailed in this province—really, the agreement between the foreign-owned Beer Store and the government—dictates where beer can be retailed in this province. It's limited to the Beer Store, the LCBO and grocery. So these small microbrewery craft breweries really don't have anywhere else to sell, and they are limited to only having two retail stores, again because of the MFA. We would welcome additional channels, especially channels that focus on microbrewery products. I know the Ontario Convenience Store Association is very supportive of 100% craft beer in the c-store channel once the MFA is gone and we have a new retail environment in January 2026. So we would support c-stores, and we would support other

channels, too, that I look forward to talking to this government about.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: You mentioned 100% craft brewers. Would you suggest that only craft brewers should be in convenience stores?

Mr. Scott Simmons: Well, that's what the Ontario Convenience Store Association would like, but obviously we'd be supportive of something less than that. I think what we call the guardrails that are in place with the MFA, which prohibit listing fees and inducements at grocery right now—a similar type of guardrails should be in place for any new channels that are adopted, whether that's c-stores or other big box stores that might come into Ontario.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: We've had the spirits association in here, and they have a lot of Ontario producers, as well, of course. You are a competitor, and you're not; people who are going to go buy a spirit may not be buying beer. How do you feel about that product being available for wider distribution, as well?

Mr. Scott Simmons: We've got a great relationship with the other three Ontario craft associations, whether that's wine, cider or spirits, and we get together quite often. As you said, we are competitors, but at the same time, we'd like to think ourselves as the Ontario craft industry.

I don't think it's my role to speak on access for the other three products, but I think something that we could do to support the Ontario craft industry holistically in a new channel post-MFA would certainly be welcome from the OCB.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Do you know of any other jurisdictions in North America—or, in fact, even globally—that have a similar distribution model to what Ontario has had to date with the Master Framework Agreement?

Mr. Scott Simmons: It's very unique, and I don't think there is any other jurisdiction that has it. Obviously, the Beer Store is the primary distributor in this province and the government has approved, I think, eight other distributors to distribute product.

We'd like to see, in a post-MFA world, an open and competitive distribution network, so that craft brewers have a choice to either deliver direct, or pick from TBS or any other supplier that's competitive for getting their product to the retail and then to the end consumer.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you. By the way, we have a great craft brewery—and I'll mention this to all the members—in Oakville: Cameron's. I'm sure you know them. They're great.

Mr. Scott Simmons: I know Cameron's well. Great people.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Great company.

My next question is for the Ontario Nonprofit Network. You did mention removing barriers to build critical infrastructure, affordable housing, child care centres etc. I know that with our Bill 23 we've put through, we either eliminate or reduce development charges in building affordable homes and rental-purpose housing. Is that something you're supportive of? I know, for example, Habitat for Humanity has come out in support; co-op housing has come out in support. Do you have an opinion on that?

Ms. Cathy Taylor: Great question.

We focus on issues that affect non-profits and charities across the sector, and so we expect our members that are specific to housing to focus on the housing issues. We don't have a specific opinion on Bill 23 when it comes to housing—so we would rely on the non-profit housing associations and the co-op housing association to share.

1740

Mr. Stephen Crawford: That's good to know.

How much time left, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Two minutes.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I will pass my time to MPP Dowie.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you to everyone for being here.

Cathy, thank you so much for the presentation. I'm most interested in the volunteerism. I'm an active volunteer at home. I run my local Scout group. I can certainly attest to the vulnerable sector check but also the difficulty in persisting and recruiting volunteers. That has been the—but it's so rewarding to be able to do so. Your points in the submission are well received.

I did want to ask a question of Rick and Hospice Palliative Care Ontario. My local hospice in Windsor-Essex estimated that the cost per day of an acute-care hospital bed for end-of-life is \$1,100, but the same service in hospice is \$460. That's based on Ontario Health West data. Is this something that you are noticing across the board—that the comparable costs for hospice care is that dramatic of a difference, about 239%, based on these figures?

Mr. Rick Firth: Yes. The data that is being cited is from the Auditor General's 2014 review of palliative care in Ontario. Even if costs have gone up in the hospital sector and they've gone up in the hospice sector, the ratio is the same. We're still about a third the cost of hospital care.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Should we have a broadening of your scope and mandate, what kind of savings would you expect versus the same care in hospitals? Is that kind of figure available?

Mr. Rick Firth: We're quoting—roughly \$200 million a year is the current offset between the cost differential. If we double the number of beds—

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

We will now go to the official opposition. Mr. Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: We're ending it strong today, Chair. I'm excited.

Thank you to our presenters, who've arrived both in person and virtually today.

My first questions will be for Rick.

Rick, I want to thank you for appearing today.

I was meeting recently with St. Joseph's Hospice in my riding and thanking them for the wonderful care that they were able to provide to my friend Marilyn and her family. It was truly a very difficult experience, but the family were so appreciative of that level of care. It was necessary, it was timely, and it meant the world of difference to them.

I think your comments about having to fundraise are deeply disturbing. The fact that the government is not

contributing enough to cover operating costs—what might that mean for a hospice that is in a community that might be economically strained or is not able to fundraise that effectively?

Mr. Rick Firth: Yes, that's what we're seeing. There are some communities that have done well with the hospice fundraising, but since the pandemic, it's down across the board, and it's more severe in the communities that are economically depressed.

One of the benefits of the funding model that the government used to give some one-time dollars last year was that it used a variable rate. So smaller hospices, which are often rural, got a higher per-bed rate than the urban centre, because the costs are not a straight line. A six-bed hospice costs 80% of a 10-bed, not 60%. In the communities that are small and rural, they need some additional support. Our proposed funding model will address that.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I met recently with a hospice, along with Meals on Wheels and Alzheimer Society and other organizations for community support services, and they were explaining the different ways to care for people. If we kept them at home, the amount of money that would cost—and this is from a 2019 study. It was \$42 to stay at home, as opposed to \$126 in long-term care or \$842 in hospital.

I want to thank you, HPCO, for providing your numbers as well.

My next questions will be for Cathy.

Cathy, I know this place must be scary, being someone who supports non-profits. We see, unfortunately, the pursuit of profit in a lot of government decisions, and privatization.

I think your recommendation about a deputy or assistant deputy minister in an office is a profound one. I hope that the government does take note of that and it is something that is implemented, because when you consider the amount that you contribute to the GDP and, really, the value of what non-profits do in the caring community, it is truly something that is inspiring. It changes lives. It is so fundamental to now and to the future.

Do you have any concerns about the grants process—if you wanted to make any comments to the government that could help them make some changes to that for you?

Ms. Cathy Taylor: Great question.

Transfer Payment Ontario is the portal, is where grants come from, as you know, and they've been going through a transformation process over the last number of years. Things are getting better, I will say. There's a one-stop shop. There's a Grants Ontario website. We do focus groups with them about their processes and systems. So it is improving, but there's still a lot of red tape and, quite frankly, really easy ways to improve; for example, umbrella agreements for organizations that get multiple funding. Right now, they have to have one agreement for every single thing that they do. They have to put in the information multiple times. They have different contracting terms, different payment terms. So there are easy ways. We've estimated that using an umbrella agreement, if you have more than one ministry or more than one project funding, would save a lot of time and energy.

The other two things that we hear all the time from our sector is longer-term grants—the one-year project granting doesn't cut it anymore. We can't recruit staff for a one-year contract; they have to be at least two years, and the ideal would be three, at least. The other big issue that has emerged in the last year is inflationary costs—so it would be, in an ideal world, having transfer payment agreements that did take into account inflationary costs instead of having the same amount for multiple years. To Rick's point: We're hearing from organizations across the sector that have been flatlined for over 10 years, and then when you have this inflation that we've had and the increased demand for services, they can't keep up. The percentage of transfer payments that goes to our sector compared to health and education is tiny; it's less than 1% of the budget. It's not a big amount, but investing in that would make a huge difference.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Well, I can tell it may be the end of the day, but when you said “red tape,” they all got excited over there. Their eyes lit up. So thank you for that. I appreciate that.

My next questions will be for Scott.

Scott, I want to thank you for advocating for those truly local businesses. They've had such a difficult time. It's frustrating when you look at many decisions that have been made by government that really prioritize those big guys, the large multinational corporations, when people who are in our communities are the ones who do so much important work.

London is a pretty awesome place for craft breweries. I'm going to miss some, I know, but there's London Brewing Co-operative, Anderson, Powerhouse, Dundas and Sons, Toboggan, Union Ten, Storm Stayed, Forked River, and Equals. I'm going to get back and somebody is going to be mad at me, but we just do our best.

I wanted to ask, in particular—this does pertain to the delivery of craft beer at some points. I know that, in speaking with some craft breweries, the Beer Store now is able to deliver through those third-party apps—

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: —that are very expensive and really take a bite out of the profit margin for restaurants. Do you have any concerns about those sorts of third-party apps?

Mr. Scott Simmons: Yes, we do. Whether it's the Beer Store or the LCBO that just also announced their Uber Eats platform with no delivery charges, the short answer is, we think that takes business directly away from these 339 local small businesses that you referenced—very well, by the way—from London and across the province, yes.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Yes, it is kind of mercenary that people have been struggling in the time throughout the pandemic, and they have these businesses that were cutting yet further out of their already meagre profit margins. So thank you for that. I appreciate it.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I'll go to the independents. MPP Bowman.

1750

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to all the presenters in this very hot room that we're all dealing with.

I'm going to start with Hospice Palliative Care Ontario. I know that you guys do amazing work. I guess one of the themes I'm feeling today is “Integration”—the care that you provide is really integrated with the overall health system and end-of-life. I think that we need to think about the funding in a different way. This started out as kind of a new way to help people at end-of-life, but it has become so integral. So I think we need to think of it that way—that it's just part of our care system.

I want to ask you about what you're hearing from family doctors. Certainly, in my riding, I'm hearing from family doctors that they also are struggling with how to engage more effectively and efficiently as it relates to palliative care. They feel that there's more red tape, that there are less resources. Is there something beyond just the actual care in the centre that is driving that? Do you have a view on that?

Mr. Rick Firth: Yes. What we've seen in primary care is there are some barriers to family physicians practising and doing home visits and being in the community. But we also have examples of where it works well. Typically, the hospice is at the centre of the care model.

I'll give you an example. In Windsor, the hospice there has about 1,400 patients every year in the community. It's their volunteers and their social workers and their physician team who look after those patients in the community. If they need to come into residence, that model follows, so it's the same physician.

In the Northumberland area, a hospice is being funded, as a pilot, to be the system navigator for palliative patients in the community. So it's the hospice that's doing all the coordination of the care. When there's a transition from one setting to another, it's the hospice that's the continuity, and that's providing better, more seamless access.

We do need to look at permitting OHIP billing codes for virtual visits for palliative care. We need to remove some of the barriers in academic funding models, where physicians are on stipend for an academic centre but they're not permitted to then go and provide relief in the community or go to another care setting. We've been talking about that with the ministry, and there are some things that we could do to change it.

Physicians need funding support to do more palliative care in the community, and the team-based model is the way to go.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: That's helpful. Thank you. I'm glad you're having those conversations with the ministry.

I'll turn to the Ontario Nonprofit Network. It's a very broad topic, Cathy. I'm trying to understand how it would work if you had an associate minister in economic development. They will still need to work with other ministries, whether it's housing or agriculture—it's anything not for profit; it's very big. Can you touch a little bit on how you see that working and not creating another layer, for example, in how things work?

Ms. Cathy Taylor: I think a lot of the relationships that non-profits have with what we could call line ministries—community and social services; culture, tourism and sport; agriculture—

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

Ms. Cathy Taylor:—would be usually a funding relationship, and sometimes some policy and regulation, whereas we see the opportunity, sector-wide, to take a look at the sector as a whole, a labour force strategy for the whole sector—volunteerism; the Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, so all the regulatory issues; the Privacy Act, which affects non-profits and charities. Every time, we actually have staff who read everything that comes out of Queen's Park and look at the implications for non-profits and charities, and there's a tremendous amount. I think it's really focusing on what we all have in common—that might be innovative, barriers, transfer payment reform. It doesn't matter what ministry you get your funding through; it's the same system—so really looking at the system issues and the big trends in issues that are facing non-profits, so they can thrive.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you.

Scott, I only have a very few seconds here. I only know of two breweries in Don Valley West: Amsterdam and the Granite. Are there others that I need to be visiting?

Mr. Scott Simmons: Too many to mention.

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

To the government: MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you to our presenters today.

I would like, first, to ask Rick about the hospice industry and the hospice need in Ontario.

In Scarborough, for example, we have a 12-bed hospice, which is scratching the tip of the iceberg. I've visited the hospice. They provide excellent care to people in their twilight days, and they provide it with dignity and a human approach—especially to the ones who need linguistic and culturally sensitive service. I know the hospital in Scarborough, the Scarborough Health Network, would love to send more people to the hospice. Unfortunately, the hospice doesn't have the capacity to welcome more people. That's a very important issue.

I think I will concur with my colleague Andrew: The services the hospice provides is less than half of the cost of the hospital—and it's not only the financial cost, but also the waiting list and providing services to other patients who are in need of more critical care.

Can you talk about the importance of or if there is a need for additional beds or additional finances, especially when it comes to our changing society, the diversity of our society, and culturally and linguistically sensitive facilities?

Mr. Rick Firth: If we look at an area like Scarborough—you have your 12 beds, but Scarborough needs at least 43 or 45 beds to meet the need, and those beds do need to be culturally sensitive and responsive to the local community.

We draft or we create the standards for the hospices. Two years ago, we strengthened the requirement for looking at access from diverse communities and how we're meeting those needs. One of the factors that brings success is when the hospices can be part of that larger team that's connected to the different communities.

I'm not sure that it's feasible to create a hospice for every identified group in Toronto, but it's certainly feasible to create a hospice that is opening and welcoming of all

the different communities and looking at the linguistic needs and the sensitivity around death and dying, the various rituals that vary from community to community. Volunteers are a huge component of that. One of the strengths that we have in the system is being able to draw volunteers in the GTA from so many different backgrounds and with so many different linguistic capabilities.

One of the things we need to do is to look at the distribution of the beds and how they can be positioned to best meet the needs of those communities.

The Yee Hong Centre is a good example. The diversity of the patients being represented within the hospice service represents what Scarborough is every day. It's a very diverse facility.

Mr. Aris Babikian: I just want to make a clarification. I wasn't referring to having a hospice for every single identified diverse group, but there are certain regions where you can bring them together and provide the service through one centre which represents the region and covers that linguistic and cultural sensitivity.

What about the private sector's role in supporting hospices? We know that the government provides financial support, but similarly to the major hospitals, where they have major corporate donors etc., is there any kind of contribution from the private sector to the hospice industry?

Mr. Rick Firth: Not from an operating perspective. There is actually a requirement in the governing legislation that hospices are not-for-profit corporations, so corporate support is really by way of sponsorships and philanthropic initiatives with the corporations at this point.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Can you expand a little bit more on the difference between hospice palliative care and regular health care—and the importance of the hospices to look after those patients?

Mr. Rick Firth: Hospice care in a facility like Yee Hong or St. Joseph's in London or Windsor is basically doing end-of-life care. Palliative care can be applied at any point. Ideally, from the time somebody is diagnosed with an illness, they're referred to palliative care—because palliative care is not just end-of-life. It's addressing all of the needs: the pain and symptoms, the psychosocial, the spiritual. We're about providing the best quality of life for the individual while they're receiving their curative treatment. That early introduction of a palliative approach to care is something that we've been endorsing, and the Ministry of Long-Term Care has put it into—

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

Mr. Rick Firth:—the Fixing Long-Term Care Act. That continuum starts at diagnosis, and when people approach end-of-life, typically the last 30-ish days, that's when hospice care in a hospice residence takes place. What we're doing there is really addressing the complexities of end-of-life care for that individual.

Throughout the continuum, we're also supporting the families that surround those people. That's a huge, important component. We're caring for both the person who's dying and their family.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you.

Cathy, unfortunately, I don't have too much time. I appreciate the non-profit organizations. I have been involved

in non-profit organizations for 40 years, and I know how important they are and how much they contribute to our economy and save money. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Your time has run out. And not only has the time run out for that question, but the time has run out for this panel and the time has run out for this meeting.

I do want to thank everyone—first of all, this panel—for participating, and all the time you put in to prepare for this meeting and then to share it all with us for this last hour here. We very much appreciate it, and we'll be taking it forward on your behalf to the minister, to help him with

his deliberations as he prepares our next budget. I want to thank both the people at the table here and the people on the screen in front of me.

I'll give a reminder that the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. today, so if anybody wants to rush, if you get it delivered by someone who lives within an hour's travel, you've got it made.

We'll call it a day on the consultations for this pre-budget consultation program. The committee is now adjourned until February 16, 2023, for clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 46.

The committee adjourned at 1803.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Chair / Président

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford PC)

Vice-Chair / Vice-Président

Mr. Terence Kernaghan (London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord ND)

Mr. Deepak Anand (Mississauga–Malton PC)

Ms. Stephanie Bowman (Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest L)

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady (Haldimand–Norfolk IND)

Mr. Rick Byers (Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound PC)

Mr. Stephen Crawford (Oakville PC)

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto (Mississauga–Lakeshore PC)

Mr. Andrew Dowie (Windsor–Tecumseh PC)

Ms. Catherine Fife (Waterloo ND)

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford PC)

Mr. Terence Kernaghan (London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord ND)

Mr. David Smith (Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre PC)

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos (Oakville North–Burlington / Oakville-Nord–Burlington PC)

Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

Mr. Aris Babikian (Scarborough–Agincourt PC)

Ms. Patrice Barnes (Ajax PC)

Ms. Christine Hogarth (Etobicoke–Lakeshore PC)

Clerk pro tem / Greffière par intérim

Ms. Tanzima Khan

Staff / Personnel

Ms. Heather Conklin, research officer,
Research Services