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Standing Committee on Justice Policy

Estimates

Ministry of the Solicitor General

Comité permanent de la justice

Budget des dépenses

Ministère du Solliciteur général

1st Session
44th Parliament

Wednesday 29 October 2025

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44^e législature

Mercredi 29 octobre 2025

Chair: Lorne Coe
Clerk: Isaiah Thorning

Président : Lorne Coe
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CONTENTS

Wednesday 29 October 2025

Estimates JP-7

Ministry of the Solicitor General JP-7

 Hon. Michael S. Kerzner

 Hon. Zee Hamid

 Ms. Erin Hannah

 Mr. Mario Di Tommaso

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
JUSTICE POLICYCOMITÉ PERMANENT
DE LA JUSTICE

Wednesday 29 October 2025

Mercredi 29 octobre 2025

The committee met at 1500 in committee room 2.

ESTIMATES

MINISTRY OF THE SOLICITOR GENERAL

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Justice Policy will now come to order.

The committee is about to begin consideration of the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of the Solicitor General for a total of two hours.

From the ministry, we're joined by the Honourable Michael Kerzner, Solicitor General of Ontario; the Honourable Zee Hamid, the Associate Solicitor General for Auto Theft and Bail Reform; and ministry officials and staff. Welcome.

As this is the first ministry before the committee, I would like to take this opportunity to remind everyone, please, that the purpose of the estimates committee is for members of the Legislature to determine if the government is spending money appropriately, wisely and effectively in the delivery of the services intended. As Chair, I will allow members to ask a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee to ensure they're confident the ministry will spend those dollars appropriately.

In the past, members have asked questions about the delivery of similar programs in previous fiscal years, about the policy framework that supports the ministry's approach to a problem for service delivery, or about the confidence of a ministry to spend the money wisely and efficiently. However, it must be noted that the onus is on the members asking the questions to make the questioning relevant to the estimates under consideration. If it starts to stray—and there are members here who were here for the last estimates, from both sides. You know I'll intervene if it starts to stray.

As a reminder, the ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust that the deputy ministers with us here this afternoon—and welcome, sir—have arranged to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly.

Are there any questions from the members before we start? I see none, Madam Clerk.

I'm now required to call vote 2601, which sets the review process in motion.

We will begin, please, with a statement from the Solicitor General of Ontario for up to 20 minutes.

Minister, the floor is yours, sir.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm proud to share my time with our Associate Solicitor General, the Honourable Zee Hamid. I'm also joined at the table by our Deputy Solicitor General for corrections, Erin Hannah, and our Deputy Solicitor General for community safety, Mario Di Tommaso—and some incredible leaders of our ministry, behind us.

It's an honour to present to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy and have the opportunity to address your questions. I've already introduced our table here.

The Ministry of the Solicitor General plays a vital role in our government's mandate to protect Ontario. It ensures that communities are supported with safe, effective and accountable law enforcement, public safety, and correctional systems. Our staff serves individuals and families who may be in urgent need of support or involved in the justice system. This work is a profound responsibility, and the ministry staff approach it with dedication and professionalism. Their work is rooted in public service and closely tied to some of Ontario's most respected and long-standing institutions. These include the Ontario Provincial Police, the Office of the Fire Marshal, the Office of the Chief Coroner, the Ontario Forensic Pathology Service, and the adult correctional services. Together, they form the foundation of public safety in our province.

Our mission is clear: to protect Ontario. This means ensuring the safety and well-being of people and communities across the province through responsive services, effective oversight, and commitment to continuous improvement. Whether it's through emergency response, forensic sciences, fire safety or correctional rehabilitation, every action taken by the ministry is to contribute to a safer Ontario.

In recent years, the ministry's mandate has expanded to include new programs and oversight bodies that reflect the need of our province and—our Ontario, by enhancing communities. One example is animal welfare services, which makes Ontario the first jurisdiction in Canada where the enforcement of provincial animal welfare legislation is led by the province. This strengthens protections for animals and ensures consistent enforcement across Ontario.

Another addition is the Inspectorate of Policing, a division created to support the Inspector General of Policing to deliver their mandate under the Community Safety and

Policing Act, which came into force on April 1, 2024. This new oversight entity plays an important role in promoting excellence and consistency in policing, helping ensure that police services and boards operate with transparency and integrity and meet the expectations of the communities that they serve.

These developments reflect our government's ongoing commitment to innovation, accountability and, most importantly, public trust. They also highlight the evolving nature of our work, where long-standing institutions are supported by new approaches and where every program and service is designed to protect Ontario by enhancing safety, upholding justice, and supporting the well-being of the people we serve.

Mr. Chair, we are carrying forward investments to protect Ontario, and we're not standing still. We're moving forward with bold, intentional and decisive action and, I might add, innovative and imaginative ways to help keep Ontario safe. We're investing in the people, the tools and the infrastructure that will keep Ontario safe today and into the future.

I want to talk for a minute about investing in policing. We're building on a foundation of strength. Ontario's police services are amongst the most respected in the country, but we know that to meet the challenge of today and tomorrow, we must continue to invest in these people and tools that help keep our communities safe.

We depend on law enforcement to protect our fundamental right to live safely in our own homes and communities without fear. I've said this many times; I said it at the committee last year: This inherent right we all have can never be compromised. We have a right to see our kids off safely to school. We have a right to check in on our loved ones and seniors. We have a right to go to work safely, to play in the park, to shop, and to pray. These inherent rights can never be compromised.

That's why we're encouraging more people to come forward to become police officers and we're making historic investments in police training and recruitment. We are committing approximately \$1 billion to expand and modernize the Ontario Police College in Aylmer, Ontario, and to build a new Ontario Provincial Police Academy in Orillia.

I can tell you that these investments that we will make over time will pay enormous dividends. We've never seen recruitment any higher than it is today. This year alone, we will put 2,400 new boots on the ground. It's monumental. When you go back just three years and our annual rate was at 1,200—we've more than doubled. By doubling the amount of people who are on the ground, there are that many more people to help keep communities safe. It's very, very impressive.

The facilities, as I've said, will be instrumental in training on a combined basis at the OPP, which follows basic constable training at Aylmer. Over 3,500 people will be trained at both institutions. They will be provided with modern and purpose-built spaces that reflect the complexity of policing in the 21st century.

To help police services meet their recruitment needs, we have allocated \$8.8 million this year to support a fifth basic constable intake. Currently, that's under way in

Cornwall, Ontario, at the Dev Centre. This additional intake will allow for 120 additional police officers to be trained—and that's how we reconcile our number at approximately 2,400 per year. It means more officers on the ground, more visibility in our neighbourhoods, and more capacity to respond to the needs of our communities.

In total, we're training, as I said a minute ago, more than twice the officers who were trained just a few years ago. It's quite unbelievable.

1510

But training is only one part of the equation. We're also investing in the tools that officers need to do their jobs safely and effectively.

Last year, our government invested \$134 million to help police services acquire five new helicopters. These aircraft enhanced patrol capabilities in the greater Toronto area and the Ottawa area, and they support rapid response to high-risk incidents and help police track and apprehend suspects.

This year, we have built on that momentum by increasing funding to further strengthen public safety, particularly, at the borders. This is a conversation that the associate minister and I had at our federal, provincial and territorial meeting, together with the parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General, when we talked to our federal counterparts about the needs of not only them stepping up at the borders—but we have to come to grips with the fact that our province is over 2,700 kilometres long, from Cornwall to Fort Frances, and the unprotected border areas have almost no resources committed by the federal government. That's why our government is investing \$57 million over the next three years to support enhanced aerial border patrols. This response to requests from Niagara Regional Police Service and Windsor Police Service is important, given their proximity to border entry points. To support this initiative, we're also investing \$36.5 million to procure two—I might add, badly needed—helicopters, the H135s, along with an operational investment of \$20 million over the next three years. That's specifically for Niagara Regional Police Service and Windsor Police Service. These investments will ensure that police services have the tools they need to protect our borders and keep our communities safe. In addition, we will provide funding to each police service to hire and train tactical flight officers. We will support the OPP, who will have a joint force role with these helicopters.

These investments are not just about numbers; they're about people. They're about protecting Ontario by giving our police services the resources they need to serve and protect with confidence.

The Deputy Solicitor General reminded me not that many months ago that people always assume that Toronto Police Service had a helicopter—they don't now, but they will.

Our government offers other community safety grant programs primarily available to police services and boards, in collaboration with community partners such as First Nations as well as municipal and community organizations. Funds are used to support recipients that undertake initiatives focused on community safety and well-being. This year,

we've allocated about \$500 million—it's a staggering number—to support community safety across Ontario. This will be delivered through grants and programs like the Community Safety and Policing Grant. These initiatives help police services tackle the issues that matter most to our communities, like gun and gang violence, human trafficking, sexual violence and harassment, mental health and addictions, hate-motivated crimes, housing and homelessness, as well as commercial retail theft. These are real challenges, and we are committed to supporting the people and services working to address them.

Again, I might add, and I've said this many times, that I've never seen a government other than our government, led by Premier Ford, that is more concerned about public safety; that takes this to heart every day, that is looking to respect those men and women who put on the uniform—and it's not just saying that we have their backs. We have to earn their trust, and we have to earn the trust of Ontarians.

I want to talk for a minute about strengthening our fire services, as well, because we're doing this in partnership with Ontario's fire services, through historic investments.

In 2024, we announced a \$30-million investment into the Fire Protection Grant over three years. It was the first of its kind. I said to many of the fire services and the chiefs, "We're planting a flag that was never planted." And I can tell you, as I've travelled extensively across the province, I've seen the results of the grants that were made available this year alone. They were able to procure equipment that will help clean bunker gear and their helmets and make a difference. I'm proud to say that funding flowed to every municipal fire service across the province. This is monumental. Large and small—from all members around the table.

The member from St. Catharines knows how fond I am, particularly, of her fire service and her great deputy chief there, Andrea DeJong.

This year, we've doubled the annual \$10-million investment. That means the Fire Protection Grant for the 2025-26 cycle will now total \$20 million, meaning more funding and more life-saving gear.

And we're expanding our fleet of mobile live fire training units. These mobile live fire training units simulate some of the most extreme situations. I've seen this in Thunder Bay. I've seen it in different places in Ontario. From a training perspective, this is very important.

Please let me also say a few words on modernizing correctional services. We have an ambitious plan to scale an increased capacity with our correctional systems, both on the public safety side with Deputy Di Tommaso and on the corrections side, led by Deputy Hannah. We are relentless. We are not going to stop. We're going to continue to do everything we can to protect Ontario.

Even while our province's population continues to grow, our capacity to house offenders dwindles because of short-sightedness and actions by the previous government. I'm pleased to say that we're reversing this trend.

To be clear, we will always find room for anybody who feels that they have to violate the code of conduct in Ontario, violate the code of the trust that Ontarians have

one to another. We will have room for them. We do have room for them.

This also means that we have to make sure that the federal government follows through on badly needed bail reform that we have previously asked for.

Ontario will continue to have the correctional capacity we need, because we said this year that we would bring over 1,000 beds online within a year or so. We will deliver that number and more. That includes:

- 110 new beds at the regional intermittent centre in London, which, by the way, is open;

- 320 beds coming online to the Toronto intermittent centre, part of the Toronto South Detention Centre;

- over 60 new beds at Quinte Detention Centre;

- the construction of new complexes in Brockville and eastern Ontario that will increase capacity there by over 500;

- the Ontario Correctional Institute; and

- our new mega-jail in Thunder Bay, which is coming online.

Chair, I have to tell you something: This is how we protect Ontario—by making sure our correctional system is safe and modern and equipped for the needs of today and tomorrow.

That's why we've hired almost 3,000 new correctional officers just in the last few years, and we've made record investments in the hundreds of millions of dollars so that our older institutions are brought up to much better standards.

I want to acknowledge our public safety personnel who are on the front lines every day. We care about their wellness.

Through the Ontario Immediate Family Wellness Program, we've invested over \$3 million to support families of first responders and public safety personnel who are killed in the line of duty or who have died by suicide. This program provides rapid bereavement counselling for grieving families of police officers, firefighters, paramedics, ambulance and communication officers, and adult provincial correctional services.

We've worked with organizations like Wounded Warriors by delivering services that include peer support training, wellness programs, stigma reduction, and leadership development.

We also support Runnymede Healthcare, which is a great institution that will also be building a first-of-its-kind centre of respite care up in Caledon.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to turn my time over to the associate, but just in closing, I want to say that there has never been a better example of the associate minister and myself working as collaboratively every single day on both lenses—and I'm very proud that the associate has a direct, microscopic look into how to combat auto theft and how to continue to advocate for bail reform.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, Minister, for your presentation.

Associate Minister, you have three minutes and 45 seconds for your presentation.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Solicitor General.

It's an honour to be here before this committee. It's my first time sitting on this side of the table.

Since stepping into this position, I've had the opportunity to see first-hand the incredible work being done to protect Ontario, from supporting front-line officers to advancing public safety system reforms that make our communities safer.

Protecting Ontario is at the heart of everything we do at the Ministry of the Solicitor General. Whether it's tracking organized crime, strengthening bail compliance or investing in auto theft prevention, our focus is on keeping communities safe and ensuring Ontarians feel secure in their daily lives.

1520

Today, I'm proud to showcase the ministry's efforts in the two key areas within my mandate: combatting auto theft, and strengthening bail reform and compliance.

On the combatting auto theft front: It's an issue that demands coordinated action from all levels of government, industry partners, and the public. For too long, organized crime has been able to run amok in this province, targeting innocent vehicle owners with violent carjackings and home invasions. These crimes have far-reaching impacts.

Our message to auto thieves is clear: Enough is enough.

SOLGEN and the entire Ontario government is taking a stand against these criminals by introducing some of the toughest penalties for auto theft. Every day, we're helping law enforcement combat crime and protect Ontario—this includes a Preventing Auto Thefts Grant and the creation of a Provincial Auto Theft and Towing Team led by the OPP.

To combat organized auto theft, we're investing \$18 million over three years through the Preventing Auto Thefts Grant. This funding supports local police services with new and enhanced crime-fighting measures, focused on prevention, detection, analysis and enforcement. It's already making a difference. The Équité Association recently reported that auto thefts are down 25.9% in Ontario so far this year, building on a 16% drop in 2024.

While we're seeing progress in the fight against auto theft, protecting Ontario means confronting all forms of violent crime, especially when the justice system doesn't work as it should.

That's why the Ministry of the Solicitor General is also focused on strengthening bail reform and compliance. We've committed \$112 million over three years to bolster Ontario's bail system. This investment is helping to prevent repeat violent offenders from endangering our communities, and it's reinforcing the message that bail is a privilege, not a guarantee. As part of this investment, \$24 million goes towards bail compliance and warrant apprehension grants. This supports the work of police services in monitoring high-risk and repeat violent offenders. It helps keep communities safe by holding offenders accountable and reducing the risk of reoffending.

We're also expanding the Ontario Provincial Police's Repeat Offender Parole Enforcement Squad—also called ROPE squad. With \$40 million in new funding, we're doubling the number of ROPE squad teams and creating 15-member bail support teams.

To support the code system, we're investing \$26 million to establish Intensive Serious Violent Crime Bail Support Teams. These teams include dedicated prosecutors and subject matter experts who focus on preparing and conducting complex bail hearings involving serious and repeat offenders.

Ontario, along with every province and territory, has urged the federal government to strengthen the Criminal Code.

But our work is not done. We'll continue to monitor the impact of these changes and advocate for further reforms that prioritize public safety. We're carrying forward these investments because we believe in a justice system—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Excuse me, Minister. That concludes the time for the presentations from the Solicitor General of Ontario as well as yourself. Thank you very much for your presentations.

We're now going to begin the question-and-answer segment in rotations of 15 minutes for the official opposition members, 15 minutes for the third party member, and 15 minutes for the government members, for the remainder of the allotted time.

The timekeeper for the 15-minute segments is the Clerk, to my left, so you don't need to try to take the time yourselves and can focus on your questions.

Please remember to make your comments through the Chair.

As the Chair, if a member seeks to reclaim the floor during their rotation while the minister is responding, I will recognize the member and allow them to reclaim the floor to ask a new question.

For the deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers, staff—please state your name and your title the first time you speak so that we can accurately record in Hansard who we have. Hansard is just to my right.

I will now start with the official opposition, please. MPP Stevens.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to everyone for coming here.

Minister, thank you for your brief statements—and the assistant minister, as well.

I'm going to get right into it. The Ombudsman's annual 2024-25 report outlines that out of over 30,000 cases received, almost 7,000 of them are correctional-based complaints. It's the number one case topic that comes across their desk—a 55% surge in complaints about correctional facilities, from 44% the year prior. The most frequent complaints are about overcrowding, which we hear every day; use of force by correctional officers; and inadequate health care, which is quite concerning. This is just to name a few.

I'm going to jump right into Maplehurst Correctional Complex, which alone made up 722 cases—this is up from 357, in one single year.

My question is, what portion of your 2025-26 estimates is being directed specifically to address overcrowding, the top complaint category cited by the Ombudsman?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: To the member: We recognize that we have to be bold and we have to be innovative

and imaginative to bring more beds online as soon as possible. That's why, after seeing what was left to us in 2018, after seven jails were closed by the prior government, we had to be bold. We said we would bring 1,000 beds online. We said we would do it in the very near term. There's more work to do. We're bringing more beds online after that, and we're planning to dramatically increase our capacity.

The reality is, the population of Ontario has also grown substantially. We can't have a situation where we have a state of lawlessness. So we will continue to be proactive. We'll continue to make the investments.

I'll ask Deputy Hannah if she wants to add to that.

Ms. Erin Hannah: Thank you, Minister.

Perhaps I'll just add a little bit more detail with respect to what our planned investments are—to the member's question.

With respect to our overall investment in estimates for corrections, we're at \$1.4 billion—that's including health care—in the 2025-26 estimates.

In addition, the ministry is anticipating over \$3 billion in infrastructure investments to increase corrections capacity, through approved new bills and major expansion projects. That includes projects that are both in the planning and design phases as well as projects that are under construction.

Very specifically, we are looking at \$55.4 million in expenses for capital over the next three years, including \$30.1 million this fiscal year in infrastructure projects. That includes the two former intermittent centres being repurposed and reopened, one of which, as the minister noted, has already been operationalized; the other is the planning work related to the Eastern Ontario Correctional Complex and Quinte Detention Centre.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: With all that information—it's fine to say that you're keeping up with the previous government's closings and everything, but we're talking about 2025-26 estimates.

I noted that you said you hired 3,000 new correctional officers this year. How many of those are full-time, how many of those are part-time, and how many are in the union?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Just to clarify: We brought in about 3,000 new officers over the last few years—but again, I will ask the deputy to clarify the part-time versus the full-time.

I think the message that we want to bring forward is that we recognize that if we're going to have a dramatic expansion in our correctional capacity, we have to have people there running the jails. Today I signed letters of congratulations to our newest class of 80. We need new people; we need them to come forward. This is a tough job.

I'll ask Deputy Hannah to comment further on clarify full-time—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Deputy Minister, to the question, please.

Ms. Erin Hannah: Apologies; I forgot to introduce myself, as you requested at the beginning. I'm Erin Hannah, Deputy Solicitor General, correctional services.

With respect to the question, just as a reminder, all correctional officers who graduate from the centre for pro-

fessional advancement for correctional services in Ontario are hired as fixed-term. It is through the course of their employment after hire that some become regular staff, which I think is what you're asking about, in terms of full-time versus those who remain as fixed-term, which allows for the complex operations to be able to operate on a 24-7, 365-day-a-year basis and gives us the flexibility to actually manage over the shifts to operate such a complex, 25-institution system across the province.

1530

I don't have the breakdown of what the current FXT is to regular staff. I've asked the team behind me here, so we may be able to come back before the end of this session and provide those numbers for you.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Since you're gathering that, that will be great. If you can just get that to me, that will be perfect.

I only have a little bit of time to ask all these questions, so I'm going to try to get them in as much as I can.

How many additional beds—I didn't hear anything—and infrastructure improvement dollars has the ministry committed to the Thorold detention centre in Niagara? Is there going to be any in 2025-26?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Mr. Chair: We actually had a great announcement in the spring. We are going to expand the Niagara regional detention centre by a modular build, which is a great concept that allows—we've been successful in seeing two be finalized.

I'll go back to the deputy on the specific number of beds—but my recollection, Deputy, is it's in increments of 50.

We've been successful in seeing two modular builds be opened in Thunder Bay and in Kenora.

Deputy, do you have any more clarity on the question?

Ms. Erin Hannah: You're correct, Minister. The modular builds, including one at the Niagara Detention Centre, are 50 beds currently.

I will say that as part of the exploratory work we are doing, recognizing our capacity needs within the system, we are exploring the opportunity to increase the number of beds within the footprint that has already been approved in our capital plan.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'll be looking forward to seeing that in the 2024-25 estimates this year for Niagara. That's wonderful news.

With the Maplehurst Correctional Complex alone generating the majority of complaints, how much funding has been allocated to the infrastructure improvements or staffing increase at that facility specifically? I think this really is an important question. I would like a precise answer on this because it's so important, because Maplehurst has recently been in the news.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Mr. Chair: We are making hundreds of millions of dollars of investments throughout the system, and part of the reason why this is important—it's taking place in Maplehurst, as well. It's because we have to make sure that the infrastructure that's there is upgraded.

Maplehurst, like many other institutions, is an older institution, but we're going to continue to make sure that

it's upgraded. It's also connected to the Vanier Centre for Women.

Deputy Hannah, do you want to provide greater clarity?

Ms. Erin Hannah: There are a few things that I'll say in response to the question.

First, I don't have a breakdown of exactly how much of our minor capital budget is dedicated towards Maplehurst in 2025-26.

What I will say is, given the capacity challenges that we are facing across the system, it has been my direction to the ministry that we only pursue minor capital repair and renewal at institutions where there is a critical health and safety need or a building criticality function that needs to be addressed; otherwise, we defer for the time being, because it does usually involve closing beds within a particular facility. I'll just note that because it can impact how much of our capital repair budget is being used.

I'll focus just on Maplehurst in general. We have, as a result of the incidents that you have alluded to, been very mindful of applying the lessons learned. We undertook two investigations in relation to the December 2023 deployment of the ICIT team at Maplehurst. Those investigations occurred, as you may know, between June and October 2024 and then the second investigation between November 2024 and April 2025.

In addition to addressing human resources matters that involve disciplinary actions for staff and management, and staffing changes at the central regional office in Maplehurst—

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Excuse me, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, Deputy.

We're going to go to a new question.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you. I'm going to try to get my time back, because I don't feel that my question was completely answered in that part—but I'm going to move on, because it really was vaguely, vaguely at the beginning of the Solicitor General speaking.

I'm going to go to a question that involves Marineland. Recently, in the news, as you know, Marineland is now sitting with 30 beluga whales still being kept at their facility in Niagara Falls, after the federal government denied export permits to transport the whales.

After Marineland officials threatened to euthanize the whales, citing financial ruin and inability to feed or care for these animals, I wrote a letter to you, Minister, and to the Premier, asking that section 35 of the PAWS Act be invoked and if your ministry would step in financially to care for the whales and ensure any further distress is mitigated while a longer-term strategy can be put in place.

In saying that, can you tell me, is there a real plan to transport or rehouse the whales at this time?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: We care about the whales' welfare. We want to see them live on in their next life's chapter.

That's why I've said publicly—I said it in the media last week—that I think Minister Thompson's decision not to grant the export permit was very short-sighted.

There are other opportunities that the media has reported, including a possible sanctuary in Nova Scotia. Premier Ford

feels that we might be able to see the whales have their next life's chapter in different places.

At the end of the day, this is a private business. As the member knows, animal welfare services has been at Marineland almost weekly for the last number of years. We believe that the role of animal welfare services is to, of course, make sure the duty of care is being provided to the animals. But, unfortunately, it's a private business.

Let me ask the Deputy Solicitor General if he wishes to add—

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Can he add about section 35 in PAWS, that the provincial government can act at Marineland, and an estimated time for the plan, for it to be implemented—of the safe travels of the beluga whales and other animals that are at Marineland?

That's the government's job right now—to make sure that you step in, under section 35 of the PAWS Act.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I will direct the Deputy Solicitor General for public safety.

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: My name is Mario Di Tommaso. I am the Deputy Solicitor General in charge of community safety in the Ministry of the Solicitor General.

The animal welfare services part of my side of the house, in the ministry—we do have a Chief Animal Welfare Inspector, and we have approximately 200 dedicated and committed inspectors who are working in the animal welfare service.

I can tell you, the minister is absolutely right; we do visit Marineland practically on a weekly basis. We've already conducted approximately 220 inspections of all animals at Marineland.

With regard to the question that you're asking about section 35—the authority to seize an animal is only when we have identified critical distress in that animal. That gives us the authority to seize an animal.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I think that with animals not being fed and being threatened to be euthanized, it's time for the government to step in. It's crucial. These animals are not in good shape.

Under the 200 inspections that you have—what have you seen, and why are so many belugas in distress at Marineland?

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: We have issued a number of compliance orders that are directed to Marineland. I don't have the number off the top of my head—but they are in the dozens. Marineland has complied with all of those compliance orders, with the exception of four.

We do liaise with our own staff veterinarian, and we do liaise with the chief veterinarian associated with Marineland.

We are satisfied that those whales currently are being properly looked after. They are being fed, their water is clean, and they are in good health right now.

The main issue with the beluga whales is that they are coming toward the end of life. That's why they are dying, and that's why we've had 19 deaths over the last number of years.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): You've got two seconds left.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Okay. I just want to make sure that the ministry is really attempting to recover costs and look after the other animals at Marineland—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): The official opposition's time for questions has concluded.

1540

We're going to move to the third party. MPP McCrimmon, please.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Thank you to the minister and associate minister and your senior bureaucrats for joining us today. I really appreciate it.

I just want to have, first of all, a basic understanding: When you compare last year's allocations to this year's allocations, what were the major changes, and what were the conditions or priorities that were driving those differences?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Mr. Chair: I want to thank the member from Kanata–Carleton for the question.

When we go back, and I said it in my remarks, to the historic investments, as an example, at the Ontario Police College, by ramping up the number of people who are coming out—you have to remember, it was a \$17,000 bill that's escalating and would have been escalating to this day over time that's no longer being paid by those individuals. So as one example—to the member's question—as we see more people going through the college, then there's greater government support to pay the tuition that would otherwise have been paid. You multiply \$17,000, as an example, by 2,400, which will be our run rate this year—that is a substantial variance over prior years, by that alone.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: So you don't see any major changes?

I get the investments you've made in the college and for the OPP and stuff. But what else are the major changes? What else is happening that is making you rejig where the money is going?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Mr. Chair: The member touched on the OPP. The money that is spent to operate the OPP continuously increases because we have been successful in expanding the amount of badged constables, and then we've expanded the amount of special constables and civilian staff. So the entire police force has gone up dramatically.

Mr. Chair, with your permission, I'd like to ask Deputy Solicitor General Mario Di Tommaso to add some thoughts too.

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: Some of the major changes that we saw that permitted us to reallocate some of the funding that we received—we are responding to major societal concerns, such as bail reform. So, through our investments, through the OPP and various grants, we are addressing bail reform to ensure that violent repeat offenders who are on bail are held to account.

We also heard some significant concerns from our friends in the United States about fentanyl coming across the border. That was a significant concern, so much so that they imposed some tariffs on this country. We had to deal

with that because we know that the federal government is not living up to its commitments and responsibilities when it comes to the border. So we launched Operation Deterrence 1.0, where the OPP, working with the RCMP and other municipal police services, invested tremendous amounts of money and time and effort to properly defend our border.

We also saw significant concerns with regard to auto theft, as an example. This was a very prolific issue with the public, and rightfully so, because auto theft will fund organized criminal organizations. Organized criminal organizations thrive from auto thefts. So not only does it impact residents and community members and taxpayers and voters, but it also funds organized criminal organizations. So we thought that it was very appropriate that this government, through the minister's leadership, consider investments in auto theft grants, for example, in provincial auto theft units, and so much more.

Those are just three examples of some of the concerns that we had that caused us to reallocate some money to those three priorities.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Well, this probably will go right back to the Deputy Solicitor General, because I just want to ask you, how do you measure outcomes? How do you make sure that you're actually spending the money and having the results you want?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Really, we've never seen such a worldwide rise of lawlessness. We don't want this to come to our borders.

We made historic investments. When we point to the OPP and their leadership for the Joint Air Support Unit, the JASU, it's understanding that the OPP will play a leadership role in the coordinating of response to situations that might arise that might require the deployment of the helicopters.

Let me ask the Associate Solicitor General for his thoughts.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Deputy, back to you: The question focused on measurement.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Mr. Chair, is it okay if I take that?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister.

As the deputy minister was mentioning earlier, we've continuously invested significantly in public safety. The thing with public safety is that it's not a one-and-done deal. It's something that requires continuous investment. It's because of those continuous investments that we've seen a pretty substantial drop in auto theft, for example, over the last two years. It has been dropping all over Canada, but Ontario has seen a significant drop. Ontario is actually the reason why the Canadian average is going down. It's done through a number of grants that have been given not just to police services—but we're also hiring more officers, putting more boots on the ground, and making sure that we advocate heavily.

Finally, the federal government is actually responding to our advocacy by strengthening the bail system, which, as the Chair knows and as the committee knows, is some-

thing we've spent years asking for. In fact, out of all the issues, this is the only issue I can think of that all 13 Premiers have been united on—not once, but multiple times asking for it—even tariffs. I can't think of a single issue where all 13 Premiers have been completely united, except when it comes to the issue of public safety. So that's an issue that we've taken quite seriously.

I just want to clarify a bit more on the bail reform side of things.

The issue we have in this country—not just in Ontario, but the rest of the country as well—is this revolving door of justice we've been dealing with, where we keep releasing repeat violent offenders and then act surprised when they offend again; obviously, they do. What our government has done is, while we wait for the federal legislation to come forward—which finally is coming forward—we've invested a significant amount of money, investing in tools and technology to help monitor these individuals as they're out on bail, to make sure they comply with their bail conditions, because that is what we can control.

Our bail dashboard provides real-time data to police services. There are 21 police services that are using it right now across Ontario—I think every single police service will be using it by the end of the year—which allows them to have a direct line of sight, a real-time line of sight into people who are out on bail, to make sure they comply with their bail conditions and don't reoffend. This bail compliance check that police officers are able to do actually saves a lot of money down the line. What used to happen in the past, without this tool, is that they would have to wait until a crime was committed before they went out and did an investigation. Now they can proactively visit every single violent offender out on bail every week or every two weeks, depending on the size of the police service, which allows them to ensure that not only are people complying with bail conditions—but it also tells offenders that police are keeping an eye on you. And we've seen a decrease in crime and a decrease in reoffence rates because of that.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Let's go over to correctional, then. It's the same issue—it's an issue about information and what's available in data and evidence and statistics and how we use those to make sure that what we're investing in is actually producing the outcomes that we want. That's what I want to know.

When I went to go look for information on prison populations and the number of beds, capacities—it's very hard to find. You cannot find it. Can you explain to me why this kind of information wouldn't be publicly available?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'll just repeat what I said in my remarks: I think it's urgent that the government have a plan to expand our correctional capacity on an urgent basis, because we have to right the wrongs that were done for the time the previous government was there. It's like anything else—if you take correctional capacity off-line, then it takes that much longer to build it.

That's why we said this year we would be historic—we would bring 1,000 beds online, and we will stand up and we will tell you where they are. It's very, very important that Ontarians know that we have a plan and the plan will

evolve every single day. We will be bold and innovative, to have our correctional capacity meet the needs of the system.

1550

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Well, I don't feel that my question has been answered, about how you use data and evidence and statistics to actually inform the decisions that you make.

Why can't some of that data, information and statistics be more available to the public, so they can actually see the decisions you are making?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Mr. Chair: We could not have been any more transparent.

When we made the announcement that we would add 150 beds at the Cecil Facer centre, which will be rebranded for adult corrections in Sudbury—50. When we said we would add a modular build, also, in Niagara, to the regional detention centre—50. And when we said we would add one at Maplehurst—50.

We continuously tell the public what we're doing. I would say to the member from Kanata–Carleton we're doing just that. We want to tell people where we are expanding the correctional system, because they have to have confidence in our government that we will have the capacity to meet the needs.

One thing that I would draw attention to is that the population in our correctional system has grown. What's interesting is—and maybe the associate minister wants to touch on it—many people who find themselves in the system today are violent and repeat offenders, or what I like to call frequent flyers.

Associate minister?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): To the question—the question is dealing with details and evidence related to that.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Directly to the question, Mr. Chair: The minister is correct. What has happened over the last few years is that with the changes that the federal government brought down with Bill C-75, everyone who finds themselves inside a facility with denied bail are people who are actual repeat and/or very violent offenders. They're in there accused of doing serious, serious crime, which puts a lot of load on our correctional officers as well, which is something we're responding to.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: It was interesting to hear the Solicitor General say that the population has grown. Do we know if it has grown as a percentage of our population? Is it in keeping with how it has been, or has the percentage of the population actually grown, and if so, are we doing anything to actually determine why it has grown?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I thank the member from Kanata–Carleton.

The reality is, our population has grown dramatically. But what we see in our correctional institutions is that the number of people who are there as repeat offenders continues to increase.

That's exactly why our government has been very, very insistent that the federal government has, I would say to the member opposite, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We want to see meaningful bail reform. The member knows we

are supportive of the federal government's initiatives—because it's not only our institutions, but the federal penitentiary system.

The minister and I were in Kananaskis at the FPT meeting. We tried to press the federal Minister of Public Safety on sharing with us his detailed plans to expand the federal correctional system. Unfortunately, we couldn't get any information.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): We're down to one minute and 13 seconds.

MPP McCrimmon, you have another question.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: The OPP: I'm really glad to hear that you're hiring more officers. That's the right thing to do. But what I'm worried about is retention. How do we keep them? How do we give them what they need in order to continue to do that very challenging job over time? It's one thing to recruit them; it's something else to keep them. What are you doing so we can keep them?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Mr. Chair: It's a great question.

By the way, I want to give a special acknowledgement to our incredible commissioner of the OPP and his command leadership.

What we're doing is, we're being positive, as a government. We're paying people a fair wage. The members around this table know that the OPPA got a very transformational contract. So the first thing we're doing is paying people a fair wage.

The second thing we're doing is having their backs. We're attending events. We're attending graduations. We're going to training events. And we're saying that their service to Ontarians matters.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): We're now over to the government, and we have MPP Ciriello, please.

MPP Monica Ciriello: I want to start by thanking the minister, associate minister and the ADMs for their leadership on this file. Public safety is certainly something that's important to all those in Ontario, and it's certainly near and dear to the residents in Hamilton Mountain. So thank you very much for your leadership on that.

I'm actually going to follow up on a question that we were just talking about when it comes to retention and recruitment and training.

As we continue to examine the province's efforts to strengthen public safety, it is clear that recruitment, training and retention of police officers—not just OPP—are critical components for a robust and responsive policing system. Ontario's communities are very diverse. We make up urban, rural and remote areas, and we're facing increasingly complex public safety challenges, and the need for well-trained, well-supported front-line officers has never been greater.

Minister, I noted that you mentioned the opportunity to attend the graduation. I was honoured to be able to attend that graduation alongside you, where we welcomed 510 new officers to our front lines. It was an incredible experience to see them step up to protect Ontario.

I'm looking for more information on how our government is ensuring that the recruitment efforts continue. What

measures are being taken that expand training capacity? And, particularly in new or temporary locations, how do we ensure that these rigorous standards are met and Ontario's police officers are trained to the highest degree? And lastly, how is the ministry working with police services to ensure that these new recruits are integrated within their communities, as well?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Let me share some incredible statistics. Since I became Solicitor General in June 2022, we have seen 6,500 people go through the Ontario Police College. I've attended 14 march past graduations, so I have personally seen 6,000 people go through the college.

Listen to this statistic: Since Premier Ford came into office in June 2018, 10,000 new boots on the ground—10,000 new people have graduated. That represents a substantial percentage of the police officers presently on the ground.

How do we recruit—I think the most important thing is, by being positive.

We've carved out something that no other government has done. We've carved out a priority for public safety. We said we will fulfill the right of every Ontarian to live safely in their own homes and communities. We will make the investments we need to do. We won't apologize for keeping Ontario safe. When we say we have somebody's back, I would say to the member from Hamilton, it's not just saying it—you can say whatever you want; you have to earn the trust. That means you have to be there and support First Nations police services, municipal police services with innovative and imaginative grants. You have to be prepared to do what no other government has done. That's our government, led by Premier Ford.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): New question, please. MPP Allsopp.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: I appreciate the opportunity, and I thank all of you for being here today and taking the time to answer these important questions about community safety, because it is something that affects all of our communities.

Earlier, Minister, you were talking about the commitment that you have made to travel across the province and to visit as many of these police services and fire services as you can. That has certainly been the case in Bay of Quinte, and I've really enjoyed the opportunity that I've had to tour around with you. In some cases, you were introducing me to firefighters in my own community, because it has been the second or third time that you've been through.

Earlier this year, in April, when Deputy Fire Chief Jim Young passed away, the first call that I received was from you, and I know how much it meant to me and to the chief that you would reach out at a time like that. So I wanted to thank you for that.

Knowing my community as you do, you know that it's very close to the US border. We're about an hour away from the nearest border crossing. In good times, that has meant that our economy has been able to benefit from that closeness. But as you know, it also means that our com-

munity is affected by drugs and by guns and by human trafficking that occurs across that international border.

The question that I want to ask you today is about Operation Deterrence. The launch of Operation Deterrence at the beginning of this year really signalled a renewed commitment by the Ontario government to strengthen border security and enhance enforcement at international crossings. This initiative, alongside the expansion of the OPP's Joint Forces Border Drug Interdiction Task Force, represents a strategic approach to combatting illegal border crossings and the flow of illicit goods. These efforts are commendable and necessary, especially given the complex and evolving nature of organized crime and transnational threats.

1600

Minister, can you provide further detail on the operational scope and objectives of Operation Deterrence, including how it coordinates with federal agencies such as the Canada Border Services Agency and the RCMP? Additionally, what else is the government doing to reduce illegal border crossings and the trafficking of guns and drugs, and how will these efforts be sustained and scaled over time to ensure the continued protection of Ontario's borders?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: One of the most revealing tours I took was going to the borders from Cornwall all the way out to Pigeon River, which is just before Fort Frances. I was amazed at how little presence the federal government has on our borders—not necessarily on the CBSA crossings, but on the unprotected borders. I don't know that we have more than 10 RCMP people there. That was the genesis of reporting back to our Premier and saying, "We have a flagship police service that takes care of over 350 municipalities in Ontario, representing 75% of the land mass"—which includes the member's riding. I stopped in at OPP Prince Edward county, and I am a frequent visitor of Belleville Police Service.

What I can tell you is that you're right; the areas of Ontario that front us—specifically, on a maritime border—have other challenges. What Operation Deterrence did is to provide additional resources by the OPP to assist with this. But it's not operating in a vacuum. It's working with the RCMP. It's working with CBSA. In the States, it's working with the Department of Homeland Security. It's working, on the Quebec border, with la Sûreté du Québec.

What I would say to the member is that Operation Deterrence illuminated to us something we may not have realized, and that is how vulnerable we are in Ontario, with the extremely limited resources.

Finally, when I toured up in Sault Ste. Marie, I was amazed at how much resources the US have on the other side—and it's a very narrow stretch of waterway. They have boats and cameras. They have personnel. Unfortunately, on the Canadian side, we have nothing or next to nothing.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Darouze.

MPP George Darouze: I also want to thank the minister and the associate minister. I know both of you visited Ottawa recently with me, and I know no one—you know every person in our—from the fire department, to Ottawa police, to everyone by name.

I want to thank the associate minister, also, for holding the round table with my community in Ottawa last month.

The report of a 25.9% decrease in auto theft in the first half of 2025 compared to the same period in 2024 is a promising indicator of early success. However, as organized crime adapts quickly to different technologies, a sustained and coordinated effort will be essential to maintain the momentum and ensure long-term impact.

The inclusion of towing industry oversight within the PATT team also reflects a broader understanding of the interconnected nature of criminal activity in this space.

Minister, can you provide further insight into how the PATT team is structured to ensure rapid interprovincial coordination and intelligence sharing, particularly with the federal and municipal partners? Additionally, what mechanisms are in place to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of these initiatives? And how will the government ensure that the recent decline in auto theft is sustained and not simply a period of disruption in criminal activity?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): To answer the question, the associate minister, please.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you, Chair. How much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): You have five minutes and 38 seconds, but I would suggest to you that you might want to allow some additional questions.

Hon. Zee Hamid: I'll keep it short.

Thank you to the member from Carleton for that excellent question. I had a chance to visit his riding earlier this summer, when he hosted a tremendous town hall with victim services, with police officers, with community stakeholders, as well as other mayors and councillors—very well-attended—and public safety was the main issue that kept coming up.

Our government is fighting auto theft by investing \$51 million in new measures to help police identify and dismantle organized crime networks and put thieves behind bars.

As you heard from the deputy minister, as well, organized crime is behind auto theft. They use auto theft as a venture and use profit from auto theft to get into other criminal activities, such as guns, gangs, drugs, human trafficking, and all sorts of nasty stuff.

This funding that I just mentioned supports the creation of Provincial Auto Theft and Towing Teams—PATT team—that are led by the OPP. It's a community safety grant that targets auto theft and the creation of the new Major Auto Theft Prosecution Response Team. The funds are already producing results. I won't mention any numbers that have already been mentioned, but we've seen a sustained decline in auto theft.

Credit also goes to both the municipal—but to be fair, also federal and First Nation counterparts, in their involvement as well, because they've also gone above and beyond to make sure that criminals are brought to justice.

Understanding that a rapid interprovincial response is required to mitigate the issue of crime in the towing industry, we also established the Provincial Auto Theft and Towing Team. This is a joint operation between different agencies, including MTO, that is targeting organized crime right at the root. It takes a collaborative approach to tackling issues of re-VINing fraud and holding offenders accountable. The minister and I were at the federal-provincial-

territorial conference in Kananaskis earlier this month, and other provincial counterparts actually asked about Ontario's success in handling re-VINing fraud—and it came directly because of this initiative.

There is also the Preventing Auto Thefts Grant that provides funding for police services to work with local and provincial partners to combat and prevent auto theft while protecting communities and keeping people and their properties safe. Our government is investing \$18 million over a three-year period, funding 21 different projects that are led by the OPP, municipal and various different First Nation police services. They feature new and enhanced crime-fighting measures that focus on prevention, detection, analysis and enforcement. This grant helps police services protect communities and keep people safe.

One data that I did not share earlier that I'd like to mention—across recipient police services, a total of 7,861 stolen vehicles were recovered. That means that the profit that organized crime was expecting from this enterprise goes down quite a bit, because these vehicles are recovered.

There are also 1,688 auto theft investigations that were recorded where organized crime may have been involved.

Further, recipient services have implemented 68 auto theft awareness campaigns in the first year, with several recipients demonstrating an increase in community agencies and partners partaking in auto theft campaigns.

Our government is on it. While we've seen reductions so far, we're not throwing in the towel. We'll keep investing in this area to make sure that the numbers continue to come down.

Thank you for that excellent question.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): New question, please. MPP Denault, you have one minute and 54 seconds.

MPP Billy Denault: Thank you, Solicitor General Kerzner, Associate Minister Hamid, and all of the assistant deputy ministers for coming and sharing the good work that is being done at the Ministry of the Solicitor General.

As you know, I come from a pretty rural riding. You may be aware that radio is very important in rural ridings like mine. We've heard about the Public Safety Radio Network and its crucial role in public safety infrastructure in Ontario.

I guess my question to the minister is—if he can provide further detail on how the new Public Safety Radio Network will improve operational coordination among different emergency services, particularly in cross-jurisdictional incidents. Additionally, what measures are being taken to ensure that front-line responders are adequately trained and equipped to transition seamlessly to the new digital network? And how is the ministry ensuring that the remaining zone transitions stay on track to meet the two-year completion target?

1610

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank my friend for the question.

The reality is, when governments don't invest in technology—when they are not innovative, when they are not imaginative—then they can't have a plan.

We decided that we would make historic investments. The member speaks about the PSRN, the public radio network. He spoke about the PSBN. He spoke about Next Generation 9-1-1. These are historic investments. But we don't do this alone. We do this with the municipalities and help them migrate.

I can tell you that Next Generation 9-1-1 will be very transformational.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): We're now back to the members of the official opposition. MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to everyone who is here today. I recognize you're supported, Solicitor General, by a large complement of staff. So welcome back to the committee.

I'm curious about your comments about the need to grow—obviously, the province is growing, but I wonder if we are looking at the same growth projection numbers. The province's population growth projections are sitting at about 1%, and people are feeling the squeeze. Obviously, there's the cost of housing, the cost of transportation, fuel, maybe the job loss that we're seeing in Ontario—807,000 people looking for jobs. I'm not sure if the population is growing the way you have described, based on the numbers that are just out there.

What I do think is growing, interestingly enough, is the number of criminal cases before the courts. In the recent Integrated Criminal Court Survey from StatsCan—I think there are about 30,000 new criminal cases before the courts each quarter, which is a high number. It's definitely not in the same line with the population growth that you're seeing.

What I'm curious to know, Solicitor General, is—your talk about needing to add more beds to the system. I think that your plan to add those beds is not moving as fast as I think you'd like, based on what you have described as this outrageous number of criminals who are now on our streets. How are you trying to square that in the financials that are before us?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you to the member for the question.

The reality is, our government, led by the Premier, has put a lot of money both on the justice side but also on the correctional side.

We know that a great portion of the population in our correctional systems are held on remand and many of them are repeat offenders. This goes back to: Why are people in jail? Because, in our jails, they're either sentenced to two years greater than a day or they're awaiting trial.

At the end of the day, we know we have to plan for the future, and we won't apologize for being bold.

I'd go back to the member and just tell her that when we said we would deliver 1,000 new beds online in a very short period of time—we will do that and more.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: If I could just respectfully ask the Solicitor General to stay with me with the questions—because we only have 15 minutes. I don't want to lose any more time. I'm not asking for an apology from the Solicitor General; what I'm asking for is just maybe some answers.

The Solicitor General himself brought up the number of those who are detained and on remand. That means that they're charged but not convicted. They're still awaiting trial. That number is pretty alarming. In Ontario, 83% of the population that is held in government custody is not convicted of a crime. While they're waiting for trial, sometimes it can take quite long. And if they're waiting in jail for pretrial—we have heard waits as high as 516 days, what I believe is one of the lengthiest periods of time. Those individuals are not offered any rehabilitation services.

One thing I haven't heard the ministry speak about is rehabilitation—so, therefore, those who are going and interacting with the criminal justice system, hopefully, by the end of the experience—we don't want that for anybody, but obviously we need it. When people are breaking the law, they must be held accountable, but we want them to come out rehabilitated. What I've heard from the police organizations that work in Toronto is that they're coming out more violent—they have received no rehabilitation services while they're waiting for trial, while they're held back or denied bail—and that the rates of recidivism, when they do finally come out, is that they're more violent and more harmed and more traumatized than before.

How is this system going to work, and how will it be sustainable, Minister, if there is no rehabilitation while people are in custody?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Chair, I don't agree that there's no plan to rehabilitate people. There's an aggressive plan—it's both within the correctional complex system itself and then it's through the probation and parole offices; it's through working with the John Howard Society and Elizabeth Fry—

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Just a point of clarification, Minister—sorry, Minister. I didn't say there was no plan. I'm saying that while they're held in government custody while they're waiting for trial, while they're denied bail, they have no offer of rehabilitation or other services, so they're coming out with higher rates of recidivism.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Chair, the reality is, we've spent a lot of money on programming—and I'll ask the Deputy Solicitor General for corrections to add to it.

We have been very ambitious with programming for that moment in time when somebody does come out, and we want to have lower rates of recidivism. What complicates a lot of this is that a great disproportion of people in our correctional system are drug addicts, and while a great proportion of those, while they're in our facility, do agree to take voluntary treatment, there's a portion that doesn't.

I'll ask the Deputy Solicitor General for her comments as well.

Ms. Erin Hannah: I'll just add to the minister's points that he has made, and to the member's question—that we recognize that we have a high proportion of individuals who are in custody who are actually on remand. We've actually made changes to some of our programming approaches as a result of that. I'll give a concrete example. Trilcor is a work program that used to be only available to individuals who were sentenced. We've actually changed the parameters so that individuals on remand can participate in that program.

Similarly, we have a farm program at Thunder Bay Correctional Centre, where individuals who want to learn about agriculture and how to grow and maintain and then bed for the winter can participate when they're on remand.

So we're trying to adjust some of our programming.

We also have numerous other programs in the system that are not limited to sentenced individuals—it would take too long to go through all of them, but we do.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Give me a sense of how many individuals who are waiting for trial actually qualify for these programs. Is it 5%, 10%, 25% of the population, or is it less than 5%?

Ms. Erin Hannah: When you ask about qualification, it's difficult for me to respond, because the qualification is based on voluntary participation in these programs—it's not so much that you apply to the program and then participate.

We can provide some information and stats, as follow-up, on participation rates within the program, if that's helpful to you.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I would like that. Thank you very much. I welcome that information.

I'm interested in understanding the conditions in the corrections facilities right now.

Today we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Ombudsman. He took it upon himself to have his office take a look at what was happening in corrections, based on the Toronto Star and Global News reports on what happened in Maplehurst—quite challenging news for us to read. What the Ombudsman uncovered is that the number of complaints has gone up by 55%. He cited some very serious matters, such as overcrowding, low staffing, safety for both the inmates as well as the correction officers and the staff who are there, and quite flagrant, broad-spread human rights violations. He called for “urgent” and meaningful system reform, and he said it was a moral imperative for the rights of inmates—because they still have some rights—to be upheld by the government.

What we hear and see, including from corrections front-line workers who are working in those correction facilities, is that their morale is extremely low. They are constantly being subjected to a lot of trauma, and they don't feel good about the job. They love what they do, they believe in what they do, but they really are forced to lock down the facility just because it's so horribly understaffed. So they're using far more measures than they generally do, such as solitary confinement, and they're frequently locking down because they can't keep people safe. We hear about three inmates per a cell that is built for two.

1620

So I'm curious to know: In the estimates, where can we find the specific quantum on how the government is going to, number one, properly staff up so we don't have low morale; so we don't have this misuse of system-wide lockdowns as they're trying to keep everybody safe, including themselves; so you can get to the actual number of people who should be in cells—no more than two? Perhaps it's one in some conditions, but certainly not three or—from

some crown attorneys I've spoken to—four. Where is that information, and how do you get to the answer?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Firstly, let me say that we are expanding our correctional capacity ambitiously.

The reality is, I think my conversations with the local union stewards from OPSEU—whenever I attend as Solicitor General in our correctional systems, I make a point of meeting with the local stewards, the local presidents and vice-presidents behind closed doors, where we can have a personal, direct conversation. I want them to know that as Solicitor General I respect them very much and I feel they must be respected.

I also feel that the steps the Deputy Solicitor General for corrections has taken, as an example, for culture, recognition and acknowledgement—so that we have a culture of recognition and acknowledgement, because it is a tough job.

I can tell you that I have met regularly with our local union leadership, and I'm proud of the relationship that we've carved out.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Through you, Chair, to the Solicitor General: Thank you for that reply. I appreciate the fact that you have worked so hard to build relationships with the OPSEU corrections unit. Absolutely, it's part of the job. I expect no less.

What I'm curious to know is, what transpires out of those conversations—besides having a conversation? Do you walk out with a plan to ensure that you start tracking the number of lockdowns that have taken place—and if you do, can you share with us how many lockdowns have taken place in Ontario corrections and for what reason?

Families of inmates have contacted me—probably yourself, as well, as the Solicitor General—as well as conversations with corrections officers have taken place, and I'm hearing that the situation has not gotten better.

This government has been in power for close to eight years, and I'm just concerned that we have a system that is being built up that's unsustainable. While you try to grow the number of beds—but it's cracking around the seams. And even by way of presentation—I heard about deferred capital costs in corrections.

So where are the sustainability and the positive outcomes in all of this?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Firstly, our government is very clear: We're not going to pander to the criminals. We are not going to pander to the fact that many in our jail system are repeat and violent offenders. A lot of them are drug addicts too.

What we want to make sure of is that we hire more correctional officers. That's what we've done. We want to make sure that we make the infrastructure improvements.

I think, to answer the member's question directly, it's being bold, to say for the first time—and to be accountable—"How will we put a thousand new beds into the system within a short period of time?" We've provided the details publicly at news conferences, in the Legislature, institution by institution, and that's important.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): New question, please. You've got one minute.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

The Solicitor General—through you, Chair—has commented several times that the jails are full of drug addicts. I'm sure that they're also full of human traffickers as well as rapists and other types of assailants, and probably some dangerous criminals. They're also, I think, overrepresented by Black and Indigenous racialized communities; communities that are poor; communities that perhaps have experienced an education system that has taken a carceral approach, that has been punitive and is a pipeline to jails.

I think, Solicitor General, you recognize the spending will not be sustainable if people are not going to be rehabilitated, coming out. So where is the rehabilitation—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Excuse me. Your time has passed. You might want to pursue that question in the next round.

We're now going to move on to the third party. MPP McCrimmon, please.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: For the Solicitor General: I'm a data person. Give me the data, the evidence, the science, the experts.

I want to make sure that you're tracking the safety of your correctional workers and what happens, and then that there are things that are addressed, if there are problems.

How do you track what happens in the correctional institutions to your correctional workers, and how do you make changes, if changes are needed?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Mr. Chair, to the member from Kanata–Carleton: I also am a student of data analytics. I believe that when we can review our data we can take that in mind when making good decisions. This is something that is important.

I'll ask the Deputy Solicitor General for corrections to shine some light on why data is as important as it is, not only on the public safety side, but on corrections as well.

Ms. Erin Hannah: Thank you, Minister.

We have a data intelligence unit for corrections and community safety. We are continually looking to expand our digitization of data so that we can have easy access, start to set baselines, and track trends. There are some areas where we're more advanced than others.

So, to one of the examples that was used—we do track assaults that occur within institutions. These are internal data points. I know you raised the question earlier about publicly available data. We look at inmate-on-inmate assaults, inmate-on-staff assaults. We look at trends over time, to identify where we may have challenges in specific institutions and then consider why there is a differential in one institution next to another, particularly when they're of similar sizes—what are some of the best practices that we can draw on and apply to another institution that's experiencing more challenges?

Lockdown data was mentioned earlier as well. We do track lockdowns. That's a relatively new phenomenon for us—not the lockdowns, but the tracking, and looking at how we differentiate between scheduled lockdowns that are necessary to the normal operations of an institution

versus unscheduled lockdowns that happen for a variety of different reasons.

So those are some examples of the data points. It's, again, a journey for the ministry, and we're continuing to make advancements each year.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: I'm happy to hear that. Thank you very much.

My next question is along the same lines. I'm interested in rehabilitation and recidivism. Do we have any statistics that actually show whether we're being successful at rehabilitating people before we put them back on the streets?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, just in preamble—I have visited, as Solicitor General, almost all of our correctional institutions, and what I can tell you is that the programming there is very important.

There's another component that I think we have to put on the record, and that's the role that the chaplains and the native inmate liaison officers, the NILOs, play. If we are able, while a person is in our custody, to have them reaffirm their willingness—because you have to want to help yourself too—then we have the people in our facilities to help them along the way.

I'll ask the Deputy Solicitor General for corrections to add a supplementary.

Ms. Erin Hannah: We have two streams of programming that relate to reducing recidivism—and I think recidivism data is quite high. I think we see about 42% who return with a second contact within one year after exiting the justice system. So we do have an area for improvement there, absolutely. Obviously, the corrections system alone can't address that. There are other supports in the broader social and community sphere that need to come together to actually bring that recidivism rate down and help individuals to find a different path away from reoffending.

1630

Within the corrections system, we have programming that the minister mentioned, in community correctional services. That's really focused on supporting people who are under community supervision to have a successful reintegration into their communities.

We also have the programming that I mentioned earlier, within institutions, and the work we're doing to change the dynamic of that programming to recognize the population we have in play. The minister mentioned individuals who identify with substance use alerts. We've added over 60 addiction counsellors to institutions across the province to support with voluntary treatment and an agreement to participate in those programs. So that's just one example, again.

We have the native liaison inmate program that supports Indigenous individuals.

We have programming with a variety of community partners that come in and provide educational supports.

So there's a lot happening in this space, even within the confines of the institution itself.

To the question of how we're measuring: I think that we can do a better job. Again, it goes back to that journey on data, where we need to ramp up the level of evaluation we have on program outcomes so that we can continue to

drive our investments into the programs that are demonstrating more impact.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: A follow-up on that: When we're talking about substance abuse and addiction—have you seen, inside of any of your own programs and institutions, programs that have been more successful than others, programs that might be of use in the broader society?

Ms. Erin Hannah: Specific to addictions?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Yes.

Ms. Erin Hannah: Specific to addictions—it's a very individualized journey, as I'm sure you're aware. Both from a voluntary participation standpoint, the type of programming that somebody might want to participate in, which can range from straightforward counselling—it could be programs that are established, like Narcotics Anonymous; it can be opioid agonist therapy. They range from clinical treatments through to more counselling-based programs. And I think the success, again, is very individualized in terms of the persons who are participating.

I would say that one of the areas that we are focused on—and we've established community reintegration tables to support this, including, very specifically, with Indigenous health care and First Nation community partners like Kenora Chiefs Advisory—is where we're focused on how you transition an individual who is receiving treatment or counselling for addiction within an institution but is now entering the community and is worried about losing access to that type of support. We're trying to make sure that we're making those connections for them, with up to six months of follow-up support to kind of ground that.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Back to my favourite data evidence management kind of question—but this one is about gender-based violence: How are we tracking the incidents of gender-based violence? And how do we measure it so that we know, if we are going to put programs in place to counter it or reduce it, they're actually going to be successful? How do we know we're getting it right?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Mr. Chair: It's an all-of-government approach—because no act is acceptable. We have to work across ministries, number one. We have to work with victim services organizations—because there are multi-points to track data; it's not just at one point. There's the judicial system, as well, to track.

I can tell the member from Kanata–Carleton that when the associate minister and I were at Peel Regional Police service and we met with victim services there, we were really illuminated on where there are opportunities with municipal First Nations and OPP services to collect more data and to make the community that much more aware of threats that may be coming their way through people who may be getting out on bail.

I want to just say that's why we have to be tough on bail. That's why we have to make sure we have the federal government take action. I'm going to be optimistic—the associate and I are going to be optimistic. But you have to remember, as a result of the revolving door—that's the reason we're in this situation of having so many repeat and violent offenders, drug addicts, and people, as the member from Toronto said, who have done really bad things.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Again, if the data, evidence, science and statistics all proves that a certain policy measure works—I'd really like to know the ministry's policy, its understanding of the use of automated speed enforcement. What is the ministry's policy, position and evidence that they use to make decisions around that?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Chair, through you: What I can tell you is that I am very supportive of the Premier, whose call is that we cannot have speed cameras generating \$20 million and \$30 million a year. That's a cash grab.

I'll say this to the member from Kanata—Carleton—her and I may be from a similar generation. I looked on Wikipedia—she may be a couple of years on me. I'll tell you this: I remember—but that's okay. I remember, growing up, that when you drove through a school zone, you slowed down; that there were illuminated yellow signs—and most recently, there were roundabouts. So this concept of why we have to rely on a speed camera that will send you a bill months later is not a deterrent—the way that the member from Kanata—Carleton and I and the Deputy Solicitor Generals might remember it was something that I think is a hell of a lot more effective.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Back to MPP McCrimmon: You have three minutes and 34 seconds. I'm sure you've got a couple of more questions.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Of course I do, Chair, even in my doddering old age here.

Laughter.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: All right.

I happen to have a lot of data, evidence, science and statistics that say that speed cameras do work as a deterrent—it reduces the number of vehicles that are speeding in it at any one time. I can understand where you might want to rein it in. Maybe put some guidelines around how it's used. But when the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police comes out in favour of speed cameras, it's really hard to stand up and challenge them, because they have the experience, the evidence and the data to actually say that this works. Why couldn't we just put some additional guidelines in place, if we were worried about it being a cash grab instead of slowing vehicles down in a school zone? Why couldn't we just put some guidelines in place instead of banning them in their entirety?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Mr. Chair: The Police Association of Ontario was against it.

Perhaps the association she referred to does not have police chiefs from my generation who remembered, as the Premier did, ways that you would drive through school zones with yellow signs, with crosswalks, with roundabouts—and people's behaviour worked just fine.

I find it offensive that now municipalities are intentionally putting a budget line for their police services—as if the police services should claim part of the proceeds.

I'll ask the associate minister, please—

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Oh, that's okay. I don't—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Yes, go ahead.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: —if that's all right. I've only got a minute.

I just wanted to say it's the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, a pretty august group of people, who came out in support of speed cameras.

I'll ask my question: Why couldn't you just put guideposts in place instead of banning them in their entirety?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Associate Minister, you've got 57 seconds.

1640

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you, Chair.

I come from a municipal background. I spent 12 years as a councillor in Milton.

One of the challenges with speed cameras is that they don't actually slow down the cars in the moment; they send you a ticket after. So when you talk about—

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: They do. I'm sorry—

Hon. Zee Hamid: Not in the moment, though.

When you talk about public safety, when you're talking about something in front of schools—traffic-calming measures work a lot better. We saw that in Milton, which is why Milton doesn't actually have any speed cameras. Instead, what we ended up doing is putting in traffic-calming measures like speed bumps, like curbs, and other strategies, in front of community safety zones. What that did is it slowed every car down to the speed that the road was designed for, that we wanted cars to travel at, which—again, no fines issued, but we got the actual result that we wanted, which was slowing down cars.

As the minister mentioned, it's also important to note that the Police Association of Ontario—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, sir. That concludes your answer.

We're back to the government. MPP Gualtieri, please.

MPP Silvia Gualtieri: Thank you to the Ministry of the Solicitor General—the Honourable Michael Kerzner, the Honourable Zee Hamid. And thank you to the ministry staff—Mario Di Tommaso and Erin Hannah. Thank you very much for being here alongside us.

I would like to say that as the parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General and also as the MPP for Mississauga East—Cooksville, public safety, community safety is the highest on our list of issues. Definitely, public safety would be the main issue that would be of concern to us in every shape and form.

I was also happy to attend one of our correctional services, along with the minister, in Niagara. And let me tell you, it was an eye-opener. I had never been to a correctional centre. For me, it was definitely an eye-opener, in the sense that I could see both sides—I could see the staff and how hard they worked, and I can also understand the plight of the inmates and their families.

I would like to say that I definitely assist the minister with the correctional reform that we are initiating and continuing.

Solicitor General, you have spoken about the investments into improving and expanding correctional infrastructure, which is an important and welcome effort. As these projects move from planning and design into construction and implementation, it is important for this committee to understand how these investments are being prioritized, how they align

with broader correctional reform goals, and how their impact will be a measure over time.

Minister, can you provide further detail on how the ministry is prioritizing infrastructure investments across Ontario's correctional institutions? Additionally, how is the government ensuring that these new builds and upgrades are designed to support modern correctional practices, including enhanced programming, mental health services and staff training?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: When I got to tour the province, as Solicitor General, and to go to our correctional complexes—I really marvel at the strength of a correctional officer who comes to work when it's not always easy. They have to be respected.

That's why—as minister, and supported by our two great Deputy Solicitor Generals and Associate Minister Hamid—we take a very open-minded approach. We want to learn from our correctional officers how more the government can be responsive to their needs—and we do.

To answer the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville's question—it's very simple. We're leaving no stone unturned. All correctional complexes have gone through an investigation of how we can add more beds and make investments into that facility. Whether that be up north, in the Monteith Correctional Complex near Iroquois Falls, which I have visited, or in one of the smallest jails that we have, in Brockville, the message is the same.

Here's an interesting fact: When the Liberals closed seven jails, they took over 2,000 beds out of the system. And it goes further: After they closed the Brantford jail—by the way, I'm working very hard with the Deputy Solicitor General to see if we can get a report on how we can reopen it, because it is next to the courthouse, it's right there, and whether we could put 80 people there or 100 people there, or more; we should at least see. What did the Liberal government do, led by Kathleen Wynne? They spent millions of dollars renovating the boilers, the roofs and other features.

I went to the Walkerton jail, proudly closed by the Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty and Premier Wynne. What did I find? Again, they spent a lot of money right after it was closed.

I'm looking to see if we can reacquire the Walkerton jail, because the county there would love to see it reopen. Again, I'm working with the deputy minister.

What I can say is this: We cannot, we will not leave one stone unturned. We will be ambitious. We will be bold. We will be innovative. We will be imaginative. And we will look for, as they say, every nook and cranny so that we can have a correctional system that will be there not only for today but for tomorrow.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): New question. MPP Ciriello, please.

MPP Monica Ciriello: Minister, you made a comment earlier, in one of your previous answers, about technology and what happens when we don't invest in technology.

I know when I speak to my residents in Hamilton or I speak to my emergency services in Hamilton, they certainly see a positive impact—when investments like Next Generation 9-1-1 are being spoken about.

Significant enhancements to the operational effectiveness of all emergency services are so important to communities right across this province.

My question is, can you elaborate on the specific steps the government is taking to accelerate the deployment of the Public Safety Broadband Network, including timelines, funding commitments, and how provincial input, such as Ontario's pilot findings and governance recommendations, is helping the federal policy development process? And how is the ministry working to support the advancement of a nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network in Canada?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Wow, that's a great question. Let me deal with the first part first, and that's the investment in NG 9-1-1.

We've come forward with \$208 million over three years—and there'll be a fourth round, actually, coming out this year—to help municipalities migrate. Why? Because municipalities have to have that extra funding that will allow everybody to reach the finish line. We have made amazing progress. And when I've seen some of the police services and fire services already have migrated over—the capacity in the years ahead.

By the way, there will be training for our amazing 911 call operators, as the Premier and I like to call them. It's to recognize that they will be able to get real-time information from the scene of an accident—never before have received in this format.

We've been bold, but we had to help the municipalities along the way—and it's work.

You also brought up the Public Safety Broadband Network, which is also important. We've had many discussions with our federal counterparts. By the way, Ontario is leading the way. This will be a multi-billion dollar investment. It will involve many ministries in government. It will also set us upon a course that we won't turn back on—and that is, if we don't confront the emerging of technology, if we don't confront innovation, then we will be left behind.

At the end of the day—and the members opposite talked about it—we're asking people to put themselves, their careers, on the line. They have to be supported with technology. And I'm happy to say that just in the last few years—whether it be body-worn cameras; whether it be, on the fire side, new pieces of technology to help clean bunker gear and helmets—we're at the forefront of this. And do you know what? We're leading the country in it.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Allsopp, please.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Chair, through you to the Solicitor General: As you may know, I'm the former chair of the Belleville police service board. Being a police service board chair and a member of municipal council, I know first-hand the demands that the community have in terms of community safety and making sure that they can go and enjoy parks, enjoy public spaces and feel safe while they're doing it, but then balancing that at a price point that they can afford to pay.

1650

The Community Safety and Policing Grant has been absolutely instrumental to so many municipalities. You've

talked several times today about being bold and innovative. We adopted things like the body-worn camera program, tasers, and we instituted virtual reality training, so that officers could make sure that they were properly outfitted and were ready to go to work every day and provide safety for the community.

The thing that I want to ask you about is the strengthening in the investment that has occurred in the province's public safety infrastructure, enhancing the capacity of law enforcement across this province—and if you could provide a comprehensive overview of the government's investments in public safety, and then also talk about the importance of those community safety grants.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Mr. Chair: The investments that the government has made—Minister Hamid spoke about grants, as well—it's in the hundreds of millions of dollars. The Community Safety and Policing Grant, the auto theft grant, the Bail Compliance and Warrant Apprehension Grant, the proceeds of crime grant, the CCTV grant—and the list goes on. These are vital, and the member knows, because he has a great municipal police service in Belleville—one I've visited a number of times—also protected by the OPP in the rural areas. The grants are essential—when we look at the grants that allow police services to work with other agencies, as well. We have a number of other grants—the MCRT grant, which is very important.

So the member is correct; they can't do it alone. What they need to have—the member from Bay of Quinte—is a government that is not afraid to come forward with ideas, that's not afraid to dialogue with our stakeholders, that's not afraid to tell Ontarians we will protect them.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): New question, please. MPP Darouze.

MPP George Darouze: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Through you, again to the minister: We talked a little bit, and I heard you answer some questions concerning—and you called them frequent flyers. I want to go a little bit more into depth specifically on that topic.

Repeat offenders pose further risk to public safety. This issue has become a focal point in discussions around justice reform. It's clear that the current bail system is not adequately protecting victims or deterring high-risk individuals; we hear it every day.

The government has consistently emphasized the importance of being tough on crime and ensuring that our justice system prioritizes the safety of law-abiding citizens and front-line officers.

Given this context, can you outline the specific steps the Ontario government has taken to advocate for meaningful bail reform at the federal level? What is the government's position on the necessity of making bail stricter for repeat violent offenders, and how does this align with broader efforts to strengthen public safety across the province?

Furthermore, Minister, how does Ontario view the federal government's recent bail reform measures? Do they go far enough in addressing the concern that we've been raising and that our community is raising, or is there more that needs to be done to ensure accountability and deterrence?

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you for that excellent question.

As the committee knows, criminal law is federal, so when it comes to bail reform, our hands have been tied. We had to rely on the federal government to bring forward legislation on that front. As I mentioned earlier, Premier Ford and the province of Ontario led the charge, organizing other provinces to make sure that we have a unified ask of the federal government.

Before I answer that question—the first half of your question was about specific investments. Our government has invested over \$110 million of new funding to strengthen enforcement and stop repeat violent offenders from threatening our communities. We also put millions, as I mentioned earlier in my remarks, into grants in support of police services to ensure they have the tools and resources they need to keep the province safe.

After years, the federal government has finally responded, announcing some legislation, and we do welcome their good first steps. We do welcome the steps to introduce reverse onus for major crimes and to allow consecutive sentencing.

Right now, under Bill C-75 that they introduced in 2019, the assumption is that every person will be given bail as soon as possible, with minimal conditions—which often means no condition at all—including those involved with serious crime and repeat offenders. So this reverse onus is a good first step.

Some other positive parts of the legislation they've announced—consecutive sentencing. Today, if someone commits multiple crimes and they're given multiple sentences, they can serve them all at the same time, as opposed to serving one after another. So that's a positive change as well—and also not allowing conditional sentencing for sexual crimes.

Our government has been advocating for these for years. But I want to be clear that these only address a very small subset of our 12 recommendations that we—the last letter that we issued to the federal government, on September 22. So while we welcome these, more work needs to be done, and we look forward to working with the federal government to do that work. And I do want to talk about what some of those are—mandatory minimum sentencing for serious crimes. Think of adults who are going after—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, sir, for that answer.

The time for questions from the government members has concluded.

We're back to the official opposition. You have seven minutes.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'm going to address some of the concerns that my colleague and I have raised today. The number one thing that we're trying to put forward is the frequent complaints that we're getting from correctional officers on overcrowding, the use of force by correctional officers, and inadequate health care that is provided to individuals who are housed within our detention centres.

My question, quickly—and I'm going to ask if you can be quick or if you can put this in writing for me and get it back to me, so I can address these with some of my constituents, as well as correctional officers. My first thing

is, the portion of the 2025-26 estimates—how much is being directed specifically to addressing overcrowding, which is so dangerous within these correctional services, not only for the individuals who are being housed there, but also for the workers? We definitely have to see something within the portion of the 2025-26 estimates that's going to address this. It's very, very crucial to protect everyone. We see in these estimates that you've said officers—and believe me, I know how valuable our police officers are.

We have the best police force in the whole of Ontario, with our Niagara Regional Police Service and my chief of police, Mr. Fordy—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): All right. Thank you.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Anyway, I would like to see what portion in the 2025-26 estimates this is.

I've heard today that you've put in money for our police force, for public safety, but we don't see it for our correctional officers, and I'd like to see that. I'd like to know how much—and give me just a specific amount, if you could, please.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Chair, I'll ask the deputy, in a second, to comment.

I appreciate, by the way, that the member—and it's not to be disputed; she loves her police service and her fire service, and she has great chiefs.

That's exactly why, when we went to the Niagara Detention Centre, we said we're going to build a modular build. It's accumulative of a government's approach to do many things—to put money into infrastructure, to hire more correctional officers. It's not one simple line, as response—it's doing many things. I think the member would appreciate, especially since the Niagara Detention Centre is in her own riding, that putting more capacity there is a good idea.

I'll ask Deputy Hannah if she would be brief and—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Deputy Minister, to the question—and the official opposition only has four minutes, so if you could try to be concise in your response, please. Thank you.

Ms. Erin Hannah: I think the challenge with the question is, I'm not sure what you're looking for in terms of a specific line.

I already mentioned what we are investing and what you can see in terms of the value for capital.

If you're asking for a staff operating cost, we can provide that in writing, in follow-up, but—

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Okay. Great.

Now I'm going to—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): New question, please.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you: This question is going to jump over to—a question on animal welfare laws.

1700

When the government transitioned enforcement of animal welfare laws from the OSPCA to the new provincial animal welfare services, PAWS, we were told this would create a stronger, more transparent system for protecting animals across Ontario. However, since its creation, there have been ongoing concerns raised by advocates and animal

welfare groups and even front-line officers about staffing shortages, long response times, and inconsistent enforcement across regions. Media reports have also highlighted cases where serious animal welfare complaints were left unresolved or delayed for weeks. And questions persist about whether PAWS has the resources—do they have the structure needed to meet the provincial-wide mandate?

My question is, what has been the cost to enforce PAWS since the act became law and enforcement switched from the OSPCA to PAWS enforcement officers?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Chair, we have, as the Deputy Solicitor General said, over 200 animal welfare inspectors. We've laid over 17,000 distress orders and 2,200 charges.

The member brought up something that I want to say: We will have to grow the number of FTEs over time, for no other reason than that there will be further iterations of the act. We came forward with the PUPS Act. As things move forward, we will have to expand that even further.

But what we have set is a piece of legislation and regulations that set a tone and expectation.

I hope that the member opposite will continue to support the evolution of strengthening animal welfare services, because we're on a course that we don't want to change.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you for that answer, Minister. You mentioned PUPS. That will lead me right into my next question.

For three years, I've met with advocates like Donna Power and Linda Henderson of the Humane Initiative, who have pointed out, time and time again, that despite new legislation, as you brought forward through the PUPS Act, inspectors need more resources. We're hearing that through PAWS; we're hearing this through PUPS—that inspectors need more resources, and we simply need more inspectors to be able to enforce adequately.

In fact, the ministry's expenditures appear to show that your spending for 2024-25, so far, is at about \$24.5 million for services within the animal welfare division, but only \$19.7 million has been allocated for the 2025-26 fiscal year. That is a decrease, if my math is good—I think it is—of over \$4.7 million to this account. Is that right?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): I'm sorry, but your time has concluded.

I did say in my introduction that the deputy minister has arranged to have the hearing closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly. It's my view that the last question please be responded to in writing—thank you.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): This concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of the Solicitor General.

Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put without further amendment or debate every question necessary to dispose of the estimates.

Are the members ready to vote?

Shall vote 2601, ministry administration program, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Shall vote 2603, public safety division, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Shall vote 2604, Ontario Provincial Police, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Shall vote 2605, correctional services, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Shall vote 2607, agencies, boards and commissions, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Shall vote 2609, emergency planning and management, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Shall vote 2610, strategic policy division, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Shall vote 2612, inspectorate, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Shall vote 2614, emergency services telecommunications, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Shall vote 2615, data insights and strategic initiatives, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Shall vote 2616, health services, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Shall vote 2617, infrastructure, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Shall the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of the Solicitor General carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. It's carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of the Solicitor General to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Members of the committee, our presentees today, all the staff in the back seats and the staff from the minister's office and associate minister's office, this concludes our consideration of the ministry's estimates.

I'd like to thank the Solicitor General, the Associate Solicitor General, the deputy ministers, and all the staff who are joining us by Zoom and those in the back chairs for all of your participation here today.

Thank you, Madam Clerk, Hansard, and research.

Thank you to the members who so diligently participated.

There being no further business, this committee stands adjourned until 1 p.m. on Thursday, October 30, 2025.

The committee adjourned at 1709.

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