

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

SP-6

Journal des débats (Hansard)

SP-6

Standing Committee on Social Policy

Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Estimates

Ministry of Colleges, Universities,
Research Excellence and Security

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

Budget des dépenses

Ministère des Collèges et Universités,
de l'Excellence en recherche et de la Sécurité

Ministère des Services à l'enfance
et des Services sociaux et communautaires

1st Session
44th Parliament

Wednesday 12 November 2025

1^{re} session
44^e législature

Mercredi 12 novembre 2025

Chair: Brian Riddell
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Président : Brian Riddell
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

Hansard on the Internet

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

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

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

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

Index inquiries

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

Renseignements sur l'index

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

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



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

ISSN 1710-9477

CONTENTS

Wednesday 12 November 2025

Estimates	SP-99
Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security	SP-99
Hon. Nolan Quinn	
Mr. David Wai	
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.....	SP-127
Hon. Michael Parsa	
Mr. Daniele Zanotti	
Ms. Shella Salazar	
Ms. Taunya Paquette	
Ms. Linda Chihab	
Ms. Jackie Cureton	
Hon. Charmaine A. Williams	
Ms. Cordelia Clarke Julien	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
SOCIAL POLICYCOMITÉ PERMANENT DE
LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE

Wednesday 12 November 2025

Mercredi 12 novembre 2025

The committee met at 1002 in committee room 2.

ESTIMATES

MINISTRY OF COLLEGES, UNIVERSITIES,
RESEARCH EXCELLENCE AND SECURITY

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Social Policy will now come to order. We are meeting to consider the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security for a total of three hours.

As a reminder, the ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address.

Are there any questions from the members before we start?

I am now required to call vote 3001, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement of not more than 20 minutes from the Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security.

Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Good morning, everyone.

As Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security, I'm incredibly honoured to lead our world-class post-secondary and research institutes. Since my appointment to this ministry in August 2024, we have made record-setting investments, built the workforce of tomorrow and protected Ontario through our colleges, universities and research institutes. I'm pleased to share more details of this work with all of you.

Ontario is globally recognized as having an outstanding post-secondary education system. We are home to 56 publicly funded institutions: 23 universities, which includes five universities that provide French-language and bilingual programs, and two fully French-language universities; 24 colleges, including two French-language colleges; and nine Indigenous institutes. These 56 institutions deliver high-quality education to more than 880,000 full-time students across the province. Inside each of these institutions, we're preparing the workforce of tomorrow—a workforce that is dynamic, highly skilled, and ready to face whatever may come our way.

Our post-secondary education system is driving economic growth by delivering graduates who are equipped to lead our key industries upon graduation. Right now, in schools across Ontario, we're educating the next spinal

surgeon, the next road builder, the next teacher and the next computer engineer, who will take our province to new heights. That highly skilled workforce is protecting Ontario and our economy today and for decades to come, which is why our government continues to make the critical investments to support our post-secondary institutions and our students to get them into rewarding careers that fill labour demands across the province.

In March of this year, I was honoured when the Premier expanded my ministry to highlight our extraordinary work in Ontario's research sector. Under this expanded title, we are continuing to protect Ontario by driving groundbreaking research across the province—research that saves lives, advances our industries, and creates good-paying jobs.

Our province is home to some of the brightest minds in the world. From cancer treatments to advanced manufacturing to AI innovation, Ontario researchers are making the discoveries that build a stronger, more prosperous province and world, which is why our government continues to support discoveries with vital infrastructure, investment and commercialization support. Through these efforts, we're cementing Ontario's status as a top jurisdiction for research excellence, talent and innovation.

Whether it's through post-secondary or research institutes, our government is protecting our future by investing in our students and our researchers, because when Ontario's students and researchers succeed, Ontario succeeds.

To begin, I'd like to go over a few significant investments we've made this year. Over the past six months, our government has invested nearly a billion dollars in new funding to expand enrolment in key economy-driving programs at our colleges and universities.

In April, I announced that our government is investing \$750 million into STEM programs at our world-class colleges and universities. This expansion will fund up to 20,500 STEM seats every year, giving students access to cutting-edge programs, hands-on learning opportunities and work placements with employers, so that when they graduate they are ready to take careers in STEM by storm.

STEM programs are the future of our economy, producing the scientists, the chemical engineers, the software developers, data analysts, and so many more who will propel our businesses and strengthen our key industries. With this expansion, we're ensuring that Ontario has a strong pipeline of highly skilled STEM workers today and for decades into the future.

As I'm sure you've heard from my colleagues, our government has a bold plan to unlock the Ring of Fire and usher in a new era of prosperity for our province—at the centre of that work is unleashing the economic opportunity that lies within the Ring of Fire. In order to harness this opportunity, we need the highly skilled workers to do so now and for decades to come.

That's why, in May, I announced that our government is investing \$10 million to establish a First Nations resource development scholarship program. This program will cover tuition, books and other educational costs for approximately 900 First Nations students who are pursuing careers in mining and other resource industries.

First Nations have been incredible partners as we work together to create a strong, made-in-Ontario critical mineral supply chain. Through these scholarships, our government is ensuring First Nations students not only have barrier-free access to in-demand mining careers, but that they can also bring the success of these careers home to their communities.

Our government monitors all workforces across Ontario to ensure we have the workers we need to drive those industries forward.

A workforce we continue to monitor closely is the teaching workforce. Our government knows that in order to have successful futures, students in K-to-12 need a strong start to their education that inspires a love of learning and equips them with the skills they need to thrive. As a father of three young children and a husband to a wonderful teacher, I see first-hand the impact incredible teachers have on our kids. As Ontario continues to grow, our province needs more well-educated teachers to ensure our children fulfill their potential and make positive contributions to their workplace, their community and our economy in the future years, which is why, in June of this year, our government stepped up to invest more than \$55 million to expand teaching seats at our bachelor of education programs. This investment will train up to 2,600 new teachers for Ontario classrooms by 2027. We also recognize that some communities in Ontario are in more need of teachers than others, which is why we focused this investment on expanding teaching seats for high-demand areas like French and technology, and in rural and northern communities, as well as compressed programs to get new teachers into classrooms faster. As I say often, our students of today are our leaders of tomorrow, and that extends to our K-to-12 students as well. In order to become leaders, our children need strong teachers, throughout their early education, to prepare them for success. With this investment, we're ensuring students in all corners of the province get the start they need to thrive. But our work does not stop there.

Like all labour markets across Ontario, our government continues to monitor the needs of the health care workforce. As part of our government's plan to protect Ontario, we are connecting everyone in the province to convenient, high-quality health care close to home. In order to do this, we need to have a strong talent pool of highly skilled health care workers, which is why, in August, our govern-

ment invested nearly \$57 million to expand enrolment in nursing programs in Ontario's colleges and universities. This expansion will train an additional 2,200 nursing students by 2029, while also supporting innovative, flexible, online nursing pathways so personal support workers and registered practical nurses can upskill their education while continuing to serve and work in their community. On top of this, we invested \$7.5 million to upgrade nursing clinical supplies and laboratory equipment at our universities, so students have access to cutting-edge tools to get the hands-on training they need to thrive in their career. With both of these investments, we're training the nurses of tomorrow and building a more connected and convenient health care system, to provide excellent care for our friends, loved ones and neighbours in communities all across Ontario.

1010

To close off an incredible summer of investments, I was proud to share in August that our government is investing \$75 million to expand enrolment in construction-related programs at colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes. Our province is growing fast. We have an ambitious \$200-billion plan to ensure our highways, homes and critical infrastructure keep up with our growth. To fulfill that plan, we need a highly skilled, made-in-Ontario workforce to get it done for our province. This investment will train up to 7,800 students for in-demand jobs such as urban and land use planners, electrical engineering technicians, and other careers that build a stronger Ontario. Students supported by this investment will build our homes, our highways and hospitals that Ontario needs today, but for decades to come as well.

From nursing to STEM to construction, teaching and mining, our government is investing in the workforce that Ontario needs today and for tomorrow. In five short months, we invested nearly a billion dollars into our world-class colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes to fund over 100,000 seats in labour-market-driven programs. That is on top of the \$1.3 billion we invested into the sector last year. We do this because we know our post-secondary institutions are not just places of learning; they're epicentres of workforce development.

When it comes to protecting Ontario, we have to protect the Ontario of tomorrow, ensuring our workforce is always dynamic and ready to face whatever may come our way. And that is exactly what these investments are doing—building Ontario's workforce for today, tomorrow and every day after that.

Now that I've discussed how we're building the workforce across critical sectors, I want to take a moment and touch on how we are breaking down barriers to get students into these programs.

A program that I'm particularly proud of is the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant. The grant covers tuition, books and other learning resources for students enrolled in nursing, paramedic and lab tech programs in high-need communities, who commit to working there after they graduate. Since being introduced two years ago, over 8,200 students have received nearly \$96 million in funding through the

Ontario Learn and Stay Grant. Earlier this year, we invested over \$260 million to continue this program, breaking down even more barriers and strengthening our health care workforce in communities that need these workers the most. But that's not all. With an additional \$160-million investment, we are expanding the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant to include medical students who commit to practising as a family doctor for five years after graduation. As I mentioned earlier, our government has a bold plan to connect every person in Ontario to excellent primary care. By covering the tuition for family doctors, we are enabling more students to receive medical education and have successful careers providing excellent care in communities all across Ontario.

Our government is also breaking down financial barriers through the Ontario Student Assistance Program, or OSAP. In the 2024-25 academic year, we issued over \$2 billion in grant and loan funding through OSAP—half a billion dollars more than we issued last year. This financial support went to approximately 470,000 full-time students, and 85% of this financial aid was provided as a grant, meaning students do not have to pay this money back. Financial challenges should not keep the next great surgeon or teacher or welder from pursuing their dream career. Our government is proud to support our students with funding to cover their tuition, books and other educational costs every year, to set them on the path for success.

The investments I spoke of thus far reach schools across the province, because our government believes that no matter where you live, you should have access to an excellent education.

But we also recognize that some of our institutions have unique needs based on their community, and we are proud to make the investments to support those needs.

For example, to support our northern, rural and smaller universities and colleges, we have invested nearly \$120 million this year alone, which is on top of their operating funding. We know our colleges and universities play a vital role in their communities, and nowhere is that more true than in our smaller, rural and northern communities, which is why our government is proud to provide this extra financial support to ensure these institutions can keep building their workforce.

Another example of the unique support our government offers institutions is our support of French-language education. Our French-language post-secondary system is the largest in Canada outside of Quebec, with nine institutions and more than 33,000 students enrolled in high-quality French-language and bilingual programs. Last year alone, we invested \$831 million in French-language and bilingual colleges and universities. This summer, we took that support to new heights by investing \$10 million to relaunch academic operations at the University of Sudbury, in partnership with the University of Ottawa, expanding opportunity for excellent French-language higher education in Ontario's north. Across all of our francophone and French-language institutions, our government is proud to be building a highly skilled francophone work-

force so that our French communities and industries can continue to prosper and strengthen Ontario's economy.

While I could go on all day about the incredible things our government is doing at our colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes, in the interest of time, I'm going to turn my attention to research.

On top of having a world-class post-secondary education system, Ontario is home to an exceptional research sector whose groundbreaking discoveries fuel economic growth, drive innovation and improve lives across our province, Canada and beyond.

That's why, since 2018, our government has invested over \$2 billion in homegrown research and innovation. We know that each dollar we invest in Ontario-made research is a dollar that protects Ontario; let me explain, with a couple of examples, why that is.

Since 2018, we invested in over 1,600 research projects through the Ontario Research Fund and Early Researcher Awards. These projects are truly incredible, attracting top talent, enabling life-saving discoveries and securing investments for Ontario-made innovation.

For example, earlier this year, as part of a \$75-million investment in homegrown research, I announced that our government invested \$45 million into the Canadian Biomanufacturing Cooperative, an Ontario-led initiative where researchers uncover new ways to protect the province from future pandemics, build a highly skilled biomanufacturing workforce, and expand access to clinical trials for new life-saving treatments.

Last fall, as part of a \$92-million research investment, our government invested nearly \$2 million in the Lawson Health Research Institute, to detect early brain degeneration, enabling earlier detection and treatment of diseases like dementia and Alzheimer's.

These are just two of the examples of the incredible research taking place in Ontario that our government is proud to support, because the benefits of homegrown research extend beyond the science.

Across all of our research investments, we have supported the creation of more than 120,000 training opportunities for researchers and students across the province. We've contributed to 406 patents being granted, formed 76 spinoff companies, and created nearly 600 new jobs at those spinoffs. But it doesn't end there.

Earlier this fall, I announced our investment of almost \$18 million to support the expansion of operations at the McMaster nuclear reactor. Thanks to this investment, the reactor will be able to operate 24 hours per day, seven days a week, producing more life-saving medical isotopes for our loved ones facing cancer and other serious illnesses. The McMaster nuclear reactor is Canada's largest nuclear research facility and one of the world's top suppliers of life-saving medical isotopes. By expanding operations, McMaster will create a stronger local supply chain for manufacturing medical isotopes, support further advancements in nuclear medicine, and bring new drugs and therapies to the market.

Nearly a quarter of a million Canadians are diagnosed with cancer each year, and we're making sure that they

have access to homegrown treatments today and well into the future.

Whether it's targeted seat expansion to build Ontario's workforce that Ontario needs tomorrow or discovering new ways to treat and eradicate diseases our communities face today, our government is making the critical investments to safeguard Ontario's future. We know that in order to achieve our full potential as a province and to become the global powerhouse we know ourselves to be, we must be two steps ahead. We have to foresee what our economy, our businesses, our families will need five, 10 and 20 years from now. If we don't start planning for tomorrow today, we will not be ready to meet that day when it comes.

1020

If the last year has taught us anything, it is to expect the unexpected, to be ready, to be nimble and able to respond to whatever may come our way.

Our colleges, universities and Indigenous and research institutes are the way that we future-proof this province. The investments we made over the last year will ensure our people, industries and economy will be able to thrive in the years ahead. As our province continues to grow and prosper amid unprecedented global economic threats, our post-secondary and research institutes are the pipeline through which prosperity will flow.

Our government will make critical investments to make sure Ontario has the industry titans we need to take our province to new heights. An investment in our post-secondary and research sector is an investment in a stronger, more self-reliant Ontario. That is something our government will always put our money behind.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you for your presentation, Minister.

We will now begin questions and answers in a rotation of 15 minutes for the official opposition members, 15 minutes for the third party, five minutes for the independent member, and 15 minutes for the government members.

As always, please remember to make your comments through the Chair.

For any ministry staff appearing, please state your name and title when you're called upon to speak so that the proceedings can be accurately recorded.

I will now start with the official opposition. I recognize MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to the minister for appearing before this committee today.

I have some questions about vote item 3002-1, concerning overall funding for the ministry.

The 2025 Ontario budget projects that spending for this ministry is going to be decreasing at an average annual rate of 3.3%, so it will decline from \$14.1 billion in 2024-25 to \$12.8 billion in 2027-28.

I'm sure that the minister has reviewed the FAO's spending plan review, which confirmed that Ontario already has the lowest per-student funding in Canada.

According to the FAO, per-student college funding is going to decrease from \$7,900 in 2024-25 to \$7,200 in

2027-28. University per-student funding is going to decrease from \$8,800 per student in 2024-25 to \$8,000 in 2027-28.

So my question to the minister is: Why is his ministry further reducing per-student funding instead of at least trying to get Ontario moved up from the bottom in terms of per-student funding, and why is he not investing in Ontario students?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you for that question.

I will reiterate, as I have in the House many times: Funding for the post-secondary sector is the highest it has ever been in Ontario's history.

Last year, we invested \$1.3 billion to stabilize the sector, which was a historic investment; the largest investment into post-secondary in over a decade.

This year, we invested another 100,000 seats to come online, which is \$1 billion in operating funding.

I will remind the member that operating funding is set to increase to \$5.8 billion this year, in 2025-26, which is an 8% rise from last year and a 12% increase from 2023-24, when it comes to our operating funding.

We've consistently raised funding, year over year, and we'll continue to do that.

Again, I'll remind the member opposite that the FAO report is a snapshot in time, which doesn't take into consideration these new investments.

Part of the new investment is \$750 million into 20,000 STEM seats, which amounts to \$450 per student and \$220, on average, per student at the college level—so \$450 per-student funding extra on the university side, on average, and \$220 extra on the college side.

Again, I will reiterate that we've made strategic investments into the post-secondary sector—the \$1.3 billion last year and a billion dollars this year. So almost \$2.5 billion has been invested into the sector to stabilize the sector because of the unilateral decisions our federal government made.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you for that response.

I just want to go on to the issue of the STEM seats. Prior to the government's investment in STEM funding—I agree that we need those seats in our post-secondary institutions—the Council of Ontario Universities was estimating that there were going to be 100,000 domestic students in this province who were not going to be able to get into their program of choice by 2030 because those domestic seats are not funded. The investment in STEM seats helped reduce that number somewhat. We now only have 80,000 Ontario students who won't be able to get a spot in a university program by 2030.

Why is this government not making investments in other programs than STEM? We have non-STEM programs that desperately need to be funded so that Ontario students can get into those programs that our labour market and our economy need.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I politely disagree. We are making investments into other programs other than STEM.

As my introductory speech mentioned, we've invested into 2,600 new teaching seats. We've invested into 2,200 new nursing seats as well. And that's on top of the \$75

million we invested into new construction-related programming.

It is not just STEM programming that we're putting the money and seats into. We're making targeted, strategic investments where the labour market needs are most acutely felt.

I'll pass it over to my deputy to expand further.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to know about those 80,000 Ontario prospective university students who won't be able to get into programs by 2030. What is the government's plan to ensure that those students are able to access a university education?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I will reiterate that, again, in the last 18 months, we've invested almost \$2.5 billion, bringing another 100,000 funded seats online.

We are, as you are well aware, doing a funding formula review for the sector right now, working with our stakeholder partners to understand where the gaps are in the system to ensure that the expenses meet the revenues that are being brought in.

At the same time, I can't discount the significant investments we've made into the system in budget 2025—a billion dollars, with 100,000 funded seats coming online, whether that's in STEM, nursing, teaching, skilled trades, planning.

We're making strategic investments because we're listening to our stakeholders, whether those are internal stakeholders, part of the college or university or Indigenous institute system, or our external stakeholders.

Last year, whenever the federal government made multiple unilateral changes to the international student file, we heard loud and clear from chambers of commerce right across the whole province the current concerns that they had, that we're not going to be able to meet the growing demand in our province.

We'll continue to sit down with our stakeholders and continue to have those conversations to ensure that Ontario will always have a world-class education system that we are known to have in this area.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: You will be aware, certainly, that in November 2023, the blue-ribbon panel found that \$2.5 billion was needed at that time to stabilize the sector. And that was, of course, before the federal government implemented the two rounds, now, of changes to international study permits. In response, there was a \$1.3-billion investment, as you have mentioned, but that was only half of what was needed, and that is set to end in 2026.

How does your ministry expect to stabilize the sector when the funding in response to the blue-ribbon panel is ending and your ministry is reducing spending by 3.3% over the next three years?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Again, I'll remind the member that operating funding is set to increase, to \$5.8 billion, from \$5 billion this year, which is an 8% increase from last year and a 12% increase from 2023-24. We've consistently raised funding, year over year—and that's including the billion-dollar investment we made into the sector this year, with 100,000 seats coming online.

Ultimately, the funding formula review that we are doing will continue to engage with the sector to understand where the needs are, as well as understand where the needs of the economy are.

The \$5.8 billion, I think, should not be lost on the member. When you mention cuts—that's an increase. A 12% increase in operating funding in two years is pretty significant.

1030

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am interested in the funding formula review which I know your ministry is currently engaged in. The budget spending plan sets out three years of funding, to 2026-27. At the same time, there's this funding formula review going on. The spending plan projects a decrease in funding by 2027-28.

My question is: Because you've already determined that funding is going to decrease, can we take from that that the funding formula review will not result in any new investments in the sector?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Well, as I've already mentioned, the FAO report does not reflect the latest information or new initiatives, including the billion-dollar investment we made in budget 2025.

It's important to note that multi-year planning allocations are reviewed annually through the budget process, and the spending plan for 2027-28 does not necessarily reflect the government's eventual spending for the year.

We are continuing to strategically invest into our colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes to ensure that Ontario students have the skills they need for good-paying, in-demand jobs that meet the needs of Ontario's workforce.

I just will remind the member opposite that the FAO report is a snapshot in time, and it does not take into account our new investments that we are continuing to make into the sector.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It's unfortunate to hear comments like that about an independent officer of the Legislature, like the FAO, and the report that that office generated.

In that report, it is clearly stated that the funding shortfall facing the sector means that the province will need to implement efficiencies or there will need to be a commitment of additional funding in order to maintain current service levels. Further to that, the FAO said that universities would need 3.6% annual spending growth in order to maintain existing service levels.

How are universities and colleges expected to maintain current service levels without an increase in funding or without cutting staff and programs?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you for that question.

I'll remind the member once again that the spending plan in 2027-28 does not necessarily reflect the government's eventual spending during that fiscal year.

As I've mentioned already, operating funding is increasing this year—estimated to increase to \$5.8 billion, from \$5 billion, which is an 8% increase over last year and a 12% increase over 2023-24.

We'll continue sitting down with our stakeholders to understand where the largest labour market needs are, and we'll continue to make strategic investments.

I'll pass it over to my deputy to provide further details.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Please state your name and title for the record.

Mr. David Wai: David Wai, deputy minister, Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security.

As the minister indicated, we continue to work very closely with our stakeholders as we work through our funding model review, considering a number of different factors—but certainly understanding, as the minister indicated, that the FAO report represents a snapshot in time and particular allocations as they were, and does not necessarily represent our current and future plans as we go forward.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I don't think that the Ontario budget was a snapshot in time, and that Ontario budget says clearly that spending will decrease from \$14.1 billion in 2024-25 to \$12.8 billion in 2027-28.

My next set of questions concerns program cuts.

We know that more than 650 college programs have already been cut, including many programs that lead to in-demand careers.

We know that there are multiple programs being cut at universities across this province.

We're hearing from local employers who are saying that they no longer have the graduates they have been relying on to support local economies.

The minister talked a lot, in his comments, about the importance of a skilled workforce to maintain Ontario's competitiveness.

I'm wondering how the ministry expects to be able to maintain that talent pipeline when college programs are being cut and university programs are being cut, including in in-demand sectors.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you for the question.

Yes, there is a rebalancing going on, not only in Ontario's post-secondary institutions, but right across Canada. Every day, I wake up and I hear new news stories from other jurisdictions across Canada of rebalancing that is taking place because, quite frankly, the federal government didn't consult with the sector. They didn't consult with the jurisdictions; they didn't consult with Ontario or other provinces.

We heard it loud and clear last year, that there were concerns about local labour market needs, whether it's the Niagara region—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

Hon. Nolan Quinn:—and culinary and tourism not being postgraduate work-permit eligible. There were times that we were advocating for the sector that, unfortunately, the federal government didn't react to.

That is why, in the last 18 months, we've invested over \$2 billion into the post-secondary sector—significant investments.

You mentioned the \$1.3 billion to stabilize the sector over three years, which was the largest single investment into the sector in over a decade. Part of that \$1.3 billion was \$903 million over three years as part of the Postsecondary Education Sustainability Fund, including \$203 million to top up institutions that are in higher need, with greater financial need, as well as another \$700 million—which accounts to that 8% increase over last year's operating funding and a 12% increase over 2023-24.

We'll continue to be there for the sector. We're going to continue to make those strategic, targeted investments that we know our post-secondary institutions need, but also the economy.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We'll now go to the third party. I recognize MPP Hazell.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you, Minister, for your presentation.

I want to go on to the students, the professors, the social workers in colleges and universities. They have been bearing the crunch of short staff, students under grave mental stress. I hear it.

I have a college in my riding: Centennial College, Progress campus. They have laid off so many staff.

What are you doing right now to ease the budget pressures for the colleges and the universities? Keep in mind that you've just spoken about the investments that you're making, but we're going to always play catch-up. So those funds that you just talked about that you are investing—do you think that is what's needed to take these colleges and universities out of the state that they're in right now?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: As I mentioned earlier to one of our colleagues, we are doing a funding formula review. We are engaging directly with the stakeholders, both colleges and universities, to understand where the needs are of the sector.

I am very proud of the \$1 billion we invested in budget 2025 into the sector.

It would be remiss to not mention \$750 million for 20,500 STEM seats. We understand the need for STEM graduates. We're graduating 70,000 STEM graduates on an annual basis. And we understand those are the jobs of tomorrow.

We're going to continue making very targeted, strategic investments, whether it's the almost \$56 million to train 2,600 new teachers as well—about \$55 million to train another 2,200 new nursing graduates also. We're going to continue stepping up for the sector and for the economy to ensure that the labour market gaps that are currently in place—that we're going to close those gaps, moving forward.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I want to extend my question—in asking you about the \$750 million that will be distributed among the institutions. I want to ask you, what safeguards are in place to ensure we don't forget about the smaller colleges? They're also turning out reputable students—and universities, especially those in rural and northern communities. Can I hear what plans you have in

safeguarding all these investments, to make sure it's equitable across all the board?

1040

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Absolutely. The STEM investment did go to both colleges and universities, depending on the programming that they were providing.

I'll just remind the member—because I think it was mentioned earlier—that programming decisions are made on the local level, so each institution decides the programming admissions that they are going to offer.

When you mentioned small, northern and rural—I think it's worth noting, in 2024-25, our government is providing \$23 million in the Northern Ontario Grant for universities and approximately \$86 million in the Small, Northern and Rural Grant for colleges. That's as well as on top of budget 2025—an additional \$10 million in small, northern and rural colleges. So we are looking after the smaller colleges, as well.

I'll pass it over to my deputy to provide further context.

Mr. David Wai: As the minister mentioned, whenever we do allocations for existing programs, we are very cognizant of ensuring that all colleges and universities are represented appropriately and fairly and proportionally.

Northern and, obviously, rural institutions face particular challenges that do make them financially vulnerable—so we do recognize that—and are reliant on operating grants and domestic tuition, sometimes lack economies of scale.

As the minister indicated, through our Northern Ontario Grant, we've worked very closely to ensure that northern universities have additional money—as well as the Small, Northern and Rural Grant, which is allocated to colleges and takes into account the size and geography of that particular college.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I receive a lot of queries around our OSAP programs for our students. The interest rate on the OSAP program is very high. It's very tough on the students to repay that—students who are going through the affordability crisis, students who cannot find jobs. They're leaving their universities and colleges with major debt to repay.

So is there any future assistance for our OSAP program, moving forward? There's a budget coming out in 2026, so are there any plans to include that in the budget?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Ultimately, right now—I'm not sure if the member is aware—85% of all Ontario portion of OSAP is in a non-repayable grant. So 85% of all funds that are going out through OSAP are non-repayable, to students in Ontario, on the Ontario portion.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Maybe your tuition is \$30,000, \$35,000; it depends on the major you're taking—you're saying 85% of that. I have students who just qualified for 50% or 30%, and then the rest is in a loan. So it doesn't really work all the time—on the students getting back 85% in the real world.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I think the member didn't necessarily hear me—that it's 85% of the Ontario portion of OSAP. There is a federal portion that is not a non-repayable grant.

MPP Andrea Hazell: So you're saying that the Ontario—

Hon. Nolan Quinn: The Ontario portion: 85%—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Let's not talk over each other, please. One at a time.

MPP Andrea Hazell: No, we're having a good conversation.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: So 85% of the OSAP financials are grants, of the Ontario portion.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Okay. I will look into that, because I'm hearing different from my stakeholders, so I would like to follow up with you on that.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Agreed, but the facts are the facts. There is the federal portion that is in a repayable loan, but when it comes—

MPP Andrea Hazell: But I'm talking about the Ontario portion.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Yes. When it comes to the Ontario portion, it is 85%, which has increased from 80% in years past.

I will remind the member opposite, you've really spoken about affordability. It's our government that froze tuition, because we understand there's an affordability crisis right now.

I will remind you that under the previous Liberal government, tuition went up 48%, and that was at a time of low inflation. Right now, we're at a time of high inflation, so if the Liberals were in government, tuition might have doubled.

MPP Andrea Hazell: To the minister: I want to tell you—you froze tuition. You know the situation, with the federal level cutting the immigrant students who are coming in here, and you pressured, you underfunded the colleges and the universities. That is why we are here today. That is why the colleges are under so much budget pressure. You're now talking about funding, which is amazing, so we're getting somewhere. But when you talk about freezing students' fees, but you're also pressuring the colleges and the universities—you're underfunding them—it doesn't work together. The equation doesn't work. I just want to put that on record.

My next question is about STEM. The government has invested over \$60 million since 2020. That's amazing. We all love the STEM education opportunities. I think we were lacking in that at a lot of colleges and universities. It's great to see that continues to happen. But is there evidence that these programs are leading to stable, full-time employment rather than short-term or precarious jobs?

We want to make sure that when our students finish these STEM programs, we retain them in Ontario and we don't see the young people leaving Ontario for different reasons.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Yes, 91% of university and 73% of college graduates are employed in a related field shortly after graduation. So, yes, the students are ending up where they went to school for.

MPP Andrea Hazell: And that's data that you guys are checking on a yearly basis, to see how that funding is going?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Yes. I'll pass it over to my deputy to provide further context.

Mr. David Wai: Through the Chair: Yes, we do, on a regular basis, through our strategic mandate agreements, work very closely with our universities and colleges to track student success. Those include a number of factors, including, as the minister mentioned, post-graduation employment levels as well as earnings. It is something we collect on a very regular and annual basis through a number of different measures. It's an important part of how we've structured our relationships with colleges and universities, to understand that focus is on the students and student success. As you said, we want to make sure that those STEM students land in appropriate roles—and, quite frankly, that all students have success. It's an important measure that we apply to all students—not just to the STEM students, in particular—to ensure that all students are having success. We are, on a regular basis, having conversations, and we regularly publish, with those universities and colleges, their results.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you for your explanation. I'm finished with my round of questions.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Now I'll go to the independent party. I recognize MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I want to thank all the staff who have taken time out of their day to come here today. I know you work very hard to help this ministry operate well. I appreciate you taking the time to be here, and all the hard work you do.

Thank you to the minister and deputy minister, as well.

I also want to recognize good things. You did come to the riding, and I was there to see a ribbon cutting of the health Innovation Arena. It's nice to see you recognize the direction that the sector is going in and make investments to help encourage these innovations.

My job is to pick things apart, so here we go.

I know the FAO report is a snapshot in time. But I was here last year, and I'm saying the same thing. I appreciate that while your government is making record investments, we're in an unusual context of high inflation. I always want to make sure that we contextualize increased investments with inflation. I appreciate that you're making targeted investments, but the fact remains that when we look at some per-student numbers, Ontario is falling behind.

I'm looking at the colleges report right now—Ontario, Canadian funding per student is \$10,900, and the next lowest, so second last, is \$17,000 in PEI. I know we're last by a long shot.

That's a huge gap between how post-secondary is funded per student in the rest of the country as compared to Ontario, and I do feel it. I have U of W in my riding, which didn't oversubscribe to international students, facing an \$80-million deficit this year; and I have Conestoga, that I really think needed some oversight—I think we all can agree that Conestoga College needed some

oversight—oversubscribing international students, with massive budget savings, at \$100 million this year, even with the cuts.

So how do we stabilize the sector, knowing that there's a gap in per-student funding, and looking at how different institutions have funded themselves?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: In 2024, we invested \$1.3 billion to stabilize the sector over three years. As I mentioned earlier, it's the single biggest investment in over a decade. But as one of our colleagues mentioned, there have been multiple, unilateral changes from the federal government since that \$1.3 billion was invested into the sector.

This year, in budget 2025, we invested a billion dollars into the sector.

On the STEM funding alone, the per-student funding at university, on average, will go up about \$450—at the college, on average, it will go up about \$220, just with the STEM funding alone.

1050

I will remind the member that funding for our post-secondary institutions is the highest it has ever been in Ontario's history, going from \$5 billion in operating funding in previous years to \$5.8 billion estimated this year, which is an 8% increase in operating funding overall from year over year, and a 12% increase from 2023-24.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I agree that, yes, you're spending more money, but we've had funded median seats for the corridor frozen since 2016. Your government made a 10% cut to tuition rates and froze them.

I appreciate that the federal government should have consulted with your ministry when making changes to international student subscriptions. But we have to wear some of this, because those cuts did lead to a way to fund the industry, through international students—and there wasn't accountability for some bad acting, with all due respect.

I live in a community where Conestoga College went from having 700 international students to 30,000 in a matter of three years. That's a dramatic population increase for a community like mine. Now we're seeing massive losses of jobs and closed campuses.

I do think, as someone with a business degree and as a business owner, we can look at how supply costs have gone up, prices have frozen, and, yes, people look for another way to stabilize their budgets.

Where were you in those moments with this over-subscription at Conestoga College?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Ultimately, as I've mentioned earlier, that's why we're doing a funding formula review right now.

The cost of doing business has changed drastically since the pandemic has started. Ultimately, that's why we're making those strategic investments—the \$1 billion into the sector, the \$750 million for STEM, and \$75 million for construction-related programming. We understand our province is growing at breakneck speed right now. We're investing into the programs that will ensure our communities are thriving for years to come.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We'll now go to the government members, and I recognize MPP Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Chair, through you to the minister: Welcome, Minister, and welcome, staff here today. Thank you for the tremendous work that you are doing in the province, but particularly in the region of Durham, which is the fastest-growing region in the province.

One of the challenges that we find in the region of Durham—we have eight municipalities that form the region of Durham, including my riding of Whitby—is growing our health care capacity, particularly health care workers. Whether it's myself as the representative for Whitby or the finance minister, for Pickering, or Todd McCarthy, the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, we realize that health care workers are the backbone of our communities, ensuring that hard-working families can live healthy, fulfilling lives.

I know that you've been out to the region of Durham often—particularly at our academic institutions like Ontario Tech and Trent Durham.

I'm interested in hearing from you what your ministry is doing, Minister, to train more health care professionals so that we can connect everyone—not only in the region of Durham, but other parts of Ontario—to excellent health care that they need when they need it.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you, MPP Coe, for your question.

Yes, I have been to Durham a few times.

We've travelled the province pretty significantly this summer, understanding some of the impressive health care programming that has taken place at our colleges, Indigenous institutes and universities right across the whole province. Whether that's in the east, the north, the south-west or right here in Toronto, we have some high-quality health care education that's taking place.

Our government is making strategic investments to protect Ontario's health care system and build a workforce that can support a healthier, more resilient province and, as you mentioned, a growing province—significant speed. We're investing in the people who make Ontario strong while unleashing the incredible potential of our students, our communities, and our world-class post-secondary institutions.

Working very closely with the Minister of Health, we're increasing the number of essential health care workers in the province, because at its core, the strength of our health care system lies in its people.

That's why I'd like to highlight how our investments are supporting more aspiring health care professionals to pursue meaningful, in-demand careers right across the whole province—careers that equip them to care for our families, our friends and our loved ones.

As I mentioned earlier, I'm a father of three, and I've seen first-hand the life-saving care, comfort and compassion nurses provide when families need it most. I say I'm a father of three; most times I've been to the hospital, it's because of my own injuries, not my children's injuries—I just think I need to clarify that—and I've always gotten world-class care when I've been to the hospital.

Their work is essential, and their impact is felt by so many across the province, especially in our hospitals, our long-term-care homes, community health centres, primary care clinics, and home care.

That's why our government is making strategic investments to build Ontario's pipeline and expand nursing education all across Ontario.

As I mentioned earlier, just this summer, we announced a \$56.8-million investment to educate 2,200 additional nurses in the next three years. Since 2018, we've added nearly 100,000 new nurses to Ontario's workforce. In fact, right now, we have 30,000 learners studying to become nurses at our colleges and universities.

And our government is supporting nursing students to enter the workforce faster, with accelerated bachelor of science in nursing programs at Conestoga College, St. Lawrence College, Western University, and York University. Students in these accelerated programs will complete their degrees in just three and a half years, getting into the workforce sooner and meeting health care needs faster.

Our government is also investing \$750,000 to support prescribing education for registered nurses at Georgian College, Humber Polytechnic, and the University of Windsor. This will allow nurses to play a greater role in patient care by prescribing medication, making Ontario the first jurisdiction in Canada to include registered nurses prescribing in undergraduate programs. And that's not the only first for us, either.

Last fall, we established a new bachelor of science in nursing program at Carleton University, in my end of the province—the first new university-based nursing program in Ontario in 20 years. Starting next year, Carleton will offer a direct-entry, compressed, three-year nursing degree. And thanks to a partnership with the Queensway Carleton Hospital, students will begin hands-on training in hospitals from their very first semester. This program will graduate more than 200 new students each year by 2030, to meet the growing demand for care in eastern Ontario and beyond.

In addition to expanding nursing seats, we've also made critical investments in our allied health programs. In 2024-25, our government invested \$1.5 million to increase enrolment at medical laboratory technology and medical radiation technology programs at 10 Ontario colleges—as well as an investment of over \$2 million to increase enrolment in primary care paramedic programs at 16 colleges, ensuring that Ontario has the health care providers it needs to respond to emergencies and provide high-quality care.

Our government isn't just increasing enrolment and introducing new programs.

As I mentioned in my opening statement, with the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant, we're also improving access to high-quality health care education, while adding to local workforces where they're needed the most. The grant is an innovative concept that gives students in high-demand health care programs full upfront funding for their education. And after graduation, these students commit to working in the same community, bolstering their local workforce.

Since it was introduced in 2023, the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant has provided over \$96 million in support to more than 8,200 nursing, paramedicine and medical lab technology students. Our government is continuing to invest in the grant, with an additional \$261.7 million. With its massive success, I'm excited to say that we'll soon be expanding the grant to support Ontario medical students.

To meet the growing need for doctors, our government is expanding the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant to future family medicine physicians, by investing almost \$160 million, beginning in 2026-27. These students will receive full funding for tuition and other education costs. In return, they'll commit to practising as a family physician in communities across Ontario. This expansion is a game-changer for health care education. It breaks down financial barriers for students and supports them to become family medicine physicians, practising in places where they will truly make a significant difference.

Ontario's colleges and universities are training more health care professionals than ever before, and we're making sure these opportunities go to students who call Ontario home.

Starting in fall 2026, we're requiring all Ontario medical schools to allocate at least 95% of their undergraduate seats to Ontario residents, while the remaining 5% will be reserved for students from the rest of Canada. By prioritizing Ontario students, we're making sure that doctors who study here stay here. That means more Ontario-based doctors providing high-quality care to people across the whole province.

1100

Further to this, our government is training more doctors for Ontario by opening the first new medical schools in Ontario in 20 years: the Toronto Metropolitan University, or TMU, and the York University schools of medicine.

Our government has invested nearly \$180 million to support TMU's new medical school, which welcomed its inaugural cohort of undergraduate learners this September. Once fully operational, TMU's medical school will have 94 undergraduate medical seats and 117 postgraduate training positions annually. But that's not all.

To date, our government has announced \$9 million to support another new medical school, at York University. Once open, York's medical school will have up to 80 undergraduate medical seats and 102 postgraduate training positions annually, serving the growing communities in the Vaughan region.

But this is not just all about the numbers; it's about the approach.

With strong ties to local health systems, TMU's medical students will learn in real-world settings, gaining hands-on training and delivering primary care services to local residents in the Peel region and beyond.

Meanwhile, York University's new medical school will serve the communities in York region, Simcoe county, Muskoka and the surrounding areas as the first in Canada to be focused on training medical doctors. This is a new kind of medical school—one that puts patients and com-

munities first—and it's exactly what Ontario needs, especially right now.

Together, our government investments at TMU, York and across our existing medical schools will result in more than 1,292 undergraduate medical seats and 1,739 residency positions.

Starting in 2026-27, we expect to see approximately 124 more Ontario students entering first-year undergraduate medical programs each year compared to 2024-25. That's real growth, and that's real dedication to care for the people of Ontario.

When it comes to Ontario's health care system, our government is proud to invest in new schools, new seats, and new opportunities. These investments are not just about today; they're about protecting our tomorrow. They're about making sure every student in Ontario has a chance to succeed, every community has access to convenient and connected care, and every person in Ontario can rely on our health care workforce to be there when they need it, now and for years to come.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Minister, for that expansive response on the effect it's having across our province.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I recognize MPP Leardi.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I've got a question about rural schools and rural colleges and universities and what the government is doing to support the rural colleges and universities.

Let me tell you where my question is coming from. I represent the riding of Essex. Essex is five municipalities: Amherstburg, population approximately 23,000; Essex, population approximately 21,000; Kingsville, population approximately 23,000; LaSalle, which I would say is the most densely populated municipality in my riding, with a population of approximately 35,000; and Lakeshore, with the largest population, approximately 40,000, but it's also, geographically, the largest municipality in the riding, so that per-capita population per square kilometre is probably the lowest. We have a riding of approximately 120,000 people, more or less, maybe 130,000, and that—of course, it's just a riding. Essex county has a larger population—approximately 200,000 or 220,000, in all of Essex county. The closest college is St. Clair College. We adore St. Clair College. It's a fabulous college. The Saints are everywhere. That's the reason why I'm asking my question.

What are you doing to support the rural colleges and universities?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you, MPP Leardi, for that question.

I truly love St. Clair College, as well. I think they're doing really great work there.

I come from a rural riding, as well. The city of Cornwall is 50,000, but 90% of my riding is rural, across Stormont, Dundas, and South Glengarry.

We all know how much the world has changed since last year; it has changed since six months ago, to be frankly honest. Tariffs are taking direct aim at our country, our province, as well as our people. Communities across Ontario are feeling the impact, especially those in north-

ern, rural and remote areas. As a result, we're doing everything in our power to unleash the potential of our province so that, whatever the impacts, we can protect our workers wherever they may live.

We're working to protect Ontario by making it the most competitive place to invest in the G7, create jobs, do business, and raise a family, and that starts with ensuring all communities in our province, including rural, northern, francophone and Indigenous, have access to the education and training they need to thrive.

Let's start with how our government is ensuring small, northern and rural colleges and universities provide students with competitive choices for local post-secondary education.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: We know that colleges and universities like St. Clair College as well as colleges and universities in northern and rural communities across all of Ontario face unique challenges. Serving smaller populations and remote regions, these schools require targeted supports to continue offering essential programs close to home.

For this reason, our government provided about \$23 million through the Northern Ontario Grant for universities and about \$86 million through the Small Northern and Rural Grant for colleges in 2024-25.

Colleges and universities serving northern and rural communities also received \$44 million in 2024-25 through the ministry's Postsecondary Education Sustainability Fund. On top of that, through this year's Ontario budget, we're continuing to allocate an additional \$10 million in 2025-26 to support our small, rural and northern schools. This will give students—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister.

We'll now go on to the official opposition. I recognize MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Minister, there were reports this morning about a forensic audit being referred to the OPP of a company called Get A-Head that received skills development funding for a project that was initially funded by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. In 2020, this company, Get A-Head, got \$250,000 from the ministry. In May 2021, there was an additional \$300,000 provided by your ministry. This is obviously a concern—when we hear about private companies getting public dollars from your ministry at a time when colleges and universities are cancelling programs and laying off staff.

Can you tell us, Minister, what kind of due diligence is being done by your ministry, when public money is being awarded to private companies like Get A-Head, to ensure that forensic audits don't uncover irregularities that merit OPP investigation? Can you tell us, also, the total amount of the ministry dollars that are going to private companies like Get A-Head?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Before I pass it over to my deputy to explain a bit more of the audit process, I'll give a statement.

In 2023, a routine audit raised concerns about an external service provider. That process identified irregularities

that led to a comprehensive forensic audit of the organization in question, as you mentioned. The results of the audit received last week recommended that the matter be referred to the Ontario Provincial Police. Within 24 hours of receiving this report, a referral was made. All payments associated with this provider are currently under review, and further actions will be taken based on that outcome.

For any additional questions, please contact the OPP.

I'll pass it over to my deputy to provide further context on the auditing process.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm particularly interested in how many private companies are getting ministry dollars to support the post-secondary sector and what kind of due diligence is done on those companies.

1110

Mr. David Wai: As the minister indicated, we have a very rigorous process in terms of both the auditing process as well as when we have new programs. We do work through a number of different RFPs and other mechanisms.

In terms of our audit process, we have an annual audit review process where we assess with our internal auditors key areas that are key government priorities as well as other areas based on a risk-adjusted basis. We work very closely with our internal auditor folks at the Treasury Board Secretariat to ensure that we have the right processes in place on that side.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Can you tell us how many private companies in total receive ministry funding and the total amount of funding that represents?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I'll have to take that back.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay. I would appreciate if you could follow up on that one, because, as I said, there are huge concerns when private companies are getting funding from the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security at a time when programs are being cancelled and staff are being laid off.

I do want to turn to some questions about student financial assistance.

Going back again to the FAO report: It was estimated that spending on student financial assistance would have to grow by 4.1% annually just to keep pace with the 2024-25 service levels. Whether that financial assistance comes in the form of grants or loans, we know from student organizations that the total amount of funding that is allocated to student financial assistance is too low to address the affordability concerns of students and to ensure that lower-income students have access to post-secondary education.

Minister, can you tell us whether your ministry is looking to increase spending on student financial assistance, to address that statistic that was reported by the FAO: that there needs to be a 4.1% increase in order to maintain the current level of financial assistance that's available to students?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: OSAP is an entitlements-and-demand-based system, so it does fluctuate depending on the amount of students who are applying for assistance. Last year, 470,000 full-time students received assistance

from OSAP. It does fluctuate year over year, depending on how many students are in need.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: So is your ministry looking to increase the total amount of funding that's allocated to student financial assistance?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Well, again, it does fluctuate from year to year, depending on how many students are applying. As I mentioned earlier, it is an entitlements-based system, so it depends on how many students are applying for it.

I'm very, very proud of the 8,200 students who went through the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant, which is part of OSAP, who had their tuition and books paid, to be able to get into high-demand health care careers.

I'll pass it over to my deputy for further context.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I think that provides enough context.

I just wondered, on the issue of affordability concerns—and we know that it's not just students, but students in particular are facing significant affordability, cost-of-living pressures.

I wonder if you can tell us whether the funding formula review is considering an increase in tuition in order to address the financial pressures facing colleges and universities. We know that there's no increase in funding in the budget to address those pressures. So are you looking at increasing tuition?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Tuition, as has been publicly stated, is frozen until 2026-27 at this time.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: And will it be increased after 2026-27?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Part of the funding formula review was not taking into consideration tuition.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Sorry, the funding formula review is taking tuition—

Hon. Nolan Quinn: It was not taking into consideration tuition; it was looking at the expenses of the programming.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Is your ministry looking at increasing tuition?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: We're looking at the funding formula review right now. As I mentioned, we are committed to the tuition freeze until 2026-27.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: After 2026-27, will the freeze be lifted?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Right now, we're looking at the funding formula review, and that's where our focus has been all summer. We're looking at the costs and expenses of programming at each individual institution, whether that's in rural Ontario or downtown Toronto. That has been the focus of this summer: looking at the funding formula. We have not looked at the tuition.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: So it could be on the table after that review is complete.

I want to turn to work-integrated learning, which is something that I have been quite passionate about. I did research on that before I was elected.

As you know, Minister, there are almost 800,000 Ontarians in this province who are currently unemployed, and

that includes about one quarter who are young people, youth.

We know there's lots of evidence about the value and importance of work-integrated learning in post-secondary education to help students get that leg up that they need to enter the labour market after they graduate.

I wonder if the ministry, given what the research says and what we know from the experience at Ontario colleges and universities, given the effectiveness of work-integrated learning to support students' entry into the labour market—will we be seeing an increase in earmarked funding for colleges and universities to help with the delivery of work-integrated learning programs?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you for the question.

I truly do believe in the importance of work-integrated learning, internships and co-ops.

This summer, we did approximately a dozen round tables, whether that was in the mining sector up north or in the health care sector, the electrical sector. We even just did one on AI as well. In all of the round tables that we sat around and heard from sector partners—they understand the importance of work-integrated learning as well.

That is something our government is very, very committed to. SMAs, strategic mandate agreements, do have the focus on work-integrated learning.

In 2023-24, 75% of all college students had work-integrated learning, and 72% of all university students participated in work-integrated learning.

Our government is fully committed to ensuring that students get the soft skills and on-job experience that are needed to be able to transition them right into careers. We'll continue to make those strategic investments—but we're seeing the numbers go up both at our colleges and universities, based on the strategic focus that we've had on work-integrated learning and the KPIs that come with it.

In 2023-24, we invested almost \$11 million to support work-integrated learning at Mitacs as well as a little bit under \$3 million to support work-integrated learning for Riipen, which were total investments over three years of \$5.4 million at Riipen—sorry, over two years—and over three years, it was a little bit under \$33 million to support work-integrated learning.

It is a focus of our institutions; it's a focus of our ministry to ensure that work-integrated learning is a huge component.

When I sign off on new courses coming online through the PEQAB process, it is something that I always look towards to see—how much work-integrated learning is a focus of that program.

Again, all summer long, doing the round tables, we heard loud and clear that students who have gone through work-integrated learning co-ops or internships have less of a gap on the soft skills that are needed going into their future careers. Employers that also embrace work-integrated learning recognize that they don't have the recruitment challenges that other employers do.

We'll continue working with both external stakeholders and internal stakeholders to make sure that work-integrated

ed learning is a crucial component of all post-secondary education in Ontario.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm glad to hear that. I have been hearing from students anecdotally—students who were expecting to go into a co-op or an internship or some other kind of work-integrated learning placement—that they were informed that the placement has been cancelled because there is a lot of uncertainty about the economy and employers are worried about taking on a student, with the threat of tariffs hanging over us.

Can you tell us what plans your ministry has to ensure that employers are able to take students for those work-integrated learning opportunities and also so that our colleges and universities have the staff they need to deliver work-integrated learning?

1120

We know, in the college sector, it was estimated that there were 10,000 college support staff who were either laid off or expecting to be laid off. Many of those support staff work in the co-op office or other offices that engage with employers and look for those opportunities for students. When those staff are lost and when employers are worried about taking in work-integrated learning placements, it really limits the opportunities for students.

Can you tell us what the plans are to make sure that those opportunities continue to be there?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I did mention it earlier, but the importance of work-integrated learning is crucial for the success of our students—and for our economy, to be frank.

Last year, we had, through the Co-operative Education Tax Credit—sorry; in 2023-24, we supported approximately 38,000 students and employers to be able to integrate into work-integrated learning.

But, yes, as you mentioned, there are concerns with the economy right now, with what's going on south of the border.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: There is an entrenchment of employers questioning whether they should go into work-integrated learning, but that's where the importance of the round tables, to get everyone in one room, a lot of different stakeholders—to get them to hear the stories of the success of work-integrated learning, to change their hearts and minds to understand that, yes, there may be uncertainty right in front of us, but in the medium to long term, if they want to continue to grow their business, work-integrated learning is so crucial for the success of their business but also for their recruitment and retention.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: So can we expect to see in the budget some supports for employers that are specifically focused on enabling employers to provide those opportunities and, at the same time, supports for institutions to deliver those opportunities?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: As I've already mentioned, the Co-operative Education Tax Credit is in place, so that does help employers to be able to bring on new—

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Any new supports, I should have—

Hon. Nolan Quinn:—employees. At the same time, we have noticed, year over year, work-integrated learning co-ops and internships are trending up.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We'll now go to the third party. I recognize MPP Hazell.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Minister, I just want to say thank you—and the government—for the investments in the medical schools. It's very positive, so I appreciate that. I have my daughter who is, right now, in the medical health field, so I'm hoping she will be one of those recipients—keeping my fingers crossed. So thank you for that.

I want to stay just a bit on the students. We all know the mental health services are really, really up in numbers with our students, and we know the pressures in the economy right now that so many of us are facing.

Maybe I missed this in your presentation, but what investments are being made to improve mental health services on campus, given the continued increased demand for support among students?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: On an annual basis, we're investing approximately \$36 million into mental health supports—\$8 million over three years through the mental health action plan grant to ensure that there are supports on campus.

The other proponent, I think, that's very important, is Bill 166, the SASS Act, that we brought into law last year in 2024. That is ensuring that there are correct amounts of supports for the students, whether it's anti-hate or anti-Indigenous hate or Islamophobia—in that regard. And we are proud to say that all schools are in compliance, both on the mental health component of it but also on the anti-hate component, ensuring that students are well aware of the programming that is provided to them at each individual institution.

I'll pass it over to my deputy to provide a bit more context on the mental health components.

Mr. David Wai: As the minister said, of the \$36 million, approximately \$8 million over the three years is for the mental health action plan grant. That's really intended to support the implementation of policies, as the minister mentioned, under the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, and for publicly assisted colleges and universities to administer the Canadian Campus Wellbeing Survey to students.

As per the minister's student mental health directive and the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, publicly assisted colleges and universities are required to have student mental health policies in place and need to report as such, as the minister indicated.

In addition to the mental health action plan grant, we do provide funding through the Mental Health Worker Grant, which specifically funds workers at the institutions to support the students, as well as the Mental Health Services Grant that also supports the provision of those services to the students.

MPP Andrea Hazell: So is this funding only for three years?

Mr. David Wai: Yes, that's annual funding that we provide. All those pieces are annual.

MPP Andrea Hazell: For three?

Mr. David Wai: Yes.

MPP Andrea Hazell: And is there opportunity for this funding to continue after three years? I don't see the mental crisis in the students—that they're facing now is just going to decrease or wipe out in three years. So is this the program that is going to be revisited every year, annually, and keep expanding?

Mr. David Wai: I can only comment on what's in the estimates, which is these three years.

I think we are cognizant and have regular conversations with our colleges and universities and students, quite frankly, on a regular basis about the situation and the services that they provide or that are not provided and ensure that student safety and student health—mental health and otherwise is very important to the ministry. So we do check on a regular basis on those issues.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I just wanted to get that on the record, that we're pushing this out for three years—and not just three years. I think a hard-core five-year plan is always better than three years, and we know what's happening with mental illnesses with our young people.

I'm going to move on to the institutions: the colleges, the universities.

When I look at the budget pressures right now that a lot of the colleges are experiencing, and some of the universities—and I'm thinking if they don't get immediate intervention financially, they're going to close their doors, just like how we see that in the health care system.

My question is, for those institutions that are facing the budget pressures, the financial challenges, such as those with lower enrolment or financial instability—are you aware of those colleges and universities with these issues that I'm speaking about? Are you very close on the ground with them? Can we save them from not closing their doors—as one in my riding, Centennial College? I don't know what other efficiencies they can create to stop the deficit that they are currently experiencing.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you for that question.

Understanding part of the \$1.3 billion that we invested last year—part of the Postsecondary Education Sustainability Fund did have funds available for efficiency and accountability reviews. Approximately 34 post-secondary institutions have taken us up on that and have used a third party to be able to investigate and understand where there are possibilities for new revenues or for cost savings. Those decisions are being made at the local level, so each institution is able to utilize the efficiency and accountability report to be able to understand what they believe the next steps are—so at the board of governors level.

I will pass it over to the deputy to provide a bit more context on the mechanisms that we have in place for auditing and ensuring the financial stability of our colleges and universities.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Can I do a time check?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have eight minutes and 48 seconds.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you.

Mr. David Wai: In alignment with advice we've received from the Auditor General as well as from the Council of Ontario Universities and Colleges Ontario, the ministry has established what's called the university and college financial accountability framework to proactively monitor institutional financial health. As the member indicated, we are in regular contact with our colleges and universities to understand their financial health, and we use these frameworks to determine the appropriate course of action for both the ministry and for the post-secondary institution. The framework has really helped ensure that we have the financial information to identify institutions that may have financial risk and inform the ministry's work as we work closely with them around requirements and action plans that may be needed to address any particular financial situation. The metrics for the framework are selected to evaluate institutions on their ability to meet short-term and long-term obligations as well as their operating efficiency and profitability.

1130

MPP Andrea Hazell: I want to ask a couple of health care worker retention questions.

Minister, the government added nearly 100,000 nurses since 2018—I hear that all the time. If you look at the numbers—it's a bragging rights number, but when I move away—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): MPP Hazell, would you please make the question more relevant to the estimates, please?

MPP Andrea Hazell: I thought my question is relevant.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): It's just a little out of scope.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Is it because I mentioned 2018?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Yes.

MPP Andrea Hazell: So can I just mention adding nearly 100,000 nurses?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Yes, you can.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I want to be specific as well.

Despite adding 100,000 nurses, the hospitals across Ontario right now are still facing those severe staffing shortages. We know what happened to the ER—and the nurses burned out. But let's look at your \$56.8 million—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I recognize MPP Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Chair. It's a point of order.

I think you've already attempted to bring this questioning into scope; right now, we're moving out of that. If you could please try to bring the questioning more directly into the vote before us—please.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Yes—

MPP Andrea Hazell: I was coming to the \$56.8 million. Is that out of scope as well?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Address it through the Chair, please.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Yes. I brought that up—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Just try to make it a little more relevant to estimates. That's all I'm asking.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Yes. That's difficult, because I thought my question was relevant, because—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Okay. Continue with your question.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Today, we are seeing a lot of shortages, burnt-out nurses in the hospitals. We talk about \$56.8 million in investments. It's not solving today's crisis on the ground.

Can the minister explain to me about the 100,000 you've put in the hospitals across Ontario? How is that solving the immediate issue that we have on the ground today?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Respectfully, Chair, this is about retention; not about my ministry's estimates.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I would agree.

Next question, please.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you.

Minister, I think you answered this, but I didn't get much of your answer. It's about the Trillium report that just came out today—it has referred the Skills Development Fund recipient Get A-Head to the OPP for irregularities in a financial audit.

Can you validate with me that they have been working with your ministry for the last five years—is that correct? And you have given it over \$9 million directly before it received \$7.5 million from the SDF fund. I just want to ask a question about that.

What kind of due diligence do you do—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I recognize MPP Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Point of order, Chair. Through you: The Skills Development Fund and the allocation of that funding through that program is not part of the vote that's before us for our consideration today, sir.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): It has to be relevant to estimates. That's what we're discussing today, so please put your question in that aspect. You may continue.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Okay. My question to the minister is, what criteria did the Ministry of Colleges and Universities use to determine that Get A-Head should get this contract?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: As I mentioned earlier, I have no further comment. Out of respect for the process, additional questions should be directed toward the OPP at this time.

MPP Andrea Hazell: But you had five years of working with those companies.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Again, out of respect for the process with the OPP, I have no further comment at this time.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Then I have no further questions, because I'm not getting my questions answered.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I now recognize MPP Clancy for the independents.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: While I understand that the Skills Development Fund resides under the Ministry of Labour—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): That is also outside of the scope.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm just starting off my question this way.

This is the gap in funding for your ministry. This \$2.5 billion that is now elsewhere, I would argue, should be in your ministry. I understand that there are lots of great programs that happen through this.

I know you're trying to be labour market-ready, but I'll give a few examples of programs that are being cut. We know about 600 programs have been cut across the province because of shortage of funding. And this is directly related to the estimates.

A consultant said, "I think it's going to be shocking to people how few programs are actually financially viable under this provincial funding."

We had something from the Auditor General in 2021 that said, "A strategic plan for the college sector to help mitigate the risk of sudden decline of international students is needed." That was in 2021.

We are experiencing what was projected to happen: this shortage of international students to fund programs.

I would argue that I've had experiences with lobbyists—from the dentists, for example. I had a dentist from my riding come to me and say, "We have a shortage of dental hygienists and dental hygienists' assistants." In the same breath, she told me two programs had closed and their ask at lobbying was for the Skills Development Fund.

We see that well-meaning citizens are noticing labour shortages, noticing programs in the ministries close. If you look at the 600—I even know in your riding, in Prince Edward county, for example, employers are saying, "We need people in the hospitality sector." Meanwhile those very programs are being shut down.

So I have a dentist coming to me saying they need dental hygienists and dental hygienist assistants, they acknowledged two programs at the college level are closed—and they're asking for Skills Development Fund. It's directly related to the shortages here on certain programs that maybe aren't as viable, given the amount of provincial funding, and so they do close.

Can you respond to that trend of programs closing where there are labour shortages—hospitality is one example; dental hygienists is one example—and how those programs are being funded in a less-regulated Skills Development Fund?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I'll speak of our funding formula review that is currently under way. We've been engaging with stakeholders. The minister team behind me—they've been on the road pretty well all summer focusing on the expenses and understanding the cost of doing the programming. So I'm really looking forward to the results of the funding formula review because I do believe that will help us drive the ministry forward.

But I will repeat again, funding for the sector is the highest it has ever been in Ontario's history. Just this year, operating funding is going from \$5 billion to \$5.8 billion, as I mentioned earlier. There's a 12% increase from 2023-24. We're going to continue making those strategic investments—last year, the investment of \$1.3 billion into the sector to sustain the sector and give it stability, because of the unilateral decisions the federal government made. We're going to continue engaging with the stakeholders to understand where there are needs. But there are less students going to our colleges, and there are rebalancing decisions that are taking place.

You mentioned Prince Edward county. I absolutely love the county. I go there quite often with my family, just being down the highway—and the culinary program that's there. I spoke to another college that has a significant culinary program, and the comments to me were that over a third of their students now are not eligible to take the culinary program because of the unilateral decisions that the federal government made on international students, but they have the scale of the program to be able to sustain themselves, because they have enough students domestically who are taking that course—whereas at other institutions, it was filled significantly by international students.

That's why we're going to continue engaging with the stakeholders, continue making the investments we have done in the last 18 months. Almost \$2.5 billion—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have 45 seconds.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: —that we've invested in the sector in 18 months—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm going to interrupt. I appreciate that the federal government didn't consult with you, but I just gave you two examples of how the writing was on the wall. In my community, it was definitely apparent that more needed to be done. I know that was a lot before your time—this wasn't an issue of your creating, but it is where we are here now. There were warning signs and alarm bells that were raised.

I would hope that your job should also be to work across ministries and reconcile this issue that I bring to you of a privatization where public dollars are being removed from the public sector, and because of the gaps in funding for some programs—and then that funding being directed towards a different ministry.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Now I'll go to the government side. I recognize MPP Jordan.

Mr. John Jordan: Thank you, Minister, for your previous presentation.

Minister, as you know, affordability is an issue across the province. And now due to the US tariffs, there is widespread economic uncertainty.

1140

People of Ontario are worried. They're worried about paying for groceries, fuel, heating their homes, but they're also worried about their children's education.

What is our government doing to keep post-secondary education both affordable and accessible in this province?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you, MPP Jordan, for your thoughtful question and the advocacy you do on behalf of the sector.

I mentioned earlier that I have three young children of my own, so understanding they're going to be going to post-secondary in the next decade—I hate to say it, but I have a vested interest in the consistency and continuity of the post-secondary sector, with young children in my household.

Let me begin by reaffirming that our government is building a better future for everyone right across Ontario, including our students and their families.

I am a very, very proud father of three young children, as I mentioned, and a proud husband of a teacher. I say it

time and time again: She makes me understand the teaching profession a lot better, because it is very complex.

Through my visits across all of Ontario—whether it was this summer or beforehand—at the colleges and universities, in my role as minister, I've seen first-hand how an education generates success both for the individuals and for the communities they serve, as well as our province and nation as a whole. Education is the foundation of economic prosperity.

Today, more than ever, access to an in-demand job relies heavily on access to a good post-secondary education.

That's why our government is making post-secondary education more affordable for Ontario students and their families. We are keeping the doors of opportunity open, not just for today's learners but for future generations, like my children. And we're doing it in a way that's fiscally responsible and economically strategic, ensuring Ontario remains competitive and resilient in a global economy increasingly shaped by tariffs, trade barriers and shifting supply chains. By strategically investing in education, we are protecting Ontario from the impacts of global economic instability.

Let's start with the Ontario Student Assistance Program, or OSAP, as I think we all call it. It's one of the most powerful tools we have to make education affordable for everyone. In the 2024-25 academic year, we provided approximately \$6.9 billion in combined provincial and federal student financial assistance to over 470,000 full-time students across Ontario. That's real support for Ontario students and their families.

And here is what makes OSAP truly impactful: 85% of Ontario's financial aid for full-time students in 2024-25 came in the form of grants—money that students do not have to repay. Let me repeat that: Students do not have to repay these grants. By reducing the amount of student loans needed to take on—we're supporting graduates to start their careers with less debt and more freedom to pursue their careers and their future lives. That means more young people can afford to buy homes, start their families and contribute to Ontario's economy sooner. This is how we're protecting Ontario's future by empowering the next generation to thrive.

As we continue to navigate the economic uncertainty brought on by the US tariffs—as you mentioned, MPP Jordan—that means supporting fast and flexible pathways to employment.

To that end, I'm proud to say that Ontario is the first jurisdiction in Canada to offer student financial assistance for micro-credentials. As of today, more than 2,000 micro-credentials are approved for OSAP loans and grants, with more being added regularly. Providing financial support for micro-credentials will enable more people to discover these rapid training opportunities and participate in flexible, labour-market-driven learning. Micro-credentials allow learners to quickly upskill and reskill in response to shifting market demands, including those caused by international trade tensions as well as tariffs.

By building a nimble and responsive workforce, we are protecting Ontario's economic competitiveness.

Making post-secondary education more affordable means making it more affordable for all students in all corners of Ontario.

We know that critical minerals are essential to everything from electrical vehicles to clean energy. But in order to unleash our critical mineral supply, we need a highly skilled workforce, which is why I'm very proud that our government is investing \$10 million to create new scholarships for First Nations students pursuing careers in the fields of mining-related resource development. These scholarships will provide full, upfront funding for tuition, books and other educational costs. This will make a huge impact in the lives of students who may not have been able to access post-secondary education without that financial support. With our support, First Nations students will gain access to the tools and training that's needed to succeed as leaders and innovators in the sector, and they'll be able to build careers close to home, bringing economic benefits back to their communities.

This is how we build a workforce that's not only highly skilled but resilient to global pressures. By developing local talent and breaking down financial barriers, we're protecting Ontario from the economic shocks of tariffs and trade disruptions.

Another step we've taken to make education affordable is through the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant. This grant provides 100% funding for tuition, books and other direct educational expenses for students in nursing, paramedic and medical lab technology programs. In return, students commit to working in high-need communities where they studied, after graduation, growing the local health care workforce. Since its launch in 2023-24, the grant has provided over \$96 million to support more than 8,200 learners.

Beginning in 2026-27, we're expanding the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant to include medical education. We are investing nearly \$160 million to cover 100% of tuition fees and direct educational costs for future family medicine physicians who commit to practising as family doctors anywhere in Ontario after residency. By making health care more affordable for the students, we're ensuring that Ontario's future doctors are trained here, stay here and serve here in communities that need them the most. This is why we are protecting Ontario's health care system by investing in talent that stays and serves locally.

Affordability in education isn't just about supporting students; it's about protecting Ontario's economy. In a world where tariffs and trade barriers are becoming more common, we need to ensure that Ontario can compete globally. That means investing in local talent and building a workforce that's ready for the challenges ahead. Every dollar we invest in affordable education is a dollar invested in Ontario's economic resilience. It's a way of protecting Ontario from the unpredictable changes in a global trade war, and it's a shield against global uncertainty—a promise to our families that their children will have the tools they need to succeed. Whether it's through OSAP, targeted

scholarships for First Nations students, or programs like the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant—we're making sure that no student is held back by its cost. As we look ahead, we're ensuring that Ontario's post-secondary education system remains a key driver of opportunity and economic security.

As you have heard today, our government is putting affordability for students first, because we know that when an education is affordable, opportunity is possible. Whether it's a high school student taking the first step towards entering post-secondary education or a full-time worker upgrading their skills to build a better future, we're making post-secondary education accessible and affordable. No student should ever feel held back by the cost of higher learning, and no family should have to choose between paying bills and investing in their children's future. By making higher education affordable, we're protecting Ontario—its people, its economy, and its future.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I recognize MPP Pang.

Mr. Billy Pang: Chair, through you to the minister: Thank you for your patience and presentation earlier, from different angles and directions that are supporting post-secondary.

Ontario's colleges and universities train the next generation of workers, innovators and leaders. In a time of global economic uncertainty, we need to take measures to protect this vital sector. This is why the government has a plan to act. It will build the workforce of tomorrow and drive our economy forward.

Minister, can you please share how this government's investments are making our post-secondary institutions stronger and ensuring our students have the skills to compete and succeed?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you, MPP Pang, for your thoughtful question.

Ontario's colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes are delivering world-class education that equips students with the skills they need to succeed in in-demand sectors across our whole province.

1150

As part of our government's plan to protect Ontario and meet labour market needs, we're making strategic investments in programs that lead to rewarding careers in key areas of the economy. Our government is continuously finding innovative ways to strengthen the link between post-secondary education and the evolving needs of Ontario's labour market. We know, at our colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes, we're building the labour force of tomorrow—a workforce that is cutting-edge, dynamic and ready to drive our economy forward no matter what comes at them. When graduates are provided with the skills and knowledge that employers are looking for, they can hit the ground running right after graduation.

That's why, through an investment of \$32.4 million, our government is supporting nearly 6,500 high-quality research internships, through Mitacs. In addition, we provided \$5.4 million to support 2,000 virtual micro-internships focused on real-world projects, through Riipen. These internships ensure post-secondary students

gain the critical skills they need to take their careers by storm at in-demand jobs.

As you heard me mention in my remarks, since April, our government has invested a billion dollars to expand labour-market-driven programs at our colleges and universities.

A prime example is our work to support science, technology, engineering and math programs—commonly referred to as STEM. This spring, we announced an investment of \$750 million to fund up to 20,500 STEM seats per year, building a skilled, made-in-Ontario talent pool that will cement the province as one of the most competitive places in the G7 to invest, create jobs, do business, and raise a family. As part of our government's plan to protect our workers, industries and the economy from the impact of the US tariffs, this historic investment will strengthen key sectors such as advanced manufacturing, the life sciences and technology, ensuring businesses have the highly skilled workers to retain and grow Ontario's economic advantage for decades to come.

When it comes to building our future workforce, we're not stopping there.

We're investing \$75 million to train up to 7,800 additional students in construction-related programs at colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes right across all of Ontario. This expansion comes at a pivotal moment. Ontario is embarking on a historic \$200-billion infrastructure plan, a 10-year vision to build homes, highways, hospitals and community infrastructure. This investment sends a powerful message that careers in the skilled trades and planning are not just viable; they are critical to our prosperity.

On the topic of vital professions for our communities, let's not forget about the teachers. To ensure every child in Ontario has access to qualified educators, we're investing \$55.8 million to train up to 2,600 new teachers by 2027, focusing on high-need areas such as French language and technology education in condensed programs and rural and northern programs as well. Since 2018, we've added approximately 1,040 full-time students for initial teacher education programs across Ontario, ensuring our communities have the teachers we need to give our students the best start to their learning.

We know Ontario needs more health care workers today and into the future to keep our communities healthy. Our government is making the investment to build this workforce, as well.

The Ontario Learn and Stay Grant provides upfront costs and funding—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: —including tuition, books and other direct educational costs for post-secondary students who enrol in an eligible health care program in a priority community. In exchange, as I mentioned, graduates must commit to live and work in the region where they studied. Since its launch in 2023-24, the grant has provided over \$96 million to support more than 8,200 learners and students who might not have gone into health care.

Earlier this year, our government announced that we're continuing to invest in the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant, with an additional \$261.7 million. We're also expanding the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant to future family medicine physicians by investing almost \$160 million, beginning in 2026-27. With this investment, four cohorts of medical school students will get their tuition, books and other direct educational costs covered. Those students will commit to working as family doctors anywhere in the province after graduating, which will build a stronger, more resilient health care workforce—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister.

I'm going to call a five-minute break. It's basically four minutes to 12, so at one minute after 12, please be back in your seats.

The committee recessed from 1155 to 1200.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We are now back in order, and we will go to the official opposition. I recognize MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to turn to some questions about college and university student supports, which is vote item 3002-1.

The minister will be aware that many students come to Ontario colleges and universities requiring a vast range of supports—from student mental health issues, food insecurity, sexual violence. They are looking for support from peer mentorship and tutoring programs. They are looking for support from career advising and many other kinds of services on campus. Over the years, those supports have been funded through ancillary fees that are collected by student unions on our campuses.

Minister, your introduction of Bill 33, which is coming back to the Legislature for a vote next week without any hearings at committees, has caused student organizations significant concern. We know that Canadian Federation of Students Ontario, OUSA, Ontario Student Voices, College Student Alliance—all the student organizations have expressed overwhelming opposition to Bill 33 because of how it will undermine these critical supports on campuses that students rely on.

If student unions are no longer able to collect ancillary fees to support those services, how does the minister expect students' needs for those critical services to be met, if student unions can no longer deliver those services?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you for the question.

You're referencing Bill 33. If the bill does pass, it will ensure transparency. It's going to foster better trust in our post-secondary education system.

Prior to getting into the role as minister, in my first couple of years being elected, I heard from parents concerned about the ancillary fees—the line after line after line—and questioning where that was going.

Last year, prior to my time in the role, we brought forward the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024. This is just building upon that. That act allowed and ensured that textbooks and other learning materials were clear to the students—and understanding the transparency behind it.

We want to increase transparency of the ancillary fees that could and should be—but I think the one part of your questioning that's missing is that we're going to consult with the sector. This is not just one and done and we're going to roll out the new transparency and fees—we're very much committed to consulting with the sector and ensuring that we understand what could be optional and what should be optional in that regard.

Again, we're in times of high inflation and challenges with affordability. We want to ensure that every student and their families—the significant investment they put into their post-secondary education—understand clearly where all of their fees are going.

So I'll just reiterate again to the member that we're very much committed to a comprehensive consultation with the post-secondary sector when and if the bill does pass.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciate that response, but I wonder if the minister has ever looked at the website of a student union on our college and university campuses. There is detailed information already provided. There is full transparency about the amount of fees that are collected and how those fees are used. Further, there is an extensive democratic process by which student unions determine how those funds will be spent. There is referendum or other kinds of democratic processes to make sure that the fees that are collected are used to address the immediate concerns of students.

Can the minister assure us that those critical services—mental health supports, peer mentorship, peer tutoring programs, student food banks, clubs, extracurricular programs, support for survivors of sexual assault—will continue to be available to students if Bill 33 passes next week? And I suspect, Minister, that it will, given your majority.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Recognizing that I've travelled this province extensively this summer and I've met with student groups, I think there are some best practices.

I'm going to reference Western. I know the student council at Western truly has some of the better practices when it comes to the support—their mandate and ensuring that there's transparency in the fees.

There are other schools that could improve their processes and could have more transparency for all of the students, not just the students who are on council. We want to ensure that every student and their families are well aware of where their funds are going, in a clear manner.

Again, no regulations will come forward until we complete the consultations. I think that's significant because the sector feedback is going to guide our implementation of the proposed changes—understanding that we're going to do this thoughtfully. We're going to consult with the sector to ensure that we understand what could and should be optional.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Bill 33 doesn't just require transparency; it also allows the government to dictate what fees can be charged to students and collected through ancillary fees. I'm sure that you can understand, Minister, how alarming this is to the student organizations that understand the needs of students and have stepped in to provide

those services that students need to be successful in our institutions.

I want to ask a question about the Campus Safety Grant. As you are aware, Minister, this grant was introduced many years ago, in 1991, to help institutions address safety on campus. It remained at the same level from 1991 to 2019, when it did increase in amount, but over those many years, the actual value of the grant declined because of inflation. The current funding that is allocated to the Campus Safety Grant works out to about \$127,000 per institution.

Bill 33 threatens campus supports for survivors of gender-based violence. Your government has acknowledged that intimate partner violence is endemic. Surely you recognize that post-secondary students are at highest risk of experiencing intimate partner violence.

What plans does your ministry have in place to ensure that gender-based violence programming will remain available on campus and will not be undermined and reduced by Bill 33?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you for the question, and thank you for referencing the Campus Safety Grant that was doubled by our government, under Premier Ford. It went from \$3 million to \$6 million, and now it's at \$6.1 million.

I will clearly articulate that all students should be able to go to post-secondary, feel safe, and feel that they're in a safe environment and that there are no threats to their safety.

Part of that \$6.1-million grant varies by institution. Depending on the institution, some of the examples that that money is utilized for are for safety; for training for the staff, for student leaders and their volunteers; consent and healthy relationship workshops and programs; as well as installing security cameras, lighting, safety apps and emergency notification systems; and safe walk programs.

As you mentioned, the endemic—and I have to give a shout-out to my colleague MPP Dixon, who spent a lot of time and hours on the report that has been represented to the Legislature. Our government takes this very seriously, and we will continue to be there with these investments for community safety.

1210

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Once again, as with work-integrated learning and a variety of other important programming that's provided on campus, these programs are delivered by staff. We know at the college sector—10,000 jobs lost. We just saw a report from Statistics Canada about the shedding of jobs in the post-secondary sector. Without the staff to run these programs, there is considerable concern about what kinds of supports will be available on our campuses.

I now want to ask some questions around deferred maintenance, which is vote item 3002-3.

Last year, at estimates, we learned that the current backlog of deferred maintenance at our colleges and universities is at \$6.3 billion. That was the amount that had been identified by the blue-ribbon panel.

What is the current dollar amount for the total deferred maintenance backlog, and can you break that down by universities, colleges and Indigenous institutes?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you for the question.

What I will state is, ultimately, our total capital grants this year is a little bit more over \$241 million—\$128 million going to universities for their capital grants and \$113.7 million going to our colleges.

Since we formed government in 2018, approximately \$1.5 billion has gone into capital grants to ensure that our colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes continue to be there for the communities that they serve.

Over the next five years, there's going to be an investment of over \$2 billion into the sector.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: You formed government in 2018.

In 2020, the Council of Ontario Universities stated that \$15.8 billion would need to be invested over 10 years in order to eliminate the backlog of deferred maintenance—just at universities in this province; not accounting for the deferred maintenance at colleges and Indigenous institutes.

Minister, I would appreciate that breakdown of deferred maintenance by universities, by colleges, and Indigenous institutes.

I want to ask, given that \$15.8-billion amount that was identified by the Council of Ontario Universities in 2020, at the current pace of funding from your government, when do you expect the backlog in deferred maintenance at our post-secondary institutions will be cleared in this province, and do you think that timeline is acceptable?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Respectfully, coming from a business background and working with the business sector quite frequently before getting into politics—there's always going to be deferred capital renewal; there's always going to be deferred maintenance.

Just a quick run of the math—the deferred capital renewal is less than 16% right now of the overall asset that our post-secondary sector has. I was chatting with some of my colleagues in the small business realm that I used to live in, and my backlog at my store, when I was still part of the restaurant, was higher than that percentage-wise.

There are always going to be the needs and wants of any business, small business, but we'll continue being there.

And I just want to clarify my statement—it's \$2 billion in capital renewal over 10 years, not five years, as I mentioned earlier.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Right—which is a far cry from the \$15.8 billion that needs to be invested over 10 years just in universities alone.

I want to turn to the Efficiency and Accountability Fund, which you have referenced earlier in your remarks.

We know that there is public money that is going into private consulting firms to conduct efficiency audits, at a time when student organizations—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: —and unions have already identified what needs to be invested in order to ensure the stability of our institutions.

My specific question around the audits is: Are the results of those audit reports binding, and does your ministry plan to enforce the recommendations that come out of those reports, even if those audits are recommending more program closures, more staff layoffs?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: The Efficiency and Accountability Fund was done by third-party reviews—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We'll now go on to the third party. I recognize MPP Hazell.

MPP Andrea Hazell: You said \$750 million will be distributed among institutions—I know I asked you the question before, but I want us to stay on the communities in the north and the rural. How much of this is going to be invested in the rural and the northern communities? I'm just concerned that they are left behind today and they're still going to continue to be left behind.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: As I mentioned earlier, when it comes to the STEM programming—it depended on the institutions and what programming they were providing in their local communities.

I will reiterate, in 2024-25—when you're talking about the northern communities, I think it's worth highlighting our approximately \$23-million investment in the Northern Ontario Grant for the universities that serve our northern communities, as well as the \$86 million for the Small, Northern and Rural Grant for the colleges. That's on top of the \$10-million investment into small, northern and rural colleges and northern universities—but I will say this is before my time.

I'm very proud of our government—to stand up the Northern Ontario School of Medicine that is serving the north really well.

I was able to visit, and recognizing I was just in the north this September—to be able to invest another \$10 million to bring the University of Sudbury back online. That serves the francophone community very well—and ensuring that all communities, wherever you may live across the province, are looked after with post-secondary education.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Right now, I heard in your response “the francophone community”—but French-language education, I want to speak to that a bit.

The school boards have been dealing with—and this is no news to anyone—shortages of teachers for many years.

Have you provided adequate funding to the French-language universities training those teachers, to adjust the enrolment accordingly—because the enrolment is decreasing.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: As I mentioned in my opening statement, we invest into our French institutions—\$831 million both to the French-language and bilingual institutions.

When it comes specifically towards our teaching, I'll highlight the 2025 budget—just a little bit under \$56 million, \$55.8 million, to train 2,600 new teachers, with a focus specifically on French teachers; 250 French-language bachelor of education programs; as well as 831 French-as-a-second-language programs. We've been hearing loud and clear from the communities we serve that there is

a shortage of French teachers. That's why we've made a targeted investment.

As well, it was in January of this year that I signed off on doubling the amount of seats at our Université de l'Ontario français, UOF, to ensure that not only are they producing more top-quality French teachers for our K-to-12 system, but they are also now doing intermediate and senior levels of training for teachers.

We are continuing to meet with stakeholders, understand what the needs are, and we act accordingly.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I'm going back on this question—because maybe I wasn't really clear in my first question to you. It's about the tuition freeze.

Again, we get a lot of these concerns, questions from our stakeholders, and they're talking about the tuition freeze limiting the ability of post-secondary institutions to adjust their income to make up for your government's lack of funding.

We know you talk about your funding strategy to the universities and colleges—but they were already behind. So my question to you is, with your new funding to the schools and universities, is that going to help them to close their deficit gap that they are experiencing? I can tell you, speaking to a lot of colleges—they are way behind in catching up and do not know if they can continue to keep their doors open. I'm just trying to find out where the lack in between is—what is not connecting. If you're saying that you're coming up with your funding model to the universities and the colleges, then why are they still suffering? Low enrolment of students, professors being let go—they just don't know how long they can keep their doors open.

1220

Hon. Nolan Quinn: When it comes to low enrolment of students, I have to disagree with that. Our enrolment at universities is increasing, domestically. Yes, there are less international students coming to our colleges, but enrolment has increased year over year.

I will remind the member that when it comes to undergraduate students, with the tuition freeze that our government put in place, we're still the fourth highest in Canada when it comes to tuition rates; for postgraduate or graduate students, we're the third highest in Canada.

It's a great time to explain the funding we've brought to the sector—almost \$2.5 billion that we've invested into the sector. As I mentioned earlier, \$1.3 billion—the largest single investment into the post-secondary education system in over a decade. That happened last year—to be able to stabilize the system because of the unilateral decisions that the federal Liberal government made without consulting either the institutions themselves or the provinces that they serve. That's on top of the \$1-billion investment we put in this year—on the \$1.3 billion. That \$1 billion is 100,000 newly funded seats at our colleges and universities—up to 20,500 seats in STEM with the \$750-million investment; 2,200 seats for nursing; 2,600 seats for teaching, as I just explained in the previous question. We're meeting those labour market needs for our French

communities and northern and Indigenous communities as well.

We're going to continue making very strategic, very targeted investments to ensure that the world-class post-secondary education system we all know and love will continue on for decades to come.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I thank you for your response. It didn't help me to understand if you're going to make up for lost revenue for these colleges.

I want to put this on the record: You are the government—since 2018. You keep going back to the federal level. You've created the mess, so we expect you to clean it up for the colleges, because that's where our students need to go to learn in a healthy, safe environment. They have a shortfall of revenue. Yes, your investment is coming at a needed time. I'm not talking negative about your funding—absolutely not. The colleges need it.

When I speak to the colleges, some of them are down 40% of enrolment—I'm not sure if you are on the ground and you're hearing it, but I just want to put that on the record. These colleges are facing huge budget deficits, low enrolment, and they do not know if they can continue to keep their doors open. It's not one, it's not two colleges; it's more than two—it's more than five. I just want to state that.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: As I mentioned earlier, that's why we're going through a funding model review right now. We understand that even in the last five years, since the beginning of the pandemic, costs have changed significantly.

When it comes to the low enrolment that you're mentioning at the colleges, I truly wish that you as a member were advocating for the system when I was sending letters to our federal counterparts to say the concerns of not having labour market-demand jobs as postgraduate-work-permit-eligible for international students. A perfect example would be early childhood education, with the \$10-a-day daycare, the federal mandate. That was not necessarily initially approved. It made the list afterwards. We were there advocating for the system, and we'll continue to advocate for the system.

Time and time again, we'll step up with historic investments—\$1.3 billion, the largest in over a decade, another billion dollars in budget 2025. They're strategic and targeted investments to ensure that the 70,000 STEM grads that we're graduating every year—we're going to add another 20,000 STEM grads to that, because we're graduating world-class STEM graduates across all of our institutions, across northern Ontario, eastern Ontario, southwest Ontario. We're going to continue to make those investments to ensure that we're meeting the needs of the economy.

I hope that when we're advocating, whether it's with the federal government or to the communities we serve, you'll be there with us to support.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I'm always going to be there advocating for education. I've got three kids. I've got to make sure that they're very well-qualified and they're

educated, because there won't be luck getting a job in this society.

I thank you for your response.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have five minutes and 10 seconds left.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I'm satisfied with my answers and my questions.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I will move on to the independent member. MPP Clancy, go ahead.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I do appreciate the amount that's invested in innovation. I live in one of the techiest hubs in Ontario. I hope that we can start to create more collaboration across ministries, because a lot of our innovators leave and they can't sell in Ontario. So I hope we can go and take what you're learning as you go across the province meeting all these innovators, meeting all these start-ups, and talk to the procurement minister, talk to the Minister of Economic Development—because in my community, 95% of those start-ups sell to people outside of Ontario and Canada because they can't sell here; the red tape is enormous. We need a little bit more collaboration across ministries.

I'd like to bring it back to the estimates.

I'm hearing from universities that they're having trouble funding the costs of Bill 124. I was affected by Bill 124. The government has mandated a 1% increase to public service jobs. It costs us legal fees, and universities are missing in these estimates—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I'll just remind the member that—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Yes. It's missing from the estimates—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We aren't talking about Bill 124, though.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: But that money that public institutions are now owed is missing from these estimates. It's missing.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Go ahead.

Mr. Lorne Coe: The scope of what we're discussing right now on the vote, Chair—and you're making an important point—does not include collective bargaining. It's outside of the parameters, sir.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I would agree.

Next question, please.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: So, these, and the salaries that we pay people, are covered under this. This is a gap in funding to their salaries that hasn't been made up, and it leaves them at a shortfall, so—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): MPP Clancy, next question, please.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: One university that's facing a shortfall is University of Waterloo—\$80 million. They're not alone; there's about a \$265-million deficit just for universities.

What is your strategy to address these budget gaps for universities facing deficits this year?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: As I mentioned, we're doing the funding formula review. We've currently spent a lot of

time and effort travelling the province, hearing from our stakeholders to understand where the gaps are in providing programs for the communities they serve.

But again, I will remind the member that the changes that have happened on the federal side have been very, very quick. Making policy at the podium has caused us to react, with the \$1.3-billion Postsecondary Education Sustainability Fund, with \$700 million across the board over a three-year increase, as well as \$203 million extra for top-ups for institutions of greater need.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I think—feedback, with all due respect—a lot of these funding infusions are often time-limited or they're unexpected. I'm glad that you're doing the funding formula so that there can be some predictability.

There's no more fat at U of W; there is nothing left to trim.

Like my colleague shared, we are trimming supports for students, and this will change their experiences as students going through the sector.

Can you tell me how your funding formula changes will affect the amount of funded seats? The amount of seats that are covered under your per capita—again, frozen since 2016. A lot of seats aren't covered under any help from the government. So what will that look like?

1230

Hon. Nolan Quinn: The funding formula review is to ensure that we have funding in a transparent, clear and fair process. Regardless of whether they're up in the north serving our smaller communities, or in the GTA serving our larger communities that have larger capacity, it's to ensure that all of our institutions have a fair and transparent manner for their funding moving forward.

I'll pass it over to the deputy to provide further context.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

Mr. David Wai: As the minister indicated, the funding model review will really focus on aligning the needs of students, communities, and industry and our economy. It aims to identify a few key pieces around the funding model with regard to supporting student success and outcomes, ensuring access to high-quality post-secondary education, and addresses the long-term sustainability of the post-secondary education sector. That includes understanding both the future growth and enrolment and ensuring that funding—but also ensuring that the right programs are aligned, as I said, with the needs of students, communities, and industry and the economy.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have 10 seconds.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Social services do matter. Critical thinking in this day and age has never been more important. So while I appreciate STEM, we need to train people on critical thinking.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister.

We'll now go to the government side for 15 minutes. I recognize MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you, Minister and Deputy, for your comments and remarks earlier today.

I also want to thank you for the investment in teachers' education, something that I have realized in my community of Burlington as well, and also for the targeted investment in the French bachelor of education programs. I've seen first-hand the incredible impact of teachers in my community.

I heard you mention that the students of today are the leaders of tomorrow, and I couldn't agree with you more.

I know that during the last round, you talked about some of the French education supports. I'm just wondering if you could talk about, overall, what our government is doing to support access to high-quality French-language post-secondary education, please.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you, MPP Pierre, for that important question.

Ontario is proud to be home to the largest French language post-secondary education system in Canada outside of Quebec, as I mentioned earlier, with more than 35,000 students enrolled in high-quality French-language and bilingual programs. Our government is proud to continue supporting access to French-language post-secondary education across all of Ontario.

Education is the cornerstone of opportunity, and French-language post-secondary programs are essential to preserving our cultural heritage, building strong francophone communities, and training the next generation of francophone workers, including in my own community in eastern Ontario.

As we take steps to protect Ontario amid economic uncertainty, our government is making strategic investments to strengthen access to French-language higher education, enabling us to protect Ontario's future and remain strong and competitive as we face new challenges, including tariffs from the US. By investing in French-language programming, we're not just expanding access; we're laying the foundation for a stronger, more resilient Ontario.

That's why, last year alone, we invested \$831 million in French-language and bilingual colleges and universities, including \$133 million in special purpose grants—but it's more than just funding.

Our government also recognizes the importance of making sure the post-secondary sector includes French-language education that is governed by and for francophones.

That's why we created two stand-alone francophone post-secondary universities, l'Université de l'Ontario français and l'Université de Hearst, a historic first for Ontario.

We're also proud of our work to establish Canada's first independent medical university, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, which offers bilingual training for francophone doctors in northern Ontario.

And just this summer, we invested more than \$10 million to relaunch programs at the University of Sudbury, in partnership with the University of Ottawa. As part of our plan to protect Ontario, this investment will expand access to high-quality French-language post-secondary education in northern Ontario, helping more francophone students to acquire the skills they need for good-paying,

in-demand jobs and meet the evolving needs of Ontario's workforce. Francophone communities are a vital part of our province's economic and cultural fabric. We're ensuring students have access to the education and training they need to thrive. Beginning this past September, the University of Sudbury offers programs in health sciences, management and commerce, social sciences and arts, in partnership with the University of Ottawa, at their campus in Sudbury. Through this expansion of French-language higher education, our government is building a robust bilingual workforce to support a stronger, more competitive and self-reliant northern Ontario.

As we work to expand access to French-language education, we're also looking ahead to the people who will inspire and guide the next generation of francophone students.

That's why, to meet the growing demand for French-language education, our government is investing \$55.8 million, through budget 2025, to train 2,600 new teachers by 2027, including 250 in French-language bachelor of education programs and 819 in French-as-a-second language. This investment ensures a pipeline of qualified French-language educators to support student success and strengthen our bilingual education system. It is part of our broader strategy to ensure Ontario's education system has more French-language teachers from K to 12 and across the province to prepare students for success in both their academic and career journeys and to preserve our province's linguistic and cultural diversity for generations to come.

All of the investments I've highlighted today are about more than numbers; they are a reflection of our values and our action plan for Ontario. They show how we're protecting Franco-Ontarian communities, workers and their culture. In times of economic uncertainty, it is more important than ever to invest in what makes Ontario strong. French-language post-secondary education is not just a cultural asset; it is a strategic advantage. It builds a strong French-language workforce and strengthens local communities and economies. Through our investments, we're protecting Franco-Ontarian culture and building a more resilient and prosperous Ontario for all.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I recognize MPP Dixon.

Ms. Jess Dixon: It probably comes as no surprise, given my interest in community safety and violence prevention and response, that I would be asking about campus safety.

I come, obviously, from a region with a number of different colleges and universities—Laurier, Waterloo, Conestoga, my own alma mater of Guelph. While our local police services and campus police are doing a great job every day on those campuses, we still do have pernicious incidents of violence, of hate, discrimination, racism etc. I'd like to know a little bit more about what the ministry is doing to combat those.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: It's an important question.

Thank you for the advocacy that you are doing on gender-based violence.

All students in Ontario, as I mentioned earlier, deserve to learn in an environment that is free from hate, racism, discrimination, disruptions or harassment while pursuing their post-secondary education.

To keep post-secondary students safe on campus, there are two pieces of legislation we have introduced.

The Strengthening Post-secondary Institutions and Students Act, 2022, addresses faculty and staff sexual misconduct towards students. Under this legislation, colleges and universities are required to have a publicly posted stand-alone sexual violence policy reviewed once at least every three years, with student input considered every time it's updated. This builds on our 2019 requirement for colleges and universities to report annually to their board of governors the number of reports of sexual violence by students, as well as the supports, programs and initiatives available to students.

In 2024-25, our government invested \$6.1 million through the community safety grant. This grant supports student sexual violence services, builds awareness of sexual violence, and disseminates information about on-campus supports available to students.

Similarly, in 2023-24, the ministry has invested more than \$1.3 million in the Indigenous institutes campus safety grant. This grant supports sexual violence prevention on campus, increasing awareness of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people, and enhances campus safety efforts both on campus and online.

These steps reflect our government's zero tolerance for sexual violence on our post-secondary campuses.

We will continue to work with all of our institutions to ensure our campuses remain safe places for students to flourish.

The second piece of legislation is the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024, which combats racism and hate on campus, including anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia. Under this legislation, every publicly assisted college and university in Ontario must have public-facing anti-racism and anti-hate policies that address how each institution will combat racism and hate. In addition, this law requires all publicly assisted colleges and universities to have easily accessible reporting mechanisms for students to report any instances of hate or racism.

Specifically, these policies must:

- outline institutional commitments to its campus community with respect to anti-racism and anti-hate;
- identify intersections between related concepts, such as academic freedom, scholarly independence, freedom of speech and expression, anti-racism and anti-hate, and how these principles are operationalized; and
- identify how the institution is proactively creating a post-secondary environment free from discrimination and hate, and this includes proactive measures such as practices to support dialogue, early intervention and de-escalation.

1240

I am pleased to share that all publicly funded colleges and universities in Ontario attested that they have these policies and reporting mechanisms posted publicly for easy student access, and they have committed to emailing direct links to anti-racism and anti-hate policies, processes and complaints mechanisms to the campus community each and every fall.

This is about more than the policy; it's about ensuring that every student feels safe to learn and every educator feels safe to teach.

When incidents of hate do occur on campus, rest assured that I and my team are in swift contact with the institution to ensure their policy is being followed to a T to protect our students. Our government's position is clear: We value free speech, discussion and debate, but we do not condone hate, racism, discrimination, harassment or violence of any kind. These behaviours have no place in our post-secondary institutions, and we'll continue to take decisive action to ensure they are addressed swiftly and effectively.

Post-secondary institutions carry a critical responsibility to protect their communities, and our government is supporting them in that work. We have set clear standards and provide dedicated funding to assist institutions in fulfilling this responsibility. From campus safety grants to directives on anti-racism and anti-hate, we're ensuring that colleges and universities have the tools they need to create safe environments where every student can focus on learning. This is about more than compliance; it's about values—it's about sending a strong message that Ontario's campuses are places of learning, not places of fear.

Together, we're building campuses that reflect the best of Ontario—diversity, respect and opportunity for all.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I now recognize MPP Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Minister, we've been saving lives through research, and you're well aware of that—it has been across the province. That's because we've been a leader, for a long time, of innovation across the province as well, with world-class institutions and researchers like Ontario Tech in the region of Durham. We're driving discoveries to improve the lives of the people of Ontario—and that has been since 2018-19.

We've made significant investments of taxpayer dollars to strengthen research excellence across our post-secondary sector—you only touched on a little bit of that in your introductory comments, because of the time constraints. Of course, it's important that these investments deliver real value for the people who fund them.

Minister, could you please share how these record investments in Ontario's research excellence are improving lives, supporting communities like those in the region of Durham and other parts of the province, and building a more innovative province?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you, MPP Coe, for that question. I do believe I may run out of time before I'm able to share all the great things we're doing in research.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have one minute and 53 seconds.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Our government is proud to support world-class researchers whose work touches upon every corner of our province—research that saves lives, attracts investment, and creates great-paying jobs. Across Ontario, researchers are working tirelessly to solve some of the most pressing challenges of our time, from dementia care to cancer treatment to pediatric health and beyond, which is why, since 2018, as you mentioned, our government has invested over \$2 billion in groundbreaking, homegrown research. We know that research isn't just about discovery; it's about the impact it can have. It's about turning bold ideas into real-world solutions that improve lives, strengthen communities, and protect our future. That's why our government has made strategic investments in research that delivers concrete outcomes for the people of Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I'm pleased to share a few of those examples now.

Through the Ontario Research Fund and early researcher awards, we've invested over \$900 million since 2018 in more than 1,600 research projects. These projects have leveraged an additional \$1.5 billion in federal and third-party funding. They supported over 120,000 training opportunities. They led to more than 400 patents and started 76 spinoff companies, creating nearly 600 new jobs. These numbers aren't just statistics; they represent lives changed, careers launched, and innovation that is making Ontario a global leader in research and development.

For example, through the ORF, this past spring our government invested \$45 million in the Canadian Bio-manufacturing Cooperative, where Ontario researchers are protecting the province from—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister.

We'll now go to the official opposition. I recognize MPP Sattler.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to go back to the issue around the federal changes to international study permits. We know that when those changes were first announced in 2024, without consultation with the Ontario government, the Council of Ontario Universities estimated that those changes would cause a \$1-billion shortfall within just the university sector. That doesn't count the shortfall that the colleges would experience. As we all know, there was another announcement of yet more changes: reductions to the international study permits that will be allocated. That, of course, is going to cause an even bigger hit to college and university revenues in Ontario.

So, other than pointing the finger at the federal government, what is your ministry's plan to address these shortfalls and make sure that our colleges and universities can continue to function and deliver the post-secondary programming that our province urgently needs?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I think the Postsecondary Education Sustainability Fund was our plan last year, but there have been numerous adjustments to the international students—too many to count. Every time I meet with the

sector, I meet with presidents of colleges and universities, they impress upon me—because they're tracking it—how many significant adjustments have been made. I think some of the challenges with the adjustments that have been made are the lack of clarity, the lack of line of sight that comes into it. Whenever there was a cap put on international students, it was for two years; within nine months, that cap was adjusted yet again, and 12 months from then, it has been adjusted again. Every time the cap gets adjusted, the sector, as well as all of the provinces, are told that this cap will be in place for two years.

The sector needs certainty. That's why, time and time again, we've stepped up with the Postsecondary Education Sustainability Fund—it was \$700 million across the board. That amounts to increases in operating funding, as well as the \$203-million part of that for institutions of greater need, so that they can meet the needs of the students they serve and the communities they serve.

There have been numerous changes that the federal government has not consulted with—not just Ontario, but any jurisdiction across Canada.

That's why, in this year's budget 2025, we made a significant and strategic investment of \$1 billion into the sector to ensure that we're graduating another 100,000 funded seats, whether that's in STEM, skilled trades, nursing, teaching, or construction-related as well.

We're going to continue to make those strategic investments to ensure that our post-secondary sector can weather the storm that was created by the federal government.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: But when the blue-ribbon panel said that \$2.5 billion was needed and when there's an additional \$1 billion at least after the first round of changes to federal study permits, and there are now additional fiscal pressures from the further reduction in international study permits, it's clear that what the sector needs is much more than a one-time three-year investment of \$1.3 billion, which is what your government delivered at the time.

So why did your government not move to a permanent increase in operating funding so that universities and colleges could do the planning that they need to ensure that the programs that our communities need, the graduates that our employers are relying on to make sure that that talent pipeline continues to be there—why did you do a one-time three-year investment instead of a permanent increase in operating funding?

1250

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I'm glad you stayed on the same line of questioning, because I missed a very important portion of what we've been doing since the challenges in the sector have been created by the federal government.

The funding formula review that's currently taking place is to understand the costs that are associated with programming, whether you're in a small, northern or rural community—to ensure that the stability of the sector is there for years and decades to come.

You mentioned the \$1.3 billion. Part of that \$1.3-billion post-secondary education sustainability funding had the Efficiency and Accountability Fund as well. That allowed

institutions to take a third party—so somebody outside of government—to look holistically at their books and understand where there are opportunities for revenue or opportunities for saving. That's allowing the board of governors at each individual institution that serve their own communities to make decisions moving forward, whether there's an opportunity for savings or an opportunity for revenue.

I believe part of the funding formula review is to ensure that we do have efficient institutions. That's where the EAF funding has taken place. And then you notice schools that weren't in a precarious position with financials were raising their arm because they wanted the efficiency and accountability funding, because I think every great institution knows there's always an opportunity to have a more efficient structure in place—so not only was it the institutions of higher risk, but the institutions of lower risk were really wanting to understand, with the accountability fund, whether they can find savings as well.

The funding formula review is crucial, and it has been so much of our heavy work by everyone behind me this summer to ensure that the increased costs that have taken place because of the pandemic—that we're meeting the needs of the cost of that programming.

I'll pass it over to my deputy to provide a bit further context.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I actually want to follow up with you directly, Minister, on the Efficiency and Accountability Fund—and if you would just clarify something that you just said.

The reports that are being generated by those efficiency and accountability reviews—is it up to the individual institution that had brought the reviewers in to determine what they're going to do with the recommendations, or is there direction and oversight from the ministry that's going to require those institutions to implement the recommendations that come out of those efficiency and accountability reviews?

The reason I'm asking this, Minister, is that some of those reviews have recommended additional program cuts, they've recommended additional cuts to staff, at a time when we are already seeing significant loss of programs across the province and thousands of jobs being lost in the sector.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I'm glad you asked that question again, because I think you were cut off earlier or we ran out of time when you posed that question.

You're even stating it—it's recommended; I think you've stated it multiple times, that it's not demanded or required. Those efficiency and accountability reports are for the local board of governors—to make the decisions on the local level—because they understand their community more than us.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: So the colleges and universities can just put the report on the shelf if there's concern about the recommendations. There's no obligation that those recommendations have to be acted on?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: It is up to the local board of governors and the senates that are going to make those

decisions. But they signed up; we invested dollars into getting a report done. So my hope would be that they take those reports seriously and understand the recommendations, whether it's on cost-saving measures or on new revenue opportunities. It was a team effort, and I believe that the institutions themselves understand the value of those reports.

But again, it's the local level, the local leadership of the board of governors and senate, that will ultimately make those decisions—whether they move forward with the recommendations that are on that report.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Those efficiency and accountability audits are being conducted by private consulting firms. This goes back to the earlier questions that I asked about ministry investments in private sector companies, consulting firms to do audits—or in the case of Get A-Head, a company that was funded by the ministry to launch a mental health app for students.

Can the minister tell us what kind of due diligence is conducted by the ministry on private sector companies that receive public funding to provide programs or services to our post-secondary institutions?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Respectfully, these are world-class corporations in the financial sector that have been providing these services. They are known—and they have a reputation not only in Ontario and Canada; they have a reputation around the world—for the sage financial advice they give, regardless if it's in this sector or another sector.

I think the big thing to take away is that it was a third-party review, not necessarily an internal review. It was somebody coming with a fresh look at some of the opportunities and challenges that are in each individual institution.

Who am I to question the validity of these world-class institutions in the financial sector that have been providing support?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: But it's not only these audit consulting firms that are being contracted with ministry dollars; it's also other private sector firms, like Get A-Head, that are receiving public dollars from the ministry.

Can you give us more of a sense, a reassurance, of what kind of oversight and due diligence is conducted by the ministry before public funding goes to private sector organizations like Get A-Head?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Transparency is key to everything we do. If we're recommended an action to take forward, we will listen to the recommendations that are put before us.

I will pass it over to my deputy. I tried to put it earlier—just talking about the audit process, because we do have a stringent process in place to ensure that public dollars are spent wisely.

Mr. David Wai: As indicated earlier by the minister, we work very carefully with our internal audit team as well as organizations like Supply Ontario to work through when we are working with external vendors.

In particular, on the audit side of things, we do have an annual kind of process that—we work closely with our internal audit team to understand where there are oppor-

tunities or needs for ensuring smooth operation and efficient use of taxpayer dollars, and ensuring the proper accountabilities are in place. We work through an annual audit plan that looks at the key government priorities and key ministry priorities, as well as potential risks that might come forward, to ensure that we're putting the right kind of checks in place as we move forward with vendors, whether they be external vendors or otherwise.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: When concerns are flagged or identified through this audit process, does the ministry immediately end the flow of funding to companies like Get A-Head that have been receiving public or ministry dollars?

Mr. David Wai: The various audit reports that we get are not dissimilar from what we receive from, for example, the Auditor General or their number of potential recommendations that are related to different pieces. Depending upon the report, they may or may not include particular issues around stopping the flow of funding. In some cases, they are just often about changes in how we go about reporting or other areas about how to ensure greater accountability. I would say it very much depends upon the report that we receive and what actions are taken and what the recommendations are. I think we try to ensure the right kind of oversight is in place and ensure we have the right structures and processes to ensure that that is happening.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Even when there are significant concerns identified through a forensic audit, it's possible that that firm can continue to receive funding from the Ministry of Colleges and Universities?

Mr. David Wai: Again, we think very carefully about what the recommendations are from the forensic audit or the audit there may be. In some cases, that may result in immediate ceasing of funding, but it depends purely on the recommendations that may come out of that particular report about what the next steps or actions will be. We will always have good conversations with our auditors around what the appropriate next steps are in those cases.

1300

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Are you able to tell us if Get A-Head received ministry funding after 2023?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I have no further comment. Out of respect for the process, those additional questions will have to be addressed to the OPP.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Okay.

For my last question, I want to go back to Bill 33 and Bill 166, which you were discussing in your previous set of answers. Both of those bills impose significant additional red tape, though bureaucratic reporting requirements and regulatory requirements etc. Many in the sector have raised concerns about that additional red tape burden that is now being imposed on the sector. Are there plans for your ministry to assist with that?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you.

It's my understanding, MPP Hazell, that you don't want your time—or you do?

MPP Andrea Hazell: I do not want my time. I'm satisfied with the minister's—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Then we'll go to MPP Clancy, the independent member, for five minutes.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I have a question, because we don't see in the budget—we do hear about cuts to jobs: in the college sector, 10,000 jobs, and cuts in the university sector.

People are coming to me in my community, saying they're having experts in their field from Harvard and MIT and so on reaching out about opportunities to work in Ontario because of what's happening to the post-secondary system in the United States. Has your ministry invested in a strategy to seize on this opportunity to get this talent?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Well, our ministry will work with the individual institutions, but when it comes to recruitment and retention, it is up to the individual leaders of each institution.

I am heartened by the federal government's announcement of a billion dollars for recruitment of researchers across Canada over the coming years.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: What is the oversight?

In my community, John Tibbits gave himself a raise. He now gets paid about \$650,000. There's a lot of resentment, because a lot of folks have lost their jobs, and I have an empty campus. Actually, we're in a housing crisis. Conestoga, a little behind the puck, did invest in housing, but now, because of the shrink in international students, we have empty student housing in downtown Kitchener, in the middle of a housing crisis.

Is there some way that your ministry could intervene to find some way to make sure that these campus assets that are sitting empty don't continue to have tumbleweeds tumble across our downtowns—and some accountability for when some moves seem to be outside of the lines, I'll say, when some institutions are going outside of the norms?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: When it comes to funding for post-secondary institutions, we provide the operating funding. The decisions are made at the local level where the investments of new assets will go or what the rate of pay will be for their senior leadership.

With regard to open housing that's there, I would hope and think that the leadership of the school would look to repurpose that to be able to serve their community at large.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: And what if they don't? I don't know exact numbers of the campuses that are closing—but what is the strategy on these capital assets?

There was a kitchen for a culinary institution that's there. It's a commercial kitchen that just got renovated. Your ministry's dollars were spent to renovate this commercial kitchen, and now that culinary institution is closed.

Is there a plan? Is there a strategy on how to support these communities that are faced with massive amounts of infrastructure that are now sitting empty and not being fully utilized in the midst of an unemployment crisis?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Well, I think the plan would be our funding formula review that I've mentioned a few times this morning. We have spent a lot of time and effort this summer engaging with our stakeholders, both in the

colleges and universities, to understand where the costs are and where there's a gap in providing certain programming. We're really looking forward to the results of our funding formula review.

I do need to remind the member that funding for our post-secondary system is higher than it has ever been in Ontario's history, including the \$1.3 billion to stabilize the sector last year over three years, as well as the \$1 billion invested in budget 2025—almost \$2.5 billion that we've invested strategically into the post-secondary system in 18 months.

Time and time again, we will continue to work with our stakeholders and be there for the system, to ensure that we have a world-class education system for decades to come.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I just want to make an appeal for low-income students. Your government made changes to OSAP a while back. I know that there's lots of grant money, and I know that there are a lot of people applying—but one of the impacts was for low-income students to be able to access greater amounts of support.

Can you speak to how the barriers might exist for low-income students in accessing post-secondary education?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: As I mentioned earlier, OSAP is an entitlement- and needs-based system. You are correct: In Ontario, 85% of the funds that are given to students are grant-based, are non-repayable—the majority that are in place as a loan come through the federal government's dollars invested into OSAP.

I'd be remiss to not mention the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant. We have 8,200 new students, including the student I met at Boréal who went into the paramedicine program, who would not have gone to school for a very crucial health care—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister.

I will now go to the government side for two minutes. I recognize MPP Leardi.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: We've had a long discussion today here about various things, but one of the things that I appreciate most about the college program in the province of Ontario is the concentration on getting students a real world-class education right here in Ontario, without having to leave Ontario. I know that there are a lot of people in Essex county who appreciate that a lot, because Essex county is the best place in the world, and nobody wants to leave, and that's that.

Minister, I invite you to comment on that.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Well, sometimes I think Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry is the best place in Ontario to live, but we'll agree to disagree.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I almost had to put MPP Leardi out of order there, but I won't.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I've been to almost all of our publicly assisted colleges, universities, and Indigenous institutes, and it's amazing—the sense of pride that they have on their campus, whether it's Niagara College on the Niagara Escarpment or Sault College up north or St. Lawrence College in my own community along the St. Lawrence

River. Each school, each institution—the students have such a pride in the campus that they are on—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute warning.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: —understanding the importance of the education they're receiving, but also the community assets that are there with them.

We're lucky where we live, and I know, just interacting with other ministers from across Canada, that they look to our system, as leaders. They truly look to Ontario to lead the way, whether it's in new, innovative funding for recruiting health care, to get them into the new programs, or a new medical school that is dedicated and focused on family physicians—the first in Canadian history.

We're focused on moving the bar and ensuring that as many students as possible can stay in Ontario—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister.

That concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security.

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? Please put your hand up.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Recorded vote.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Shall vote 3001, ministry administration program, carry?

Ayes

Coe, Dixon, Jordan, Leardi, Pang, Pierre.

Nays

Sattler.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Carried.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Vanessa Kattar): Sorry, can you clarify? Is it a recorded vote for all of them or just the first one?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Do you want all of them?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Shall vote 3002, post-secondary education program, carry?

Ayes

Coe, Dixon, Jordan, Leardi, Pang, Pierre.

Nays

Sattler.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Carried.

Shall vote 3005, research program, carry?

Ayes

Coe, Dixon, Jordan, Leardi, Pang, Pierre.

Nays

Sattler.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Carried.

Shall the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security carry?

Ayes

Coe, Dixon, Jordan, Leardi, Pang, Pierre.

Nays

Sattler.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security to the House?

Ayes

Coe, Dixon, Jordan, Leardi, Pang, Pierre.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): The motion is carried.

This concludes our consideration of estimates of the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security.

I would like to thank Minister Nolan Quinn, ministry officials and staff for their time today.

The committee is now standing in recess until 2 o'clock.
The committee recessed from 1310 to 1400.

MINISTRY OF CHILDREN, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Social Policy will now come to order.

We're meeting to consider the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services for a total of three hours.

As a reminder, the ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address.

Are there any questions from the members before we start?

I am now required to call vote 701, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement of not more than 20 minutes from the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Minister, the floor is yours, sir.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Good afternoon, colleagues. It's a great opportunity for me to be here with all of you to

discuss the 2025-26 estimates for the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, and how our government is taking action to modernize and improve services and supports for Ontarians.

Before I start, I want to recognize my colleague the Honourable Charmaine Williams, Ontario's Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity. Over the last year, Minister Williams has been focused on increasing women's social and economic opportunities so that all women are empowered to succeed and thrive regardless of their circumstances.

I also want to recognize Deputy Minister Daniele Zanotti, who can provide further insight into the work of our ministry, along with the ministry's associate and assistant deputy ministers, who are all available, in person and virtually, here this afternoon.

And I must take this opportunity to thank all the staff across the ministry for their hard work and their professionalism, and extend our incredible gratitude and appreciation to the ministry's many partners and stakeholders.

Our government believes that protecting Ontario starts with empowering everyone to reach their full potential, and we're committed to supporting the people who need our assistance. Demand for the ministry's programs and services continues to increase as we meet this commitment. That increasing demand saw the ministry's investments last year rise by more than \$1.3 billion over 2023-24, and that upward trend continues this year.

The 2025-26 printed estimates forecast total spending of approximately \$20.4 billion for the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, representing an increase of more than \$596 million compared to last year, as we continue to make investments to build stronger communities and improve outcomes for people right across the province. Let me outline precisely where and how we are investing these additional funds, keeping in mind that these are precious, hard-earned taxpayers' dollars and we're committed to delivering value for money.

Let's start with our investments to support people with autism and their families. Our government is increasing its investment in the Ontario Autism Program by \$175.4 million in 2025-26, bringing this year's total funding to \$779 million. This funding will support the continued enrolment of more children and more youth in core clinical services this year and help provide access to other services such as applied behaviour analysis, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, and mental health services, including counselling and psychotherapy. I will remind my colleagues that it was our government that doubled the funding to the program and increased it again in our latest budget.

Ontario is also investing an additional \$293 million in financial and employment supports for vulnerable Ontarians. We're proud of the positive changes we have made, and I'll have more to say about those shortly.

Continuing my accounting of the \$596 million in new funding this year—Ontario is investing \$20.8 million to support children and youth at risk, increase capacity at

youth justice facilities, and assist young people in turning their lives around.

We're making new investments to reduce gender-based violence and keep women and girls safe in our province.

We're reprofiling \$17.6 million to support capital improvements to the Children's Treatment Centre at CHEO, the Chatham-Kent Children's Treatment Centre, and the Lansdowne Children's Centre.

We're continuing to invest in supportive housing options for adults and children with disabilities. That includes committing \$16 million to Luso Canadian Charitable Society in Hamilton for housing for aging individuals with disabilities, and \$1 million of that funding will flow this year for planning. We are committing \$21 million to Safehaven's Bloor Street redevelopment project in Toronto, to better support children and adults with complex care needs.

At a high level, all our investments in 2025-26 are being made across four key categories. The first is financial and employment services through the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Programs and associated supports like the Ontario drug benefit. The second is supports to individuals and families, including: Passport, for adults with developmental disabilities; children and youth with special needs, including autism; women and children experiencing violence; Ontario's deaf-blind community; and youth in communities facing systemic barriers. The third is the support for children and youth at risk, including child protection services delivered by children's aid societies, youth justice services, as well as community and prevention support. And the fourth and final category is for direct financial support for low- to moderate-income families, through the Ontario Child Benefit.

Highlights of our investments include:

- just under \$10.5 million for financial and employment services through the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Programs and associated supports like the Ontario drug benefit;

- about \$5.79 billion for supports to individuals and families;

- approximately \$2.2 billion to support children and youth at risk; and

- about \$1.3 billion, through the Ontario Child Benefit, to provide direct financial support to low- to moderate-income families.

Chair, I'd like to speak a little bit about the everyday work of our ministry that is supported by more than \$20 billion in funding, as forecast in 2025-26.

We help individuals and families in financial need by providing monthly income support and benefits, as well as access to employment supports.

Ontario Works supports low-income people in temporary financial need while they work with Employment Ontario to find meaningful employment.

The Ontario Disability Support Program assists low-income individuals who have a disability and connects people seeking employment to Employment Ontario.

We help young people who may need to transition from receiving children's special-needs services at age 18 to

receiving ministry-funded adult developmental services, including Passport funding and the Ontario Disability Support Program.

We help survivors of gender-based violence and human trafficking rebuild their lives with dignity and compassion.

And we help individuals who were involved with the youth justice system and child welfare system, who may now need support in finding a job or furthering their education.

Chair, these are all vital services that make Ontario a more compassionate and a more caring province.

I am pleased to tell you that we are improving our delivery of those services. The ministry is streamlining its administration, updating and standardizing transfer payment processes, aligning and integrating service contracts, and enhancing its IT infrastructure and transforming programs to better serve clients.

Let me briefly go over a few examples. One, we fully implemented an employment services system that is easier to use, that is more localized and will improve access to employment and training services for Ontarians, including those on social assistance. As of March 31, 2025, service system managers have helped more than 93,000 people referred from social assistance find meaningful employment. And I will add that amongst social assistance clients who have completed pre-employment services, 69% have found employment. In 2024, the number of social assistance cases that exited to employment increased by 22%, continuing an upward trend since 2021.

We've improved service delivery by centralizing intake and making initial eligibility determinations for most of the approximately 22,000 Ontario Works applications that are received every month. This allows us to determine eligibility faster, reduce applicant wait times, strengthen program integrity, and prevent more than \$35 million in losses.

Overall, we've made it easier and faster to apply for social assistance, with a simplified online application process that lets people apply for Ontario Works and ODSP through one single application. In fact, the new digital application saves most applicants about 74 minutes when they apply.

We also made it easier for clients to connect with their caseworkers, send messages and documents to access information and report changes through the MyBenefits digital channel. As of March 2025, over 10.4 million messages have been sent and received through the MyBenefits portal.

1410

We partnered with ServiceOntario to provide enhanced supports for social assistance applicants. This approach provides the support applicants need, and it also lets local offices focus on supporting existing clients.

Just to give you some context, ServiceOntario handles over 70,000 calls per month from social assistance applicants and clients. Several areas of the ministry's operations will require additional expenditure in 2025-26 to continue this important work.

Let's start with our increased investments of almost \$293 million for social assistance.

Our government is improving social assistance rates for people with disabilities, to give them the support that they need.

We're empowering people with disabilities who are able and looking for work by increasing their earnings exemption by 400%.

We're delivering on the government's commitment to annually increase disability income support rates. As you are aware, we increased ODSP payments by 2.8% this year, in line with inflation. This boost took effect with the July payment in 2025. Additionally, we increased the maximum monthly amount for the Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities Program, or the ACSO program, also by 2.8%. These latest rate increases bring Ontario's total increase in social assistance disability payments to almost 20% since September 2022.

Our government also exempted the new Canada Disability Benefit as income for ODSP, Ontario Works and ACSO to ensure the benefits give meaningful support to social assistance recipients. The changes allow social assistance and ACSO recipients who are eligible for the Canada Disability Benefit to receive up to \$200 per month per person without seeing a reduction in their social assistance payments or entitlements.

Finally, we have also indexed the Ontario Child Benefit to inflation.

Our government is making life more affordable and improving outcomes for vulnerable individuals, while also providing them with the best supports, in partnership with Employment Ontario.

Our approach to employment training and supports enables social assistance recipients to receive the same opportunities and assistance as everyone else, which maximizes their chances of finding and keeping a well-paying job.

Chair, as I touched on earlier, this year's estimates also include additional expenditures for children and youth services, such as \$175.4 million for the Ontario Autism Program to support program delivery and enrolment of children and youth into core clinical services. I can say that as of August of this year, more than 22,000 children and youth were enrolled in core clinical services under the Ontario Autism Program. To better support children with special needs, we are modernizing facilities to increase access and improve critical programs and services.

Our government also has a very good story to tell when it comes to helping young people achieve lifelong success by improving student nutrition.

Last year, we announced a three-year, \$108.5-million agreement with the federal government, through the National School Food Program, that will help give young people the healthy start they need and deserve.

Our government just announced last month that we're increasing Ontario's investment in the Student Nutrition Program and the First Nations Student Nutrition Program by \$5 million, for a total investment of \$37.5 million this year. These programs will serve more than 800,000 stu-

dents and are projected to deliver over 140 million healthy meals and snacks under the Student Nutrition Program, and more than 1.4 million meals to Indigenous communities this year through the First Nations Student Nutrition Program.

Our work to improve Ontario's child welfare system continues, which is why we're investing \$170 million over three years in the Ready, Set, Go Program, which was launched in April 2023. This program is designed to connect youth in the child welfare system with the additional services and supports that they need to prepare for and succeed after leaving care. Last year, Ready, Set, Go supported more than 4,000 youth as they prepared for adulthood, and this initiative will continue to make a positive difference.

Chair, we're continuing to work with representatives of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples to support the implementation of Indigenous-led models of child and family services, including those governed under Indigenous laws. To date, there are three First Nations in Ontario providing such services pursuant to their own child and family service laws. This is an example of reconciliation in action, and it shows our government's strong commitment to working with Indigenous partners to support children, families and communities.

Chair, I'd now like to spend a few minutes to talk about the ministry's work to help end violence against women in all its forms. Our government has zero tolerance for violence against women and children, and we're taking action to end it.

In December 2023, the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity and I launched our four-year action plan to prevent and address gender-based violence in our province. This plan is supported by Ontario's investments of more than \$1.4 billion in gender-based violence services and protections, as well as by an investment of \$162 million over four years through Canada's National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. As part of Ontario's action plan, we launched a call for proposals last year for community-based programs to prevent and address gender-based violence and support survivors. As a result, Ontario is investing approximately \$98 million over three years in 85 new projects across our province. Through our action plan, we're enhancing programs and services so that survivors and their families can access the services they need, where and when they need them.

Similarly, we're investing in Indigenous-led approaches that address gender-based violence through healing, health and wellness programming.

Building on existing investments, we're providing an additional \$13.5 million over three years to enhance initiatives that support women, children, youth, and others at risk of violence or exploitation.

The issue of women's personal safety is closely connected to the ability of women to feel socially and economically empowered in today's Ontario.

My colleague Minister Williams is doing an outstanding job of helping to increase the participation of women

in the workforce and supporting the economic security and prosperity of Ontario's women. That financial stability is a critically important fact here in helping women leave abusive situations.

That's why we have invested more than \$30 million since 2022 in the Investing in Women's Futures Program and Women's Economic Security Program. Women who are eligible for these programs learn to build the skills they need to increase their financial security by starting a business or getting a job.

Finally, I'd like to speak about our government's actions to combat human trafficking.

The province's anti-human trafficking strategy takes a comprehensive approach to combatting human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children and youth. As part of our strategy, the government is providing dedicated, specialized supports to intervene early. In July of this year, I announced that we are investing \$345 million to renew this strategy from 2025 to 2030. This represents the largest investment of its kind in our country.

Since its launch in 2020, the strategy has trained more than 1,000 front-line workers and helped tens of thousands of survivors, as well as children who were at risk of being trafficked. It has also led to hundreds of charges and arrests.

As part of the strategy, we're investing \$19 million over five years in three Children at Risk of Exploitation—or CARE—Units in Durham, Toronto, and the district of Kenora. CARE units pair and train police officers and child protection workers, including Indigenous workers, to identify and locate children who are being or who are at risk of being sexually exploited or sex-trafficked. CARE units then connect those individuals to relevant supports and services in their area.

Our government is expanding the anti-human trafficking Youth-in-Transition Worker Program to support underserved communities—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute left, Minister.

Hon. Michael Parsa: —and to align with the expansion of CARE units across the province.

When it comes to combatting violence against women and children, we're taking actions that support survivors and deliver concrete and tangible results.

By working together, we can help ensure that all women and children can live free from the threat of violence.

1420

Chair, that concludes my opening remarks regarding the ministry's 2025-26 estimates.

Both MCCSS and the Office of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity will continue to support the delivery of service that improves outcomes for all Ontarians, and we'll continue to work with our outstanding networks of partners in the community to strengthen people's lives and support the communities in which they live in.

Thank you so much for the opportunity.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister, for your presentation.

We will begin questions and answers in rotation of 15 minutes for the official opposition members, 15 minutes for the third party member, five minutes for the independent member, and 15 minutes for the government members.

As always, please make sure you make your comments through the Chair.

For any ministry staff appearing, please state your name and title when you are called upon to speak. Just make sure that you do that so we can accurately record you in the record.

I will now start with the official opposition. MPP Gretzky.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Prior to last year's estimates, the Financial Accountability Office projected that your ministry would be \$3.7 billion short of what was needed to sufficiently fund all of the program areas under your responsibility when factoring in inflation, and that would be up until 2027. You didn't really answer the FAO calculations directly during last year's estimates. You said the government's—basically, your go-to line: that the FAO projections are just a snapshot in time.

So my first question is, was the FAO snapshot of a \$3.7-billion shortfall in social services spending by your ministry over four years accurate?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes, it is a snapshot in time.

As I mentioned on many occasions, the accurate numbers are reflected in public accounts which, as you've seen—you've seen an increased investment in the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services every year, including this year, where, again, we see an increase in support for our ministry right across the board.

In my remarks, MPP Gretzky, I alluded to some of the investments in the various programs—

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Chair, if I can reclaim my time—because that's not a direct answer to my question.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I don't give you time. You can rephrase and ask your question again.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: In follow-up to that, then, Minister—since you, last year, suggested that we wait for public accounts to see what the real investment was, and you just repeated that line again: What was the increase to the MCCSS budget, based on the 2024-25 actuals?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, if you look at the remarks, you would see that the increase of investment in our ministry is up again this year—

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I'm asking for specific numbers related to the FAO's projected shortfall of \$3.7 billion. We were told to wait for public accounts last year.

I'm asking today, as we're looking at 2025-26, was the FAO's information correct, and what specific increase have we seen dollar-wise to MCCSS spending—specifically, even in last week's fall economic statement?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'm going to ask the deputy to provide some exact numbers for you. But as I mentioned to you, MPP Gretzky, the investments of our ministry—and again, it was reflected not only last year in public accounts, but this year as well—have increased across the board.

I will just defer to the deputy to see if he can get that exact number.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Chair, I'm asking the minister, specifically—since he was the one who stated to wait for public accounts and he's now referring to those public accounts—to provide that information.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Chair, I think the member is well aware that if she's looking for exact amounts, we have staff. If you're looking for answers, I would be more than happy to provide those answers. That's why we have a support team to be able to provide that information.

I would add—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Hold it, everybody.

Deputy Minister, please go ahead. State your name and title.

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: Daniele Zanotti, deputy minister, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and Women's Social and Economic Opportunity.

The percentage change compared to our 2023-24 actuals was 5.6%.

If you're requiring any more, I would ask our CAO and ADM, Shella Salazar, to step up for a moment.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): State your name and your title.

Ms. Shella Salazar: Shella Salazar, the chief administrative officer and the assistant deputy minister, business planning and corporate services division in the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

As the minister mentioned, the FAO does their own growth projections as well as analysis of Ontario spending. That is based on data that is based on public accounts that are not restated and not comparable when we're comparing estimates and public accounts. As you can see from, for example, the last FAO report that was issued in October 2025, they were using public accounts actuals that are actually not restated and not comparable to our estimates.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Okay, so there's no specific number for 2024-25, as there was for 2023-24. It was stated 5.6%—

Ms. Shella Salazar: It's 5.6% between 2023 and 2024. And between the estimates of 2024-25 and 2025-26, we have a 3% increase.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: That includes 2026? Is that what you said?

Ms. Shella Salazar: 2025-26, yes.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: My next question is on victim services.

Before I begin my questioning, I just want to acknowledge that within the last 24 hours, a young woman, 29 years old, was brutally murdered in my community as a case of intimate partner violence. I would like to thank the Windsor police for their good work in catching the alleged killer and for recognizing IPV as an epidemic, along with many municipalities in this province.

Based on the minister's estimates, the FAO expects that the budget for supports for victims of violence programs through his ministry will grow by only 2.1% over the next five years, and that is well below inflation—in fact, that's flat growth to their budgets, which is what the FAO means when they say that the program spending by your ministry

will effectively be in a deficit by billions of dollars. This is reflected through local agencies that are saying they have to reduce staffing and reduce programs. The victims of violence program spending includes the Victim Crisis Assistance Ontario program that does vital work all across the province.

I would like to know, how much of an increase to the annual budget did the victim services in Dufferin-Caledon receive—or Kingston or London or the York region or Hamilton?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks for the question.

As I said in my remarks, we're working—not just in this ministry, but across government—to end violence against women in all its forms in the province. We are working with our community partners.

As I mentioned, just two years ago, Minister Williams and I put together an action plan that was a result of the collaboration with our community organizations across the province, factoring in local context and the support that was needed—we then backed that work by \$1.4 billion, MPP Gretzky, that never was there. We had an action plan to be able to provide education, prevention, early intervention, to support survivors and hold perpetrators accountable. And that work was not only backed by \$1.4 billion in provincial funding; we also signed on with the federal government to the National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence, which, as a result, saw an increase of an additional \$162 million over the duration of Ontario-STANDS.

You asked about victim services, MPP Gretzky. That's a really good question, because we just recently announced that we are increasing their support for this year to better support victim services across the province—as well, a \$26.7-million further investment increase to provide shelter spaces for organizations that are providing support to survivors and victims across the province. That's all in addition to—

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Chair, I'd like to reclaim my time. I only have 15 minutes to get through a lot of questions.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Ask your next question.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Minister, we're hearing from shelters across the province. They're turning women away. They're turning women and children away because they do not have—and the other minister is shaking her head at me. It is a fact. It is a fact that they are turning people away and they are understaffed and under-resourced. So—

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Gretzky, I'm sorry; I know it's your time—

MPP Lisa Gretzky: It's my time, Chair.

I want to talk specifically about the victim surcharge. What steps is the minister taking to collect on these surcharges on behalf of victims? There is a huge backlog—I think it was about \$4.1 billion that has not been collected on behalf of victims. I'd like to know, what is being done to support the victims and collect that money, and where in the estimates is that reflected?

1430

Hon. Michael Parsa: Before I turn to the deputy for some of the exact figures, I will just reiterate, MPP Gretzky, the recent investment in the shelters that was very recently announced, last week. I would recommend the organizations that you're talking to—please contact them again and let them know. We're in constant communication with our partners. I'm sure you're hearing that. They will tell you that whether it's Minister Williams or myself or the amazing public servants we have at the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, we're in direct contact. That's what it requires, when you're hearing from them. That's why we increased that funding by \$26.5 million.

Deputy, can I just ask you, if you don't mind—

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Chair, I'd like to reclaim my time. That's not an answer to the question. What the minister is doing is trying to put responsibility on other MPPs for, frankly, the failure of their ministry.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We're going to let the minister answer the question—

MPP Lisa Gretzky: He's not answering the question.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Excuse me.

Are we going to address it to the deputy minister?

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: Before I pass this on to ADM Taunya Paquette, who is online to speak to victim services, I'd like to also acknowledge the increase in funding that we have provided to shelters across the province this year—annualized funding for rural and remote services and supports of \$3.6 million, an additional \$2.9 million in ongoing that will provide stability and enhance access to crisis and community supports for survivors in rural and remote communities, and an additional \$800,000 in our crisis lines in 2025-26.

I will now pass it over to ADM Taunya Paquette to speak, particularly, about victim surcharge.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Please state your name and your position.

Ms. Taunya Paquette: Thank you, Deputy Minister Zanotti.

I'm Assistant Deputy Minister Taunya Paquette, gender equity division in the Office of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity.

Building on what the minister and the deputy minister have said, in addition to the increases in the investments, we took it very seriously—the collection of debts. However, that is not handled through our ministry, but we can refer that over to the ministry that actually manages the debt collection.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Thank you for that.

How much time do I have left, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have three minutes and 11 seconds.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Okay.

I'm going to shift now to child welfare, child protective services—and it might possibly include some developmental services as well.

We know that child protective services—we're hearing more and more of parents who are pushed to the edge and

can't get access to community supports for their children with intellectual or developmental disabilities. They feel like they're being given no option but to surrender their children to CAS—thinking that they'll get the supports there, which is not accurate. And we know that these organizations are turning to private options, as far as housing children or getting supports and services.

I'd like to know how much money was paid to third-party providers of group home services in 2023-24 and how much is estimated to be paid to these service providers in 2024-25.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'll ask the deputy, since you want some of the exact figures, but I'll just say this—and I said this in my opening remarks: Every child and every youth in this province deserves the opportunity to succeed and thrive, regardless of their circumstances, which is why, in the child welfare sector, MPP Gretzky, we have increased our investments to \$1.7 billion to better protect children and youth. Why is that important? Because if you look at it over the last 30 years, the number of children and youth in care has actually declined by 30%. Over that same time period, our investment has increased by \$129 million. We will leave no stone unturned when it comes to protecting children and youth. We do rely on placements—on experts on the ground who are making those decisions, not the government. But when it comes to making sure they have the resources, we'll leave no stone unturned. Every child and every youth in this province deserves to succeed and thrive.

Deputy, if you don't mind—

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I appreciate that, Minister.

I don't have much time, so I'd like to know the answer to the question—the actual numbers.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute remaining.

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: Before I pass it over to ADM Linda Chihab, who's online—97% of our planned spending supports vulnerable people and children in need right across the province.

For any child who is placed in an unlicensed setting, those placing agencies, including our children's aid societies, are responsible for making those informed and safe placement decisions.

I'll ask ADM Chihab to speak specifically to your question.

Ms. Linda Chihab: Thank you very much.

Assistant Deputy Minister Linda Chihab, child welfare and protection division.

Just in follow-up to what the minister and deputy spoke to: While the minister spoke about a 30% decrease in children and youth in care, I think it's important to also note that open protection cases have decreased by 48%. There was also a decrease of 58% for the number of children and youth in extended care.

Despite this—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you very much. We'll now move on to the third party. MPP Tsao.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I want to start, first of all, by saying thank you to the ministers for being here today to

take the time to answer our questions. It's appreciated. I want to say thank you, as well, to members of the OPS who are here and prepared today. I know that a lot of effort and time goes into these committee hearings. So thank you for what you do today and every day.

Chair, this summer, I had the opportunity to meet with a really incredible group of residents in my riding of Don Valley North at a round table organized by the North York Harvest Food Bank. I heard directly from my neighbours about how they're struggling to make ends meet, and they're relying on supports such as ODSP and OW, while being forced to live under the poverty line. They feel like they're being treated like second-class citizens because they're facing issues like chronic illness, severe physical injury, systemic employment barriers, or fleeing abuse or domestic violence. That simply does not allow them to keep full-time employment. But to add insult to injury, if they do some way, somehow, find employment to supplement their income and give them a sense of purpose, they fear clawbacks or termination of the meagre support that they are receiving from this government.

When we review the ministry spending plans through the estimates, we see clear signs of a system that's under enormous strain; not a system prepared to lift up all Ontarians.

Social assistance rates remain far below the poverty line, leaving people unable to meet even basic needs.

Families continue to face wait-lists of an average of five years for core autism services.

Youth leaving care are still aging out into homelessness and poverty.

And violence-against-women shelters across Ontario are overwhelmed, as my colleagues to my left just acknowledged.

What families and service providers are asking for is simple: transparency, equity, and investment that reaches the people who actually need it. They want a government that listens to them, values their expertise, and delivers programs that work in practice, not just on paper.

With that, I'll begin my questions to the minister.

I want to quickly read a statement from Jordan in Toronto.

Jordan said, "I'm the father of a non-verbal autistic 10-year-old and a 17-year-old high-functioning autistic person. My youngest languished on the Ontario Autism Program wait-list for years.

"I know this is not a unique story. I know other families have experienced this, and I even know that COVID will always weigh on her development. But the years of potential development lost will weigh on me as a parent for a lifetime. If only she had received services earlier, I have to wonder if her life may look even a little different than it is today. Would her socialization be different? Would she be more vocal?

"Please, do not misunderstand me. We love our daughters with all our heart. But we cannot help but wonder if life could be made a little bit easier for our youngest daughter if only Premier Ford would not take away

programs that were already inefficient and somehow made them worse.

"Doug Ford has failed a generation of some of our most vulnerable children. He needs to own that."

That's from Jordan from Toronto.

Minister, I hear you today talking about record investments and about \$175 million more to the autism program. But when we look at the numbers of people on the wait-list, people who are receiving clinical services—64,000 children are on the wait-list; 20,000 appear to be receiving some sort of service, some sort of clinical supports.

1440

Do you believe a \$175-million injection to the system will be able to serve the 80,000 who are asking for help?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks so much for the question and for conveying the input and feedback and concerns of the families. That's what we all do, and you know this. I always say this: There are 124 of us who are coming to work to represent our constituents and do the very best we can to serve them.

I'll tell you—to Jordan and to every parent out there—as a minister, as a government, we're working hard to ensure that we don't leave anyone behind. That's evident in the supports that we're providing across this ministry.

MPP Tsao, when it comes to the Ontario Autism Program that we have in place today, I just want to share some facts with you. We have now nearly 23,000 families who are receiving an expanded core clinical service. This isn't the service that they were receiving before—through one stream. Some 8,000 families, under the previous government, had access to one program. Under the core clinical service that we have in Ontario, they have access to occupational therapy; they have access to speech-language pathology, ABA—applied behaviour analysis—and mental health supports for the first time ever. That's an expanded core clinical service—and that's nearly 23,000 families.

If you ask Jordan and other parents in the province, talk to them about—because I do. As you know, when we're not here, we are all over the province getting feedback, input about the programs. That's the only way to improve. You should hear some of the feedback that parents are sharing with us about programs like entry to school, like foundational family services, like urgent response, caregiver-mediated programs. Those programs never existed before, MPP Tsao. Families who register with the Ontario Autism Program have access to these programs right away. As you know, the needs of every child and every youth are unique, so depending on what they require, the Ontario Autism Program that was built by the autism community is there to serve the families of the province. We've done this by backing it up not only after we doubled the investment of the program from \$300 million to just over \$600 million—but as you eloquently just noted, we also increased it by more than \$175 million again, in this year's budget, to provide more support to families.

You also touched on affordability, that I wanted to ask—but if you've got others, I want to give you back the floor.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Yes. I want to just stick back on this autism question for now.

I have comments from Jordan, from Alicia from Burlington. Minister, I hear what you're saying—that you're making investments and there are different services available and help that's available—but the facts remain. When I speak to parents, they say things are worse. These are people with children who are seeking help, who are desperate for help, and they say things are worse.

The FAO indicates that there's a decline in children receiving funding for core clinical services. We talked about 64,000 children on the wait-list. I'll go back to my original question. You said there's an increase of \$175 million for the OAP. How many of these 64,000 children on this wait-list will now receive clinical funding as a result of your increased funding?

Hon. Michael Parsa: It's also important to note, MPP Tsao, that the number you're referring to is the service registry that—families that have registered already have access to the programs that I named earlier, like the caregiver-mediated program, the foundational family services, the urgent response. Those services are available to families, and the reason they're registering for the program is because they know that there's a pathway to support for their children and youth. That wasn't the case before. A total of 8,000 families were able to access supports in the province, and that wasn't good enough. It's why we made a commitment to hear out the families and the Ontario autism advisory panel came together. We took key recommendations. We implemented those. We backed that up by doubling the funding of the program. We further increased it by \$60 million the year before, by another additional \$60 million the year after, by \$175 million this year—all committed to making sure that we get as much support in the province to families who need these supports and services.

All the people you're referring to have access to other programs—because, again, the needs of every child and youth in the province are unique. They have different needs, and that's why families have an option of accessing those programs that I mentioned earlier.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: The families I'm speaking to are not asking for these other programs, Minister.

What I'm asking about is the Ontario Autism Program. We're talking about core clinical services, 64,000 children—just like Jordan from Toronto, an average five-year wait time. Early intervention is key here. If we have 64,000 children waiting, a five-year average wait time—time is of the essence.

So your investments, based upon the estimates of this year—how many of those 64,000 children will get off that wait-list for core clinical supports?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, because the needs are unique, every child has different needs. You're assuming that every single one will require a particular support. That's not the case.

If you talk to families as I do—I talk to at least five families a day from all over the province because I want to receive that feedback directly from the families.

The needs of every child and every youth are unique. That's why we have the programs in place to be able to support them, whether it's the entry to school program—by the way, MPP Tsao, when you're talking to your constituents, ask them about the impact of entry to school; ask them about the impact of urgent response or the foundational family services. They will tell you that these are incredibly effective programs that are available to families now, that didn't exist before.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Just to switch up the question line now, I'll refer back to some of my earlier statements in my introduction.

Minister, you mentioned a 2.8% increase in ODSP. How much will OW be going up by, based upon your estimates?

Hon. Michael Parsa: As you know, we have two types of social assistance programs in the province. We have Ontario Works, which has always provided short-term support and connected people with the supports they need to employment. Then, we've got the Ontario Disability Support Program, which provides long-term support, and that's why we increased that by 20% over the last three years, indexed rates to inflation so they can keep up with the cost of living, and also increased the earning exemption from \$200 to \$1,000—a 400% increase for those who can and those who are able to work.

Also, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, we advocated strongly for the Canada Disability Benefit—I'm on record for this program to provide more support to individuals who are accessing that. We made a decision to exempt that as income so it doesn't impact their benefits, for those who are receiving Ontario Works, the Ontario disability benefit—ODSP—or the ACSD. That's a decision that we made to make sure that those who are on social assistance are receiving more support through the programs, whether it's through the province or the Canada Disability Benefit.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Just for the record, for Hansard, I want to make it clear that if the minister today were to say that OW would be doubled, that would just bring it up to the level of ODSP, which is still keeping people under the poverty line.

Minister, what I want to ask you now is, would you commit to doubling ODSP? Some 2.8% is not enough—it's not even clear to be enough.

Again, I'm not taking a political stance here. These are real people in my constituency I sat down with, I looked eye to eye with, and they told me that they can't afford their rent; they can't afford to put food on the table with the amount that the government is providing. So if I go back to them today and I tell them, "Good news, the minister told me that you got a 2.8% increase to your ODSP," do you think they'll be satisfied by that?

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Tsao, the 2.8% that you're referring to is this year—the support of ODSP has increased by 20% over the last three years, which is the largest increase in decades, under any government.

As I said, that wasn't it—we're taking steps and measures across government.

I can tell you, through the LIFT tax credit, which, as you know, directly impacts low- to moderate-income Ontarians—provincial income tax is reduced or completely removed for 1.7 million Ontarians, under the LIFT tax credit.

The CARE tax credit provides 300,000 families with their child care expenses across the province.

Again, we're working across government to make life more affordable. The investments that I mentioned earlier, MPP Tsao, are the largest investments in the program in decades. That hadn't been done in the past, under any government.

Mindful of the cost of living, inflation and impacts south of the border, we are making decisions not just in our ministry, but we're working with other ministers, through many initiatives, to make life more affordable for Ontarians, and I listed some of them.

I'll give you back the floor.

1450

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Let me change the number. Let's not say 2.8%; let's say 20%. So if I went back to my constituency now and I said—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: —“Good news. Your ODSP has increased by 20%,” still, that is not enough, Minister. When I talk to them, what they're asking for is a doubling of social assistance.

Will you commit to doubling OW and ODSP?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I will just say this, MPP Tsao: When you're responding to them, please let them know, as I do, about all the changes that we have made. The 20% that you're referring to is just one part of it. Let them know about the impact that the earning exemption from \$200 to \$1,000—that's per month, by the way—has on the individual; the support of removal of 1.7 million Ontarians from their provincial tax income tax, that impact on the individual; the CARE tax credit. We took measures through One Fare, as you know, that reduces cost for transportation across the province for a rider in the GTA by \$1,600 a year, MPP Tsao. And I won't talk about the initiatives of the licence plate fee removals—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister.

We will now go to the independent member. I recognize MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I do want to thank the ministers for coming today. I have deep respect for both of you. Thank you to your team for all the hard work you do and for taking time out of your schedules and coming all the way—schlepping to Queen's Park, as they say. I hope we have a good conversation with no interruptions.

I want to bring it back to Ontario Works. The province is facing 80,000 people this year who are unsheltered, without homes. We know that those folks in tents don't get a shelter allowance at all. When people do find themselves in a pickle—maybe they lost their jobs; maybe they are in a violent relationship—right now, Ontario Works only provides \$390 to find housing.

When we think of that reality, could we do better, Minister, to ensure that the rate of a housing allowance

actually meets the realities people face in communities across Ontario?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'll just say, when it comes to Ontario Works—and you may remember, at AMO, I made this announcement public. And I mentioned to you the difference between the two social assistance programs—one, Ontario Works. And to your point about individuals, maybe through short-term, losing a job—this provides them with short-term support.

On the ground, at the local level, we freed up caseworkers by uploading much of the responsibilities, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, through MyBenefits, through the digitization of—again, we say “digital first,” but not “digital only,” because they can still access the supports in person, if they want to go in the office. By making sure caseworkers on the ground, MPP Clancy, have the time to support these individuals with the supports they need, whether it's housing, whether it's employment, résumé writing, all of those supports; that they have the time to be able to invest and support that individual and connect them with the higher pay—because, as I said, Ontario Works has always been meant to provide short-term support to the individual. And to provide municipalities with the support to do that, we increased the funding to municipalities to administer Ontario Works by \$52 million annually—for them to be able to spend more time with the clients on the ground.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: But we have to admit that's not enough to pay rent. We can say that that shelter allowance, \$390, isn't enough to pay rent. That's fair to say.

Hon. Michael Parsa: But as I mentioned to you, MPP Clancy—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I know that the objective is jobs.

Hon. Michael Parsa: —the short-term support is to connect them with higher income—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: For sure, 100%.

Hon. Michael Parsa: —which is why, if you remember—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One at a time, please.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Sorry. Go ahead.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Sorry—100%, but we know that won't cut it. We are facing a reality of unemployment.

I did talk to a mom who left a violent relationship and had to leave the kids with her perpetrator because she couldn't afford rent somewhere, and she had to go stay with someone on a couch, couldn't be with her kids. And we know that those numbers will increase.

I know that ministers tend to disagree with the FAO statements. But according to the FAO, it says that transfer payments to OW for financial assistance are decreasing by 19%. That's from the FAO—that's not me making something up; that's in the numbers. When adjusted for inflation, for example, it goes from \$9,455—and that's including housing allowance and basic needs. And in 2027, it's projected to be \$8,891. It's probably adjusted for inflation, but still, that's still the reality of the world we live in.

We're projected to see 300,000 people homeless in the next decade. That's from AMO, not me, and that's 444

municipalities that are—I'm just worried that there's a direct correlation to OW rates not meeting—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy:—the moment and the amount of people who may find themselves unsheltered.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I know we don't have a lot of time, so I'll be very quick in case you have any follow-up.

On the Homelessness Prevention Program that my colleague—we increased the funding of that program to more than \$700 million annually. That's on one front.

You talked about a survivor, which is why, in my response to MPP Gretzky, I mentioned a recent announcement of \$26.7 million of increased investments specifically for housing for women leaving abusive situations. That's a recent announcement. That is in addition to all the other works and supports that we are providing as a ministry. We'll continue to listen to our partners. And this came as direct feedback, as the great work that Minister Williams has done—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister. We'll now go to the government side. MPP Leardi.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Through you, Chair, to the minister: Thank you for being here today.

I have a question about the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

In my riding, we have a great network of veterans, and they're in touch with each other, and they're great at supporting each other. I think it's great to have a support network.

Yesterday was Remembrance Day, but we don't have to wait for Remembrance Day to talk about veterans and what we do for veterans.

My question to you today is about the Soldiers' Aid Commission and what veterans can access under the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thank you very much for the question.

That is—and you've probably heard me say it—a very important program in the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

I have to say—and I've said this from day one—although we'll never be able to truly repay the people who have served our country and have fought for the freedoms that we all enjoy, we'll continue to show our support to the men and women in this province. I thank all my colleagues from both opposition, yourself—I saw on your social media how active you were with your local Legion—every single member, and I can't thank you guys enough. I can tell you when I travel the province, MPP Leardi, that they know it and they appreciate it. I drop in at local Canadian Legion halls.

On that note, I do want to take this opportunity to thank Minister Quinn, who, when he was with us in this ministry—Minister Quinn, PA Lorne Coe, PA Laura Smith, Minister Charmaine Williams, PA Natalie Pierre, PA George Darouze and I have visited more than 100 Legion halls to talk directly to these heroes and their families and to ask them what else we can do to support them and to show that respect. I have to tell you, the conversations are just incredible. When you sit down with some of the

veterans across the province and they share their stories with you and their families and what they've been able to accomplish, it's just one of those things, when you leave—you actually don't want to leave. You want to stand there and you want to continue to listen to them, to hear from them—the wisdom, the knowledge. It's also really important that we don't forget.

The province of Ontario is the only province in Canada that has a program that provides financial assistance to veterans in need of support. It's called the Soldiers' Aid Commission. This program is 115 years old. It's not new. It started 115 years ago.

As soon as we formed government, we made changes to the program. First of all, we increased the funding of the program by 600%. We wanted to make sure that if veterans in need of assistance contact for support—these are incredible individuals. They've done so much for us. The freedom that we enjoy is because of them. So we wanted to make sure that they are not left walking without the support. We increased the support. We further increased that allowance, from \$2,000—by 50%—to \$3,000 now, annually. And we've removed barriers to ensure that they can access the support. Before, they had to pretty much exhaust all options and other available resources before they contacted the Soldiers' Aid Commission. Through our conversations, we didn't think that was fair to veterans—they shouldn't have to. Now, as long as they contact the federal government, which as you know, has direct responsibility and purview—once they've contacted the federal government, they can contact the Soldiers' Aid Commission. Very, very quickly, their application is reviewed, and those funds are provided to them—even in person, if we have to get the funds over to them.

1500

When you look at some of the support and what it's used for, MPP Leardi—one veteran, for example, wanted to buy a whole new wardrobe, a suit and tie and shirt, to be able to go for a job interview. He was starting a new job. He used this to be able to get what he needed. Another one needed some medical devices and applied to the Soldiers' Aid Commission and received the funding for the support.

It's an incredibly important program for our ministry. It provides—and I just want to make sure I don't leave anything out, so if you don't mind I'm going to share this with you: We changed the rules as well. Before, it was only for veterans who served in World War I and World War II. We changed that. We said that any veterans who have served, and their families, are eligible for the Soldiers' Aid Commission. The idea is to provide the support that they need, with the utmost respect to the veterans who have served our country.

As I said, we increased the amount from \$2,000 to \$3,000—and, of course, their eligible family members as well. These are for essentials and supports. I'll just list a few of them for you. It could be for mental health support and health-related items, like hearing aids, glasses, prescriptions, dental needs, for example; home and housing-related items, such as furniture, for example, repairs, rental

costs; employment-related supports, as I mentioned with one case, including work clothing, short-term courses to help improve access to the job market; and personal items, like clothing, personal care products, and others.

It's a program that I am incredibly proud of.

I take this opportunity to thank all of my colleagues who have provided this input to us, because this comes as a direct—it's when we go to the Legion halls and hear from these proud individuals who are looking for support, and we want to make it as easy as possible for them to access this. This is why we—whether it's PA Coe, myself, PA Pierre, PA Darouze, or Minister Williams—take posters and we post them in the hall so they don't even have to ask anybody. I was the former fundraising chair for my local Legion hall. It was an incredible opportunity for me—every time I spent time with these veterans and their families. The one thing I can tell you about is just how proud they are, and the fact that they don't want to ask for support. What we wanted to do is make sure the information is readily available to them so that they can access it and contact us at their convenience.

We did one other thing: Through this program, MPP Leardi, we also provided funding for the Royal Canadian Legion to revamp their website so that (a) it's mobile-friendly and (b) it's a lot easier to navigate and to use, for members. As a result, we have seen an increase in the support that veterans are requesting through the Soldiers' Aid Commission, because of our efforts.

I'll just leave it at that. I thank you for the very important question.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I recognize MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Time check, please?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have six minutes and 52 seconds.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you.

My question is around Ontario's youth.

Ontario's youth represent the future of our province, and ensuring that they have the tools and opportunities to thrive is one of the most important responsibilities we share.

Young people today face unique challenges in navigating education, employment and social inclusion, and they need strong supports to help them transition successfully into adulthood.

Minister, can you speak to the programs and initiatives in your ministry, the MCCSS, that have been developed to empower youth—such as supports for youth who are leaving care, services that promote skill-building and independence, and partnerships that create pathways to education and employment—and how these efforts reflect our commitment to helping make sure that every young person in the province of Ontario has an opportunity to reach their full potential?

Hon. Michael Parsa: It's actually a great question.

I want to thank you for the great work that you do, not just as an MPP, but as a parliamentary assistant in this very important ministry.

You've heard me talk about the importance of providing support to the youth in our province. I've often said that the youth may be a portion of our population, but

they're 100% of our future. So we've got to do everything we can to make sure that they have the support to achieve lifelong success. Part of that is making sure that they have access to the support.

I want to highlight a few programs for you. One, in particular, is the Youth in Policing Initiative, the YIPI program. The YIPI program provides employment opportunities for youth to be able to work, whether it's after school or in the summer, with police services and law enforcement. Think about the impact. I've had the opportunity, as a minister, to go to some of their program launches and some of the graduations, so I've gone to the launches, and I've gone to the graduations. I've spoken to the youth who have been there. It's an eight-week program that we provide support to, for police services. I have to tell you, we just doubled the investments in the program, and we're going to continue expanding the program because it is such an important one. It connects youth with employment opportunities—but there's the impact. I was having a conversation with a family, and the youth said to me, "I have always had a different perception of police in our province, in our community. I didn't know—I just had only heard of police." We always say we have to make sure we reach the youth first, before some of the bad people do, and it's so important. Through these programs, we are doing that. He said, "You should see the interaction between the police officers and these individuals." It's incredible—that bonding, that camaraderie, that mentorship. Think about what it does. The success of this program is just beyond what I can convey to you. So many of them have gone on to gain employment with their local law enforcement—sometimes not in uniform; sometimes they're behind the scenes, doing just as important work. Every single one of them I talk to says, "We never even thought of having a job in policing one day." That YIPI program is one program that I wanted to highlight.

The other program that I wanted to tell you about is the Youth Opportunities Fund. The Youth Opportunities Fund is a program that's rendered through the Ontario Trillium Foundation. It provides direct financial support to community organizations—to be able to provide that culturally appropriate support to the youth in their communities. Again, the impact of the Youth Opportunities Fund—because I know the time is limited, I won't get into it too much. It is so, so successful for the individuals and families. It's important for us to continue investing in the program, and we will.

We talked about the children and youth in care. I've said this, and I'll say it again: Every child in this province, regardless of their circumstances, must have the opportunity to succeed and thrive, full stop. As a ministry, we'll do whatever it takes to make sure that happens.

We have a program called the Ready, Set, Go Program, as you're familiar with, from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. The Ready, Set, Go Program provides life skills to individuals in care, but also financial support, right up until their 23rd birthday. At 13, they start learning life skills, and at 15, they learn other skills—like opening bank accounts, résumés, and other

supports. The youth who leave care can have access to financial support right up until their 23rd birthday. If I were to tell you the results, the impact, of this program—on this, I want to give a shout-out to my chief of staff, Jane Kovarikova, and the team who put together this program.

1510

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I can't thank the public servants enough, MPP Pierre. We have some of the finest people, led, of course, by Deputy Zanotti and the many faces you see on TV and behind me here. These are some of the kindest, most caring individuals, who are helping us make sure every that child and every youth in this province is supported and protected through these very important programs—I did have other ones, but I am sorry that we don't have time for me to highlight.

I want to talk about the Student Nutrition Program, in particular, which provides healthy meals to 800 students across the province. We not only increased our investment by \$5 million, to bring our investment to \$37.5 million, but we also signed a deal with the federal government.

I've said this from day one: For us, it's about how we can improve the lives of Ontarians. We'll work with anybody, if it means that—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister.

We'll now go the official opposition. I recognize MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you, Minister, Associate Minister, Deputy Minister, the entire team—both behind them and online—for the work that you've put into this moment.

It's a little nerve-racking to be here for the first time, because, of course, like some of you have mentioned, I care deeply about the lives of the people I am called to serve.

I'm going to bring your attention back to the Ontario Autism Program. You spoke a little bit about 23,000 families receiving expanded clinical core services. Just to be clear: Was that the clinical core services plus the pillar services—is that what you meant by 23,000?

Hon. Michael Parsa: The 23,000 is core service—the other programs that I was talking about are completely different. The entry to school, and those ten of thousands—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: So 23,000 are receiving core service funding at this moment?

Hon. Michael Parsa: They have been approved. The funding, as you know—after the determination of needs, the families will sign, once they're in agreement.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One at a time, please.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: So 23,000 have been approved. How many are actually receiving core clinical services? What number—not how many have funding, how many been approved, but what number of individuals or families have core services at this moment?

Hon. Michael Parsa: The ones who have a funding agreement in place—is that what you're asking for, MPP Gilmour?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: No. The ones who are actually receiving services—because we might have a funding agreement—

Hon. Michael Parsa: But the ones who do—they have access to all supports and services. The ones who have a funding agreement have access to core clinical services.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I just want to make sure I understand.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Perfect. I'm going to come back to that because I do have some questions around that.

I'm actually wondering also, in terms of that, how much of the autism program funding itself went into funding core clinical services for the families on the wait-list in 2024-25?

Hon. Michael Parsa: For the exact numbers, I'll ask the deputy to come in.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: That would be great.

Thank you, Deputy.

Hon. Michael Parsa: But I just want to make sure. You're asking for this year—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: For 2024-25—last year first.

Hon. Michael Parsa: For 2024-25.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: The one that we're in.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Okay.

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: Before I call ADM Jackie Cureton to respond to that—just a few reminders on that, that the minister has brought up, of course.

When we talk about the Ontario Autism Program, it is a holistic range of programs that we're talking about—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: And I do understand.

Mr. Daniele Zanotti:—an entire continuum, with 22,000 people accessing core clinical services. It's one component of the full range. All of that is developed by an advisory panel of families involved, and partners, with significant work that we've been doing across the province in building workforce capacity—whether it's in the north or in the south—so that families can indeed access.

I would like ADM Jackie Cureton to speak a little bit about the wait-list and the process for families who are on the wait-list—the process they have to go through—so it's clarified.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: If I may interrupt, just to reclaim my time—I just wanted to know how much of the funding went to core clinical services. Just that answer would be great.

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: ADM Cureton, do you have that?

Ms. Jackie Cureton: Jackie Cureton, ADM of children and community supports division, with the ministry of children and community supports.

The answer to that question, very specifically: In 2024-25, there was \$409 million that went to core clinical services.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you.

Minister, how many families are currently on the wait-list for core clinical services?

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Gilmour, I'll reiterate the point I mentioned earlier: The service registry that we have currently—families are accessing or can access other programs. As you know—we've had conversations—every

child and every youth is unique and has different needs. Upon the determination of needs, that's when the families and the care coordinator will have a conversation about—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: How many would you say are on the list for core clinical services—not necessarily accessing the pillar programs; waiting the five years for the core clinical services? How many families are currently on the wait-list for core clinical services?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, when they register through AccessOAP, they have access to the other programs.

I'll reiterate: The needs of every child and every youth are unique. We can't assume that this—I certainly cannot, and that's why there's a determination-of-needs process in place which will then—that conversation is happening between the care coordinator at AccessOAP and the families, and they decide once that conversation has happened.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: That's okay. Thank you. I understand what you said earlier there is that you actually don't know the number for core clinical services—

Hon. Michael Parsa: Well, I'm not going to assume it, because every family has different needs.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: So we've got numbers on the wait-list, but we don't know how many.

How much of the autism funding is estimated to go into funding core clinical services for families in this next year, the 2025-26 year? How much of the autism funding as a whole is estimated to go to the core clinical services?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, we'll continue providing—I'm going to ask the deputy—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Not the pillar services, but the core clinical—

Hon. Michael Parsa: —but in addition to that, their core service. She gave you a rough percentage. I'll ask them to maybe give you that again—but it's the same. We're going to continue inviting families, when they register with AccessOAP—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: So you're saying, the same as last year—

Hon. Michael Parsa: We're going to continue—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Please don't talk over each other.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Pardon me.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Sorry.

We're going to continue inviting families into core service or have that determination of needs, and based on the needs, that's when it's assessed and the families make a decision.

Deputy, if you don't mind—I think MPP Gilmour is asking about the enrolment in core for next year.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Yes. I can ask again. How much of the autism funding is estimated go into core clinical services for families in 2025-26?

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: ADM Cureton.

Ms. Jackie Cureton: Thank you for the question.

For the 2025-26 allocation, it's \$526,571,640.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you very much.

I'm looking here, Minister, at data from your own ministry and from the Financial Accountability Office which shows that the investment that has been put in so far has

not led to a significant increase in the number of children and youth accessing the core clinical services. In fact, the numbers even declined since June 2025, in the last few months.

Given that over 64,000 children—that's a lot—remain on the wait-list and that core clinical services—the program is still, right now, only really funded for 20,000. That number, 20,000, comes from your binder. That's what the ministry has estimated they will have the funding for. I'm wondering if you can provide specific, measurable increases in funding to the core clinical services that are going to be aimed at actually expanding access.

Can you tell us how many additional children the ministry expects will receive funding agreements for core clinical services?

I keep going back to the core clinical services because, of course, that is what the families are asking for and have, over and over again, spoken out in terms of what is most needed—that early intervention and core clinical services.

So let me ask that question again. Can you provide a specific, measurable increase in funding for the core clinical services, that's aimed at actually expanding access? And can you tell me how many additional children the ministry expects will receive funding agreements for the core clinical services in the next fiscal year, as a result of that funding?

1520

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes, I can tell you. The increased number, I can tell you right now—this is estimates, so I can share that with you. Nearly 23,000 families are invited to core service. From the invitation, from the care coordinator, when they have the agreement—and I know that you know the file really well, so I won't get into the details. But as soon as that care coordinator has that conversation with families, then the families will sign on, and that's when the funding becomes available to the family. Right now, we have nearly 23,000. And we're going to continue inviting families to core service—those who require core service.

The other programs that we have in place that families who are on the service registry can access—I assure you, tens of thousands of families are accessing those. I know you talk to them, just like I do, and you can hear how important those programs are.

To your specific question about how much more they will be—I'll ask the deputy to see if we've got the exact number.

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: I'll ask ADM Cureton to jump in with that number, but I also do want to say that recent data is showing that about 14% of children invited to core clinical services declined those invitations and/or do not respond, and that those enrolled in core clinical services—some are not following up and booking their determination of need when they first enrol or are not completing. Often, the wait-list number is slightly bigger or broader when we dig into those who either decline or do not follow up.

I'll have ADM Cureton answer specifically.

Ms. Jackie Cureton: Thank you for the question.

Enrolment in core clinical services has grown significantly, from 8,000 children in 2022 to approximately 23,000 as of October 2025.

AccessOAP is continuing to invite children and youth to core clinical services in the order that they register for the autism program. Several factors affect the timing of when families will receive invitations for core clinical services. That includes the number of families, as the deputy mentioned, accepting their invitations, the number of youth who age out of the program, the varying levels of needs of children and youth enrolling in core clinical services—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Can I reclaim my time? I'd just like to—

Ms. Jackie Cureton: —and finally, the amount of funding they're eligible to receive—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I would like to reclaim my time. I just want to know what the ministry expects to receive for funding and how many children will actually then—it was a number that I was looking for. If we don't have that, I want to move on to the workforce, because my time is—

Hon. Michael Parsa: It's over \$175 million that has been added this year to the funding.

The numbers that ADM Cureton was alluding to—and again, to the point that I raised earlier about families and the needs of every child and youth, we can't assume that. When they have that determination of needs with a care coordinator, that's when we know and the families know—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Got it. Thank you. I'm going to reclaim again, because I was just really looking for what the estimates are—what you're projecting is going to be the number of individuals.

I'm also somewhat confused, because it seems to me that that \$175 million is really a restating of funding that has already been announced—and not new statements. But I'm not going to ask you a question on that because we're going to run out of time.

I'm going to talk about the workforce. How much did the ministry spend on the workforce capacity grant for core clinical services, and how much is it estimated to spend on workforce capacity grants in the year to come, 2025-26? Just numbers is what I really need, because we're running out of time.

Hon. Michael Parsa: It's a very important program. I believe it's over \$19 million, but I'll just ask the deputy to confirm. I can tell you, and you know, that the impact of the workforce capacity fund, with specific focus on rural, northern communities, francophone communities, Indigenous—Deputy, am I correct on that? It's over \$19 million, if I'm not mistaken.

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: Correct.

Hon. Michael Parsa: ADM Cureton?

Ms. Jackie Cureton: It's \$18.9 million, Minister.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: It's \$18.9 million. How much of that is being set aside to increase the capacity in the north, in particular rural regions?

Hon. Michael Parsa: It's very important, and as I said—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: How much of it?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Do we have the breakdown of the regions, if you don't mind?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: That would be great.

Hon. Michael Parsa: This is specifically for northern, rural and, as I said, francophone communities, Indigenous communities—like when I spoke at AMO—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: The full \$18.9 million is specifically for rural and—

Hon. Michael Parsa: All around, with specific focus on those areas.

I'll just ask the deputy if they can give some breakdowns for you.

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: As ADM Cureton looks at the specifics around workforce development, let me just say that it's \$72 million in specialized services and the Ontario Autism Program for children and youth with special needs in the northern region.

Jackie will speak specifically to the workforce capacity number.

Ms. Jackie Cureton: I do have the percentage. Over 20% of the projects funded in the most recent round—that's round 4 of the workforce—are in the north region.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you.

Given that the number one issue for autism families, as evidenced in the Ontario coalition's recent survey, is that they are still feeling they're not able to access the core clinical services that they need badly—I am just wondering if you can explain why it is that some of the families who actually are in receipt of the funding envelopes through OAP continue to say that they feel they are unable to access the core clinical services that they need at this time.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Well, again, that's where the workforce capacity fund—and I assure you, when I came in, that was initially set up to be able to provide that support: capacity-building, hire more staff, expand hours of operation to be able to serve more families, specifically, again, in the north and rural communities.

We're going to continue—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister.

We'll now go to the independent. I recognize MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I know I'm a little bit of a squeaky wheel, but I know that housing is a big issue. A lot of the women's shelters in my area said they could serve fewer women because nobody could move out; there weren't places to go. I do hope that we can find a way to collaborate with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to have better options for people, so that we can build out more options for women, people with disabilities, and people with complex needs.

I have a resident in my riding whose child has complex disabilities, and as he has grown, she can't access—she's on the wait-list. Right now, the housing wait-list for an accessible unit is about 12 years, she said to me, and her child is going to be too big, so she's going to have to give him up to CAS, because she can't physically care for him

without an accessible unit. That's the reality—and she's on the wait-list for even the COHB.

We're finding barriers to families staying together because of housing, so I do—that's just a statement. I hope that you can collaborate with Minister Flack. I have many cases of families who are getting separated or are languishing on wait-lists because of the lack of access.

I want to talk about our developmental services sector. Their main ask to me was the delay—so, two things.

First, I know that you're working to reduce red tape for Ontario Works and ODSP applications. The families I talk to who are applying for services in the special-needs sector, whether it's ABA funding, SSAH—the paperwork is incredible, and every time they apply for anything, they have to create a big portfolio and prove their child's disability again and again and again. So I do think there's red tape to cut here. One thing that ends up creating grief for them every year—and it seems like a bit of red tape—is funding for their SSAH and respite services. Every year, they have to wait for this letter, and it ends up meaning that for a month to two months, they lack funding—and so that's them paying out of pocket. It could be thousands of dollars, and then they could end up losing the workers they have, because the workers can't wait two months if the family doesn't have those dollars.

Can you talk about how we could use this budget to cut some of the red tape for families who are just trying to access care? That is one ask. Every year, waiting for their money, waiting for this letter—“my kid has complex disabilities” is not going away year after year.

Hon. Michael Parsa: First of all, thank you so much for your advocacy. We always have a lot of conversations, and I appreciate you providing the feedback on behalf of your constituents to me.

When it comes to the developmental services sector, MPP Clancy—because you mentioned housing, I just want to share a couple of things with you.

We are investing about \$3.7 billion in the developmental services sector this year. Just to put that in context, that's nearly \$1.4 billion more than when we formed government.

1530

To your point about housing: In the developmental services sector, for supportive living, we have increased our funding by \$798 million more than when we formed government in 2018. As you know, I'm having discussions not only within our team, but really with everyone involved in the sector, on what else we can do to improve services and supports. I've always said that making sure that the investments are there is one thing. Looking at—to your point—about removing barriers and making sure that the supports are more readily available, less onerous for individuals and families, is something that we strive to do every single day.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Hon. Michael Parsa: For process—100%, we're going to continuously look at ways of improving it. But if you look at the investments that we're making in the developmental services sector—it never has been done. These are

record-high investments—\$3.7 billion in the developmental services sector.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: In my region and MPP Riddell's and MPP Dixon's, they just closed ABA services. So for the regions of Waterloo and Wellington, our local service provider shut down ABA. They said it's not financially sustainable.

While I appreciate the increase in funding, I think we need to look at some areas where, because of the move to privatization—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you.

We'll now go to the government side. I recognize MPP Dixon.

Ms. Jess Dixon: My question is to Minister Williams.

Minister, I know that you and your team have put a huge amount of work into really strengthening women's financial security and their economic participation in Ontario. I've been with you and seen some of your exciting announcements, particularly on STEM and the trades, but I know that you've also worked on other initiatives—even hair braiding.

I wonder if you can explain a little bit more about what the government is doing to make sure that women continue to have access and increase their access to this type of financial independence.

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: Thank you very much, MPP Dixon, for the question, and thank you for everything you've been doing to ensure that women's voices are being heard.

It is truly my privilege every day to be able to work and ensure that women in Ontario are empowered to succeed and to pursue their dreams. Women's participation in Ontario's economy is critical to their well-being, critical to their prosperity, but most importantly, critical to their independence and safety.

Women make up 51% of Ontario's population. We are essential to addressing the pressing labour shortages in vital sectors. Whether serving as high-profile executives, running their own businesses, working in the skilled trades or supporting key sectors such as education, personal support work, and nursing—the contribution of women is critical to our province at every level.

Our government is committed to empowering women across the province to thrive everywhere: at home, at work, and in their communities. Under the leadership of our Premier, together, my colleague Minister Parsa and I, and our fellow cabinet ministers in Ontario, are taking action and a whole-of-government approach to help more women access in-demand, well-paying jobs, including in fields where women are highly under-represented, like the skilled trades and STEM.

I'd like to take a few minutes just to outline in more detail how our government supports the dreams and aspirations of women and girls—and I want to encourage girls.

I went to a Dreamer Day event. Chair, 6,000 girls participated in that event from Build a Dream. These girls were able to experience the trades and many different professions. They are so excited. This is our future that we're talking about here.

We are empowering more women to participate in the economy through actions that result in safer workplaces for women and that support women to excel in business, in leadership roles as entrepreneurs, and in sectors where the need is greatest. This includes promoting a wide range of career options for women and girls; strengthening pathways to entrepreneurship, to create more women-led businesses; and investing in targeted employment and training supports to assist women—including women of colour, Indigenous women, young women, girls, transgender women and women with disabilities.

Last year, I was pleased to announce the investment of \$26.7 million over three years to support 25 community-based training programs across the province, through the Women's Economic Security Program. This program helps women with lower incomes access more career options and strengthen their financial security by helping them gain skills, knowledge and experience to find a job or start a business. It includes training programs that target in-demand sectors such as the skilled trades and information technology, as well as entrepreneurship and general employment training. This training provides opportunities for women to break through barriers, build sustainable livelihoods, and achieve financial independence. And this program is working.

George Brown—I was there over the summertime, and I had the opportunity to tour the campus and speak with the textile students. Hearing their stories of success and perseverance and how far they've come in their journeys was completely incredible and inspiring.

Every single woman who goes through that program comes out trained and certified and has a job—because that program places them in positions where they are often hired by the employer.

I met with a woman who was fleeing violence, was able to get into this program, and is earning an income putting her well above entry-level positions. It was completely life-changing for her. And I've heard so many stories like that.

Since the inception of WESP in 2018, more than 5,700 women have benefited from the Women's Economic Security Program, with over 2,000—almost 3,000—women pursuing further education and training or starting an apprenticeship, a business, or a job.

We're also continuing to deliver the Investing in Women's Futures Program at 34 sites across the province. This program is benefiting over 10,400 women who face social or economic barriers—women who are fleeing violence and wanting to rebuild their lives. I always say this program is the job readiness program. Getting women who are really raw, who are executing safety plans at the drop of a hat—they're going to this program, working with individuals who are empowering them to see the value and the strength within themselves, but also providing them with important job training skills that they are able to take with them when they hopefully move on to the next level. So many women are benefiting from the program. They are receiving employment services that empower women with skills they need to secure employment and achieve

financial stability, with additional supports that help prevent gender-based violence and promote healing and wellness.

So the Investing in Women's Futures Program, to me, is for job readiness. The Women's Economic Security Program is for job certification and training. Later this year, though, I'm really excited that our ministry will be launching an invitational call for proposals for what I call our third leg, which is job retention. We are doing an invitational call for proposals for our new program called the Women's Economic Leadership and Legacy Fund. This new fund will invest in projects that help increase women's retention, promotion and leadership positions in high-growth sectors; foster more supportive work environments; and further women's advancement in these sectors. This fund will also strengthen Indigenous women's leadership in their communities and empower survivors of human trafficking through survivor-centred leadership, education and employment opportunities. We're really excited about this, and I'm looking forward to launching WELL later this year.

The WELL fund, the Women's Economic Security Program, and the Investing in Women's Futures Program are a part of our cross-government approach to increase economic opportunities for women and support their well-being and financial security.

I would like to take some time to thank my colleagues in cabinet and across caucus for the collaboration of your partnership—going into communities and hearing the voices of many women wanting support, especially those women who are in those sectors like the trades. They are saying, “We need community. We need opportunities to meet with other women who have been doing this work,” so that they are empowered to stay in these jobs. We don't want women to leave these high-growth sectors. Women on the job site create such an important balance to the job site. So this is the future. When we encourage women to stay, they are earning well above what they can possibly earn—and what women have earned in the past—and are changing their lives.

1540

We are promoting careers in the skilled trades to women and girls, through our elementary and high school curriculums and the government's skilled trades strategy.

In many of the skilled trades, women are significantly under-represented. Women make up less than 5% of Ontario's construction workforce, and less than 30% of workers in the skilled trades-related occupations are women.

Over the next decade, Ontario will need 100,000 workers in the construction sector alone. That's why we need to create opportunities for women to develop and retain these positions.

Our government is continuing to take action and to work with the trades for a new generation, with investments in initiatives that help empower women and girls to explore and enter skilled trades while also supporting workplaces that are healthier, safer and more accessible to women.

Our government has also brought new laws that are making construction workplaces more accessible and welcoming for women—this includes mandatory properly fitting PPE for women and diverse body types, clean washrooms, and menstrual products.

This has also led to other women-led businesses, like Covergalls, for example, a great company developed by women, making PPE for women—even maternity wear. It's creating opportunity for places like Sarnia. I was out there, and there's a great women-led business that has now created a storefront—one of the first brick-and-mortar storefronts—that sells Covergalls and other women's PPE.

This month, our government announced \$8.6 million, through the Skills Development Fund, to help more than 1,700 women access training and prepare for high-paying, in-demand careers in the skilled trades. Careers in this sector are exciting, diverse and in demand, with good pay and benefits.

As the Premier always says, when you've got a trade, you've got a job and entrepreneurial skill for life.

Chair, women entrepreneurs and women-owned small businesses are also essential to the future of our economy. Small businesses are the backbone of Ontario's economy, and we are fortunate to have so many incredible women entrepreneurs and small business owners strengthening our province.

That's why, in addition to the Women's Economic Security Program and the Investing in Women's Futures Program, our government is supporting entrepreneurs and fostering women-led businesses. We're doing this through initiatives like Futurpreneur Canada, the Racialized and Indigenous Support for Entrepreneurs Grant, and a network of small business enterprise centres and regional innovation centres across Ontario.

Because our government is committed to making Ontario the best place in Canada to start and grow a business, we will continue to work together with our partners to improve opportunities for women. We know that when women succeed, Ontario succeeds—and I always say that.

As I mentioned earlier, our government delivers two flagship programs that help women overcome barriers, build skills and find employment: the Women's Economic Security Program and the Investing in Women's Futures Program.

The Women's Economic Security Program offers training to low-income women in four streams—skilled trades, entrepreneurship, information technology, and general employment—to help remove barriers to participation. The training programs may also include additional supports—such as providing meals throughout the training day, transportation to and from training, and support with finding child care—removing the barriers that prevent women from completing these programs. That is essential for the success of these women. Through the program, women, including those who have experienced or are at risk of gender-based violence, can also access supports that include referrals to mental health and well-being supports, counselling, housing and legal supports.

I'd like to share a few examples of the unique training opportunities that we support through the Women's Economic Security Program.

Oasis Centre des Femmes delivers an entrepreneurship launch pad program that is tailored to the specific needs of francophone women.

The Seven Generations Education Institute delivers a telecommunications and IT maintenance and repair training program for Indigenous women.

The Across Languages Empowering Interpreters for Success program is delivered virtually across southwestern Ontario to help women fluent in a second language become interpreters.

These are just a few examples of how our government is funding targeted, specialized training programs that help women gain useful and in-demand skills to find meaningful employment.

The Investing in Women's Futures Program is also helping women build skills that get jobs and start businesses, while also increasing their well-being. This program is designed for women who have experienced violence or other social and economic barriers. The program helps women access training opportunities and wrap-around supports to develop the skills they need to gain financial security and independence. Women who are in the midst of their violent situation are able to access this program. I've met with women who've told their partner—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: —that they are just going to a training program; meanwhile, they're receiving so much support to help them leave safely.

Some of the programs that are offering this service:

—Roots Community Services, which serves primarily Black, African and Caribbean communities and provides an employment readiness program that helps support women to heal from past trauma and build financial independence;

—Up with Women, or Exponenti'elles, which provides bilingual counselling services, workshops on financial wellness and job readiness, and coaching for women and gender-diverse people who are survivors of violence and homelessness; and

—Resolve Counselling Services Canada, which supports the economic independence and well-being of survivors of gender-based violence while providing access to counselling services, supports and employment programs.

To wrap up, Chair, these are only a few of the innovative and effective programs our ministry—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister.

We will now go to the official opposition. I recognize MPP Gretzky.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I did mention something earlier, and I just want to correct my record. The young woman who was killed in my community was 26 years old. The man who is alleged to have killed her is 29.

My first question—especially since the associate minister just talked at great length about women's employment opportunities and income, and the importance of the work that women do in our communities and our prov-

ince—is directly related to Bill 124, the bill that the government brought in that attacked workers and capped their wages at 1%. It was found to be unconstitutional twice. The government had been told they needed to remedy that situation.

So I'm wondering—

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Chair, point of order, please.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I recognize MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: We're not here to talk about legislation under Bill 124. We're here to talk about estimates.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I agree.

Rephrase your question and ask again.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Thank you. I wasn't to the question yet—and I was going to get to it, if the member opposite had let me.

What I'm wondering is, where in the current estimates does it show the financial remedy that is owed to over 50,000 workers in this province—workers who represent agencies such as developmental services, community health services, children's aid—who never received the remedy? Where is that in the estimates?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): MPP Gretzky, we have a point of order. Ask another question, please.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I'm asking where in the estimates it is reflected, in this ministry—the funding that was ordered to make these workers whole.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): I'm rejecting your question, so please ask another one.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: It's interesting that the government doesn't want to address that.

Chair, 78% of social and community service workers are women, 85% of social workers are women, 82% of direct support professionals in developmental services are women. We have many of those workers who are leaving their sectors altogether, because the scope of the work has become so great and the demands on their work has become so great. They are working sometimes two or three jobs. These are workers in very critical sectors. We're talking about supporting women fleeing violence. We're talking about workers in child protection. We're talking about workers in developmental services and other very vital services in our province.

They're telling us—and we're seeing data—that these workers are relying on food banks. Many are on the verge of declaring bankruptcy.

And we are now seeing a crisis in many sectors, where their budgets are not keeping up for them to be able to properly compensate these workers or to maintain staffing levels and program levels to provide these vital supports and services.

1550

In the six-plus years since the government took office, the number of adults with developmental disabilities needing supportive housing has grown by 10,000, so that's up—18,000 between 2017 and 2018. It's currently sitting at 28,000 people waiting for these services, as we're

seeing a staffing crisis and more and more of these agencies are facing regular funding deficits.

My first question to the minister is, is it the government's position that you are funding developmental services adequately?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks for the question. It's a very important question.

As I mentioned when we were chatting with MPP Clancy, this government has increased its investment in the developmental services sector. I know you want numbers, so I'm going to share that with you—

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I just asked, do you believe it's adequate—

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'm asking—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Please don't talk over each other.

Hon. Michael Parsa: —\$3.7 billion in the developmental services sector—nearly \$1.4 billion more than when we formed government.

You talked about supportive housing—almost \$800 million more on supportive housing in the developmental services sector. If you look at the recent announcement—

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to reclaim my time, Chair. That's not an answer to my question.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Well, you also asked about investments, so I would like to share some of the investments—

MPP Lisa Gretzky: No. I asked if you think you're funding it correctly.

I'd like to reclaim my time and ask another question, since it's not being answered.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Ask another question, please.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: According to the FAO analysis of MCCSS estimates for developmental services supportive living, it shows nearly an \$11-billion cut from the expenditure estimates; that's about 10.9%, I believe. That's a cut from the expenditure estimate for 2024-25—from what was spent in 2023-24.

I'm wondering if the minister can point to where in the current estimates not only is that cut or that shortfall reduced or eliminated, but where additional funding has been provided in order to keep up with the increasing needs of the individuals seeking support and the increased number of people on the wait-list for services—with the cost of living in general? Where in the budget, in the estimates, does it show catching up to the cut from last year but then also providing sufficient supports to meet the current demands?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'd be more than happy to share some facts and some numbers with you.

The facts are that the investments in the developmental services sector have increased to \$3.7 billion this year—an increase of nearly \$1.4 billion.

Last year, we increased investments in the developmental services sector by \$90 million of ongoing support to the organizations—in housing, nearly \$800 million more of an increase.

Again, \$3.7 billion—an increase of \$1.4 billion in the sector; on housing, an \$800-million increase in housing; last year, through budget 2024, a \$310-million commitment to community organizations.

What did that mean for the developmental services sector? An increase of \$90 million of ongoing base funding for the sector.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: That's not a direct response to my question. I'd like to reclaim my time and ask another question since my time is limited.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Ask another question. Go ahead.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I want to talk about Ontario Works and ODSP.

Can the minister tell me if he's aware of how much the maximum individual benefit amount for Ontario Works was in 2019?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes, so you're asking—for both, it's \$733, and you're asking for Ontario Works.

I would tell you again, MPP Gretzky, Ontario Works is a program that provides supports to individuals and connects them with employment—

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to reclaim my time. I'm well aware of the program and its purpose. I'm not getting an answer there.

How much was the maximum income amount for Ontario Works in 2024-25—so last year?

Hon. Michael Parsa: As I mentioned to you, it's a total of \$733 to provide support to the individual, direct, with a caseworker on the ground—whether it's résumé writing or whether it's employment support—to connect them with employment, with a bigger paycheque, on the ground.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: So then I think it's safe to assume that it will be the same in 2025-26, because we have not—

Hon. Michael Parsa: I think what you can safely assume is the number of people who are exiting Ontario Works, MPP Gretzky. You should look at the number of people who are exiting Ontario Works and connecting to employment, with much bigger paycheques, in the communities. That work is as a result of our uploading the work to the province and allowing caseworkers to have more time to provide that support to the individual.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to reclaim my time.

There's actually an increase in the number of people on OW and ODSP and working people who are living in deep poverty, Minister.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Next question.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: And many of those people who access the employment programs that you're referring to actually re-enter the system because they don't have successful employment or because they are not making an income to live off of.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Question, please.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Stats Canada says the average asking price to rent a room in most Ontario cities has surpassed the amount that is provided to people to live on on social assistance. Today, a person on Ontario Works could put their entire monthly income towards housing—and I would say the same for people with disabilities on

ODSP—and still not be able to afford to rent even a room in this province. This is not an apartment that I'm talking about. I'm talking about a single room. If you can't afford a room, you can't afford any housing. And frankly, for those who are unhoused, it would be very difficult for them to obtain and maintain employment as well.

Does the minister know of a room that could be rented for less than \$733 a month anywhere in this province—and if so, then how do people afford groceries and other necessities? And for those who you want to move into employment—how do they afford the necessary clothing and things that they need, like transportation to get to work?

Hon. Michael Parsa: In addition to the amounts on Ontario Works—and again, I want to reiterate the point: The intent of Ontario Works is to provide short-term support and funding to the individual—with supports on the ground.

You talked about how that person is going to get employment—well, through now having more time with a caseworker to get the support he or she needs to be able to find employment.

In addition to the funding, there's a discretionary benefit that's allowable within the municipal partners who are rendering Ontario Works in communities. These discretionary funds can be accessed by individuals for circumstances that you just listed.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Okay. I'm going to move on to the next question.

In fact, social services workers are—there's not enough of them. They're leaving the field because of the burden and the stress that's being put on them. And more and more people in community—whether that's ODSP or OW—are having a hard time accessing workers you're referring to because of the caseload that many of these workers have—

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Gretzky, we just increased our investment by \$52 million—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One at a time, please.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: According to data obtained from MCCSS by the Trillium in June 2022, there were 11,074 Ontario Works cases who were homeless—people who were homeless, on Ontario Works. In July 2025, there were 20,659 people on Ontario Works who were currently homeless—nearly double the number from three years earlier.

Why do you think that the number of OW cases who are unhoused has doubled, and is this something that the ministry tracks?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'll tell you again, this is one of the reasons we're trying to provide supports on the ground to every individual—because the needs of every individual are unique. That's why we've uploaded the work to the province, so that caseworkers on the ground can do exactly what you're referring to: provide them with the housing supports.

It's why we—and I didn't get a chance to answer MPP Clancy earlier—increased funding and annualized the

Transitional and Housing Support Program for the individuals you're referring to.

It's exactly why we increased funding to municipalities by \$52 million this year—so that they have the time on the ground to be able to provide that support with that specific need—

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Can I reclaim what little time I have left for my last question?

I would ask the minister, would you agree that when the poverty rate in Ontario was up faster than in the rest of Canada, it suggests Ontario's policies are contributing—or do you consider the government powerless to address poverty? And in that, I would ask if you would commit to doubling the income supports for ODSP and OW recipients, recognizing that many of them are living in deep, legislated poverty.

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Gretzky and Chair, I will make it very clear to you: We will leave no stone unturned when it comes to supporting Ontarians in this province.

Again, if you look at the investments that we're making across the board, whether it's the Ontario Disability Support Program, of 20%; whether it's the earning exemptions, by 400%, so that those who are able to can gain more income; whether it's not recognizing the Canada Disability Benefit as income so that individuals on OW, ODSP, or those who are receiving ACSD can receive up to an extra \$200 from the federal government—those are decisions we made as a government. We're never going to waver from that commitment that we made to people, to support them in every community.

The feedback that we got was that the process on the ground was too onerous for the individuals—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: If I can reclaim my time for my last question, I want to ask, specifically, why is the Ontario Child Benefit estimated to be \$13 million less this year, from last year. There's a \$13-million cut to the Ontario Child Benefit amount this year. Why is that?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Chair, I will just say, when it comes to the Ontario Child Benefit, the investment in that has increased to \$1.3 billion annually. That supports a million families across the province. That monthly support has increased under our government—to now \$1.3 billion of annual investments in families. Some one million families are receiving that support, as a result of our government—and that funding and that support has increased, actually.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): You have nine seconds.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I'll allow the time to go to my colleague.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Five-minute break. Right now, it's 4:02. Please be back at 4:07, in your seats.
The committee recessed from 1602 to 1609.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): MPP Clancy, you have the floor.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm going to sound like a broken record again.

When I talk to children's aid societies, again, housing comes up. They're spending inordinate amounts of money

to pay for motel rooms or so on because of the lack of housing. I have shelters where women with their babes are in there and they can't move out, and then I have families who are connected to CAS, who need housing.

We know that the likelihood of someone being in housing again when they're an adult—they're at a higher likelihood of being homeless if they were homeless as a child.

So I really feel like when we tackle our homelessness prevention or reduction strategy, we need to talk about families.

I know that you care a lot about this.

While I appreciate that we want to invest in shelter spaces, shelters are still homeless—we need somewhere for people to go.

That's why I'm begging for some cross-ministerial collaboration. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing needs to be involved in a family-focused solution to ending homelessness.

One area that has come up in my conversations with child welfare is the gap between the amount that a foster parent receives and the amount that kin care receives.

We all knock on doors. I knock on doors. One of the vivid memories I have is a grandma who had all these kids mucking around in the driveway, and she was saying, "I can't do this anymore. I'm at my breaking point. Neither parent can take the kids. They're each in other shelters that are not for families. And I'm not receiving enough money to put food on the table."

Is there some way, in future budgets—I don't know what the numbers are in the estimates—that we could actually reflect the cost of caring for kids, for kin care?

We're not doing the prevention that we need to do. I could speak to the CAS numbers because—I appreciate that referrals are going down, but as someone who was working in social work not too long ago, it's because they're not taking referrals they used to, like for prevention and more minor abuses. They're only dealing with the most severe cases. So, yes, there's a reduction of numbers, but the costs—we know the complexity of families accessing services in CAS is extreme.

Could you speak to the amount that kin-relationship family members can receive? That's a great way to prevent families from becoming homeless.

Hon. Michael Parsa: That's an important point. We've actually prioritized that and annualized the funding because—you've heard me say it—we want children and youth to stay with their families as much as possible, in their communities, closer to heritage. We did annualize the funding.

I'm just going to ask the deputy so that we can give you some exact figures.

Deputy, can you talk about that, please?

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: I can indeed, Minister. Thank you.

I will ask ADM Chihab to speak to your question on kinship.

ADM Chihab?

Ms. Linda Chihab: Kinship services centre on the identity of children and youth.

I should start off by saying that there are start-up fundings of up to \$1,000 per placement in helping with costs like furniture and home modification, and episodic funding of up to \$1,000 annually in assisting with children's personal needs, such as clothing, school needs, and recreation.

The foster care costs are determined locally. At the local society, in the community, they decide what types of funding they provide in addition to any of per diems at a foster care. That would be linked to the needs of the child—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Ms. Linda Chihab: —and so if there are additional needs that are required, then the children's aid society makes that determination.

It's important to note that, of the \$1.7 billion, each society has total funding flexibility within that allocation and can provide supports as they see fit, based on the child's or the youth's needs.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I've heard feedback from CAS that the funding model actually needs to have a shift—just like we need to move from providing shelter to providing supportive housing, we also need to provide a shift to more prevention-based. So many of them are in deficit—I'm going to say 95%; you'd have to fact-check me, like many of us politicians. There are lots of deficits, and it means that there is very little for prevention—if anything—which we know is the most cost-effective way to help families avoid these high-risk behaviours.

Can you speak about the money that's lacking in prevention and the deficits?

Ms. Linda Chihab: What I can share with you is that—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you very much.

We will go now to the government side. I recognize MPP Jordan.

Mr. John Jordan: I want to start by thanking Minister Parsa for coming to my riding and doing the round table. I think the most impactful thing was meeting on a one-to-one basis with the parents after that event and then going out and meeting a number of organizations at their site.

Just recently, I was at an event—a totally different and unrelated event. A father of an autistic child came to that event just for one reason, and that was to thank this government for the services they were now receiving that they did not have access to before.

My question is about social assistance programs.

As you know, social assistance is a vital lifeline for many Ontarians, helping individuals and families meet their basic needs and work toward greater independence. Over the past few years, MCCSS has focused on modernizing these programs to make them more responsive and effective.

Can you share what changes have been implemented to improve the delivery of social assistance, how these changes are helping people move toward employment and financial stability, and what steps are being taken to ensure these

supports are accessible and client-centred across the province, Minister?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks for the question, and thank you for the work that you do in your riding. I really enjoyed being there and meeting with the families and the service provider. They have a great deal of respect for you. So thank you for everything you do—especially for the families we met at that developmental services community organization.

Every single person has to have the opportunity to succeed and thrive in this province. Every single person should have those opportunities. You heard me say it earlier. We're working across government, with other ministries—Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education—to make sure that the supports that are provided are streamlined and less onerous for individuals who are accessing them. When it comes to social assistance, client experience is incredibly important.

You think about an individual—I'll just walk you through the process of what it was like. An individual had to go into an office, physically take documentation, fill up an application—and this wasn't long ago—and sit down with a caseworker. Imagine you are a farmer who had to leave, or you lived somewhere where it was a rural area in the province. You left, you took time to go into an office. And let's say you were missing a document. Let's say you forgot something; you didn't have the correct information. Well, off you go again.

That wasn't good enough. The people who require assistance and supports—we wanted to make sure that client experience improves. That's why we brought in the MyBenefits portal that I mentioned to you earlier—one process, one door where those who seek social assistance can apply and share information. I talked about this in my opening remarks—over 20,000 exchanges of text messages and emails with the client and the caseworker. Why is that so important? I mentioned that as I was responding to MPP Gilmour.

We made additional investments in this space. For Ontario Works, we're providing \$52 billion more so that caseworkers on the ground can spend more time supporting that individual with his or her needs—to connect them with housing, to connect them with employment support. That's really, really important. We also took a lot of the work that was being done on the ground to the province. So we are now that first, initial stage, where we provide approval. As a result, again, it frees up more time for the caseworker on the ground. Instead of doing paperwork, they're providing support to the client. That was in Ontario Works.

The Ontario Disability Support Program provides more long-term support to individuals, and we made several decisions in this area. We increased rates by 20% over the past three years. We tied rates to inflation so they can keep up with the cost of living in the future. There are people, as you know, who are looking for employment opportunities. We increased the earning exemption from \$200 per month to \$1,000, so that those who can and are able to can

work and earn extra income every month without it impacting their benefits.

We want to make sure the supports are provided on the ground to individuals—the MyBenefits portal is one; the supports in ODSP are one.

We also said—I highly advocated and Minister Williams and I talked about more support needed in this space, which is why we were strong advocates for the support of the Canada Disability Benefit. We made the decision of making sure that the income and that support that's provided to the individuals—whether on Ontario Works, whether on ODSP or those receiving ACSD—is not treated as income provincially. That's a decision we made to make sure people have more money in their pocket.

In addition to the two social assistance programs, we have a LIFT tax credit in the province of Ontario. The LIFT tax credit provides support to about 1.7 million Ontarians. It either reduces the Ontario income tax portion or eliminates it completely from the individual—again, affordability.

1620

We also have digital tools that are available to individuals who are accessing support, because, as I said, the client experience is just so important. Because of the work that we've done with social assistance with our partners, we're now able to see—you heard in my opening remarks—the number of people who are now connecting to employment across the province. That's the goal—it's to provide the support to the individual, the support that he or she needs, to connect to employment and earn bigger paycheques. We're doing that in collaboration with our partners on the ground so that, as I said, by uploading the work to the province—allowing more time on the ground with caseworkers and the individual.

You heard about some of the other measures that I mentioned, such as the Student Nutrition Program—because that affects a lot of people. These are important measures that are making a difference in the lives of every individual who relies on these supports—tangible support. These are actions that we're taking to lower the cost of living.

When it comes to people on social assistance—those who require transit, for example. The decision made by the Minister of Transportation, through the One Fare program, saves an individual rider \$1,600 annually.

When we increased funding in the Homelessness Prevention Program to more than \$700 million annually, it increased support to individuals.

As I was responding to MPP Clancy earlier, I said we just announced—Minister Williams and I—\$26.7 million of funding for emergency shelters for women who are leaving abusive situations, for victims and survivors across the province, to make sure that no one is turned away when they're requesting supports and assistance.

To get to support people, it requires action, not slogans. In this ministry, that's what we're focusing on—delivering results for the population and the individuals in Ontario who we support through community organizations. I do want to acknowledge this.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the many organizations across the province that are working so hard in supporting Ontarians through—whether it's the developmental services sector, whether it's the violence-against-women shelters or other programs. These are incredibly caring, compassionate individuals who we rely on to be able to provide and render these services—which is why, as I was mentioning earlier, we provided an increase in funding of \$310 million to community organizations that are providing these supports and services. For the developmental services sector, that meant \$90 million more funding; for child welfare, that meant \$41.7 million more in funding; and in violence against women, \$5.5 million more in funding.

We've said this from the beginning: We'll work with any level of government to improve the lives of people, which is why Minister Williams and I signed on with the National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence, and which is why we created our own action plan in the province that prioritizes intervention, education, support for survivors and victims, and holding perpetrators accountable. These are actionable. This is work that we're doing to protect people of this province.

All of this work is backed by historic high investments in our ministry. As I said in my opening remarks, you would see that investments in the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services this year has increased by \$596 million. The ministry's funding, you will see—it's more than \$20 billion of investments in services and supports across the province.

We'll never stop. We'll continue to work with all organizations and all levels of government to provide better support to those individuals who rely on our services.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Go ahead.

Mr. Billy Pang: Time check?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Four minutes and 20 seconds.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, Chair. Through you to the minister: I would like to take this opportunity to express my admiration and appreciation for you taking up this file.

I can still remember back to when I was a high school student, engaging with the social service community as a volunteer. The first engagement was when I went to a children's centre, and I played with the kids with developmental challenges. After months, I quit. I was too young to take that emotional impact.

I believe that, as a minister, you have to deal with vulnerable groups every day. I appreciate that.

Minister, children's treatment centres play a vital role in supporting children and youth with special needs, helping them access therapies, developmental services and programs. They allow them to thrive in their communities. Families across Ontario rely on these centres for early intervention and ongoing care, and ensuring these services are accessible and effective is critical.

Minister, can you share what MCCSS is doing to strengthen the support of children with special needs, including investment in children's treatment centres and improvements to service delivery, and how these initia-

tives are helping families receiving timely, coordinated care?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thank you for the question, and thank you for everything that you do as an MPP in your region. I know you're highly respected, and your vote numbers speak to that. It has been wonderful working with you. Thanks for the advocacy that you do on behalf of the people you serve.

It's a very important question

I'll just repeat this because it's worth repeating: Every child, every youth in this province should have the same opportunities to succeed and thrive, regardless of their circumstances. That's why we're doing so much work as a ministry—working with our community partners to ensure that resources are available on the ground for individuals and for families, so that children and youth outcomes are, in fact, improved.

In the developmental services sector, as I mentioned just a bit earlier, we have increased our investments in that space by nearly \$1.4 billion since we formed government. They're historically high investments.

In order to have the facilities to provide these supports—we have, right now, Grandview in Ajax. I want to thank the former member for Ajax, Patrice Barnes, who's a very strong advocate for the work that Grandview does, and PA Coe and Minister Bethlenfalvy. As a result, if you look at the state-of-the-art building providing supports to children and youth with autism—speech-language pathology, audiology—the children's treatment centre at Grandview was one.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Hon. Michael Parsa: It's completed, it's open, and it's up and running. I was proud to be there for the grand opening.

We also have done more. Thanks to the advocacy of our members in Ottawa, we have CHEO's new, state-of-the-art, massive facility, under one roof, for families needing to access these supports.

In Chatham-Kent, we have a new children's treatment centre that's going to be built in that area.

I thank the member sitting right next to you and Minister Jones for the work that they're doing.

And I want to thank the member for Brantford-Brant because, in his riding, we will have a new, state-of-the-art children's treatment centre in Brant county.

Again, these are investments that we're making to make sure that those services that families rely on are there for them—and now, as a result of our investments, these are larger facilities. They'll be able to serve more families—and more expanded services as well.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): We will now go to the official opposition. I recognize MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: This has been very edifying so far. I appreciate the answers and the spaces where we didn't get answers. We'll have to keep having conversations.

I'm torn. There are many, many things that call my heart, but I think I want to move us back into the child protection space.

I am thinking about the conversations I've had over the last little while.

A phone call with a mother who desperately called her CAS social worker and the police, trying to get help for her child—and this was as her child was actively dying in the home of someone else, and she couldn't get the help that child needed.

1630

I'm thinking of the 14-year-old—whose funeral I did when I was still a minister at a church—who died of a fentanyl overdose. She was thrown out of a car and left to die on the side of the road by herself. She was in children's aid care.

I'm saying this because I need to connect the dollars to children. We know that we are not doing enough, because a child is dying every three days. We can say we're doing a lot, but we cannot ever say we're doing enough.

One question I had was around the CAS audit that the Premier said would fix everything. When can we expect the results?

Hon. Michael Parsa: The third-party review that you're referring to—and that goes back to when I said this from the beginning: We want to make sure we leave no stone unturned. And that third-party review started some—I just want to make sure that we're very clear: Child protection work never stopped. This was for us to find out what else we can do. I'm glad you raised the point, because I think it's a really important point that you mentioned. I've been very clear in public about this. We will never stop looking at ways to do things better. Every day, I challenge everybody in our ministry to do the very best that we can—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'm going to reclaim my time. Forgive me. I know that you are passionate about this.

I just want to know, very simply, when—the date. When can we expect the result?

Hon. Michael Parsa: It's imminent. The reason I was telling you that is because some societies asked for more time to provide some information. We granted that. But that is imminent. And I have made that commitment that as soon as we have that, we will review it, and we will make the findings public.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Has it already been shared with cabinet?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I haven't. When I receive it, we will review it, and we will share it publicly.

This report is to find what else we can do to do things better, in collaboration with all our partners.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I had more questions about it, but we'll wait until you've got it and it can be shared more.

The Star reported around the fact that there's no cohesive death review system, which is a chilling thing to say when we're talking about children in our care.

I'm wondering what funding the minister has allocated to overseeing the CAS, the residential care—the death reviews, those outcome measurements that we really need to save our children's lives.

Hon. Michael Parsa: We do have a directive where it's a duty—whether it's the Ombudsman's office or the Chief

Coroner's office or the ministry. I will ask the deputy to be able to provide a bit more context for you on that.

The investment that you asked for in child welfare is now at \$1.7 billion. MPP Gilmour, that is an increase of \$128.9 million more over the last 10 years, while the number of children and youth in care has decreased by 30%—open protection cases, just under 50% less. We've made more investments—but I'll ask to the specific question.

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: And I will call ADM Chihab to speak specifically about your question, I believe around—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Sorry. The review.

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: The process by reviewing?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Yes, the process by reviewing.

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: Thank you. ADM Chihab?

Ms. Linda Chihab: There is a joint directive, the child death reporting and review, between the ministry and the office of the children's coroner. It sets out requirements that children's aid societies, the ministry, and the OCC must follow whenever a child who receives child protection services dies. The purpose of the child death review process, and also the report, is important, and it identifies recommendations that may enhance the overall well-being of children, whether that's through policy changes, whether that's through different outcome measures, whether it's through the local society making other choices at the local level to ensure that children are safe. There are—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you. I'm going to reclaim, because I'd love to jump to the second half of that, which was—what funding has the ministry allocated for that?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Answer the question, please.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Are you talking about child welfare, or are you talking about a specific part of child welfare?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: No, around oversight of the CASs in the residential care system—the death reviews, the outcome measurements. What amount of money are we putting towards oversight?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Overall, it is \$1.7 billion of investment.

Do you want the breakdown of every section of—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I was looking for that. Maybe we can talk about it afterwards, because it looks like it's not going to come in this time. What I also—

Hon. Michael Parsa: Yes. There are different components.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Yes.

I think you mentioned the record investments. I'd really like to know how much we are spending on private, third-party providers that are doing the group homes—how much did we do last year, in 2024-25, and how much are we estimating is going to be on those private third-party providers in the next year?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Before I ask the deputy to provide you some numbers, I will just say that the ministry does not direct placements. Those decisions are made locally, by experts who assess the situation of every need. They're the ones who are making decisions on placements.

Deputy, if you could—

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: To restate: 97% of our investments go directly to people and our agencies, to deliver service.

For your specific question, I'll ask ADM Chihab to speak to the percentage that goes to our children's aid societies, and then that might go to providers that they select and that they work with individually.

Ms. Linda Chihab: Thank you for your question, member.

As the minister pointed out, those decisions happen at the local level. Children's aid societies make those decisions. That's information that's held at the local level. We have expectations around what societies—the oversight responsibility that we have, in terms of reviewing those homes, doing annual reviews, doing unannounced visits.

There have been a number of changes that have been made through the supporting children's act, where there are increased site visits that are required, that societies—they've been moved from 90 days to 30 days. And there are eyes on the ground in terms of what those placement agencies—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Can I reclaim my time, please? I appreciate this. I do actually know this file fairly well.

What I'm looking for is the number, because we're in estimates here—what we're going to spend, as Ontarians, on private third-party providers of care in group homes.

Ms. Linda Chihab: The ministry expectation is that family-based care is first. When that is not possible, the societies will then make a decision about the best placement option—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'm going to reclaim my time because I don't seem to be getting an answer. I just wanted a number.

Let me move on. Do we know, Minister, how many children in CAS care were housed in these non-licensed settings in 2024-25?

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Gilmour, before I pass it on again to the deputy to provide you with that information, I just want to clarify: An unlicensed setting could be—just because you are familiar with the system, as you would know—a youth who's involved with a voluntary youth services agreement; who's living with a friend inside a community, with a family member.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Correct.

Hon. Michael Parsa: As you know, that also falls in the same category.

I'm just going to ask the deputy to provide some more context for you.

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: I would also just like to repeat ADM Chihab's statement, which is that the ministry is responsible for licensing. Decisions around funding remain at the local level. Children's aid societies decide and invest in for-profit or non-profit.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I got that.

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: So the number of children who would be housed is also at a local level—children's aid societies decide, locally.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I want to reclaim my time and just get that number if I can. I want to know how many children in CAS care were housed in non-licensed settings in 2024-25.

So far, I think I've asked three questions with numbers as answers, and not gotten an answer.

Do we have a number for how many children in CAS were housed in non-licensed settings in 2024-25?

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: ADM Chihab, do we have a direct number at the local level—

Ms. Natalie Pierre: We're here to talk about the estimates for 2025-26, not—

Ms. Linda Chihab: No, we do not have a direct number. We do have an expectation—

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: Hold on one second, Linda.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: We're here to talk about estimates for 2025-26, and I'm not sure that member opposite's question is relevant to the subject material we're discussing—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you, MPP. I can make it relevant.

I would like that number, but I understand you just said we don't have that number. I was going to move on, then, from that number.

Do we estimate what the cost will be in order to prevent these settings, whenever possible—in 2025-26? If we don't have the number of people who were in unlicensed settings in 2024-25, I'm going to assume that we don't know how much it will cost to prevent this from happening in 2025-26, but we can ask anyway. Does the ministry have any projections on how many kids will need to be housed in this way—recognizing unlicensed is a number of things? Do we have an estimate of a projection of how many of our young people will be housed in settings like this in the year to come?

1640

Hon. Michael Parsa: Just before I ask the deputy or ADM to chime in, I will tell you, again, those placement decisions—because cases are dealt with at the local level by experts, by societies, and you know that.

Part of what you're inquiring about involves what we refer to as VYSAs, the youth service voluntary agreements—that's an individual who could be living in this setting voluntarily and receiving that support.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you. I'm going to reclaim and not get the answer—because I understand that we're not going to have this answer.

So far, I've asked a number of questions, and we haven't been able to have any answers to those questions.

The reason that this is important, of course, is because we are seeing more and more children housed in motels, in offices, in friends of—in all sorts of spaces—and we are seeing an uptick in deaths.

I was really expecting, quite frankly, that even though we have a situation where the individual CASs have certain responsibility, we have oversight. It's our money, and it's our children.

I'm wondering if this feels to the minister that this is a satisfying way to run this particular program—where we

don't have any sense of how many children are in the unlicensed settings, how much it's going to cost us, and how we prevent it.

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Gilmour, as I said to you, every child and every youth in this province has to have the opportunity to succeed and thrive.

We have made decisions—for example, the quality standard framework that we brought in. We have hired more staff on the ground to conduct more inspections. We have conducted more unannounced inspections. We have brought in penalties—administrative, monetary penalties—to hold some of the actors accountable for their actions.

When it comes to protecting children and youth—and as you said, we talked about it earlier—we currently have a third-party review to find out what else we can do to protect them.

I'll make it very clear: We will leave absolutely no stone unturned when it comes to the protection of children and youth in this province, including those in care.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'm glad to hear that.

How much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute and 11 seconds.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I want to note that this is the month of November, Woman Abuse Prevention Month.

Chair, 75% of Ontario's public service workers are women. The associate minister was correct in linking economic security as an important part of IPV survival. It's also in the service sector where many of the supports they needed are found—shelters, mental health.

There are 12,000 social service workers from more than 16 workplaces who are still owed remedy from Bill 124, and we know the President of the Treasury Board has already said that it's not their problem. This denies the reality of the fact that we are—

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Go ahead, MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: We're not here to discuss Bill 124. We're here to discuss the estimates for 2025-26—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): That's correct.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: No, but we are here to discuss the budget—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Next question, please.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I am wondering if the minister will commit, in the month of IPV prevention, to ensure that the sectors that are saying they cannot pay their workers that 6.5%—to making sure that those areas are properly funded.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Mr. Chair—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister.

We'll now go on to the third party. I recognize MPP Tsao.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I'm hoping to ask a lot of questions to the minister and the team around this digital-first approach when it comes to access to social assistance.

Moving to this digital approach—which I think, overall, is a good initiative. We want to move into a digital age. What has been the cost to do this? And is this a complete

program, or is there more spending that will be required this year to move forward?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Are you talking about the incorporation of MyBenefits?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: MyBenefits and just applying for social assistance now.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, you said it: It is digital-first, but not digital-only. People have the opportunity to physically go in and receive the support. They can call ServiceOntario by phone to receive that support or they can do it on an iPad or on a device, on a computer.

Specifically to the program, I'm just going to ask, Deputy, if you can please go down and walk through the implementation of MyBenefits in the portals that we have in place.

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: I'll have ADM Cordelia Clarke Julien speak to this.

Ms. Cordelia Clarke Julien: Cordelia Clarke Julien, ADM for the social assistance programs division.

The implementation of the transformation for social assistance has been taking place over the last four to five years. It's digital-first, but not only. Working with our 47 municipalities, what we've done is to make sure that folks are able to apply for an application no matter where they are. That includes having workers go to encampment sites and actually fill out applications and/or call our ServiceOntario individuals—where they can fill out application forms and work closely to make sure that they are getting the assistance they need. As you probably heard the minister speak to before, as a result of this modernization, we've been able to save up to 74 minutes on application time, to ensure that we can be able to grant right away, as opposed to waiting several weeks, in order for people to get their dollars.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: And can I ask, to my first question—what's the cost associated to this?

Ms. Cordelia Clarke Julien: The cost, in terms of the—

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Implementation—and if there are any new costs, moving forward, in this budget.

Ms. Cordelia Clarke Julien: No, the costs are in terms of the—

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: The portal. Sorry.

Ms. Cordelia Clarke Julien: What you're actually seeing is, there hasn't been a reduction. In fact, there has actually been an increased investment of \$293 million in our social assistance cadre to support those who are looking to get support from us as they go forward. So we've completed the modernization—that was completed in June of this year—and we continue to do continuous improvement as we go forward with respect to the digital pieces. That's just part of our regular operations that we continue to do—as some part of investments regularly for operations.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Sorry; just so I understand—\$219 million over the past four years to implement? Was that what it was?

Ms. Cordelia Clarke Julien: No, \$219 million more we've invested this—

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: More. Understood. So you don't have an overall costing here—

Ms. Cordelia Clarke Julien: Sorry; \$293 million more is being invested in social assistance this year.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Okay. The reason I asked for this digital-first approach—and I understand you're saying it's not exclusively digital. My concern around this is exclusion of those who are the most vulnerable—and why. I've had people tell me about their experience. When you have a digital-first approach, I think for perhaps 90% this is great. It's helpful. It's more streamlined. It's efficient. But when we talk about those who are the most vulnerable—those who don't have access to Internet, those who don't have access to a computer, those who don't have access to electricity sometimes—this becomes a barrier. So, in fact, for the majority, yes, we're increasing access, but there are also those who are the most desperately in need—and we're actually having barriers.

I understand that you said “not just digital.” But again, in this case where I spoke to an individual—when you say “not just digital,” what does that mean? They actually walked into the office and said, “I can't do it digitally. I need your help.” They were directed to a telephone. They spoke to someone on a telephone, who then opened the computer and proceeded to fill the form out for them on the computer, while they were on the phone. Is this normal?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, it's about client experience. It's a good question.

As I said to you, what we've changed is to make sure the supports that were being on the ground, MPP Tsao, existed—we wanted to make sure those who can access will always be in place.

For the vast majority that you referenced in your question, who can go digitally and apply for this—this is for them. The people who still want to go in and do it your traditional way—they can do so. People who want to call in can still call in and do it through ServiceOntario, which is probably what you are alluding to.

1650

The client experience on the ground is very important, which is why, as I mentioned earlier, even with Ontario Works—which are supports that are provided through municipalities on the ground, or the DSSABs. That's why we increased the support for them—so that they have more time on the ground, to spend with the client. It was really important, so that when you're sitting down with that individual—they don't have a clipboard with a paper, and filling it up. And if that individual is missing an ID—well, off you go, and you have to come back again later on to do that. Well, now, when they're doing their application, they can pause and resume it again later if they want to—or like I said, going in person and having those conversations. So all we did was expand options to individuals who require assistance.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I think expanding is great. But I think when we're starting from a place that's already at a deficit, expanding isn't really fixing the core problems that we're trying to address here.

I'll give you another example. A person who is trying to apply—and this is a real-life example. I'll omit the details, for privacy issues. A person who is trying to apply for social assistance—they have developmental issues, so they're on the phone, at a ServiceOntario, with an employee who has the program up on a screen on their own computer. They ask a question. The person cannot fully grasp the question that's being asked of them because of their developmental issue—"I don't understand." They repeat the same question again—"I don't understand." They repeat the exact same question, word for word for word, over and over and over, as if they're some sort of robot.

We're talking about client experience, and there's some frustration—just because I'm talking about real-life experiences here. I understand, again, 95%—sure, 99%. This is another tool; it's better.

But if you're not here, as a government, to lift up the most vulnerable and make sure the people who are most vulnerable, most in need of these services are getting access, then what are you doing?

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Tsao, as I mentioned, that process—what existed has never changed. We just supplemented and augmented the current services that were being provided. Current services that were being provided are still in place. People who want to go in person can. We expanded the supports and services.

I'll go back to the time on the ground. The reason we uploaded a lot of the responsibilities—especially at intake—to the province is because, again, we wanted to make sure that client who's requiring specific supports has the time to sit down with that caseworker and get those supports they need. Those supports could be housing, employment supports, résumé writing.

So all of those existing supports continue to be there—we just expanded for those who can and who would like to do it digitally.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I understand what you're saying, but what I'm saying is, what's existing is not enough. When I talk about someone with a developmental issue who's talking to a person on a phone who's staring at a computer, filling out a form on their screen, repeating the exact same question over and over—that's not serving anyone. An expanded tool set is not going to support that situation either.

What, in this budget, are you doing to make it easier for that person and people like them to access support?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, it's about improving client services. This is one of the reasons, MPP Tsao, we are constantly reviewing the work that we've done.

I was asked, "When are you going to be satisfied with this work in this space?" I said, today we'll be happy with the work that we've done, but tomorrow we have to do things better. That's what we do at this ministry and as government. You can never stop. You can never rest. You do the very best, you listen—and that's what we do. We have a technical table with partners in social assistance,

where we receive feedback about the work that's being done, how else we can improve that work. That's where we make changes.

These changes that we're talking about came as a result of listening to clients, as a result of the direct feedback we get from partners who are on the ground providing these services. They said current service and the current way of doing things is great—but we want to be able to offer services better to the people. As you mentioned earlier, MPP Tsao, there are many people who can use—it's at their fingertips. So we wanted to make sure, for those people, there are more services and more streamlined services available—but not changing the way services were being done before. It was very important.

We repeat all the time that digital service is available—but it doesn't have to be just digital service. That's just an expansion.

If you still require in-person support, in fact, they have more time now to be able to spend with you, because of our decision to upload the responsibilities to the province, because of our decision to increase their funding by \$52 million.

It's all about client experience. It's all about, how could we do things better? And that's where these decisions came from—directly from the people we're working for and listening to.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Absolutely. I hear you when you're talking—again, I think we're kind of in a loop here—about the majority of people. But we're talking about the people who are falling through the cracks, Minister, and that's where the focus needs to be as well. I appreciate that.

I want to touch on the move to privatize employment supports that were once administered through OW offices themselves.

I looked at a recent—I'm sure you've seen it—Maytree report that shows social assistance recipients achieve employment outcomes consistently 10 percentage points lower than other IES clients. If that's the case, why is there a move to privatize these services?

Hon. Michael Parsa: If you're referring to employment services that are being provided through the Ministry of Labour—is that what you're referring to?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: These are services being provided through OW offices.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'm going to ask the deputy to talk about that employment service transformation that we've done.

Mr. Daniele Zanotti: Thank you, Minister.

That is a partnership between the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Labour. You're referencing the new individual employment service model that has resulted in an employment service system that is much easier to access and use, and much more localized.

Since IES began in 2021, more Ontario Works clients have exited social assistance. In 2024, in fact, employment

exits rose by 19%. We're continuing to work with the Ministry of Labour to strengthen that partnership so that as people enter Ontario Works or ODSP, they are immediately triaged. We believe that we will continue to exit more people from Ontario Works in partnership with this model that the Ministry of Labour has set up and that we're partnering with.

A final comment that I would make is that we are hearing experiences from our municipalities, who are saying that the central intake that we have now taken on has enabled their workers to provide wraparound supports.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I hear what you're saying—but again, the Maytree report says 10 percentage points lower than other IES clients. So is the Maytree report wrong?

Hon. Michael Parsa: I said this in my opening remarks, and I'll tell you: Through the centralization, the work that you're referring to, making eligibility determinations—22,000 Ontario Works applications are received every month, 93,000 people have been referred from social assistance to employment, and 69% have found employment from getting that referral.

Again, as a result of feedback that we received from our partners, we implemented a process to make sure that client service continues to improve and those who are looking for employment have the services on the ground to access those supports.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Let's go to the independent member. I recognize MPP Clancy.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I just want to start off by reiterating some of what I read in the FAO report on your estimates. The report says that if we carry on with the budgeted amounts for 2025, 2026, 2027 and 2028, it will be the smallest spending annual growth since 1999 to 2003. That's what the FAO is stating right now: that it will be the smallest amount of growth—and the other statement, for example, just for ODSP, that the projected cost of running the program is \$6.2 billion in 2024 and \$7.2 billion in 2027. This is higher than the funding that has been allocated in the budgets. I'm just letting you know what the budget looks like, in terms of what the path ahead looks like.

1700

I'm going to argue again for an increase in shelter allowance. I know we throw numbers around all the time in this place. One number that I will probably talk about a lot in the next while is that, in this fall economic statement—the budget said that we're spending \$6 billion subsidizing people's hydro; it doesn't matter how much money they make. The FAO says it disproportionately advantages high-income earners. If I'm going to say "disproportionate"—let's say halfish. So \$3 million to \$3.5 billion of our taxpayer money is being spent to subsidize Galen Weston's hydro, Drake's hydro, our hydro—and I do consider us high-income earners. We get a lot of money, in taxpayer dollars, to subsidize our hydro. If we

doubled shelter allowance just for the people on Ontario Works, that would be \$110 million. That would be 0.3 of a percentage point of that \$3.5 billion, so \$110 million—over \$3.5 billion—when you think of it in those terms. These are choices the government makes on how to spend money. I know you never do this, but some people in the province might say, "If we give them too much money, they're not going to work." But if you think about it in this perspective, on doubling shelter allowance, \$110 million versus the amount we subsidize high-income households in this province for their hydro, \$3.5 billion—it's a stark, dramatic distance between what we could offer folks who are increasingly becoming homeless and what we offer folks who are comfy, cozy and have food in their belly.

Why we need to address this is that the people on social assistance programs have doubled. The number of people who were homeless two years ago was 14,500, and now it's 26,500. The number of people who are homeless, either in shelters—and if you've spent a day in a shelter, God bless you; you've earned all the credibility possible. Living in a shelter is not a great scenario—or living in a tent; it's November, and it's cold.

Could we explore the option of doubling shelter allowances, given the circumstances? We've run out of the COHB. We don't have affordable housing. We don't have enough supportive housing. Can I have a commitment from your government to explore increasing the shelter allowance, especially—there is no dignity in Ontario Works right now. You will lose your housing, actually, on \$390 a month. So while you might be out of work for a short period of time, in that time, a lot of bad things happen. We know when you have to find housing again, it costs twice as much.

Can you talk to me about the importance of that housing allowance?

Hon. Michael Parsa: MPP Clancy, let me tell you, there are times when people talk about "bare minimum." That's not what we're focusing—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): One minute.

Hon. Michael Parsa: We want to make sure people have access to bigger paycheques, more income. I want that support on the ground—for people who need support to have access. That's why I keep reiterating the point of the supports on the ground for individuals—to connect them with bigger paycheques.

You talked about investments in the ministry, MPP Clancy—

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I want you to have more money.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Right across the board, if you see, investments have increased.

In child welfare—as I mentioned to you, a record investment: \$1.7 billion. If you look at the developmental services sector—nearly \$3.7 billion, an increase of \$1.4 billion since we formed government.

In the space that Minister Williams is doing fantastic work—it's record investments to make sure that women

and families have access to the supports to be able to leave those difficult situations.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: They need housing, and most women are—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you.

We'll now go to the government for three minutes and 10 seconds. I recognize MPP Wai.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I just want to say thank you very much, Minister, Associate Minister, Deputy, for being here, and to the whole team, for working so hard. For the past three hours, you have been answering all the questions that we have, and I thank you—it's not just asking the questions; it's you preparing this.

I really thank you for, across the board, increasing the funding of different programs—not just all the programs, but it's across Ontario. I thank you for that. There are rising costs of groceries. Household budgets are stretched. Families are struggling to make ends meet. We recognize that you have already made a lot of increases in different funding.

I also heard you mentioning the student nutrition programs a little bit. What have we done and what can we do to help children, so they can receive healthy meals, to help them to learn and succeed?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Thanks very much for the question. Thank you for all the great work that you do in your riding.

I have the pleasure of serving the city of Richmond Hill with MPP Wai. She's an outstanding member.

It's so important—the Student Nutrition Program and the First Nations Student Nutrition Program. Very simply said, we want to make sure that children have access to healthy meals so they're not in school with empty bellies.

That's why we are working with the federal government—not only did we secure \$180.5 million to support the programs; we increased our investments in the Student Nutrition Program and the First Nations Student Nutrition Program to \$37.5 million this year.

We went a step further. We partnered—the spirit of the Student Nutrition Program is about partnership and collaboration—with municipalities and the private sector. We

partnered with a group of supporters, and, as a result, we have a campaign called the Healthy Students Brighter Ontario campaign. Through this campaign, partners are working to match our \$5-million investment to provide more support to students across the province.

The Student Nutrition Program, MPP Wai, is supporting 800,000 children and youth in our province, with healthy meals, snacks and lunches, depending on the needs in different schools.

Again, we're talking about children and youth in this province. We will do everything we can to make sure that they're supported, make sure that they're protected, and improve outcomes for every single one of them. That's a commitment that I made as a minister, and I continue to do so, with the work of the amazing people we have at MCCSS. We will really improve—

The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell): Thank you, Minister.

This concludes the committee's consideration of estimates of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

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? Okay.

Shall vote 701, ministry administration program, carry? All those in favour, please put their hand up. All those opposed? Carried.

Shall vote 702, children and adult services program, carry? All those in favour, please put your hand up. All those opposed? Carried.

Shall vote 704, children, community and social services capital program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? Carried.

Shall the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? Carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to the House? All those in favour? All those opposed? Carried.

The committee adjourned at 1710.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Chair / Président

Mr. Brian Riddell (Cambridge PC)

First Vice-Chair / Première Vice-Présidente

M^{me} France Gélinas (Nickel Belt ND)

Second Vice-Chair / Deuxième Vice-Présidente

MPP Andrea Hazell (Scarborough–Guildwood L)

Ms. Aislinn Clancy (Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre G)

Ms. Jess Dixon (Kitchener South–Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud–Hespeler PC)

M^{me} France Gélinas (Nickel Belt ND)

MPP Andrea Hazell (Scarborough–Guildwood L)

Mr. John Jordan (Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston PC)

Mr. Anthony Leardi (Essex PC)

MPP Robin Lennox (Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre ND)

Mr. Billy Pang (Markham–Unionville PC)

Ms. Natalie Pierre (Burlington PC)

Mr. Brian Riddell (Cambridge PC)

Mrs. Daisy Wai (Richmond Hill PC)

Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

Mr. Lorne Coe (Whitby PC)

MPP Alexa Gilmour (Parkdale–High Park ND)

MPP Lisa Gretzky (Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest ND)

Ms. Peggy Sattler (London West / London-Ouest ND)

Mr. Jonathan Tsao (Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord L)

Clerk / Greffière

Ms. Vanessa Kattar

Staff / Personnel

Ms. Sandra Lopes, research officer,
Research Services

Ms. Ellen Wankiewicz, research officer,
Research Services