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HE-12

Journal des débats (Hansard)

HE-12

Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy

Estimates

Ministry of Citizenship
and Multiculturalism

Ministry of Municipal Affairs
and Housing

Comité permanent du patrimoine, de l'infrastructure et de la culture

Budget des dépenses

Ministère des Affaires civiques
et du Multiculturalisme

Ministère des Affaires municipales
et du Logement

1st Session
44th Parliament

Thursday 13 November 2025

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44^e législature

Jeudi 13 novembre 2025

Chair: Hon. Laurie Scott
Clerk: Tanzima Khan

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE,
INFRASTRUCTURE
AND CULTURAL POLICYCOMITÉ PERMANENT DU PATRIMOINE,
DE L'INFRASTRUCTURE
ET DE LA CULTURE

Thursday 13 November 2025

Jeudi 13 novembre 2025

The committee met at 1001 in committee room 1.

ESTIMATES

MINISTRY OF CITIZENSHIP AND
MULTICULTURALISM

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will now come to order. We are meeting to consider the 2025-26 estimates for the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism for a total of two hours.

We are joined today by staff from Hansard, broadcast and recording, and legislative research. From the ministry, we are joined by the Honourable Graham McGregor, Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism and Nosa Ero-Brown, deputy minister, along with other staff from the ministry.

As a reminder, the ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that ministry undertakes to address. I trust that the deputy minister has arranged to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised, so that the ministry can respond accordingly. Are there any questions from the members before we start? All right.

I am now required to call vote 4601, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement from the minister for up to 20 minutes. Minister, the floor is yours. Please proceed.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, colleagues. Good to see everybody. It's always good to be back to this committee. I spent a year and a half on the standing committee here, sitting on that side, grilling witnesses—asking them polite questions, as it were—so it's fun to be back doing it this time.

Of course, I had the honour of presenting the estimates last year for the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism on behalf of the Honourable Michael Ford, who was dealing with some health challenges, so we stepped in. It's good to be back to fulfill our obligation to this committee, to the Parliament, to talk about the great work that the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism is doing.

I'd like to extend my appreciation to the dedicated ministry staff, led by the incredibly capable Deputy Minister Nosa Ero-Brown. Deputy, thank you for your leader-

ship and for everything you do to serve the taxpayers of Ontario.

We are also joined here from the ministry by Dr. Parm Bhattal, who's the assistant deputy minister for the Anti-Racism Directorate; Michelle Gittens, who's the assistant deputy minister for the citizenship, inclusion and heritage division; Rebecca Ramsarran, the assistant deputy minister for the heritage policy and programs division; Helen Chimirri-Russell, who is the CEO of the Ontario Heritage Trust; and Supriya Mahimkar-Patrick, who is the chief administrative officer and the assistant deputy minister for corporate management and services.

I'll start with an overview of MCM, the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism. I'll try to not use too many acronyms because I know we want to be clear in the language that we're using, but if I devolve into acronyms, please forgive me. The ministry was established in the summer of 2021 with the overarching goal of creating a better future for the people and communities of Ontario. Today, the ministry includes the Anti-Racism Directorate; the citizenship, inclusion and heritage division; the heritage policy and programs division; and the Ontario Heritage Trust.

The ministry's main responsibilities include:

- leading the government's anti-racism and anti-hate initiatives;

- promoting economic growth, empowerment and opportunity for diverse communities;

- recognizing and honouring the achievements and contributions of exemplary Ontarians; and

- conserving and stewarding Ontario's heritage.

The ministry leads strategic initiatives that advance equality, heritage and cultural recognition across Ontario to support a resilient province and foster a strong sense of belonging. The ministry does this by promoting economic growth and opportunity for all Ontarians, which includes leading the government's Black Youth Action Plan, modernizing Ontario's heritage framework and streamlining heritage and archaeology processes to expedite economic and infrastructure development opportunities.

We do this by celebrating our history and heritage, which includes planning, delivering and administering the province's recognition programs to support community heritage organizations, honour exceptional Ontarians and encourage civic participation, community leadership and volunteerism, and supporting and honoring veterans along-

side partner ministries such as the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security. We work to protect Ontarians by fighting racism and hate, including the implementation of the province's anti-racism strategy to address racism and delivering the Ontario Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant. We conserve Ontario's heritage by stewarding archaeological assessment governance, by developing and implementing heritage policies under the Ontario Heritage Act and providing heritage technical and advisory services.

Today, the ministry's strategic initiatives will continue to support the government's priorities to make it easier to build, hire and do business in Ontario. Ontario stands at a pivotal moment. While global and regional challenges, including actions by international allies and shifting geopolitical dynamics, present complexities to navigate, the province of Ontario remains steadfast in its progress and dedication to creating a united society for all. Our government has set an ambitious goal to be the most competitive economy in the G7 to invest, create jobs and to do business in.

To support our government and province to remain strong and competitive, my ministry is working to ensure that every Ontarian has an opportunity to succeed. When we say every Ontarian, we mean every Ontarian. We know that Ontario's future prosperity must include Indigenous, Black and other racialized Ontarians, which is why we are investing in the people of this province through key initiatives that will empower future generations. Through cross-government collaboration and in partnership with community leaders, researchers and sector experts, we are making targeted, evidence-based investments that remove barriers and build thriving communities.

One way we are building a stronger Ontario is through the anti-racism strategic plan. In August, we released our sixth annual report on the progress our province has made under the anti-racism strategic plan. This report reflects what it takes to protect Ontario and highlights progress updates on anti-racism initiatives across government. The 2025 annual progress report demonstrates the ongoing efforts across government, and in conjunction with community and sector partners, to remove barriers that impact Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities, to address and combat racism, and to advance opportunities and foster economic empowerment for all Ontarians.

It also highlights key milestones achieved under the anti-racism strategic plan, which includes over 49 initiatives from 14 partner ministries and millions of dollars in investments from our government, including a \$132-million investment from the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism alone. The ministry will continue to report annually on our government's progress on the plan to help build a safer, more prosperous Ontario.

Ontario, like other jurisdictions worldwide, is not immune to global conflicts and geopolitical tensions abroad. We have seen a growing concern on global events that have sparked a rise in racism and hate crimes worldwide. Despite our efforts to promote a culture of

respect and understanding, in 2024, the number of police-reported hate crimes across Canada rose to 4,882. Over half of those, 2,575, occurred in our province and were reported by Ontario police. In Ontario, this represented an increase of 3% from 2,499 police-reported hate crimes in 2023.

With ongoing global conflicts, we must use the tools available to our government to address local issues head on, which we have done in several ways. Since 2021, the government has invested a total of \$86 million to support more than 2,000 faith-based and cultural organizations so they can implement or enhance safety and security measurements at their places of worship and community spaces. Just this morning, we announced an additional investment of \$12.75 million in the new run of the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant for 2025-26.

The Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant was originally launched during the pandemic as the Ontario Grant to Support Anti-Hate Security Measures for Faith-Based and Cultural Organizations. We have gone through iterations over the years, making it a better program and shortening the name, which I think members will appreciate.

1010

The grant was redesigned based on feedback received from a broad range of community organizations, grant recipients and applicants in 2023, in the fall. In December of 2023, our ministry expanded the grant program to better respond to urgent security needs and to help ensure communities can worship safely amidst the concerning rise in Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. Time and time again, we have shown how our ministry adapts to changes and responds to the needs of our communities. We look forward to continuing our efforts to serve our communities in the coming year.

To support the people of Ontario while continuing to create a more competitive and resilient economy, MCM, the ministry, works to empower and equip Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities to reach their full potential. The ministry is working to create opportunities for youth, small businesses and organizations across the province, especially for groups facing barriers. One of these programs is the Black youth action plan, an economic empowerment program first announced in 2020 and administered by my ministry since its creation. Since then, these programs have served over 20,000 Black youth and young professionals. Most recently, in 2025-26, the ministry invested \$16.5 million in the Black youth action plan's economic empowerment program so that Black youth and young professionals can develop the skills needed to help them launch their careers in high-demand sectors such as health, information technology, automotive and other skilled trades.

We were joined at that announcement by two of the members of the committee, the member from Mississauga-Malton and PA Babikian, the member for Scarborough-Agincourt. I realize I'm allowed to say member's names: Deepak Anand, from Mississauga-Malton. We were at the Youth Taking Flight simulator, which was

transformational. It impacted me deeply to see youth in communities that never had the opportunity to see themselves in the aviation sector, never saw themselves in a pilot uniform, never saw themselves getting into aerospace engineering, into high-skilled STEM jobs. This is a program where they're taking kids, giving them the opportunity—that exposure to it—and I think we will see dividends from that program and from many programs under the Black youth action plan for years to come.

I will note, Chair, for the committee, I did participate in the Youth Taking Flight. I flew two different planes. Don't ask me the names of them. One was small; one was big—and I landed them both. I've got to say, on the second landing, thank God for co-pilots.

Anyway, I want to talk about the racialized and Indigenous supports for entrepreneurs—or the RAISE program, commonly known. In September, our government reopened applications for the RAISE program. We invested an additional \$15 million over three years in 2023-24 to expand and enhance the RAISE program, which empowers Indigenous, Black and other racialized entrepreneurs to start or grow their small businesses in Ontario. This additional investment will prepare more than 1,400 Indigenous, Black and other racialized entrepreneurs to grow successful businesses that will create good jobs for Ontarians, provide goods and services, and foster stronger, more united communities. Our government is also working to ensure community voices and organizations are reflected in government decision-making to make better, more effective programs and services.

I'll talk about the advocate for community opportunities, or the ACO, who is a special adviser who works as a liaison between government and marginalized communities to better understand the needs of Ontarians and provide strategic advice to inform government action. In the coming year, the ACO will continue engaging with communities and organizations to ensure their voices inform policy and program recommendations.

I want to thank our new ACO appointed this year, one Patrice Barnes, whom members of this House will know well, with a long history of engaging in community, making sure that diverse voices are represented. She carries that work very ably, and I think I speak on behalf of the whole ministry—the whole government, frankly—when I say that we're lucky to have her in that role.

Ms. Barnes also in her role chairs the Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity, which is another way that we are ensuring we are engaging with communities to create better programs and services. The council is an advisory group that champions community voices and provides advice to government on how to help young people succeed in Ontario's changing economy. The PCEO's 15 appointed members include intergenerational experts from a wide range of professional backgrounds, including youth members.

In the coming year, the council will continue to support our government's key initiatives, such as a Black youth action plan, and do consultations on the amended anti-

racism strategy to make significant strides in advancing social and economic empowerment priorities.

I turn now to the citizenship—sorry, time check, Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Six and a half minutes.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Six and a half minutes left, right?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Yes.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Okay. I was going to say, if I was only speaking six and a half minutes, then it flew by.

I want to highlight the honours and awards programs through the citizenship, inclusion and heritage division, which includes the Ontario Honours and Awards Secretariat, or OHAS. The Ontario Honours and Awards Secretariat, OHAS, leads the delivery of honours and awards on behalf of our government, including our highest honour, the Order of Ontario. Throughout the year, the secretariat administers and delivers 23 honours and awards programs that recognize approximately 10,000 Ontarians annually for their service to their communities and to the province. In the coming year, OHAS will continue to deliver recognition programs to strengthen our province, encourage civic participation, promote citizen engagement and support our ministry partners in an advisory capacity.

In fall 2024, our government introduced the Honouring Veterans Act to honour the sacrifices and service of veterans. Ontario is home to approximately 149,000 veterans today and that is growing, which is why we passed the Honouring Veterans Act: to increase financial and community supports; open more career pathways for veterans and military families; and so much more.

As part of the act and with the support of the OHAS team, the Ontario Honours and Awards Secretariat, we officially launched the new Ontario Veterans Award for Community Service Excellence in partnership with the Ontario branches of the Royal Canadian Legion. This is a first-of-its-kind provincial award that expands recognition and celebrates veterans who have made significant and sustained contributions to their community. The idea being—we know and we heard from the veterans' community that we need to recognize veterans for the service they give to our community after their service life. Life doesn't end after service. We all need to do a better job of supporting and commemorating and thanking them, but also acknowledging them for the work that they continue to do.

I'll note that initiative came through this government, through a really wonderful gentleman named Michael Ford, who was the minister before me. I had the honour of tabling the bill on his behalf as the acting minister last year and it was the first bill I had ever tabled. We tabled it on a Monday; we passed it on a Wednesday; we got royal assent on a Thursday, in time for Remembrance Day. The reason we were able to do that is because the NDP, the Liberals, the independents, the Green MPPs, as well as my colleagues in the PC caucus, gave unanimous consent to pass that bill quickly. It's something I'll always be grateful for, the spirit of collaboration. I know the veterans I have

spoken to—and I suspect members have spoken to veterans in their communities—those veterans serving organizations, they sure appreciate it.

So I want to acknowledge the great work done by this Legislature across the board to make sure that we are supporting those who have defended our country. I don't know if we can ever properly thank those who have served our country, Chair, but we can sure as heck try. That bill was a very strong step forward by this House in doing just that.

As we honour those who have served and continue to serve our country, we also recognize the importance of preserving the stories and places that define Ontario's identity—which is a cool segue that was written for me here to bring me to the Ontario Heritage Act, which we also administer, which sets out the province's framework for conserving and promoting cultural heritage resources. I am proud to say that in 2025, we marked the 50th anniversary of the Ontario Heritage Act—maybe we should give it its own heritage designation. That's a very meta comment. Jonathan, don't laugh.

We marked the 50th anniversary of the Ontario Heritage Act. It is an enduring piece of legislation that has helped protect the province's cultural and archaeological heritage for half a century. Since the enactment of the Ontario Heritage Act, Ontario now has over 37,000 registered archaeological sites, with 3,000 archaeological reports submitted annually, which is a challenge and an opportunity I'm sure we'll get into in some of the Q&A.

There are over 1,300 provincial plaques installed by the Ontario Heritage Trust across the province; over 9,000 individually designated properties, including 1,293 properties designated between 2020 and 2025; more than 145 designated heritage conservation districts, which contain over 27,000 properties; and more than 150 provincial heritage properties.

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I'll talk about archaeology. With over 37,000 registered archaeological sites in Ontario and roughly 500 additional sites being added each year, the ministry has an important role to ensure the protection and conservation of archaeological sites and artifacts under the Ontario Heritage Act. As the regulator of licensed archaeologists in Ontario, the ministry provides appropriate oversight by ensuring that licensed archaeologists comply with the act and its regulations; that archaeological reports meet provincial standards; that information about Ontario's archaeological records, such as the register of reports, are available to researchers; and that archaeological collections are—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): One minute left.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Oh, gosh. I'll speed run.

All that to say, it's an important sector; one that we need to regulate. I thank all the staff that do diligent work to make sure that we keep that sector accountable and transparent. Importantly, we thank the 500 licensed archaeologists in Ontario for the work they do to preserve our heritage.

We are seeing some challenges in the space. We note that the standards and guidelines around archaeology, for

instance, haven't been updated since 2011, and we're engaged in heritage framework transformation to bring those standards and guidelines into 2025 to, frankly, set us up as a province, working in collaboration with all partners and, importantly, with First Nations partners, 133 First Nations communities across Ontario, to make sure that we are achieving the outcomes that the people expect us to deliver on: preserving resources and doing the important work.

I'm happy to follow up further in—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you. I'm sure there will be questions.

Hon. Graham McGregor: I was just getting good.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister, for your presentation.

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

As always, please remember to make your comments through the Chair. As Chair, if a member seeks to reclaim the floor during the rotation while the minister is responding, I will recognize the member and allow them to reclaim the floor to ask a new question.

For the deputy minister, assistant deputy ministers and ministry staff, please state your name and title the first time you speak so that the proceedings can be accurately recorded in Hansard.

I will now start with MPP Gilmour from the official opposition.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you very much, Chair. It's great to be here. I'm still feeling very new to this. This is only my second estimates, so I'm grateful for the welcome that I've experienced and what you've brought to us so far.

It's lovely to hear about the \$12.7 million that was announced this morning—is that correct?

Interjection.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Yes, great. Thank you to all those behind who are just so diligently working; appreciate you very much.

My first question is actually around the Anti-Racism Directorate. I'm seeing that it's estimated to be \$236,000 less this year than last year. Can you tell me why that is?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you for that, and note, importantly, that the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant is open right now, so we hope all members share that with your communities, get the applications in. We want to make sure that we are responsive to community and, obviously, the rise in anti-hate tensions. Of course, it is incredibly important work that we need to do.

I'll say that the Anti-Racism Directorate works year after year. We establish a report that goes out in August every year detailing the whole-of-government approach around this. We have invested on anti-racism initiatives \$132 million from my ministry alone over the years.

On the slight change in some of the funding year over year, I'll turn it to the deputy to give us a technical response on the dollars and cents.

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Good morning to the committee. My name is Nosa Ero-Brown. I am the deputy minister responsible for the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism. I'm pleased to be joined by my staff.

Thank you so much to the member for the question. I'll just let you know that the Anti-Racism Directorate actually saw a net increase due to some internal realignment of the Black youth action plan program from the citizenship, inclusion and heritage division into the Anti-Racism Directorate for better alignment. This is part of our plan to have a more effective delivery of the programs and services.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay. So am I to understand then that that \$16.7 million is both the ARD from, as we understood it, last year and the youth component to it?

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Thank you for the question. I would invite the assistant deputy minister of the Anti-Racism Directorate to provide a more fulsome response to your question.

Dr. Parm Bhatthal: Good morning, everybody. Parm Bhatthal, assistant deputy minister of the Anti-Racism Directorate.

Through you, Chair: As the deputy alluded to, the Anti-Racism Directorate's budget has increased from last year as a result of internal realignment. The Black youth action plan moved over from the citizenship, inclusion and heritage division to the Anti-Racism Directorate. The only program that saw a decrease was a two-year pilot program that we did with the city of London for \$250,000. That was a time-limited anti-hate pilot response with the city of London.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay. So, combined, then, if you could tell me, with the ARD and the youth piece, what is the total budget being spent there in those two lines together that have been combined? While you're looking, the reason I'm asking is because I'm seeing on page 51 the loss of the youth action plan. I know it's down 100%. I'm understanding that it's been realigned, but I'm just trying to figure out if the budget has remained the same in terms of spending on these two spaces or if there's been a change there.

Dr. Parm Bhatthal: Through you, Chair: The budget for the Anti-Racism Directorate is estimated to be just under \$50 million: \$49.5 million. That does include the legacy Anti-Racism Directorate budget as well as the internal realignment.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you.

I'm seeing here, Minister, that there's \$7 million for staffing in the ARD. I'm wondering if you can briefly—because I've got lots of other questions—describe the ARD staffing function for me.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Yes. I appreciate that. Part of it is through—the ARD administers the Black youth action plan, so the \$16.5-million Economic Empowerment Stream. They also engage in working through the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant, which, again, is open

today. I can't say that enough. We want to make sure people apply for that.

But they also carry a very important function from a cross-government perspective. The Anti-Racism Directorate works to make sure that all of Ontario's government institutions are free of discrimination, they're safe places for anyone from any background, any walk of life that they come from. I think they do very important work in that regard, and they report on that work every year, in August, through the anti-racism strategy annual report-back.

But I think it might merit—if the member would like, I'm happy to turn to the deputy for some of the technicals on who exactly works there, their job titles and that kind of piece.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: It would be lovely to, and maybe you could elaborate a little on the evidence-based research being done by those ARD staff.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Brilliant. Then I'll turn it over to the deputy.

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Thank you, Minister.

Chair, through you: The Anti-Racism Directorate, as the minister mentioned, does administer our anti-racism programs, including RAISE, AHSP and also the Anti-Racism Strategy.

They also have carriage of the Anti-Racism Act, which enables us to collect race-based data across key sectors in the province, including child welfare, education and the justice sector. The Anti-Racism Directorate provides support to these sectors and to ministries across the province to ensure that the barriers to participation and opportunities for Indigenous, Black and other racialized Ontarians are removed.

The Anti-Racism Directorate includes professionals that are seasoned in anti-racism work and also work across the sector to enable that the Anti-Racism Act continues to be implemented.

1030

In addition to that, as the minister mentioned, the directorate also makes sure that we monitor and use data and evidence to report on the work that is being done, so it's not only collecting outcomes-based data but also outputs and reporting all of those through our annual report, the most recent of which was submitted this past summer.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you for that. I'm wondering, Minister, just sort of following up a little bit on this, if you could speak a little further to the criteria that is being used to determine the funding priorities of the ARD?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Regarding which part of the ARD? Forgive me.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I had it sort of broken out into the youth and the other one. Now I understand that they're combined, so you could actually speak to both for me.

Hon. Graham McGregor: The Black youth action plan, for instance, was born out of the realization that for a huge segment of the population, which are youth from the Black community across Ontario, that the opportunities that other kids were having and other youth were having simply weren't there in their lives, and we need to

step up as a society, as a government, to make sure we do that.

The Black youth action plan this year is funding 57 community partners to work to do—frankly, to give opportunities to youth that don't have access to that opportunity otherwise.

I talked about Youth Taking Flight as one of the ones that we did the announcement on, but there are dozens of community partners across Ontario that we work with. One of the philosophies of the program is that if government is not doing its part to support marginalized communities, then government should partner with community organizations that are doing the work on the ground, help fund them and help amplify the work they're doing already, quite frankly, to make sure that we are getting the best return on investment that we possibly can and betting on these youth and their potential.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you. To that point, one of the funding priorities is looking locally at organizations that are doing the work on the ground. I'm wondering about the London pilot you just mentioned. My understanding was that that came into play—and again, I wasn't here at the time—when the Afzaal family had tragically lost their lives due to Islamophobia. I'm just wondering why that program is not being extended, given your other comment about hate crimes being on the rise.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you for the question, and it's a good question. I would say the resources that we invested in partnership with the city of London, a lot of it was spent on getting the infrastructure together to be able to deliver programming. The city of London is still delivering that program today, so we were able to help them establish that anti-Islamophobia program and kind of get it on its feet, which is why it was a time-limited funding program.

Regarding the Afzaal family, I think I speak on behalf of all members—when you see that happen, it was heartbreaking, not just for the community in London but for the community all across Ontario. We are continually praying. I know all members of the committee are praying for the families. Our hearts break for those who knew them and for the whole community in London. I do take some solace knowing the individual who committed this—the terrorist, frankly, who committed this against the Afzaal family—is rotting in prison. I hope he remains there for the rest of his miserable life.

But you highlight a really good point around the need to do more, and so we continue to do more through the anti-hate security and prevention program to deliver service directly to communities to help keep them safe. One of the things that was a flexibility—and please take back your time if I'm going too long, but it's an important point.

One of the things that we changed, in response to community and in response to the National Council of Canadian Muslims and other community organizations, was that back in 2023, an illegible cost was short-term security. In the Muslim faith and in many faiths, you have a lot of people coming to the place of worship, obviously, every

day for prayer, but particularly on big holidays—Ramadan, for instance.

So by changing the eligibility requirement, mosques across Ontario are able to hire short-term security personnel, as well as upgraded doors, windows, locks, security cameras, cyber security. But that short-term security personnel are able to keep their communities safe in mosques all across Ontario, including in London, including in Toronto. I think it's a beautiful thing and something that we are very keen to continue to invest in.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: So, then, does that mean that your announcement of the \$12.7 million today means that this is a permanent program, or is this a one-year announcement?

Hon. Graham McGregor: The Anti-Hate Security Prevention Grant has existed in its current form since 2023. It existed in a previous form since 2020. It's obviously a decision of government to continue to run these programs. I would say we funded it every year since. I think it's a huge success metric for the government and funding that communities rely on each year.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have a minute and a half left, just to let you know.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay. But I believe I have another round coming up, so—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Oh, yes, you do.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Just quickly, can you describe an initiative through the ministry that has most positively impacted those hate crime rates that we were talking about?

Hon. Graham McGregor: I'd point to the Anti-Hate Security Prevention Grant. I think this is part of changing the name. When we're funding directly in security measures for a place of worship, obviously, if an individual has hate in their heart and wants to commit an act, that individual will try to find a way to do that. When we have places of worship with cameras that are visible and big signage—we have, actually, a Seventh-Day Adventist Church in my riding with a big “No Cameras” sign, “Illegal Dumping Will Be Prosecuted,” “Graffiti Will Be Prosecuted.” Some of these things really prevent crimes from happening in the future.

I know time is limited, so I would love to answer more about that in supplementaries.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have 20 seconds.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I can cede my time.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Okay. We'll now move on to the third party. MPP—

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Tsao.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Tsao. Sorry.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: No problem. Thank you very much, Chair.

As I always do, I want to start by saying thank you to the minister for taking the time to be here, and the deputy minister and, of course, all the members of the OPS. We know how much time and effort goes into preparing for meetings like this, so as a former OPSer myself, I want to say thank you for all of your hard work.

Chair, I also want to acknowledge the critical mandate that this ministry oversees. Over the past several years, communities that have long been integral to Ontario's cultural and social fabric are facing, really, an alarming increase in threats, vandalism and harassment simply because of who they are and what they believe.

Across Ontario and around the world, communities are becoming increasingly divided along ethnic, linguistic, religious and political lines. This polarization is eroding trust, deepening fear and, indeed, seeping into our politics.

We don't need to look far for examples. In the early days of COVID-19, for example, members of Ontario's East Asian communities faced a surge of discrimination and violence. Today, we continue to see that troubling trend from anti-Semitism to Islamophobic attacks, to hate-driven rhetoric online that targets faith-based and racialized groups.

One example that I did want to bring to the committee today and make special mention of is of a synagogue that serves a number of residents in my community. The synagogue's name is—and please forgive me, members of the congregation, if I don't pronounce this name well—Kehillat Shaarei Torah synagogue. This is an important institution that serves a number of my constituents, and it has been the victim of vandalization over 10 times.

In Don Valley North itself, we have Advent Lutheran Church, whose front doors have been smashed three times. So this hate has seeped into many aspects of our lives.

I also want to mention online hate speech. As an MPP, we regularly post greetings for various religious or ethnic holidays online. Just last week, I posted a video wishing the Hindu community of Ontario a happy Hindu Heritage Month. Within hours, I received multiple hate and derogatory comments on that post.

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This is a disturbing trend in our society. Why I'm bringing this here today, Chair, is because it requires more than just reactive measures from a government. We appreciate security cameras and stronger locks because that speaks to the symptoms, but what we need is actual work, we need programs, we need investments that speak to cause.

Greater focus needs to be placed on preventative approaches, including community-building initiatives that address the root cause of hate and division. We need programs that bring people together, strengthen our shared identity as Ontarians and make multiculturalism not just a principle but a lived value.

That's what I'm looking for in the estimates right now—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): I have to—

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: —and that's why I bring this up, Chair.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Point of order.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Okay, thank you. Point of order from MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: I appreciate MPP Tsao's concerns and I share the concerns, but the issue is that what he is raising needs a multi-ministry-problem approach to solve the problem. We all realize the increase of hate because

we are living in unprecedented times. The challenges that we are facing are immense, and it is not only a one-ministry problem. So I would appreciate if the member could focus on the estimates of the ministry.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. MPP Tsao has the floor. The topic is for the ministry we are speaking to today.

Interjection.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): I know you want me to say it, that's fine. It's citizenship and multiculturalism.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Multiculturalism, exactly.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Tsao, you can continue speaking. It is about the estimates here. So if there's a question coming—

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Absolutely. I have a question right here. That's the reason why I went specifically into locks and cameras, because that's part of a program that helps religious institutions get—but my point, Chair, is that, in these estimates, we cannot just focus on locks and cameras. In our budget for this ministry, we need to go beyond that. I worry that we're only looking at symptoms. We need to look at root causes.

I want to look at the Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant Program. I see here that this grant will conclude in July 2025. A lot of groups here who have been receiving this are uncertain about what's going to happen next. What is the logic behind the sunset of July 2025, Minister?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you to my colleague for the question. It's a wide-ranging question so I want to make sure that I respect my colleague by trying to hit all the points. If I don't hit every point you're asking about, please, focus me.

On the Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant, that was a time-limited program the government put forward. We are always looking at, I would say, new ways to make sure that we are supporting communities across the board.

The member's comment about the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant and doors and locks and security cameras not being preventative, I would beg to the contrary. When you have cameras out front of a place of worship, people who want to commit these incidents know that they aren't able to commit them.

I'll note for the member, the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant—the same grant that the member is saying is not enough—we've invested, since 2023 to 2025, \$297,500 in that member's riding for places of worship, for synagogues, for churches, for mosques, for gurdwaras, for Hindu mandirs. That member and his party did not vote to support that investment. This is an investment that we put forward in the budget after the election, when the member was sitting in the House. The member chose not to.

If that budget didn't pass, the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant—the same one that is benefiting his riding by almost \$300,000, Chair—would not exist if every member of the House voted the same way that that member did.

There's a fall economic statement that's coming up later this month to be voted on. It was tabled by the finance

minister. The member will have an opportunity to vote yes or no on that again.

I understand there's an urge for party discipline, and I know your whip and your House leader will tell you not to support it for partisan purposes. I hope that you do vote for it because there are critical investments, like the member has indicated, which are directly benefiting your riding. We'd like to continue.

I share some commonality, I think, with the member around posting out greetings. What you've told me about posting about Hindu Heritage Month breaks my heart. When you see that happening to politicians who are posting greetings, it's awful, and you think about what's happening to community groups every single day. It just breaks your heart. We have to be the type of province where anybody can live, work, succeed, know they belong, feel safe and, frankly, be safe.

I made a post recently about Gurburab. It's the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of the Sikh faith. I spoke a little bit of Punjabi in my video; I'm a Punjabi banda.

Remarks in Punjabi.

I did some speaking in my video. I got a lot of love from the community on it, but I also saw a lot of hateful push-back and, frankly, radical nonsense. I think some of the comments said, "You're betraying your country. You're a traitor to Canada."

I think about folks like Buckam Singh, a Sikh Canadian who served in the First World War, defending this country—the Sikh community being in Canada for over a hundred years, Chair. And that hateful rhetoric to say that Gurburab isn't Canadian—to engage in that hateful rhetoric is way less Canadian. What's un-Canadian is hating your neighbour because of how they worship, whether they worship on a Friday, a Saturday or a Sunday, or engaging in vile acts of hatred against people because of where they come from. I think the member and I are aligned on this.

I say that to say that the member has a very important decision to make. We've got a \$12.75-million investment going forward in the fall economic statement. That investment doesn't go through if that bill doesn't pass. Now, the 80 members of the PC caucus—hopefully I'll have their support and we're able to pass the bill. But this is serious, because these investments are making a huge difference in every member's community at this committee. They're making a difference in Don Valley North. They're making a difference in Brampton North, where I'm from.

I realize my answer's pretty long, so I'll—

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Chair, I wish to reclaim my time, please.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Please go ahead.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Please go ahead.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Chair, I just want to express my disappointment at how politicized this conversation has become. I've come here with a genuine intention to speak about anti-racism, about how to make a better Ontario for all of us. As someone in this Legislature, one of the few elected members who is actually a visible minority, some-

one whose grandparents fought in wars for this country, to be spoken down to—I take great offence.

I would like to say to this minister that, if this government did not use omnibus bills to push through all these things—in these estimates, in this budget, if you brought substantive legislation to protect people, to fight racism, and not bundle it in some omnibus bill that you know I couldn't support, I would stand behind it right away. The people in my riding would agree with me. So I take extreme offence to what I've heard here this morning, Minister. It's not right, Chair.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Can I—was that a question?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: No. I'm not finished yet, Minister. You have members here laughing because they think this is a joke. This is not a joke. Look, I have serious questions—

Interjection.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Chair, please.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Okay. I'm just going say I don't like the tone that's going on. There are questions on the ministry and the estimates—

Mr. Deepak Anand: Excuse me—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Anand, you'll get your time. Just hold on. I'm speaking right now.

MPP Anand is coming with a point of order, but I'm just asking everyone to stick to the estimates on the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism and ask the questions as best can be answered in this form.

MPP Anand, did you have a point of order?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Chair. I just want to say that, absolutely, we as members have a commitment to Ontarians. What we are doing today is about estimates, about the numbers, how these numbers matter, where the expenses are going, how these expenses are being incurred, whether they're increased or decreased. The member said so well there should not be politicizing in this committee, and I would say a lot of them are putting clips, making clips, and saying, "Oh, you're laughing." He could be laughing at anything. Saying he's laughing at you? No, it's not true. Please—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, MPP Anand. I think I've said that before.

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MPP Tsao, please continue.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Yes, I appreciate that very much, Chair. I have a few minutes left here, so I would like to focus again back to the Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant Program, as my question originally started with. Again, why is this program ending?

Hon. Graham McGregor: I do want to say that I think we all have a duty to make sure that we have a high level of rhetoric here in the committee. Certainly, none of my interactions are meant to belittle the member, but I do want to impress the importance of voting for these investments on the member. The Ontario Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant is a real, effective program that is helping places of worship all across Ontario: in my riding, in the member for Mississauga–Malton's riding, in the member

for Don Valley North's riding—again, an investment of \$297,500, invested from 2023 to 2025.

I don't mean to overly politicize, but it's just a fact. If these budgets don't go forward, if these investments don't take place—

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Chair, I'd like to reclaim my time. I'm asking a simple question: Why is the program ending? And I'm not getting an answer.

Chair, through you, can the minister please try again? I'm asking directly about the budget, about the estimates and I'm not getting an answer. I'll try again, Chair.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): It's your time.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Minister, the Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant Program is ending July 2025. Why is it ending? Will you extend it?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you to the member. Again, while we try to elevate the rhetoric of the committee, Chair, I would just ask—these are serious questions.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): And there's 40 seconds left in this round.

Hon. Graham McGregor: I'm giving a serious answer. Again, these issues are deep, and they're complicated, and we need to take them seriously.

The Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant was always established as a time-limited program. We're always looking at other ways that we can support, but at the same time, I don't want to allow members of the public that are watching from home to hear this disparaging of the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant, which is helping places of worship all across Ontario. We've got a \$132-million investment—

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: [*Inaudible*] one second: I did not disparage that program, Chair.

Hon. Graham McGregor: —a \$132-million investment, Chair—

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I reclaim that one second, Chair.

Hon. Graham McGregor: —in anti-racism initiatives across Ontario.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I want that one second back, Chair.

Hon. Graham McGregor: That member—

Interjection.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Take your time back.

Interjection.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Chair, please, I can't speak over the minister.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Go ahead. I'll give you 60 seconds.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I just need to address that fact for Hansard: I never disparaged that program. In fact, I said it's important and good, but we need both. We need to be able to walk and speak at the same time. We need more, not less. Thank you, Chair.

Interjection.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): I will again go back that I would like to see a nicer tone among all the members.

The government side is for 15 minutes, and MPP Babikian is going to start. There are other rounds that are coming around.

Okay, MPP Babikian, 15 minutes on your side of the government.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity. Thank you, Minister, the deputy minister and the rest of the staff for your hard work. It has been a great pleasure for me in the last few months to serve as the PA to the minister. I had the opportunity to travel with the minister, to attend events in Ottawa, Cambridge, Mississauga and Brampton, and see how effective these programs that we have are—the race program, the Black youth action plan grants—and how they are changing the lives of people and how they are making input in the future of our generations to come, future generations.

I come from a diverse group. I am not a coloured individual, but I come from a minority. I was elected in Scarborough—Agincourt, which is a diverse community—probably I can say one of the most diverse communities in Ontario. I deal on a daily basis with issues related to racism, anti-hate etc.

The issue is that, unfortunately, in the last few years, we have seen how our society changed, and no ministry has a magic wand to address all these issues immediately. We have to address them, and this ministry has been doing an amazing job in trying to catch up with the development, with the change that we are facing in our society.

That's why I was pleased when we visited, for example, the African, Caribbean and Black Wellness Centre in Ottawa. We sat down for two hours with the board and with the members who were part of that program, and we saw the gratitude in their expressions about what we are doing. And not only they are serving the Ottawa community, but they were also thinking of expanding their services to Toronto because of this ministry's work.

I have been with the minister to different groups. We made the announcement at Crafty Ramen in Kitchener. We were together at uFly. We made the announcement, and we have seen the youths and how they are benefiting. I had the chance to speak to some of the students, the youth who were participating. They were grateful for the opportunity to change their life and to become productive members of our society.

Minister, can you elaborate little bit more on the racialized and Indigenous support program and how this program and the grant have been helping people? And can you give us more details on this program?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you to the member for that question. I have been able to go with MPP Babikian to many events. We were just on Monday, Chair, at the HMCS York, the Navy reserve division in downtown Toronto, doing a citizenship ceremony: 200 individuals, representing 48 new countries of origin, all taking their pledge to become Canadian. It was one of the most beautiful experiences you could go through, the day before Remembrance Day. You saw people come from all different countries: from the Middle East, from Africa and, actually, a lot from the States. I'll leave members to maybe

guess why so many Americans might be interested in becoming Canadian nowadays.

What really took me aback in that room was the hope and optimism on people's faces when they took their Canadian flag and we handed out pins. PA Babikian and I were able to hand out pins and shake their hands. I'll note we were joined by—again, in the need for cross-partisanship—Chris Glover, who's the Spadina–Fort York MPP from the NDP, a great guy, a friend of the committee. We were also joined by Chi Nguyen from the federal Liberal government, who's the local member there, who joined us. I think everybody saw how special it was. I recommend, frankly, for all parliamentarians to get down to one of these citizenship ceremonies and really remember the people who we are here to serve and why we do what we do.

The RAISE Grant that the member talked about is a very successful program for the government, which is a small business support program specifically focused on racialized and Indigenous entrepreneurs who may not have had access to the same opportunities, frankly, that other people have had. It's a three-year program, a \$15 million investment, \$5 million per year. Last year, we saw some pretty staggering positive KPI numbers: 500 individuals, or, I think, just off—499 or something like that; forgive me—that went through the program. Over 99% of them finished the program. Over 99% of the people who finished the program reported satisfaction with the training they went through. And the RAISE Grant is \$10,000 for business growth investment, so it's not for the day-to-day operation of the business, but for building for the future.

But more important, in my humble opinion, than the \$10,000 grant is the 10-week coaching program that they go through through the DMZ. We saw the businesses that went through, the high satisfaction rates, but we also saw the average business revenue of somebody that went through the program increase almost \$60,000 per year. And that's just in the year that we track immediately after they do the coaching, never mind the compounding effect year over year over year and what that does for our economy.

It's excellent social policy. It's giving disadvantaged groups a bigger opportunity to step up and bigger opportunities to succeed. It's excellent social policy, but it's also excellent economic policy. Again, a \$60,000-per-year increase—34%, over a third, of the businesses that went through the program went on to hire a new employee.

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When we talk about supporting businesses, of course, that RAISE program works in concert with a multi-ministry approach, work that's happening through the Associate Minister of Small Business, through our MEDJCT economic development team, through our labour ministry etc. There's a whole host of measures that we're putting forward as a government to make sure that everybody is able to succeed in the Ontario economy. But that RAISE program is really a special one. It's an excellent one.

I was happy to announce this year's round of it with the member at Crafty Ramen in Kitchener, hearing from a

business owner that went through it. We had one business owner—it's in my notes somewhere, but I'm recalling from memory—they nine-times-ed their business revenue. They got in major catalogues all over the place—just fabulous stories from the RAISE Grant. We're glad that people applied. It's always oversubscribed and a competitive one to get into, but we encourage people to apply. It's just one of the ways, I think, of many, that members of this House, of this Legislature, can support small businesses, which are the backbone of our economy.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Sandhu, please. There's six and a half, almost seven, minutes left.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Let me begin by appreciating the minister and the entire team at the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism for the excellent work they are doing, especially in serving Ontario's incredibly diverse and multicultural communities.

I appreciate the minister for the great work he's doing, as we always say that Ontario's strength lies in its diversity. I appreciate the efforts you're doing in fostering inclusion and cultural understanding—truly commendable, especially the grant programs you mentioned and highlighted already that are helping the communities.

I wanted to touch more on the other grant programs, like the Heritage Organization Development Grant or PHO. How are these programs further strengthening community engagement and cultural tourism across Ontario?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you to the member for the question and for the member's strong leadership across Ontario but, importantly, in Brampton, which deserves strong leaders to step up for them.

Through the—we call it the HODG and the PHO—forgive me; I should grab the name, but the PHO. Basically, these are grants that we do to support organizations that are commemorating Ontario's history, all across the province. Through annual operating support, these grants help over 160 heritage organizations deliver public education programs, walking tours, exhibits and lectures that bring local history to life.

They range from small-town historical societies to province-wide associations, like the Ontario Historical Society or the William Morris Society of Canada. By funding these outreach activities, getting community involved in celebrating our history and commemorating our history, the big stories and the small stories, this is how we keep the fabric of our province together.

We talk about the need to fight back against division in our communities, and we do that through a lot of ways, through direct supports. But we also need to make sure that we are telling a story of Ontario and a story of Canada that people want to believe in, that people want to be a part of. We live in the best province and the best country in the world, bar none. The reason for that is because you can come to Ontario from anywhere, from any continent, worship any faith; you can pray on Friday, Saturday, Sunday—not often enough, if you ask some of my family members about me. But you belong in Ontario, you can feel safe in Ontario, you can succeed in Ontario, and we need to tell that story.

Another organization that tells that story very well—we're joined here by the CEO of the Ontario Heritage Trust. Through the Provincial Plaque Program, they are really meaningfully engaging and commemorating Ontario's history, all across Ontario—some stories that folks, frankly, wouldn't have heard: the Hungarian '56ers.

We were at Queen's Park recently. I was with the Minister of Finance, who is of Hungarian origin himself. The member Jonathan Tsao was there from the Liberal caucus. We had—I don't know if there were NDP members that were there as well, and all coming together to commemorate folks that fought against communism and fought for the freedom and opportunity for their families to succeed.

The Josiah Henson Museum, an Ontario Heritage Trust property; the Cheltenham Badlands, just a little north of where I'm from in Brampton North, administered and protected through the Ontario Heritage Trust—they do absolutely fabulous work. And I just want to say on the record, thank you to Helen Chimirri-Russell for her leadership and John Ecker, the chair, and the whole board that's there and all the staff that work diligently.

Stuff like this doesn't happen by accident. Commemoration has to happen through intention. People have to devote time and effort and energy to making sure that we're commemorating what we need to commemorate. I think they do a fabulous job, and I'm thankful to the member for asking about it so I had the opportunity to highlight it here today in estimates in front of committee.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much.

MPP Anand, two minutes and 20 seconds.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Chair, before I ask my question, I just want to start by saying, I came to Canada in 2000, and I got nominated in 17 years, got first elected in 2018. I cannot thank Canadians enough for opening up their arms and giving everyone equal opportunity.

I just want to mention that—the member on the other side talked about Hindu heritage, the pushback he got. So I was a little worried, how can Canadians think so. Now, I want to share some of the information which I noticed, and then I'm going to ask the minister a question on that.

On X, or whatever Twitter is, on his post, there were three replies: one was their own, and one was somebody saying, "I hate Indians"—didn't talk about Hindus, but they're talking about Indians taking jobs. So that could be one case. The other one was actually a Hindu group saying the Liberal party is not doing enough. I didn't see any Canadians more than this talking against anything in this post—and I'm just talking about this post.

And then I went to Facebook, just to check. There was no reply at all.

Then I went to Instagram, thinking maybe there is a reply on Instagram. Actually, there is no Hindu heritage on Instagram from the member opposite. It's on Diwali he did—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Anand, that is—

Mr. Deepak Anand: I'm coming to the question. Minister, what is your opinion about Canadians, and how are we doing about the anti-hate?

Hon. Graham McGregor: I appreciate the member's detailed question. I'll answer about the estimates. Look, we know that, regardless of where people come from, they need to have an opportunity to live and succeed, and they should see themselves represented in Ontario.

Interjections.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Sorry, I don't know what part of that is annoying the member—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Minister, I think I'm going to stop your answer.

MPP Anand was inappropriate in his prelude in the comments. He actually should apologize to MPP Tsao.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I withdraw, and I apologize.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Tsao, are you okay with that?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Yes, thank you. I just do not appreciate being gaslit. And I'll tell you why. Those were there, and I'm not crazy—

Hon. Graham McGregor: You're going to get your time.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I'm sorry. You're right; this is not the time for it. We can talk about it later. But I appreciate the apology. Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you.

We're now going to go over to the official opposition for 15 minutes.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay. Thank you very much.

Hon. Graham McGregor: My answer was just getting good, Chair.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: It's clear that speaking on these issues invoked a lot of passion, a lot of feelings for all of us. I really want to drill down a little further on some of the pieces, picking up on MPP Tsao's question around the end of the security grant and the other grant. What is going to take their place?

We're seeing that hate crimes are going up year over year. Certainly, in my community, I'm knocking on doors where Jewish constituents are in tears. I am speaking to racialized individuals who have had things thrown at them. I, myself, have a racialized daughter, and I am very worried about the world in which we are participating in. In a world where we are funding hydro rebates to \$8 billion, and then we're only spending \$49.5 million on anti-hate in the province, I'm really concerned.

Can I ask this question first? Let me just really focus my question: What do you think accounts for the hate crimes being up, year over year?

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Hon. Graham McGregor: It's a good question. I think there are a lot of factors to it. Our work is to make sure that the ministry is well-funded and the government is well-funded to respond to it, and we respond to it in a few ways through our ministry. I know the member talked about some of these grants—the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant. Again, the new run of it was launched today. One of the—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: If I can reclaim—

Hon. Graham McGregor: Oh, sorry.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: No, I just want to reclaim just to refocus you, because I know you want to talk about the grants. What I want to talk about is that we don't know what to spend money on if we don't know what is causing hate crimes to go up. So I'm looking for your expertise in terms of this file. What are you seeing that is causing hate crimes to go up, year over year?

Hon. Graham McGregor: So we're seeing—
Interjections.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Sorry, some of the members are talking. I think we see it for a lot of reasons. Certainly, we saw a huge spike in 2023—geopolitical tensions, conflicts that are happening around the world. We saw a huge spike in Islamophobic incidents, a huge spike in anti-Semitic incidents that are occurring.

I think there's a troubling trend that some members have talked about, frankly, regarding social media. Again, the member from Don Valley North talked about some of the attacks on his posts. I've seen attacks on mine. I've seen attacks on members of this committee that have been experiencing these vile incidents.

I think we need to be focused and multi-pronged in how we address it. One of the ways we address it is through the grant. Obviously, we need to deal with the reality that we're facing and support those institutions. We need to invest in programs like the hate crime/extremism unit, which is funding for police services, primarily where you see large spikes in hate crimes, but also cross-collaboration between police services to make sure that when people are committing these acts, they are held accountable.

The other thing we need to do is promote positive Canadian identity and realizing that a Canadian can be from any country in the world. They can worship on any given day.

I note the member's history as a church minister as well. Churches are, as the member from Don Valley North talked about, not immune to hate-motivated incidents and graffiti and some really nasty stuff. They're funded through the grants and—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'm going to reclaim my time, just because I want to refocus us back to understanding some of these root causes. If the ministry is looking at preventing and solving, then I think we really need to understand. I'm looking for the answers in terms of systemic racism, for example. What would you see as examples of systemic racism, not sort of the individual pieces but the larger, systemic racism issues that we are facing at this moment?

Hon. Graham McGregor: I know I'm not allowed to ask, but I'm wondering if the member has read the anti-racism strategy annual report back in August—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Yes.

Hon. Graham McGregor: —because they detail a whole-of-government approach to make sure that we're all rolling in the same direction, across government, to make sure that we tackle some of these challenges.

One of the issues that we tackle directly through the Black youth action plan is that we're seeing graduation rates and employment outcomes for Black youth are more adverse than for other youth in our society.

Youth unemployment is a problem, and the government has taken lots of steps. We disagree on some of the ways to do that, and that's part of parliamentary debate etc. But I think we all agree on the efficacy of a program like the Black youth action plan, which is giving youth an opportunity to achieve careers that they never could have dreamed of.

I was at the Black future tech summit at the Pearson Convention Centre in Mississauga a couple of weeks ago. It's run by this organization called Obsidi. They're a newer funding partnership with the Black youth action plan. They're getting 10 Black youth into high-skilled coding, cyber security jobs with banks and accounting firms, and these jobs are 80 grand a year that they are able to get people directly into.

I think we need to acknowledge that we're not getting the outcomes, frankly, that Ontarians expect us to get to. We need to put programs in place to fund those. We are dedicated to do that but also to improving as we go along to make sure that we are doing it better and we're responsive to future needs.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I would love to keep in this line of understanding the ministry's understanding of systemic racism. Through the Chair, what does this minister think contributes to this systemic racism continuing?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Obviously, we need to build a society where everyone's included and everybody's able to succeed. We put forward a host of measures to make sure we're tackling those challenges.

I encourage folks watching the committee or reading about it in Hansard to check out our annual report back. It's not just my ministry's work but cross-government work that is taking place that's important.

In the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, some of that work happens through programs like the Black youth action plan or through the RAISE Grant. There are—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Apologies. I just want to refocus, reclaim.

Hon. Graham McGregor: I'm answering the question. I just have to—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Let me just reclaim and help. I'm actually looking for—

Hon. Graham McGregor: You've done it a few times, and I just want to be able to answer the question, Chair.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Yes. I am not hearing the answer at all. I am hearing what you're doing, but I'm not hearing the answer to what contributes to systemic racism or naming what you would say—you mentioned challenges. That would get me closer, if you were to name what those challenges are.

For you, what contributes to systemic racism continuing in our province?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thanks. Yes, I'm trying to answer as best as I can, Chair, but forgive me. I believe I've answered that a few times.

Today I am here to talk about the estimates of the ministry.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'll reclaim.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Sorry. Can I—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: No, no.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Please?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: It is my time in terms in wanting to understand.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Okay, whatever you like. I'm happy we do whatever works.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Let her reclaim. I gave you the warning.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Let me reclaim and let me redirect, because clearly, I am not getting an answer to what—

Hon. Graham McGregor: But I do want to talk about the RAISE Grant—sorry.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Yes, MPP Babikian. Do you have a point of order?

Mr. Aris Babikian: Yes, I have a point of order.

I appreciate my colleague on the other side. She wants to claim her time, and that is her right. She can do that by focusing on the estimates.

There are multi-faceted aspects to this issue that we are facing today with racism, hate going on. It is not only a local issue; it is an international issue. There are other developments happening around the world that are affecting us from south of our borders, from the Middle East, from other places.

I appreciate her time, but if she focuses on the questions related to the estimates, it will be much more beneficial to her and to all of us. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, MPP Babikian.

MPP Gilmour has a right to claim her time back. The minister can answer or not answer. Do whatever you can within the ministry.

Go ahead, MPP Gilmour. Let's carry on.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you very much, Chair.

For me, as we move into questions about estimates, where we're sending taxpayers' dollars and where we are speaking to those individuals who are most vulnerable and most under attack in our province, it feels vitally important to me that the minister of this file has a basic understanding of terms and definitions like "systemic racism" and what contributes to it.

Then the next question I was going to ask was around the ways the ARD and others are connected to those basic challenges. However, I didn't hear an answer from the minister on what systemic racism is, what contributes to it. What I heard—forgive me, Minister—was what the government is doing about it.

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I want to move on because I don't want to go around that merry-go-round one more time. I do want to instead

shift, with a little bit of my time that's left, into citizenship, inclusion and heritage, because there's a nearly 50% cut to the estimated budget, as I understand it here. We're going from \$38.6 million in 2024-25 to \$19.4 million. That's an even bigger cut if you actually take the interim actuals that I see.

I'm hearing from Indigenous individuals—Saugeen First Nation, for example, who had the individual build a driveway partway onto their Indigenous burial ground. They're quite concerned about protecting the burial grounds, the ancestral places. If we are cutting down this fund, I'm concerned about how their rights are going to be protected.

Can you tell me, why is this amount going down by half?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Absolutely. Thank you to the member for the question. I think we share goals in making sure the rights of First Nation communities, Indigenous communities are respected. The reason for the decrease in the citizenship, heritage division is due to an internal reallocation of the Black youth action plan from that file to the ARD.

I will note, we are spending more money on heritage and defending First Nations treaty rights than the government ever has, through our ministry and through the Heritage Act. We do that primarily through ensuring that licensed archaeologists do what they're supposed to do, follow the rules and are engaging with First Nations communities when it is appropriate.

I will note, one of the challenges that we have is that we have more archaeological reports being submitted than we ever have—3,000 reports a year. We had a backlog in May 2024 of 3,000 reports waiting in the backlog, waiting for the government to administer—that's bad outcomes across the board. When a file is sitting on the desk of the government and they're unable to disburse that file, it does nothing to protect the resources and the cultural heritage for Ontarians and, importantly, for First Nations communities. It does nothing to make sure that we are developing responsibly and able to move forward collaboratively, hand-in-hand, to build a brighter future.

I'll note that 3,000 backlog reports in May 2024—through an increased investment and actually increasing the citizenship and heritage division's budget, which we have, on heritage files, we've been able to reduce that backlog by 81%, from over 3,000—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Sixty seconds.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: May I reclaim my time?

Hon. Graham McGregor: —in May 2024 to 556 today, and we're aiming to end the backlog in the spring.

It's a success story and great work. I wish I could take all the credit. There's a team behind me that does that work every day.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I have one last question that I would like to ask you. Given that we are about to spend an extra \$2 billion—\$6.5 billion before and now \$8.5 billion—on subsidizing hydro rates for some of the wealthiest people in our province, and we have instead things like

women making 68 cents on the dollar, racialized women making 58 cents on the dollar—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): How is this related?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'm going to get to this—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Well, you've got 10 seconds.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Would the minister consider doubling the anti-racism budget, which would really only be about 0.5% of what we're spending? Would this ministry consider putting their money where their mouth is, taking money out of the hydro subsidy—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): I'm afraid that's all the time we have on this round. I gave you the warning ahead of time.

MPP Tsao, so you have 15 minutes. It's up to you; it's your time now.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I want to touch on a topic that I think the minister will be very happy to talk about: the AHSP grant. It's \$12.75 million; Minister, do you think that's enough?

Hon. Graham McGregor: It's a good question. In years past, we haven't been able to subscribe to the full amount that we've spent on it. When I look at more organizations that are never taking advantage of the security prevention grant—I think there's certainly a positive side to that because that means that we're flowing money directly into community and keeping communities safe—that's a very good thing. But we certainly want to make sure that there's enough money to go around.

We believe so. That's why we've tabled \$12.75 million to make sure that communities are able to access the grant.

But I'll say, our vision as a government—we're always wanting to make sure that we serve our communities the best that we can. We think \$12.75 million is the right number, and we'll see the way that it works when totals come in.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I do agree that protecting physical security, especially at places of worship, is an extremely important thing. I think we all agree with that statement here—

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you for saying that. It's important to hear you say that. Thank you.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Yes, it is important. What is also important is that we also look at how we fight systemic issues that cause these acts as well.

I wanted to know more about this program. I'm sure there will be a lot of people who want to apply, because we have heard this issue. What are you doing to ensure that mosques, synagogues, places of worship across the province are aware of the program and have equal access to the program?

Hon. Graham McGregor: It's a really good question, and I appreciate that. Part of why we've been able to get applications in for the program is because we've had the ability to establish great relationships with communities. We built this program and designed it hand in hand with the National Council of Canadian Muslims. We had a quote I'll get to in a minute.

I've had the honour of being able to visit all places of worship, but mosques—I visited one in North Bay with Vic Fedeli, for instance, over the course of the summer. We saw the security cameras that the government was able to help them with.

I want to read a quote for the member from the National Council of Canadian Muslims, a very important organization across Canada. I know all members support them—a non-partisan organization. “The National Council of Canadian Muslims welcomes the Ontario government's commitment of \$12.75 million in 2025-26 to refresh the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant as an important step toward enhancing community safety across the province. Ever since the terror attack near a mosque in London in 2021 that killed three generations of a Muslim family, we have called for more measures to protect our community from violent Islamophobia. This grant will continue to assist Muslim Ontarians and other faith-based and cultural organizations in implementing practical measures to help ensure that our community spaces are safe while remaining welcoming for all.”

When we work hand in hand with community, we achieve better outcomes. I know the member can appreciate that as well.

That's not to say that the government is perfect by any means; we're always in the work of getting better and seeing how we can do more. But on the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant, I do want to just thank the NCCM and a whole wide array of community partners—you can see that from the news release that was issued this morning on the new round of the grant—that have helped keep the government accountable, responsive and supportive of community needs.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I want to assure the minister that these questions I'm asking are genuine questions, because people actually need this help, they need these supports.

So, Minister, what I'm wondering in terms of this budget is how much, if any, has been allocated to promote these programs to make sure that people in the communities are aware that they exist and have equal access, beyond just having a relationship with you?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thanks. I want to note that when I say relationship, I don't mean a relationship with me; I mean a relationship with the government of Ontario.

We want to make sure that we've got a robust newsletter list, email list. We put it out through media. I would love, frankly, if members opposite would promote this grant maybe in their community newsletter, with their presence. I know the 80 members of the PC caucus do this regularly to make sure that folks are able to access it. Frankly, if we put the money aside and community organizations don't know it exists, then what the heck's the point? We've got to make sure that communities are able to access it, including in the member's riding.

One of the organizations that we're happy to fund is the Armenian Community Centre of Toronto. We've got a member of the Armenian community, Aris Babikian, who is here as well. I know the member was with myself and I believe Ms. Gilmour at the Armenian Heritage Month

reception that happened here. There are actors and there are people who are hate-motivated against the Armenian community for a million reasons, and we need to make sure that that community is protected. So a \$30,000 investment through the Armenian Community Centre of Toronto—that's real results, real efficacy to make sure that their parking lot is safe, that they're able to have community events and exercise speech in a free and safe way. It's great.

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In terms of the dollars for the advertising budget, forgive me, I know we put some resources behind it, but maybe I will ask the deputy to talk about the system-wide, government way that we put that out. We certainly try to get as much attention as we can on this, and I legitimately am asking the members for their help, not only from you, but from your caucuses. Get this program out; get people knowledgeable about it. And if anybody—open offer to the members opposite; I've done it for members of both of their parties, or certainly a Liberal—forgive me, I believe for an NDP as well. We will help them apply. If they want to reach out to the ministry or to my office and they don't know the allocations or how to do the paperwork or whatever, we want to help them do that. We want to build the most inclusive province possible, and, frankly, as the member has noted, there are some issues that are just above partisanship. We're happy to put that aside and work with you to make sure that your organizations are getting funded.

And sorry, to the deputy on the advertising.

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: For sure. Thank you, Minister. I'm going to call on the assistant deputy minister of the Anti-Racism Directorate. While he's coming up, what I will say is that we do extensive networking on the ground, because we believe that's the best way to reach the communities in multiple languages. Our networks have been extensive throughout all of the programs that we implement, so when we're ready to launch, we share with the community groups. We engage with them and make sure that they are sharing with their networks in the best way possible, because we know not everyone is reading Ontario.ca.

I will pass it on to Parm Bhatthal to add some more fulsome information.

Dr. Parm Bhatthal: Thanks so much. Just to build on what the minister and the deputy had alluded to, the Anti-Racism Directorate has provincial relationships with cultural and religious organizations, so those regular meetings—we use that as a bit of a driver to promote this as well. Our office also has regular engagement with other ministries, using their networks: municipalities, police services, community and social service organizations. We try to promote it as wide as we can.

We also provide information sessions prior to organizations applying, so, just as the deputy alluded to, making sure that we provide that service to organizations that may not have the full capacity to be able to apply for the grant themselves. We know municipalities and other organizations have also stepped up to support organizations within

their community to apply. We are building year-over-year successes, and we always welcome a continued engagement to try to build our network out.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Yes, if I could, I just want to talk about some of the actuals from last year. I just want to really make sure that people know—just condense in terms of any worry about this being—again, the member said, “friends of mine.” I want to make sure they know it's “friends of the government.” In all faith communities are friends of the government; all members of the Legislature.

The funding, if you break it down by riding, is about \$8 million to PC ridings; about \$1.3 million to Liberal ridings; about \$2.8 million to New Democrat ridings from last year's AHSP. I think that roughly breaks out to the number of seats folks have in the House, so it's not like this is money that's going overly into PC hands over anything else. We are funding—I could go down the list of members, and I have the list; trust me. Each member of your caucus is getting support for their community organizations. We would love to do more, so it's an open offer: Please let us help you get more support for your community.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Wonderful. That's exactly my point: \$12 million. We would like to see more. I think everyone around the table would like to see more.

We talked about physical security, and I mentioned the need to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time: talking about root causes, talking about other forms of hate, including online hate, which I touched on earlier. I don't want to harp on this topic, but it's real. We all know it's very real, and I wanted to save the committee from having to hear what those comments were on the post of the other party and my post giving that message. But I think it's important, Chair, if you would agree that I can read this into the record. There's nothing explicit in them.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): I mean, you're the one that's filtering. I can't see what you're about to say.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Absolutely. And the reason why—look, I think as politicians, I think we just all need to remember that online hate speech is a very real and concerning thing that we all need to make sure that we combat, and that we're all committed to making sure doesn't spread or get worse. So the comments here—let me just pull it up. One second.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): As long as you tie it to a question.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Absolutely. I want to talk about what funding is going toward stopping this type of thing.

So, the comment was, “No more stinky Indians. Canada is full. Stay out.” That was six days ago. Right after that, six days ago—maybe it's the same; I don't know: “When is the white heritage month? Right, that would be”—

Mr. Aris Babikian: Chair, point of order.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Excuse me, MPP Tsao.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I'm not being political—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Babikian, did you have a point of order?

Mr. Aris Babikian: No, I understand the issue. We understand the problem. This issue has been raised. It has nothing to do with estimates.

The problem is that we, as responsible citizens, are inflaming the situation more by rehashing the same question again and again. We—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Babikian, it's not a point of order.

MPP Tsao.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I have a very friendly relation with the minister. I think he's doing a good job. I respect you a lot.

I think the minister would agree that we need to have these conversations, because when we don't have these conversations, when we pretend like these things don't exist, that's when the problems get worse. So I'm going to finish—

Interjection.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Babikian, MPP Tsao has the floor.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: And unfortunately, the last comment there was, "When is white heritage month? Right, that would be racist."

These things—you get them all the time. I'm sure you all get them all the time. This isn't okay. So what I'm wondering is, is there any programming through the ARD or any other programs in your ministry that will help combat online racism, online hate and radicalization?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thanks. Yes, I think what the member described—it's just disgusting when you hear that, and I thank the member for reading it into the record because it's real. It's not pleasant for members of the committee to hear, for sure, by any stretch of the imagination, but I think it's important for the public to know the issues that are happening.

The area of online hate, and the rise of social media and these things is something that properly merits an all-of-government approach. I'll give you an example of some of the some of the changes to the anti-hate grant where we're to include cyber security as part of that, and acknowledging that changing world that we're in.

I would be curious what the member would think a program combatting online hate from the province would look like. I can tell you we put out positive messages. The incident that the member talked about on—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): One minute remaining.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Mr. Tsao talked about on the Hindu Heritage Month, I hope you continue to recognize Hindu Heritage Month and Diwali and everything—Navratri and all other Hindu celebrations. It's really important. Holi is coming up in spring. Maybe all the critics and the ministers, we could all do a Holi, play colours or something.

But diversity makes our country beautiful. It's something we need to defend, that we need to stand up for. I think part of the way that we combat that hate is through spreading that positive message.

And, sorry, please ask me one more question with your time, if you have time.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Twenty-two seconds.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: No, I appreciate the answer. I yield back the rest of my time. Thank you, Chair.

Hon. Graham McGregor: If I could, Chair, he did say I'm doing a good job, so I just reserve the right to remind him of that at a future date.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: And your promise to do a video together about Holi. That's on the record.

Hon. Graham McGregor: There we go. Thank you, sir. Take care.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Look at that nice conversation.

Okay, now over to the government side for 15 minutes. MPP Grewal.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you, Minister McGregor, for your great work at the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism. Thank you to everybody that's here today: staff supporting, deputy minister and your entire team. You play a vital role in Ontario in this crucial moment. I'd like to thank the members opposite, too, for raising very important points that reflect on Ontario's diversity, heritage and culture.

Ontario's heritage and Ontario's cultural background are very important because that diversity, that background that Ontario has is our strength as a province. When people look at Ontario, they see a cultural mosaic. When you come to Ontario, and Toronto especially, you're able to experience the finest cuisines of the world, and that's due to our diversity and strength.

When we take a look at our tourism sector as well, why people want to visit Ontario, why people want to visit Toronto, is specifically attached to those culturally diverse aspects that we have in our province. We're very fortunate to have a little bit of the world here in our province.

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What I wanted to highlight today is to talk about some of Ontario's heritage. Why is it so important, and what kind of programs do we have that promote Ontario's cultural diversity? Whether it be through grant programs, whether it be through heritage days that we celebrate through the province, what are we doing to support this diverse heritage and culture of our province?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thanks to the member for that question. The member is doing a great job. I'm biased, being a Brampton boy as well, but I know he's doing a great job standing up for our residents. It's an honour to serve with him every day here at Queen's Park.

And the member is right: When you look at the wide range of diversity in our community in Brampton or here in Toronto where we are today—if you can't find food that you like in Brampton or Toronto, I don't know what to tell you, because you can eat anything and everything in the world here, and it's beautiful. Cultural celebrations: If you can't find a dance event or a music event or a performance here in Ontario, I don't know what to tell you. Over 200 languages are spoken in our beautiful province, and it's incredible.

We need to celebrate that and we need to acknowledge that fact. I think Parliament has done a great job of that by recognizing 29 official heritage months across Ontario, and I know some members are working on some more. We do offer grant-funding programs to support communities, primarily through the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, for supporting those events all across Ontario.

But I do want to take the chance—there's an organization that we have called the Ontario Heritage Trust, and they have a Provincial Plaque Program which recognizes historical events big and small. They capture the history of Ontario and, frankly, the diversity of Ontario. I think they do really great work, and I haven't had an opportunity to highlight some of that work. So I would love to give—maybe through the deputy—a chance for that kind of pitch on what the Ontario Heritage Trust is doing and why it's so important.

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Chair, through you, I'd like to call on Helen Chimirri-Russell, the CEO of the Ontario Heritage Trust, who can speak directly about the trust.

Ms. Helen Chimirri-Russell: Thank you very much. Through the Chair, I'm Helen Chimirri-Russell. I'm the CEO of the Ontario Heritage Trust. Thank you very much for the question.

We have a broad range of programming across the Ontario Heritage Trust that does concentrate on recognizing the story of Ontario and how it has been made up by thousands and millions of people over the years, including the Ontario Provincial Plaque Program that does look at marking events and people and places across the province. Most recently, of course, we did unveil the Hungarian '56ers, which did look at people who came from Hungary during the Hungarian revolution and the impact that they've had on building the province of Ontario.

Tomorrow, we'll be unveiling a plaque to the River Canard Bridge, which is one of the first francophone communities in Ontario, and looking at how a structure within a community has actually helped build infrastructure that connects communities together, the pride that's built through infrastructure development and the ongoing relationship that people have with the places that they have, as well as the beauty that they create, as well as those infrastructure relationships that help people to build and grow a community.

We also have things like Doors Open Ontario, where the Ontario Heritage Trust works with communities all across the province to support them to be able to open up buildings, structures, communities for the public to be able to access for free, where they can explore things that are normally behind closed doors. We work very closely with those communities to ensure that diverse spaces are made available.

One of the things that we're really focusing on at the moment is places of worship and ensuring that places of worship are opened so people can come in and explore not only the places but the things that happen within their communities that make their communities special. It's really building those relationships between people and places and recognizing that this diversity that makes Ontario

very, very special has existed over a significant period of time, that that diversity and the contributions of diverse peoples is a significant part of what has built Ontario to be what it is today.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you for that, Helen—just an incredible job you and your team do safeguarding the heritage of Ontario. We all appreciate you for that.

A program that we didn't have a chance to get into yet in the committee is the volunteer service awards. It is administered through OHAS, the Ontario Honours and Awards Secretariat. I had the privilege of being able to attend many of these ceremonies across Ontario. Members from all parties are invited to participate in these. I certainly hope they took the time to do it.

It's about acknowledging volunteers across Ontario. When you think about today's day and age, it's so easy to be apathetic and so easy to be cynical. It's so easy to be stuck on a cellphone. You've got to go to work; you've got to go home; you've got to look after your kids; you've got to take your parent to the doctor—you've got to do this, that and the other thing. People who do all that and still manage to give back to their community need to be recognized by their government. They need to be celebrated, so we have these volunteer service award ceremonies all across Ontario.

I just want to note the fabulous work of the team in the ministry. There were 40 award ceremonies that were held this year and 5,300 volunteers that were acknowledged. When they do their service—it's five, 10, 15, 20, 25 years—it's 70,000 combined years of service to the public from volunteers that were recognized through the ministry this year. It's a fabulous thing, and I thank all members of the House for taking part in the ceremonies when they can.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: I want to thank the minister for that very elaborate response and all the great work that he's been doing, but I do want to share my time with MPP Saunderson.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Saunderson, please. You have the floor. There's seven and a half minutes left.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I want to thank the minister and your team for all the hard work you've been doing in multiculturalism, racial equity and anti-hate initiatives.

I am going to steer a little bit away from that discussion to talk about veterans and that veterans act, as many of them made the ultimate sacrifice and fought to give us the rights and freedoms that we have today that we're talking about protecting. In my riding of Simcoe-Grey, I have Base Borden, so I have amongst my residents the men and women who are our armed forces. I have 13 Legions, 14 cenotaphs. I had a busy Remembrance Day this year.

We also have Peacekeepers Park. I remember, Minister, you coming up to visit that important initiative with Bob George and Fern Taillefer, two of our veterans who are very much at the forefront of making sure that we recognize our peacekeepers as well and those that have died since 1955 in peacekeeping missions.

As well, we have large Indigenous populations in the riding of Simcoe–Grey and Simcoe county. I had the pleasure of visiting K’ómoks First Nation in Courtenay, BC, over the weekend for Indigenous Veterans Day on November 8.

I was wondering, Minister, since Veterans’ Week has just passed, can you speak about our government’s efforts to continue to support veterans in Ontario and recognize their incredible contributions?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you to the member not only for the question and the opportunity to talk about it but, frankly, for the member’s leadership on veterans’ issues, on diversity issues, for sure. I’ll explain something the member did in my answer.

We tabled the Honouring Veterans Act. I was able to do it on behalf of Michael Ford, who had some health challenges last year. The act did a few things.

First, it changed the name from Remembrance Week Act to the Remembrance Day and Veterans’ Week Act with the recognition that we’ve got 149,000 veterans in Ontario. We must remember the fallen, and we do that, but we must also remember the 149,000 veterans who are here in Ontario, who deserve our thanks, our appreciation and, frankly, more support than they’ve been getting over generations.

We launched the community service award, and we did it through Legion branches. We’re doing it this year through the Royal Canadian Legion provincial command, and the local Legion branches will continue to do that. We’ve had a good uptake of the program, but we haven’t hit as many of the branches submitting somebody as we should, but we’ll work on it with them.

Importantly, we realize also that we can’t just do the award only through Legion branches. There are a lot more organizations in the veterans’ ecosystem that are operating that we should be reaching out to and commemorating.

One of the organizations that Mr. Saunderson brought to my attention, to the Premier’s attention and to the government’s attention is the central Ontario chapter of the UN peacekeepers’ foundation. These are folks that served in peace years here at home but in peacekeeping missions all across the world, in eastern Europe, in Cyprus, in Africa and all over the place.

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These chapters are, of course, veterans, but they also have that peacekeeper designation. And so I’m very happy to be acknowledging that we’re expanding the amount of organizations that will be able to award the community service medal. Some of those organizations include UN peacekeeper chapters across Ontario. I know the member has advocated for that, and I just want to thank you for the idea, for the advocacy. It’s something that we’re going to be really proud to roll out for next year, again, in the idea and the spirit that we can always do better.

Some of the other initiatives this government has undertaken in that act alone: We talked about free GO service for service members and for retired service members, for veterans. I’ll be honest: When we first rolled out the program, it wasn’t all service members. We made sure it

is all service members, and credit to the Minister of Transportation for his leadership making sure that happened.

This is a government that has exempted Legions from property taxes. This is a government that enshrined the right to wear a poppy in the workplace, when we had workplaces saying that people couldn’t do something. A simple act of patriotism like wearing a poppy was considered a political act. This government enshrined that, with the support of all parties, to make sure that Ontarians have the right to commemorate and celebrate our veterans and those that we’ve lost.

We can never properly thank those who have served. I’ve said it before. We can sure try. This government has been working tirelessly to make sure that we do that, and it’s an honour to help play a part in that work through the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism to continue that and to advance that into the future.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Saunderson, continue.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you for that answer, Minister, and thank you for the work you’re doing too on our veterans.

Another local issue for myself and my riding of Simcoe–Grey, and I know across the province: I have a lot of old communities that have heritage districts. I also have communities that have archaeological sites, given our Indigenous populations up in the Simcoe county area and across the province.

I know that you are looking at making changes to the permitting process. We have a housing crisis. We’re trying to accelerate the building process, eliminate red tape and get homes built faster. At the same time, we want to protect our incredible heritage and history in this province. I wonder if you can just talk about the efforts you’re making to make sure that we protect our rich history and heritage while, at the same time, trying to speed up that process to get rid of needless bureaucracy.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thanks. Time check, Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Yes. One minute and 15 seconds.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Okay. We’re engaged right now in a heritage framework transformation to make sure that we build a responsive archaeological system for a permitting system and licensing regime for generations to come. The standards and guidelines haven’t been updated since 2011; they’re due. So we’re engaging in that work, and the team behind me is doing a fabulous job engaging in that work.

Not only clearing the backlog that we have—again, I talked about 3,000 last year in May, now down to just over 500 today, and we’re aiming to get to zero—but we need a system that is tough, fast and fair and responsive to the needs that we have. Too many projects are held up for too long. And frankly, so much justice for First Nations communities is held up for too long.

We’re engaged right now through the Return of Ancestors initiative in meaningful work to repatriate ancestral remains to First Nations communities, which, frankly, should

never have been in the possession of the Ontario government to begin with. We're doing that work thoughtfully. We're doing it intentionally. It takes time to do the hard work, to make sure we are engaging respectfully and collaboratively to do that.

And I want to say, for so many First Nations—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): I'm afraid you can't. We are out of time. I'm so sorry. What can I say?

There's seven minutes and 40 seconds left, and it's going to go to the official opposition—MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I would like to spend a little of this time diving into the Black youth action plan, which accounts for the majority of the program funding to the ministry. I'm looking not just in my riding and surrounding areas, but also thinking about—we represent the province, the rural, the remote areas. I know that Thunder Bay has been struggling deeply with issues around racism.

I'm wondering if you can speak briefly—because I'd love to ask a second question—about some of the initiatives that are supported by this fund and tying them to the geographical locations where possible.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you for that. I'm going to turn it over to the deputy, and potentially to our ADM through the deputy, if she'll allow it. But I do want to say this: This is something that we are seized with. We've heard it from community partners. The program as it stands is too GTA-centric. It's too Toronto-centric. I was with PA Babikian and a few other members in Ottawa; they're saying, "Hey, you need to partner with our organizations and make sure we're represented."

It's an area for improvement. We need to get better at it, but we have been taking steps to make sure that we are hitting the cross-section of Ontario, and I'd love to turn it to the deputy to talk about some of that diligent work.

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Thank you, Minister. Chair, through you, I will call on the assistant deputy minister for the Anti-Racism Directorate.

Dr. Parm Bhatthal: Thanks, Deputy. Just to build on what the minister and the deputy had said: We are looking at opportunities to expand the Black youth action plan across the province. To your question, we do have relationships with organizations that are funded through the Black youth action plan outside of the greater Toronto area.

We do know that 84% of the Black youth population in Ontario is concentrated in the in the greater Toronto area. However, we do know that there are populations in eastern Ontario, western Ontario and northern Ontario that need additional support, and so we have been funding organizations outside of Toronto. We have been funding cultural organizations. We have been funding francophone organizations as well. We're constantly looking at the data to build out the Black youth action plan, and that data also supports the organizations that we fund and the programs they ultimately deliver to Black youth across Ontario.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you.

Again through the Chair to the minister: I'm just running around this total overall spending, if you can help me understand. It's projected to be 31% more in 2025-26,

and that Black youth initiative program we just spoke about and the ARD program seem to be essentially static, as far as I'm understanding. Where is that increase in the budget?

Hon. Graham McGregor: You're referring to the increase in this year's budget?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: The total overall spending for 2025-26.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Under the ARD or under the ministry?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: For the whole ministry. It looks to be—I may have done the math wrong, but 31% more in 2025-26, and I'm just trying to understand the increase there.

Hon. Graham McGregor: I'll turn to the deputy in a sec, but we've seen increases across the board. One of the areas where we're seeing an increase that the member had talked about is around our First Nations engagement and dealing with archaeology licensing and standards.

I was talking about the Return of Ancestors initiative. It's important that we when we talk about this—I had a chief tell me, "You know, you say 'archaeology.' We're not talking about that. We're talking about our ancestors." Imagine, any one of us here at the committee table, if your great-great-uncle or great-great-grandparent was at a burial site and wasn't properly accounted for and they built on top of it without accounting for that or even consulting you. It's something that we strive to make sure that we do better at. We've put significant investment this year on that piece as well as through other initiatives.

I'll share with the deputy, if she'll talk about some of the other increases that the government's put forward this year.

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Thank you, Minister. Chair, through you: Some of the increases that we've seen in our ministry are due to the ministry administration. The \$3-million increase is primarily due to additional resources required to support shared corporate services with the newly established Ministry of Sport. We didn't have this previously, we now share corporate services with the Ministry of Sport for efficiency, and that accounts for some of the increases that you're seeing.

I spoke previously to the net increase due to the internal realignment of the Black youth action plan to the Anti-Racism Directorate. That accounts for some of it, as well.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you for that. I think I'm probably getting very close to my time. I'm wondering, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister: The minister spoke about being in this position for a year, sort of thrust into it, and then living into it. I'm wondering what surprising or regulatory thing that he's learned since becoming minister of this ministry.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): And you have two minutes to answer—just to let you know.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Well, Chair, that's not in the estimates. No, I'm just—the file that has taken me most aback and takes a large amount of time that, when you hear "citizenship and multiculturalism," you probably don't think about, frankly, is around the archaeology file.

This is a file that—we had 2011 guidelines. They need to be updated. We need to be more collaborative and more intentional in our partnerships with First Nations communities, but, frankly, with municipalities, educating them on their obligations under the act, and, frankly, with proponents.

I didn't get into politics because of an affinity for archaeology. I don't know who did, but it's important, right? There are 500 people that are licensed and thousands more that work in the sector. It's certainly an economic benefit. They deserve a government that is responsive and modern and providing 2025 solutions in 2025.

The work to move that system into the modern day takes time. We're engaged, right now, with First Nations communities in consultation, directly in community. ADM Rebecca Ramsarran, who is behind, has been on planes all over the place, meeting directly in communities. I've had the honour to meet with many chiefs as well.

I went down to Windsor for the Ontario archaeological symposium. They said they've never seen a minister at their event before. I said, "Well, look"—again, nobody gets into politics to deal with archaeology, but it's important, right? It's how we protect our heritage. It's obviously a tremendous asset to the province. But it needs to be treated properly—modern—and we need to build a system that's tough, fast and fair. I'm engaged in doing that.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. This concludes the committee's consideration of the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

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

Shall vote 4601, ministry administration program, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 4601 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 4602, Anti-Racism Directorate, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 4602 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 4603, citizenship, inclusion and heritage, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 4603 is accordingly carried.

Shall the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare the motion carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism to the House? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I will report back.

That concludes our consideration of this ministry's estimates. I'd like to thank Minister McGregor and everyone here today for their participation.

There being no further business, this committee stands in recess until 1 p.m. this afternoon, when we will consider

the estimates of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The committee recessed from 1204 to 1300.

MINISTRY OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS AND HOUSING

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will now come to order.

We are meeting to consider the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for a total of two hours.

We are joined today by staff from Hansard, broadcast and recording, and Legislative Research. From the ministry, we are joined by the Honourable Rob Flack, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing; the Honourable Graydon Smith, associate minister; and Martha Greenberg, deputy minister, along with other staff from the ministry.

As a reminder, the ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust that the deputy minister has arranged to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly.

Are there any questions before we begin? Seeing none, I am now required to call vote 1901, which sets the review process in motion.

We will begin with a statement from the minister for up to 20 minutes. Minister, welcome, and the floor is yours.

Hon. Rob Flack: Obviously, it's great to be here, and thank you to those who came a long way on constituency week to be part of this estimates committee.

Thank you to Minister Smith for being here, along with our deputy Martha Greenberg and the team behind. They've done a great job and continue to help out in the entire process at municipal affairs and housing.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy to present and discuss the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. These estimates outline how our ministry is investing to protect Ontario workers and businesses, support municipalities, strengthen communities and help create the conditions—I emphasize "the conditions"—to build more homes right across Ontario.

It's a privilege to lead this ministry at a time when our work has never been more important and our work and our success needs an all-hands-on-deck approach.

I have a bias for action. It's what I stress with everyone I work with on my team, or teams throughout my life, and it will continue to be that way. As Benjamin Franklin once said, "Well done is better than well said," and this government is focused on creating those conditions to build more homes and faster.

Housing availability, affordability and community growth are challenges that affect every region and every Ontarian. The decisions reflected in these estimates will

have a lasting impact on how our province grows and how our province prospers.

My remarks today are organized around three central themes that align with the ministry's key spending priorities: (1) it takes too long and it costs too much to build homes in Ontario, (2) protecting our most vulnerable and (3) strengthening and supporting our partner municipalities.

Ontario continues to face significant headwinds or pressures in its housing market. We understand this, and we are focused on creating the conditions to build more homes faster. Too many people are struggling to find a home that meets their needs and budget, while builders and municipalities face rising costs and lengthy approval processes that delay new construction.

Let's be clear: Again, it takes too long and costs too much to build in Ontario. We are changing that. At its core, the challenge is getting homes built where they are needed most.

The first priority of this ministry is removing barriers and streamlining the system so that homes can be built faster and more affordably. This includes modernizing planning processes, reducing duplication and red tape, creating consistent and transparent approval frameworks, and providing municipalities with the tools they need to facilitate timely housing development.

Earlier this year, the government introduced and passed the Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, 2025. This legislation and the associated programs and regulatory changes represent a major step towards our efforts to support Ontario's housing goals. The measures introduced through this act were developed through extensive consultation with municipal partners, the home-building industry and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. Together, they are helping to simplify development approvals, enhance predictability and reduce costs.

A key area of focus with the ministry relates to the development charge framework. Development charges, or DCs, help municipalities pay for essential infrastructure like roads, parks and water systems. However, these charges also add significant costs to housing projects, which can make homes less affordable for the buyers and the renters.

The ministry heard loud and clear from municipalities and builders alike that reforms were needed. Through Bill 17 and its associated implementation measures, we have acted to make the framework more consistent, transparent and predictable. We are doing this while working with partner ministries, such as the Ministry of Infrastructure, to continue delivering the funding to get critical infrastructure built faster.

These measures include:

- deferring DCs for non-rental residential buildings until occupancy;
- eliminating municipal authority to charge interest on legislatively deferred DCs;
- simplifying bylaw amendment processes to reduce charges, refining freeze provisions to ensure fairness for builders; and
- eliminating DCs entirely on long-term-care homes.

These changes will help reduce costs and improve cash flow for builders while ensuring municipalities continue delivering on core infrastructure.

The ministry is also working to strengthen intergovernmental collaboration to reduce housing costs. We continue to engage with the federal government to align investments and remove barriers.

Within the recently announced fall economic statement, we also removed the provincial portion of HST on new homes. This action represents a significant step towards improving affordability and stimulating new construction.

Rapid population growth further reinforces the need for coordinated housing and land use planning. Between July 2023 and July 2024, Ontario's population grew by more than 500,000 people, bringing our total population today to just over 16 million people—I might add, double to what it was when I was in high school a few moons ago.

However, this growth brings challenges from health care to education—and yes, to housing. Chair, let me be clear: We are facing these challenges head on. This growth demonstrates Ontario's strong economic performance but underscores the urgency of expanding housing supply and ensuring that infrastructure keeps pace with those needs.

To support municipalities in planning for growth, the ministry has consulted on proposed updates to the projection methodology guideline, which will replace the 1995 version. The updated guideline will provide a modern, data-driven approach to forecasting housing and employment needs. It will ensure that official plans reflect realistic population projections and align with the new provincial planning statement. This initiative will help municipalities make informed decisions about land use, infrastructure and service delivery—all critical elements of sustainable growth planning.

The ministry's spending in this area reflects a continued emphasis on removing financial and administrative barriers to housing, fostering predictability for the private sector and ensuring local governments have the tools to plan effectively for the future. I look forward to discussing with this committee the many actions my ministry is taking to lay the foundation to get Ontario building.

The second theme reflected in the ministry's estimates is protecting vulnerable Ontarians, including people and families who face challenges in accessing safe and affordable housing. We know target investments are important in dealing with the acute challenges some Ontario residents are facing when it comes to finding housing.

Ontario delivers two major homelessness prevention programs that are fully funded by the province: the Homelessness Prevention Program and the Indigenous Supportive Housing Program. Together, these two initiatives represent approximately \$700 million in annual provincial investment in combatting chronic homelessness.

The Homelessness Prevention Program provides Ontario's 47 municipal service managers with the flexibility to allocate funding based on local priorities. These service managers represent the local communities which they know best, as we do not believe in a one-size-fits-all approach to allocating funding. Service managers understand the spe-

cific needs of their communities and use this funding to deliver effective, locally designed solutions. These investments include emergency shelters, supportive housing, rent supplements and outreach services.

The Indigenous Supportive Housing Program provides culturally appropriate housing and support services for Indigenous individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The program also assists youth, individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and those transitioning from provincially funded institutions.

In 2023-24, the province enhanced both programs with an additional annual investment of \$202 million, bringing the annual funding to roughly \$700 million, or up 40%. We have provided an additional \$75 million to help municipalities to address homeless encampments, expand shelter capacity and create pathways to stable housing. This targeted investment supports a range of local initiatives from increasing shelter spaces to building new affordable housing projects and expanding rental assistance under the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit.

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Ontario continues to collaborate with the federal government to enhance resources for the non-market housing and homelessness-prevention requirements. Earlier this year, the province secured \$1.5 billion in federal commitments through the National Housing Strategy to fund new affordable housing, rental assistance and homelessness prevention for the next three years. The ministry's funding commitment is Ontario's share of this partnership, which is ensuring that federal and provincial funds are aligned and used effectively to deliver measurable outcomes for those in most need.

The ministry also continues to prepare for future federal-provincial housing programs once the current National Housing Strategy concludes in 2027-28. However, this is not the end. We will continue to push with fellow provinces and territories for a new deal to continue this important work—for the federal government to work in partnership with us so we can continue to protect those who need it most.

The ministry is also investing in innovative housing models to make home ownership more attainable for moderate-income Ontarians. One recent example is the 33-unit modular condominium project on Coxwell Avenue in partnership with the city of Toronto and Habitat for Humanity GTA. I hope we can talk a little bit about that today. Units in this development will be priced below market value and indexed to inflation. This demonstration project, funded in part through the ministry's capital programs, will provide new home ownership opportunities and help grow the modular construction industry in Ontario.

This project is offering lessons that can be applied to future affordable housing projects. I visited that site this summer and can say I was nothing but impressed. I know it maybe took a little longer than we wanted to get it done, but shovels are in the ground. It's going to be a great story to tell. These initiatives form a core component of the ministry's spending plan, reflecting our commitment to

ensuring that every Ontarian has access to safe, stable and affordable housing.

The third and final area reflected in the ministry's estimates is strengthening and supporting municipalities. Ontario's 444 municipalities are essential partners in delivering housing, infrastructure and critical local services. Ensuring they have the tools and resources they need is a fundamental part of our mandate. The ministry's estimate includes substantial funding for housing and community-enabling infrastructure.

Through the Building Faster Fund, the province is investing \$1.2 billion to reward municipalities that are leading the way in creating the conditions for housing growth. This program provides financial support for local infrastructure such as roads, sewers and water systems, the foundational elements required for housing development. We are looking at ways to strengthen the program to reflect the realities and the challenges we are facing today, brought by global economic uncertainty that is influencing all aspects of our economy. We also look forward to working closely with ROMA, AMO and our municipal partners for their valuable and ongoing input.

The Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program is another major investment within the ministry's estimates. Following an additional \$1.6 billion announced at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario's conference in Ottawa in August, the total program envelope now stands at nearly \$4 billion. This funding will help municipalities build and upgrade the infrastructure necessary to support new homes in growing communities. These investments reflect a shared commitment between the province and municipalities to meet Ontario's housing targets. They also recognize that strong local infrastructure is essential to economic growth and community well-being.

The ministry will also continue to provide targeted support for municipalities undergoing structural and service changes. For example, in Peel region, legislation introduced by our government will transfer responsibility for regional roads and waste collection to the local municipalities of Brampton, Mississauga and Caledon. The ministries will ensure that these changes are implemented smoothly, efficiently and with no disruption to residents.

As you can see, the investments contained here are focused on strengthening partnerships, providing stable and predictable funding, while ensuring municipalities can deliver services that keep communities functioning and growing.

Chair, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is continuing to deliver on the government's priorities, removing barriers to housing construction, supporting vulnerable people and ensuring municipal partners have the resources to plan and grow sustainably. The ministry's spending plan demonstrates fiscal responsibility, while providing the investments needed to address Ontario's most pressing housing and community challenges.

Every dollar in these estimates supports the goal of building more homes, strengthening local infrastructure and helping Ontarians in need. I'd like to take this moment to thank the dedicated staff at our ministry for their hard

work and professionalism, as well as my associate minister and good friend Graydon Smith, and all the parliamentary assistants for their ongoing support.

This housing crisis we're in is not partisan; it is all Canadian, all Ontario hands on deck. We need to do it together. Ontario continues to grow, and with careful planning and responsible investment, we can ensure that this growth translates into more homes, stronger communities and better opportunities for people right across our province.

If time permits, Chair, I will now turn the floor over to Minister Smith for some opening comments.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Yes. There's five minutes left.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair. Members of committee, it's a pleasure to join everyone today to talk about how our ministry is working alongside communities right across Ontario to build homes, strengthen partnerships and create the conditions for growth. I've had the opportunity to meet with mayors, councillors, home builders and community leaders across Ontario since being appointed associate minister and, frankly, for a long time before.

Every time I do that, one thing becomes clear: that every municipality has a deep understanding of local realities and a shared determination to work with us to get homes built faster. Those local conversations, that constant flow of ideas, are what shape our work at this ministry. Now, while policies, legislation and programs start here at Queen's Park, progress happens when governments, home builders and communities are all pulling in the same direction.

As many of you know, before becoming an MPP, I had the privilege of serving my community and local government for over a decade—15 years, as a matter of fact. I was a councillor, a mayor, president of Ontario Small Urban Municipalities and president of AMO. That time taught me something I carry into this role every day, and that is that real progress happens closest to the people. Municipal councils are where growth meets reality and where those big provincial goals that we talk about become the challenges that we solve locally, getting shovels into the ground.

When families are looking for housing or when a community is planning for growth, there isn't time for endless processes. Believe me, I know it first-hand. Local leaders are expected to find solutions, and they need the province behind them, and that's exactly what we have been doing. That's why our ministry is focused on being a partner, helping municipalities cut through red tape, access the tools they need and plan for growth with confidence. When the province and municipalities move in the same direction, we get homes built, we strengthen communities and we deliver results people can see.

Building homes today isn't just about numbers; it's about building smarter. It means rethinking how we plan, how we approve, how we coordinate across all levels of government. We're seeing communities and industry partners embrace new technologies, streamline local processes

and collaborate in ways that make approvals faster and outcomes better.

Our government is doing its part. We're cutting red tape. We're modernizing planning frameworks and investing in the local infrastructure that makes housing possible. This is the foundation of the Building Faster Fund and our ongoing work through the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program that Minister Flack mentioned earlier. We are recognizing and rewarding municipalities that lead by example.

Strong communities are built on strong local leadership, leaders who know their residents, who understand their local economies, and who work every day to balance growth with good governance. We've seen municipalities take bold steps to speed up approvals, rethink planning processes and pilot new housing solutions that better fit local needs. That kind of initiative, again, with us all working together, is what drives Ontario forward. It is proof that when local governments are empowered and supported, they innovate, they deliver and they make real change happen. Our role as a ministry is to listen, collaborate and clear the path so that local ideas can take root and thrive, because accountability is not just about compliance. It's about confidence: confidence that the system works, confidence that decisions are made fairly and quickly, and confidence that every level of government is pulling in the same direction.

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At the heart of all this is a shared mission to make life more affordable, to support economic growth and to give every Ontario citizen a fair chance at finding a home that meets their needs. That work takes partnership and trust—trust between governments, trust between industry and regulators and trust between communities and the people making decisions on their behalf. That trust grows when people see results, when homes get built, when communities thrive and when progress feels real.

Chair, Ontario continues to grow at an incredible pace, and with that growth comes opportunity and responsibility: the responsibility to plan well, invest wisely and work together.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Forty-five seconds.

Hon. Graydon Smith: When we do that, we don't just build faster, we build better. We build stronger, more resilient communities. We build opportunity for families and jobs for workers, and we build confidence in the future of this province we are all proud to call home. Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much for your presentations.

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

As always, please remember to make your comments through the Chair, and as the Chair, if a member seeks to reclaim the floor during the rotation while the minister's responding, I will recognize the member and allow them to reclaim the floor to ask a new question.

For the deputy minister, assistant deputy ministers and ministry staff, please state your name and title the first time you speak so that the proceedings can be accurately reported in Hansard.

I will now start with the official opposition, MPP McKenney.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Thank you, Chair. It's good to be here with you today.

I'm going to start my questioning just around the HART hubs. When your government announced the HART hubs, I guess, almost a year ago now, they were meant to include new supportive housing. So my question is around that. How many net new units of permanent supportive housing are funded in this budget for the HART hubs?

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you for the question. As you know, when it comes to supporting our—

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Point of order, MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I mean, I'm happy to have good dialogue on municipal affairs and housing in the estimates set out. HART hubs are part of the Ministry of Health. If the member wants to ask a question about affordable housing, which is under purview of this ministry, that's fine, but this is not part of the estimates of this ministry.

MPP Catherine McKenney: I'll challenge that. I think the staff that are here are presumably ministry staff who provide support for this initiative, so I would argue that it is within the purview of this.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Okay. MPP Saunderson has a good point. You did say supportive housing. The minister did start to respond, so he can answer or his team can answer, as much as they can within the purview of what they're responsible for. But the HART hubs do come under the Ministry of Health, just to clarify that.

MPP Catherine McKenney: So the question then is more specific to the supportive housing.

Hon. Rob Flack: As I think you know, we announced in the 2024 budget that we're investing an additional \$152 million over the next three years to support individuals facing unstable housing conditions. This funding will go towards a suite of supportive housing initiatives, which we've announced to design and bolster support for the vulnerable populations that we all live with in this province.

This funding is provided through the Ministry of Health, which I think you understand, but in March 2025, this year, the government announced an investment of almost \$550 million to create 28 homelessness and addiction recovery treatment centres or hubs across the province—nine more than originally planned for. This includes two Indigenous-led hubs to ensure delivery of culturally relevant care for those community leaders. The funding, again, is provided through the Ministry of Health.

HART hubs connect vulnerable Ontarians to a holistic approach to treatment. I don't believe we've seen the full effect of their benefits yet, but it includes support around

mental health, primary care, substance use care, wrap-around services and mental health and addictions supportive housing. We will add an estimated 560 highly supportive housing units—I think that was part of your question—in addition to the addiction recovery and treatment beds that exist. Again, I think we've invested a significant amount of money—I emphasize “invested”—and we will continue to follow that progress, again, getting started, and I think as the weeks and months go ahead, we'll see substantial results.

MPP Catherine McKenney: So just for clarity, then: The per-unit new net funding allocated in this budget is zero for the supportive housing.

Ms. Martha Greenberg: Supportive housing is also funded through—the three programs can be through the National Housing Strategy. As you know, there is hundreds—

Interjection.

Ms. Martha Greenberg: Apologies. Martha Greenberg, Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you.

Ms. Martha Greenberg: Supportive housing is also funded through the service managers from the funding they receive through the National Housing Strategy funding, as well as the homelessness prevention funding. They can choose to use that for affordable units; they can choose to use that for affordable, supportive, and rent-geared-to-assistance. There is funding for supportive housing through those three programs.

MPP Catherine McKenney: There's just no per-unit funding allocated specifically to the supportive housing units that were supposed to be established through the HART hubs. I just want to make sure that I have that clear.

Hon. Rob Flack: We are the only province in Canada that uses a service manager model. What we do is we allocate funding for the 47 service managers. We feel they know their communities best. It's not one-size-fits-all. How they determine the investment and where they determine the investment goes is up to the service manager, working along with the municipal partners. I think the answer to your question would be different in all 47 different jurisdictions.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Okay, but I just want to be clear: There is no net new housing that is provided through this budget for the supportive housing that was supposed to be provided through these hubs. It is shuffled around with the municipalities—I get that there are service managers and that they get money for supportive housing—but there is no net new funding.

Hon. Rob Flack: Again, our ministry does not provide that financial support. It is through the Ministry of Health. I think if I commented on it anymore, I would be doing the Ministry of Health an injustice. I'll maybe ask you to talk to those folks.

But again, service managers play a critical role in this province. Whether it is in Toronto, Windsor, Ottawa or Thunder Bay, they know their communities best. That is where we take comfort in the fact that we work closely with them. Municipal affairs and housing folks work

closely with them to make sure that those investments are applied logically and in the right place. And again, we're working closely with them through the National Housing Strategy, making sure we deploy those resources as best as we possibly can, right across Ontario.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Thank you.

Hon. Graydon Smith: I wouldn't want to leave the impression that that supportive housing is somehow not being funded. As Minister Flack said very clearly, the service manager role is to determine the need in those communities. Whether it's been Minister Flack or myself, we've attended the opening in in very recent history of supportive housing units, including in in the city of Ottawa, where I was pleased to attend with the Shepherds of Good Hope and the project that opened there.

MPP Catherine McKenney: I'm aware of it.

Hon. Graydon Smith: All these projects are a reflection of what Minister Flack talked about, of the service managers being able to work with—

MPP Catherine McKenney: If I may reclaim the floor, Chair. Sorry; it's just that I'm getting a repeat of the answer, so I'll happily move on to my next question.

On the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit allocation, if you could provide the COHB allocation for each municipality for 2025-26 and how these allocations compare to the previous year.

Hon. Rob Flack: I'm going to defer to the deputy on that one.

Ms. Martha Greenberg: Hold on just a sec. I believe we have it here.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Sean Fraser, assistant deputy minister for municipal and housing operations.

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The funding formula, the allocation formula remains unchanged year to year in terms of the proportion of households in a particular service manager geography. That is the proportion by which the COHB allocations are given out.

The difference year over year is that last year there was direction from the federal government to give additional funding to Toronto—so that's one difference in that mix—but the actual formula year to year, going back through the National Housing Strategy, has remained unchanged in terms of the proportionality of how the allocations are given.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Have any of the allocations for any municipality gone down from last year? If so, in which municipalities?

Mr. Sean Fraser: The specific one that I can speak to is the Toronto example, which had an exception the year before in that there was exceptional, above-formula funding provided to Toronto. This year there was not exceptional, above-formula funding provided, so that's the one easy example that I can give.

MPP Catherine McKenney: So Ottawa and Hamilton got the same allocation of COHB funding?

Mr. Sean Fraser: They got the same proportion. I would have to look at the specific details to see what the actual amount would be for those particular service man-

agers, but they got proportional to what they would have gotten in the past.

MPP Catherine McKenney: I wouldn't mind a follow-up with the exact number. Thank you.

I noted that funding for homelessness is unchanged from last year's estimates, and I wonder why this government is freezing funding on homelessness programs as we're experiencing a worsening homelessness crisis.

Hon. Rob Flack: Sorry, could you ask that again? I was looking at—

MPP Catherine McKenney: Yes, sorry. I noted that overall funding for homelessness is not changed from last year's estimates, and I wonder why this government is freezing homelessness funding during a worsening homelessness crisis.

Hon. Rob Flack: Well, I think you can appreciate that we've got some pretty strong headwinds in front of us right now with respect to our economy, and thank goodness we've grown—no, we haven't grown; we created the conditions for our economy to grow. As such, we've been able to add 40% more—just two years ago.

It is a chronic problem; we acknowledge that. We're working closely with our municipal partners day in and day out. We'll continue to take a look at where the need is. I will come back to the need for a new National Housing Strategy agreement between the federal government and the provinces and territories.

This year coming, I will be chairing the FPT, and I've already asked Minister Robertson that we need to sit down, and I'd like to see an extension or a new National Housing Strategy in place, because we need stable, consistent, sustainable funding for the months and years ahead, not to be guessing when it will end. It's an important part of how we deal with affordable housing and homelessness in this province.

But again, our government has stepped up to the plate and provided excellent funding to a chronic situation, and we'll continue to support those who are our most vulnerable.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Again, to supplement Minister Flack's answer: When we talk with the service managers throughout the province, the conversations about how they're working in resource deployment are certainly more than just a monetary conversation. It's imperative on us that we work with them to take the information that they have from a local perspective and apply that broadly. So what are those best practices that work from one service manager to another, recognizing the variation in the communities? What are the things that we can do on the whole to get the best value for the dollar that is being spent, recognizing that this is very much about human beings at the end of the day and that the dollars that we deploy, there's a real efficacy to them in that deployment?

That work is ongoing, and I think the conversations that I've had with service managers have been very enlightening, innovation within their programs that can be spread more broadly—

MPP Catherine McKenney: Sorry, Chair, I'll reclaim the floor again. I'm running out of time. I do have

questions to get on. I sat on city council for many years, and I worked with a service manager before that, so I'm well aware of the challenges that are happening in the city. And it is money. It is often money. Often, when people say it's not about the money, you know it's exactly about the money.

I just want to get back to the target of ending chronic homelessness. Your government had set a target for ending chronic homelessness by 2025—less than two months left here, so I would think you would agree that you're not going to make it. I just wonder if you have an updated target for ending chronic homelessness in the province of Ontario.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): There's a minute and 15 seconds left, just to let you know.

Hon. Rob Flack: I would agree that I do not think chronic homelessness is going to be done by December 31. That's why it's chronic. Unfortunately, it continues to be a challenge and grow in this province.

I take a look at certain communities that have done an unbelievably great job. In my riding in St. Thomas, we have chronic homelessness, but it's dealt with effectively. People get wraparound services right away, into supportive and affordable housing. There are always issues. There's always the chronic part of it.

I think the answer to your question, ultimately, is this government is focused on supporting those that are most vulnerable. Setting a target as to when and where I don't think would behoove a logical discussion today, because it is not going away any time soon. So we need to continue to invest.

Again, I want to say, we want to aim at working with the federal government to come up with a new National Housing Strategy to ensure that we have stable, sustainable funding for the months and years ahead.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much.

We'll now move on to the third party. MPP Shamji, you can begin—15 minutes.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Minister, I want to begin by thanking you. I know you came into this role with good intentions. I've noted some of the things that you have advocated for that I believe are a step in the right direction. As we'll discuss, I think we could go further—for example, the recent announcement of rebating HST for first-time homebuyers on new primary residences. I want to congratulate you for taking a step in the right direction. That being said, I do firmly believe there is much more that needs to be done, and so perhaps we can dive in together.

I want to note, just on reviewing the expenses here, that the total operating expenses quoted in the attached documents that you've submitted for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is \$1.456 billion. That is \$1.5 billion of hard-earned taxpayer contributions. What do Ontarians have to show for it? Our province has the lowest homebuilding starts, sky-high rents. Frankly, we have a market failure where people can't afford homes and builders can't afford to lower prices. We have record encampments and homelessness.

So, do you think that Ontarians are getting their money's worth after giving you billions of dollars?

Hon. Rob Flack: The answer would be absolutely yes. I think the member appreciates money doesn't grow on trees, and this is investment that we're making. The reason we're making this huge investment and continuing to grow it is because, if we create a strong economy, it creates the wealth within our economy, our treasury, to be able to pay these bills.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Respectfully, we've got record unemployment, and the housing record which I just stated: lowest home-building starts in the entire country, sky-high rents, record encampments. So what are you pointing to that is the return on investment of these hard-earned taxpayer dollars? Point to one thing.

Hon. Rob Flack: Respectfully submitted, we've created more jobs in the last seven years—

Mr. Adil Shamji: We're talking housing.

Hon. Rob Flack: You talked about employment.

Housing starts are down. There's a national housing crisis, and it's in Ontario. We acknowledge it. No one's walking away from it. That's why, through Bill 17 and Bill 16, we're creating the conditions to get more homes built faster. We don't build the homes. We're creating the conditions to work with our municipal partners and those that build the homes, like you acknowledged, removing the HST to get those homes built.

I think it's common belief that governments are going to build these homes. That's the worst business we could be in. Governments don't run things well, businesses well. Let those that do what they do best, those that build, build. Create those conditions, give them the confidence. People have hit the pause button, and I think with the measures we've got in place in Bill 60—reducing red tape, a standard building code where code is king, reducing or delaying development charges until occupancy like we did in Bill 17. These are the conditions that are going to create builders to have confidence, for people to have confidence to hit the start button and build housing and buy housing.

Mr. Adil Shamji: So I have to acknowledge you pointing to a couple of things that could potentially make a difference. You talked about HST, allowing the deferral on payment of development charges. I think those have the potential to be positive things.

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But actually, what I'm trying to focus on is not these intermediate measures but the actual outcomes. You mentioned that there's a national housing crisis. Perhaps there is, but it is distinctly severe in Ontario, the only province in all of Canada that has declining home building starts. Every other province is positive—only us. So why is it? Sure, there's a national housing crisis. Why is it so bad here, and why is it that with the \$1.5 billion that you're asking for, your government has not been able to deliver the outcomes that Ontarians are looking for, have paid for and deserve?

Hon. Rob Flack: Well, let's take a look at the environment we're in. I think you would acknowledge that in this province—it's the largest province in the country. It's

been the fastest-growing population in terms of immigration. It's been the fastest-growing province in terms of job creation.

I would also submit that with that comes a demand for housing. When we have high costs, as you mentioned in your first question, to deliver this housing, it takes months or it takes years sometimes, in some jurisdictions, to get a building permit, whereas you can go south of the border and get them in weeks or months. We have to change that.

I think you would agree the development charge framework we have in this province has become punitive to building houses. In Toronto alone, it can be \$140,000 or \$150,000 just for a person to pay a development charge. Yes, we need the infrastructure. But we can talk about infrastructure later on, which I think is a big part of kick-starting our housing starts. But at the end of the day, we've grown so fast, to digest that growth has been difficult. But again, we don't build the houses; we're creating the conditions. It's not going to happen overnight.

We want to set up now for success in the spring, and I think we're doing that through Bill 17 and now Bill 60 and other measures, along with looking at municipal service corporations, which I think is a great tool to help fund the infrastructure we need to get shovels in the ground—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you, Minister. I just need to keep moving.

I have to say and again acknowledge some of the things you said: We are the largest province. We have the largest immigration. That also means the most skilled workers coming in, the most rapidly expanding tax base and therefore the most resources to be able to do something with that money. And we are not seeing the results and the outcomes that Ontarians are looking for. That is the reason that I'm pushing as hard as I am on this.

You mentioned this won't get fixed overnight. No one is asking for it to get fixed overnight. This government has had seven, going on eight, years to fix this, but every single year, as evidenced by the budget, the updated fall economic statement from just a few weeks ago—every year is getting worse. We're not even seeing a change in the signal.

So let's try this another way: Are you still committed to building 1.5 million homes by 2031?

Hon. Rob Flack: I get that question a lot. Thank you.

I'm not focused on 1.5 million new homes—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Your government promised that, so we are focused on it and so are Ontarians.

Hon. Rob Flack: Okay, good. Thank you. I'm not. I'm worried about kick-starting the housing economy for the six, nine, 12 months ahead. If we don't get this thing started, you're right, we won't hit it.

But we are going to get it started by the conditions we're creating to get more homes built faster. Can we still hit it? Absolutely. But we need these conditions to change. It takes too long and it costs too much to build housing. And I hope you would agree that through Bill 17 and now 60, we're changing the environment for that to change.

How many times have we said over the last number of years that it's not governments that build the homes?

We're creating the conditions for municipalities to lower the development charges, to defer them, to standardize the building code.

I talked to one builder in my riding, and he goes to four different communities in this province and he's got four different building codes he's got to adhere to. We've gone crazy in terms of red tape. We've got to reduce the time and lower the cost to get homes built.

Minister?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I think the other thing to bear in mind is that this is the "How do you eat an elephant?" question, which is, "One bite at a time." Some of those bites are larger than others.

We've had several years of robust home-building in Ontario. The minister has talked about the number of rental units being built in Ontario. We've laid the conditions for many things to be done.

You referenced the numbers that were part of the ministry estimates earlier. Behind every one of those dollars is somebody that's in a home because of the way that we have deployed those dollars and the programs that we have supported through those dollars. So, very proud of the work that we've done and very proud of the groundwork that we've laid.

We continue to make sure people get put into homes. If you look at the Building Faster Fund, that's enabling more infrastructure in communities to allow more homes to get built. Then, if you again go through the lines and look at the dollars that we spend on homelessness, which has provided opportunities to work with the federal government, work with municipal governments and get things done, we've really laid the groundwork to build a lot of homes in Ontario and have built a lot of homes.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you. I want to be crystal clear to the two ministers here: I believe that you're honourable men, and I do not for a moment question your intentions or your desire. However, I am questioning the performance.

The Minister of Housing, on several occasions, has referenced Bill 17 as one of the successes of this government. I will be clear: I voted for Bill 17. It was a good move. I was very clear when I debated it. It was a good move. It was a step in the right direction. But it went nowhere near far enough in addressing the scale of the crisis that we face right now.

Very interestingly, before Bill 17, there was a table in the Ontario budget that projected housing starts. This is your ministry's own estimates. Then Bill 17 happened and the fall economic statement came out, and then your estimates came out again and they're lower. So, despite saying that there may have been some good things in Bill 17, I have a very difficult time allowing this ministry to celebrate Bill 17 as the Hail Mary that's going to resuscitate our flailing housing sector.

You don't even have confidence in your own Bill 17; you subsequently lowered your housing starts. So what can you point to that you actually believe will get us back on the path to building 150,000 homes a year—more than

that now if we want to hit 1.5 million by 2031, which you acknowledge is still possible?

Hon. Rob Flack: Well, I wouldn't agree with the premise of your question. No one said Bill 17 was going to be the Hail Mary; far from it. I think what I said is, it was a tool that we're going to use, along with now Bill 60, to help create those conditions. When you create conditions, you don't turn the light on right away.

The new housing market is tough; we're acknowledging it. We can talk about it all day. I acknowledge it; it's tough. So what we're trying to do is, again, create the climate for change. How do you do that? You put in new initiatives. You incent people, which is exactly what we're trying to do: lower the time it takes to get a building permit, lower the time or the cost it takes to get shovels in the ground, and we're doing that. Again, we don't build the houses.

Now, I will say that there are some bright lights across the province. I will say, take a look at rental starts. This year, we're up 38%—through nine months, I believe, 17,000 starts. Over the last three years, we're up 51,000 starts—again, creating those conditions. We reduced the provincial portion of the HST. It helped create those conditions. Those rental units didn't get built overnight. Those rental units started coming on stream, and now we've seen some momentum—again, creating those conditions to get that done.

I'm confident—again, no Hail Mary. I don't think there is a Hail Mary in the housing industry today. I think it's going to be many, many measures—one step at a time. Bill 17, and now Bill 60, if passed, helps create those conditions. As always, we're open and willing to listen and learn about however else we can kick-start this housing economy, including working closely with our federal counterparts, who I'm in constant communication with. Again, it's not just market housing; it's affordable housing and its rentals. It's the housing continuum that we need to work with.

Hon. Graydon Smith: I think the other thing you point to when we talk about Bill 17 is, who was on the podium the day that bill was announced? Well, it was the minister, of course, and the provincial government, but also the Ontario Home Builders' Association, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. I mean, that moment was recognized as an important moment where all the different factions of how homes get built in Ontario had come together to celebrate a moment of significant change.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I don't deny the fact that that was an opportunity to celebrate, but—

Hon. Rob Flack: But would you not acknowledge that, in the last year, the economic conditions of this province have changed massively?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I would, but—

Hon. Rob Flack: The economic headwinds of tariffs, the Trump tariffs, Trump's threats—it changes by the minute, and you know it. I live with it every day.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Absolutely. Of course.

Hon. Rob Flack: That's absolutely caused us to hit the pause button on housing.

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Mr. Adil Shamji: I believe I'm doing the questions here, but I will indulge you and answer your question. Of course, the economic circumstances have changed. They've changed across the entire country, but Ontario is the only one that is flailing.

Hon. Graydon Smith: I think we should get back to the statement I was making earlier—reject the notion that when you have everyone that is part of the home-building continuum standing together saying that these are the right moves and these are the moves that are needed in our province to create positive outcomes, that that isn't an important moment. Because I can tell you that, being a part of a municipal government for a long time, that was a little bit unprecedented to have everybody there in recognition of the work that this government has been doing—

Mr. Adil Shamji: It is a great point, Minister, that the Ontario Home Builders' Association and other groups were present with you at that announcement. However—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): There's one minute and 10 seconds left in this round, so how would you like to use it?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Yes, exactly. I would like to use it, not the ministers.

But if we're going to actually listen to what they're saying, the OHBA, as you seem keen to listen to, has also said that rebating HST for first-time homebuyers on primary residences doesn't go far enough. They've actually said to go further and rebate it on all new primary residences. That will get seniors to downsize and open up more opportunities for housing.

Why is it that you only listen to the OHBA on some occasions but won't listen to them on the others?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thirty seconds.

Hon. Rob Flack: Listening is part of the process in learning. There's OHBA, there's BILD, there's ResCon, there's FRPO—they all acknowledge that we're on the right path. We've created strong economic conditions in this province to be able to afford to drop the HST on purpose-built rentals; on long-term-care homes, development charges are gone; and now first-time home buyers. We're going to continue to put a series of measures in place to ensure that we kick-start this housing economy. I'm focused on the next six to nine to 12 months to get that job done.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister.

We'll go to the government side now: MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you to both ministers, Minister Flack and Minister Smith, for attending today with your staff, and thank you for the heavy lifting you've been doing on this file.

Prior to getting into provincial politics, I was in the municipal sector for eight years and I was a part of a two-tier government. The municipality was Collingwood, and the county was Simcoe county. Housing is a legacy issue. This is not a new issue. It is more acute today for many of the reasons that you've discussed thus far in the estimates hearing today. But I recall being part of Simcoe county governance when they brought in their 10-year housing

strategy, which was an updated strategy. That was in 2014, long before this government took office in 2018.

We know, for a number of reasons that have been discussed today, including geopolitical factors in the economy and what's happening south of the border, that the economics have made it more difficult to address the housing crisis. You've indicated that Ontario has 40% of Canada's population as the fastest-growing, and we know from the CMHC's numbers that, in 2021 and 2022, we had the highest housing starts across Canada with about 200,000 both those years, with 100,000 of those being in Ontario. They indicated that if we continued on that metric, by 2030 we'd be 3.5 million units underhoused across Canada. So this really is a sustainability crisis for us and for the sustainability and resiliency of our communities.

The municipalities are very important partners in developing and getting home building started, along with the builders. This is not going to happen at one level of government. As you've indicated, I don't think there is a silver bullet; I agree with you on that.

We know that the high interest rates, rising construction costs and lengthy approval timelines slow down new housing starts. We also know—certainly in my riding of Simcoe—Grey—that critical infrastructure is a huge pinch point to getting housing starts going. If you don't have the water, waste water and critical linear infrastructure in the ground to support the housing, it's going to prove difficult to do that.

I'm wondering, Minister, if you can take us through the actions that the government is undertaking to ensure that housing starts can move forward—how we cleared these barriers in terms of infrastructure pinch points; what we're doing on that front to try and work together with our communities, with our municipal partners and with our stakeholders in the building sector to overcome these hurdles and to get that type of infrastructure in the ground?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Long question.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It's a good one, though.

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you. A few things that I would highlight, first of all—and maybe back to MPP Shamji's question as well.

We have the largest infrastructure gap in Canada. No province comes close. That being said, it's my belief that that is the biggest deterrent to getting more homes built faster. As we've talked about, in many municipalities, we've invested billions upon billions of dollars in the infrastructure, and so much more is needed. Having said that, I think you would agree that there's only one taxpayer and our municipal partners don't want to see taxes go up. We certainly don't want to raise taxes. And the federal government—I won't speak to them, but there's only one taxpayer.

Frankly, there just isn't enough money or investment ability in the treasury, or through our borrowing capacity, to invest in what the Sewer and Watermain Construction Association would suggest would be over \$200 billion needed in the next 15 years. So where's the money going to come from? One of the tools we want to look at is through a public utility or municipal service corporation.

With that, I think you would find great appetite for municipalities to participate. Peel is going to be the pilot project—again, through public ownership. There are some musings that it isn't going to be public. Well, that would not be correct.

So that is one avenue of which, I think, we can help fund the infrastructure going forward, to support the communities and how they can support themselves through that service—again, amortized over decades, not a few years. Growth does not pay for growth; I think you would agree with that. There was a time when housing prices were going up. Building was strong. Municipalities got to charge these DCs. Those economics don't work anymore; the math doesn't work. So infrastructure is key, and we can talk more about that throughout our time together. But municipal service corps or a public utility—again, emphasizing the word “public”—are still an important factor going forward.

Again, I want to emphasize how long it takes to get a building permit in Ontario. And I use the story that when I bought my first house. I think I paid \$54,000 for it in 1983. The land cost, when I talked to builders in Guelph—probably the lot was \$22,000. There was no development charge—none. I had \$16,000 for a down payment. Interest rates were 19%, I might add, but I could make the math work.

You take the same house today in Guelph, Ontario, and it's over a million dollars. You take a look what the lot would be: \$450,000 to \$500,000. What the DC would be, I'm guessing, is around \$100,000. The math doesn't work today. No matter what you make, a first-time homebuyer like myself—they call them used houses today, but I think I was the third owner in it. The math doesn't work. We have to change that.

So municipal service corps, I think, are a good way to at least lower the development charges. And there's got to be competition. What happened in the rental market—look, I'm a business guy. You can see it. You build scale; you create competition. You create competition; rent prices are coming down. That has to happen in the housing business, as well, too: market, affordable, everything.

And so I would end by saying, maybe turning it over to Minister Smith, that creating those conditions—again, it may not seem big, but lowering development charges or eliminating them, deferring them, getting rid of unnecessary studies. How many studies were around when you built your first house? I would venture to say none. Standardizing the building code is crucial to our success. The code is king. It should be the same in Windsor as it is in Wawa, bottom line. Creating those conditions—that's what's our legislation has been doing.

I'd maybe turn it over to Minister Smith, if he has a few comments to make on that.

Hon. Graydon Smith: And just to supplement what Minister Flack has said, specific to your points around infrastructure—and you know this from your time in the municipal world—those dollars often don't come easy. You plan a long time for what that infrastructure is that

you need to make your community grow and you need partners to make that happen.

What we've been doing through the various programs that we have is making that happen for municipalities, and, I would say, doing so without the traditional support from the federal government. Honestly, we have been doing very much heavy lifting for municipalities, when you look at the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund and the core infrastructure funds that we have, to work with the municipalities to make sure that they can execute on those plans that they have using a combination of municipal and provincial dollars.

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But with the federal government absent, that makes it difficult for everybody. One of the last major programs they had was a long, long time ago—pre-COVID—in terms of pure partnership programs.

So here we are picking up the slack to make sure that our municipalities stay strong; making sure that our municipalities have infrastructure dollars to continue to invest to enable their communities to grow. We've seen that as an incredibly important opportunity that we needed to take. We wish the federal government was a greater partner in that, but in the absence of them, we are certainly going to be and have been there for our municipal partners.

In doing all of that, that lays the groundwork for the street to be built, the bridge to be built, the waterline to be extended, and to create those new areas of development or create an area that allows for more intensification of development.

Minister Flack was talking about some new and innovative ways to look at how this infrastructure gets managed and invested in. I think it's very, very critical that we're doing that at this point in time, when we've seen the increase in costs and how much this infrastructure cost today versus let's say 10 years ago. To simply say, "Well, we'll just keep doing everything exactly the same way forever"—you can't do that. You have to always be in this world of continuous improvement and asking yourself what we can do differently that is going to deliver the best return for those that are ultimately paying these bills, which are people buying new homes and others through taxation.

So I think we've taken the opportunities to examine this and say, "What can be done differently?" and taken some steps to advance that in legislation. I'm excited about those opportunities because, again, having sat on the other side of the municipal-provincial relationship—as have you—these are important conversations that we've all wanted to answer for a long, long time in service to the people in our communities. I think we're on the precipice of something really interesting. But in the interim, we continue to support our municipal friends—all 444 of them, with varying needs from big to small across this province—in ways that are really having an effective return on that investment. You cannot get a better ROI on a dollar than a dollar spent on infrastructure.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you both for that thorough answer.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you.

MPP Smith, please.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): There are four minutes left, roughly.

Ms. Laura Smith: Okay, thank you for that information.

I want to thank the ministers, the associate ministers and the deputy for being here today.

I live in a very large, growing community, and part of Thornhill involves the city of Vaughan. We have an area called the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, which is actually one of the largest-growing communities in Canada, I'd say. Having partnerships with our municipal partners, our mayors, is so key. I was just at a waste water management press conference, and we were happy to talk about the investments that are happening. I'm going to be very graphic: If you can't flush a toilet, you can't put up a building. You have to make those investments happen from the ground up at the beginning. Recognizing that and working with our partners is something that I value, especially the relationship that I have with the mayor of the city of Vaughan, Mr. Steven Del Duca. He's been very progressive in so many ways.

I'm just wondering if you could share how the ministry is supporting municipalities in this work, including the tools and the funding and the programs that have shown to be effective. I know one of the tools that we're using in the city of Vaughan or in my riding of Thornhill is the expansion of roads as well. It's going to facilitate thousands of homes in this one singular area.

So my question to you is, how do these efforts help accelerate housing delivery, enable more homes to be built and ensure that these communities across the province have the infrastructure and support needed to meet their growth and development priorities?

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you, MPP Smith, also for your great work in municipal affairs and housing, supporting our ministry as a great parliamentary assistant.

When I got into this business in April, I remember saying to the Premier, "I don't have any municipal experience." He said, "That's just fine. Be yourself and go do your thing." That's what we've done.

I'd met through AMO, obviously, with many of the mayors and councillors throughout the province. It's a balance between what they need in terms of what they'll ask for—they'll ask for a lot, which I respect. But we've also delivered a lot. When I take a look at what we've done as a province—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Sixty seconds.

Hon. Rob Flack: —really quickly, whether it was the Building Faster Fund, \$1.2 billion; whether it's been the water-enabling fund; infrastructure, \$4 billion; I look at the city of Toronto's \$1.2 billion; I think Ottawa, if I'm not mistaken, was \$200-something million—we continue to support our municipal partners with key investments to get infrastructure in the ground and support their critical needs. Whether it's the vulnerable, the homeless, we con-

tinue to do it. It's an insatiable need. This is a fast-growing province.

At the end of the day, we see this as a partnership. We will continue to work closely with them and advocate with them.

I've enjoyed my time thus far working closely with AMO. President Robin Jones has been terrific to work with. We don't always agree, but it's done so respectfully. We work well together, and we'll continue to do so.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much, Minister.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon.

I have a few questions about the Peel transition that has been referred to. There is obviously a lot of anxiety in Peel, and it's not hard to understand why. This issue started a few years ago with the Premier apparently making a deathbed promise to Hazel McCallion that he'd disband the region of Peel without, apparently, any idea of what the consequences would be. We had the Hazel McCallion Act, which created mass chaos in Peel. At one point, there were hundreds of employees leaving Peel just because of the plan to dissolve the region.

Now we have this Peel transition. Understandably, there's a lot of anxiety, and the anxiety I've heard centres around three main areas, one being the privatization fears that you referenced earlier, Minister, around the municipal services corporation. There's understandably a lot of anxiety from employees who are affected and ratepayers who don't want to pay higher water rates.

What I'd like to know is, for the Peel region water system workers—has this government informed them whether they will continue to have jobs, and will their collective agreements and their working conditions be honoured?

Hon. Rob Flack: I'm really glad you asked this question. First of all, as I think you can see in Bill 45, I believe it is—the transition act—when it comes to municipal service corps, what we did in Bill 60 is say it's going to be a pilot project. Being a pilot, it means we are in the very beginning stages. We do not have a master plan, a strategic plan. We've got, I think, the brightest and best in the room working closely with the deputy and her team to ensure that we have the people who can get it right when we put it together, understanding there's always fears. People fear the worst, but I believe there's nothing to fear here.

I want to emphasize again that when we talk about a public municipal service corporation, “public” means public ownership. I really hope we can stick to that narrative and we can agree to that, that it needs to be public. This government agrees with this 100%.

Mr. Jeff Burch: One of the things that's unique about this is that the government is imposing a municipal services corporation onto Peel, which hasn't happened before, and that's, first of all, something that is happening that is not normal.

1410

The government says that they're on the side of workers. But I would think that a government that's on the side of

workers, when they take an action and they're imposing something on a municipality like Peel, would think about workers and understand that it's going to create anxiety, and that those workers should be reassured that their jobs are going to be secure.

I'm thinking about a lot of the CUPE workers I talked to last week when we talked about Bill 60. They want to know that their jobs are going to be secure. They're loyal, hard-working employees. Why wouldn't the government make it a point to reassure those employees that their jobs and their working conditions would be protected?

Hon. Rob Flack: First of all, I can emphasize that every mayor in the region of Peel wants this. I've talked to them all extensively, and I think the deputy would agree that there is no push back here. How is it going to look? I can't fully answer that yet. It's a pilot project; that's not my expertise.

Mr. Jeff Burch: The mayors will still have their jobs as long as they get re-elected, but it's the employees that work there—

Hon. Rob Flack: I respect that, but I would ask those employees to be patient. We're still going to need—why would there be job losses? Why would there be? We're creating fear where fear doesn't exist.

Again, we're looking at a model, I think, that is progressive, a model that will help build the needed infrastructure for a growing region, a model where three mayors support it, a model that can be replicated right across the province, a model that will help fund infrastructure over decades, not just a few years.

I think, ultimately, as this province grows, employment within the water and waste water sector will not do anything but grow.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Well, we have quite a bit of experience in the municipal sector as well on our side. I have some experience with this model, and it's usually entered into of their own accord by municipalities, and it's usually small or medium-sized municipalities that want a collective vehicle to realize economies of scale and be able to borrow more money for infrastructure and all that. But it's never been imposed on a large municipality like this, and pretty much everyone that I've talked to, including AMO, believes that it will increase water rates for folks in Peel.

You talked earlier about how, under this system—that it's innovative and it's going to open up new possibilities. But the only way I can see that more money is going to be raised or moved from one pocket to another would be that the development charges you referred to are going to move from developers onto the rates that ratepayers pay. That's really the monetary shift that's happening under this. Have you informed Peel ratepayers that they're going to experience—I'm not going to say “skyrocketing;” I don't want to be alarmist. But everyone agrees they're going to have higher water rates. Is this something we want to do in a period when people are worried about affordability, move more costs from developers onto the backs of ratepayers in Peel?

Hon. Rob Flack: Well, a few things: Number one, developers don't always pay the development charges.

Ultimately, the homebuyer does. I think we can acknowledge that.

Again, I want to emphasize that the three mayors have agreed to this pilot project to work closely with us. So this is not something done with their disagreement. We are going to work together to figure this out and get it done right. Again, if it works, and I'm confident that it will, it can be deployed throughout the province—big communities, smaller communities. We can look at communal water systems, which is also highlighted in Bill 60.

The one thing we know for sure is that we need infrastructure. I'll give you an example. Let me give you two quick points. I was with the mayor of Toronto a couple of weeks ago, and we were talking about this very subject with Gregor Robertson. One of the city managers said, "Oh, we had this water main blow up, and we shut down two streets over the weekend." And he said that pipe was put in there in 1874.

So if I come back to the \$200 billion-plus we need to invest in water and waste water infrastructure—when the water and sewer main construction association gives that number, that's not just new infrastructure. That's to replace the very old and aging infrastructure in the province. So where does the money come for that? That's why we're looking to this avenue, because growth doesn't pay for growth. In the past, you could take these fat development charges and invest in infrastructure. But we're reaching the point where we need more than just new infrastructure; we have to replace aging infrastructure—

Mr. Jeff Burch: But shouldn't we be honest with people about where the money is going to come from? Because it's pretty clear it's going to come from ratepayers. It's not going to just appear out of nowhere. The developers are paying those charges now; they won't be later. So the money has to come from somewhere, and it's pretty obvious it will come from ratepayers.

Speaking of transparency, I wanted to ask: The NDP sent a FOI request for the reports from the Peel transition board, and we got over 1,000 pages of redacted pages. Why is the government keeping the information secret from the people of Peel? What is the government concerned that people are going to find out about?

Hon. Rob Flack: Well, not to put you on the spot, Deputy, but can you help me out with that one?

Ms. Martha Greenberg: Yes, they were redacted as cabinet confidential because they do support the decision-making that went into both the decision with respect to the next steps on waste and roads, which was in the previous bill, and then used to inform this bill as well.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay. The government's previous plans for fully dissolving Peel region were scrapped after leaks of reports showed that the cost of dissolution was going to be enormous for taxpayers in Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga. This time, the ministry has managed, obviously, to, I guess, plug those leaks, or successfully managed to keep things secret, let's say. Will the government release the studies showing how much restructuring Peel will cost local taxpayers or water ratepayers?

Hon. Rob Flack: I'm trying to understand the question.

Mr. Jeff Burch: So the previous reports have been kept secret. You have a transition board which has and has not at certain times been in contact with the government. Will studies be released now showing—you must have done some studies showing how much this would cost, I would imagine. It doesn't happen promising someone on their deathbed. I would think that the ministry would have done some homework and have some studies showing how much this will cost: how much it will cost taxpayers, how much it will cost water ratepayers. Will that be released, or will it be kept secret like the last documents were?

Ms. Martha Greenberg: Some of the comments that the minister made with respect to, in your question, will water rates go up—I think that is some of the work that we're going to be doing going forward, and we'll be doing it quite openly. We will be consulting, working with the three lower tiers as well as the region to understand what the opportunities are for investments from other sources, as well, to look at what will be the impact to rates, or not, and what the additional tools are that we could use to support investments in infrastructure, not solely using looking at the ratepayers. So we'll be doing a lot of consulting going forward, which will be very transparent and posted publicly and working with the three lower tiers, as well as investment opportunities to look at how to get investment in the infrastructure, taken into consideration so rates don't go through the roof.

Hon. Rob Flack: If I could just add one thing, again, I want to emphasize we're in the infancy of this whole project. If I had more to give you, I would. I don't today. But I do know that we've got the right people in the right place to help figure this out, working very closely and collaboratively with all the lower municipalities, the lower tier and the region. Again, the three mayors support this initiative. Speed is of the essence. I get a little impatient sometimes, but we're going to get there and get there right.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I hope so, Speaker.

I'm going to hand the rest of my time to my colleague.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP McKenney, you have three minutes.

MPP Catherine McKenney: I just want to get back to chronic homelessness. I do recognize that in St. Thomas, there was a significant advancement in reducing chronic homelessness. That was done because there was an investment in housing and supportive housing and those wraparounds. Something that the associate minister said about—chronic homelessness is with us and will continue to be with us, that's why it's chronic—I would suggest that it's chronic in the past. It's chronic because we've allowed people to stay in homelessness. I don't agree that we will continue to keep people in homelessness because it's chronic. We need those investments. We can end homelessness, and we can do it in a significantly short amount of time if we make those investments, keep people from falling into homelessness, and then build the housing that people need to move out of homelessness and wrap around those supports.

1420

My question really is whether this government has set a target for building new non-market housing, or do you continue to believe that just the for-profit, private market alone will deliver the homes that we need, especially for those people who are in shelter and living in encampments?

Hon. Rob Flack: We have targets set, worked with by the federal government—and we'll get them here in a sec if we can just pull them out—which are part of the National Housing Strategy.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): There's a minute and 23 seconds left.

MPP Catherine McKenney: There was actually a very good report put out by United Way East Ontario and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada—you probably read it, I hope—Built for Good. It called for significant new investments in both affordable, non-profit and co-op housing. I wonder how many new non-profit and co-op homes will be funded by the provincial government this coming year.

Hon. Rob Flack: I can answer your first question a little more specifically here. The National Housing Strategy asks for a commitment to build 19,660 affordable homes by March 31, 2028. We're sitting at about 12,000 and change right now.

On co-operative housing—I'm a big advocate and a big fan, and I'm hoping through Build Canada Homes that we can work together collaboratively to get more shovels in the ground to see more of those projects. I visited many of those—

MPP Catherine McKenney: I would suggest that Build Canada Homes was pretty disappointing as well. It provided about half of the funding in the budget that the federal government just put out. I'm not sure that I'm going to be hanging—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): I'm sorry. The time is up, MPP McKenney.

MPP Shamji.

Mr. Adil Shamji: With your permission, gentlemen, I wanted to continue back along the previous line of questioning, where we left off when we were discussing the HST rebate—again, another important measure. I wanted to just ask some more questions around that.

Notably, I think all of us around the table can agree that it's an important step in the right direction. Given the scale of the housing crisis in Ontario, (1) why did it take so long to implement and (2) why is it only limited to homes up to \$1 million, given that that excludes a lot of homes in the greater Toronto area, our largest municipality in Ontario?

Hon. Rob Flack: First, I would suggest there's a sliding scale above \$1 million. We'll get you the graph. But there still is a rebate—not as much. And even over \$1.5 million, I think it ends up being—please don't quote me on this—about \$24,000. There is a sliding scale above \$1 million, understanding that Toronto is a more expensive market.

We wanted to work collaboratively with the federal government. They made the commitment, and I was very pleased to stand with Minister Bethlenfalvy and make that

announcement a couple of short weeks ago. I think it's going to have impact. We're certainly counting on people to take their finger off the pause button and get homes built very quickly.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I certainly hope so too.

Let's talk about some of the anticipated outcomes, because I listened very intently, and I'm hoping for this to be a tremendous success. One of the things that I believe that you mentioned is that you anticipate that this will lead to about 10,000 new starts in the next year alone.

As I look at your own projections in the fall economic statement, however, even by 2028, there's only going to be 83,700 housing starts—10,000 only gets you up to 93,700. Let's say it's twice what's expected. That's 100,000, far short of 150,000, which is the minimum that we're looking for.

Expanding the rebate to all homebuyers would not get us 150,000, but it would get us about 40,000 more starts. I think we can all agree that would be a good thing, so why not go further?

Hon. Rob Flack: I think we want to see exactly how this particular iteration of the HST removal for first-time homebuyers works. Again, I'm confident that it will.

I would also point out, in terms of affordability, this government has not raised a tax since we've been in power. I think that certainly bodes—versus the federal government where taxes continue to increase.

Creating the conditions to get more homes built faster is really what we're trying to do here. That's an important tool, but so is eliminating and deferring development charges.

I think when you see—I'm not sure. Deputy, I'll turn to you. What have we got in municipalities right now, sitting in the coffers in terms of development charges: \$10 billion, \$12 billion? Is it about that?

Interruption.

Hon. Rob Flack: So \$10 billion in reserve. We want to see that money invested quickly into infrastructure and, along with a municipal service corp, look at different ways of lowering the cost of getting shovels in the ground. Whether it's Building Faster Fund money or DC collections or new infrastructure money, we need to get those infrastructure projects started and started faster.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I think we can both be absolutely agreed on the fact that development charges are a major barrier to housing affordability in Ontario. And your earlier remarks about how that's holding things back, I entirely agree with.

You've mentioned development charges a number of times. I've been very clear for some time now that I think the province should step in and eliminate development charges and provide the funding that municipalities require so that they're not forced into a position where they need to do that.

This government has had no problem essentially committing \$50 billion to \$100 billion for a tunnel under the 401, \$3 billion for a foreign spa company at Therme, \$1.9 billion to bring alcohol into convenience stores one year early. Why not make an investment that will actually help

everyday Ontarians and take action now, given the scale of the crisis that Ontarians are facing right now, the distinctly abysmal situation of housing in Ontario compared to the rest of the country? Why are we waiting to take action on development charges right now and why will you not eliminate them today?

Hon. Rob Flack: Well, we have taken action: We deferred them until occupancy, which is freeing up cash flow for builders, and we're talking about a public utility that will offset the need for development charges. That's exactly what we're doing.

So maybe not the way you're suggesting, but we're creating ways that we continue to lower them or get rid of them altogether. I think it's going to take some time because we do need critical infrastructure. It's just not going to happen overnight. We need to continue to invest in roads, water, waste water. And that's exactly why they're there.

Now, deferring them until occupancy has certainly helped because it frees up cash flow for builders to not have to invest that money. And importantly, we've eliminated them on long-term-care residences and we're seeing shovels in the ground there. We're seeing benefit from that and deferring, again, until occupancy.

Take a look at Mayor Del Duca and Mayor Parrish, both in Vaughan and in Mississauga. They cut them in half, deferred them, and we're seeing, I think it was, 11,000 or 12,000 new starts in Mississauga. There's a perfect example of how we need to create the conditions to get more homes built faster.

Hon. Graydon Smith: How development charges are calculated and collected is a choice, too. All these development charges are the fruit of a background study that has a lot of different inputs that—the municipalities are going to control those inputs as to what goes into it, and a number comes out.

As Minister Flack referenced, municipalities, at that point, can decide what they want to do with that number—whether they want to implement the entire number; whether they want to implement a percentage of that number—but we have been, as we talked about, putting billions of dollars into infrastructure to support municipalities in that core infrastructure that otherwise would be part of a development charge. So I think, to your point, that is a very critical thing to remember, is that the billions of dollars we have invested is exactly what you're talking about.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I will say you've given two examples and there are 444 municipalities. I don't think that all 442 of them have issues with development charges, but many of them do, which underscores the need for provincial leadership. And I'd like to see—if you're giving examples for two municipalities, we need to get to a place where we're seeing that example in every single one of them, hence the nature of my question.

Hon. Rob Flack: I don't disagree.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I wonder if we could—just a quick question here. I'm very concerned about backlogs at the Landlord and Tenant Board. I'm curious to know what's stopping you from returning to in-person hearings?

Hon. Rob Flack: Sorry, I missed the last part.

Mr. Adil Shamji: What's stopping you from returning to in-person hearings at the Landlord and Tenant Board?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): I'm sorry. MPP Saunderson—point of order.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: So the Ministry of the Attorney General determines how hearings are held at the Landlord and Tenant Board. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and housing has a procedure but does not do the operation of the boards, so this question, I would submit, is out of scope.

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Mr. Adil Shamji: Respectfully, Chair, this is a question about the administration of the Residential Tenancies Act. The legislation, Bill 60, that just came under this minister has ramifications for the Landlord and Tenant Board. I think it's perfectly reasonable to ask this question.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: The hearings are determined by MAG, by the Ministry of the Attorney General.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Saunderson, I can't look through every word at this second in the estimates to see if that falls under this ministry. It makes sense that it goes to the Attorney General's ministry, so—

Mr. Adil Shamji: No problem. Let's talk about homelessness, since that's clearly within the ministry's purview.

Minister, earlier you mentioned that it's a chronic problem. Respectfully, I differ slightly on it. There's a chronic element, but I think it's more of an acute, un-chronic problem, because while it's not unusual for many municipalities and jurisdictions—frankly, around the world—to see an element of homelessness, it has become markedly worse under this Premier's government. For the first time ever that I am aware of, municipalities are declaring emergencies because of homelessness, and I am not aware of that ever having happened before. So it is an acute, un-chronic issue that I believe your government has played a role in.

For example, your government passed legislation that would commit people showing signs of addiction to jail if they were living in a public space, and there is a stated intent to redirect them to supportive housing or alternative supports. Yet funding for homelessness has stagnated. It is unchanged even as the homelessness crisis has worsened. Shelters are full and largely overwhelmed.

What steps are you going to take to ensure that the supportive shelter and housing space is present, especially when current funding is inadequate and, according to your budget, will remain unchanged?

Hon. Rob Flack: Again, it's up 40% from two to three years ago to \$700 million; it's what we're investing in homelessness prevention. We are continuing to work closely with our federal and provincial counterparts. Again, I think one of the things I'll be asking for is a redefinition or reorganization of the National Housing Strategy because I think we need to have that stable funding, sustainable funding, for years ahead, and that's going to start immediately as we take over as chair in early January.

This province has made record investments in homelessness prevention. There are many great stories and many great success stories throughout the province.

Yes, I've seen some emergencies that were called on. Let's talk about Barrie for a second. We're seeing results from that call; improvements made in that community. It's being dealt with.

That being said, again, there's no magic bullet here either. It is chronic or acute—we can debate the adjective—but we continue to invest significantly. We're going to continue to support our municipal partners, our service managers, helping them deploy the best funding possible where it needs it most.

Minister, would you like to add to that?

Mr. Adil Shamji: As you answer that, Minister, perhaps you can elaborate on just one other thing. I acknowledge that maybe the investments are greater compared to three years ago.

I'm actually more interested not in the investments, but in the outcomes. So can you share with me what is the state, objectively, of homelessness now compared to three years ago?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I think if you want to talk outcomes, there are a lot of really exceptional outcomes that we've seen.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Across the province, though.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Well, in particular communities, as I referenced earlier to MPP McKenney's comments, we see on a regular basis the deployment of provincial dollars that is making a tangible and positive impact on people in the opening of new facilities, the investments that we've made that have increased shelter facilities for those that maybe—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Minister, again, speak to me about the outcomes in combatting homelessness at a provincial level because that is where you measure your impacts, right?

So you've made record investments compared to three years ago. How much has the homelessness situation across the province improved?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I think we measure homelessness at very much a personal level, so to humanize it in—

Mr. Adil Shamji: No, no, no. We don't get to pick and choose anecdotes—unless you're telling me that you guys are investing, according to your estimates, \$670 million a year, and you do not measure, for example, the number of people who are homeless.

Hon. Graydon Smith: What I am telling you is that we have many successful outcomes for many people across this province—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Give me some numbers.

Hon. Graydon Smith:—based on the investments that we have made, whether that's in Hastings county or Sault Ste. Marie or the city of Ottawa or the city of Toronto. We continue to make investments that have positive outcomes for people—

Mr. Adil Shamji: So it's worse in Ottawa, by the way, and it's worse across the province.

Hon. Graydon Smith:—and we'll continue to have those conversations with our local service managers.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I need some reassurance. If we're approving your estimates for \$1.5 billion, including \$670 million—which is not an increase—in homelessness, what is the reassurance that you guys are even measuring the effectiveness of your intervention as opposed to cherry-picking stories?

Hon. Rob Flack: So new funding is supporting—new funding will be put forward. The creation of over 1,200 long-term affordable and supportive housing units in the province, expanding shelter capacity by nearly 1,000 spaces and creating additional temporary accommodation space like modular units aimed at providing people living in encampments—I can tell you in London, right now, that's taking place as we speak. And we're topping up the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit to help local service managers move approximately 1,000 people living in shelters into long-term housing.

Mr. Adil Shamji: What is the total number of homeless people in Ontario today and what was it three years ago?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): One minute and 10 seconds.

Ms. Martha Greenberg: I don't have the number from three years ago. I can tell you that September 2025, with respect to shelter occupancy, was at 89.1%, whereas a year ago it was at 95.6%. So we have seen a use of shelter space decrease. We've added shelter space. To the minister's comment, additional shelter space has been created, and we're seeing the use of the shelter space decrease. So it was at 95.6% occupancy last year, and it's at 89.1% occupancy this year.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay, it's not what I asked. We've seen encampments go up, and my understanding is that after the recent legislation that you guys passed, some people are being incarcerated. So what is the total number of people who are homeless in Ontario right now?

Ms. Martha Greenberg: As of October 2025, there are 31,185 people experiencing homelessness among people who are recipients of social assistance. We work with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to look at the numbers based on social assistance use. So that number, as of October, is 31,185.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Can you give me that number going back annually as far back as you can?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): I'm afraid we're out of time in this transaction anyway.

We're going to the government's side for 15 minutes. MPP Grewal.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you, Ministers, for joining us today as well as the deputy minister and your entire team at MAH. Thank you for the great work that you've been doing introducing new bills and bringing some well-needed changes in Ontario to support the growth of our housing sector.

Like you said earlier, the announcements, especially the people that have been standing beside you during these announcements—it's astonishing to have the support of

the very community that is bringing out the changes required to help support the housing industry. I've seen previous governments stand up and go on the podium without any of that. That's a testament to your leadership, that those organizations are now jumping on board and supporting this government's agenda in moving housing across the province.

Apart from the DCs and the development charges that you've been talking about, I want to focus on some of the changes that we can do to kind of streamline the process further when it comes to our building code. The government is looking at certain changes to the building code to help streamline and progress forward to make it easier for developers and municipalities to enforce that code but have a certain level of consistency throughout the board when it comes to that. We've seen comments from developers come back, and municipalities, that there is duplicacy in the building code and there are certain items that we can streamline to help build homes faster and remove complications within the system. So would any minister like to comment on that and see what we're doing to help streamline that?

Hon. Rob Flack: Great question, thank you. So in Bill 60, what you're seeing us try to accomplish is a line-by-line review of the building code. When I first walked into the MMAH office—my office there—there were two binders on the credenza. I said, "What are those?" Thick binders—I think we weighed them; they were 13 pounds. That would be the building code of Ontario. So I said, "Okay, that's great." Then you figure out that there are I don't know how many iterations. Municipalities add iterations of this building code and, again, it takes too long to go through it, so it causes cost to get homes built.

That being said, we're going to go through, with this particular legislation, if passed, a line-by-line review of the building code, section by section. We have a really good building code, by the way, in Ontario. I'm very impressed with the committee that oversees it, with the team that manages it. I think it's a very, very effective building code. That being said, there's always ways to find streamlining improvements and ways to find efficiency. That's what we're going to focus on, line by line.

1440

Code is king. As I said, whether you're in Prescott or Pickering, whether you're in Windsor or Wawa, the code should be the same in Ontario. If we believe in the code, then let the code be king. Municipalities should not be able to have their own iterations, in our respectful and humble opinion.

I think once this review is done, you're going to see a more efficient, standard and applicable building code right across the province. I'm sure it's going to reduce the time it takes to get these building permits in place with a strong building code like we have today.

Hon. Graydon Smith: To add to that, I think that predictability, that consistency from municipality to municipality is incredibly important. Not just for that home builder that comes through the door and may work in

municipality A but also works in municipality B and they're striving for that consistency, but when you look at it from chief building officials and other building officials that may work in a municipality, oftentimes, they go from municipality to municipality in terms of their own career advancement. If they can carry that internal knowledge of a building code that can be applied rigorously and properly and consistently in the same way from each municipality, that also creates better outcomes.

We want our building officials, who do an incredible and great job, to be able to be trained up on a code that has that clarity to it. I'll just use, again, a small town for an example, but it really translates to larger municipalities as well. In some cases in my riding, I've got a chief building official that works for two municipalities. Well, imagine if they had their own kind of iterations and little substitutions—or additions, rather—to the code. That presents challenges. It would present challenges for them in executing their job and for any developer that went to those two communities.

The code itself, it's really important to have that simplified and streamlined and to get it right, and that code is king, as the minister said. But also, the application of that and how it really rolls out and plays out is super important too, and we'll be leaning heavily on the great building officials all throughout Ontario to help us with that.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you very much to both ministers. I truly believe that this legislation that you're bringing forward is going to also help streamline building permit processing times. If the code is the same across the board, to your point, Minister Smith, if the same people are dealing on the same files across the province, it's really going to help things move faster. Thank you for your leadership on that, Minister Flack and Minister Smith.

I'm going to yield the rest of the time that I have to my colleague MPP Amarjot Sandhu.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): MPP Sandhu.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the minister and associate minister for the presentation. Let me begin by appreciating you both and the entire team at the ministry for the great work you're doing.

Besides my role as being the member of this committee, I'm also the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Infrastructure. I have had the opportunity to meet over 60 municipalities at the recent AMO conference, and I heard loud and clear that water infrastructure is the number one enabler to build housing. They generally appreciate the billions of dollars of investments that we're making in Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund and Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, because these are the critical infrastructure priorities for any growing community.

But for far too long, municipalities have been stuck navigating outdated, expensive, and overly complicated processes that drive up costs and delay construction. Our government understands that when municipalities succeed, families succeed, and that is why we're introducing

practical, made-in-Ontario solutions that help get homes built faster while keeping costs down for homebuyers.

But we have heard some wild claims suggesting that our government's new municipal service corporation model is somehow privatizing water services. Can you please explain and highlight to the members of the committee how this publicly owned and publicly accountable model will deliver water and waste water infrastructure more efficiently while keeping services where they belong, in the hands of the people of Ontario?

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you again for the question. I'm glad to answer it again, I think for the second or third time this afternoon.

As we move forward with this pilot project and hopefully down the road with other projects, they will be publicly owned—not to say that there won't be private investment to help fund them so we don't have to raise taxes. But the Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act certainly identifies that this municipal service corporation will be publicly owned.

Let me just say a couple more comments about municipal service corporations again, and again maybe to my friend opposite here as well. This is a pilot project.

Maybe, Deputy, if I could turn it to you to just talk a little bit about some of the great minds that sit on this committee—not specifically, but where their background is. From finance to having done these projects, we're going to get it done right. We're going to measure twice, cut once, as they say. But maybe just give an overview of who you have working on this committee.

Ms. Martha Greenberg: This is work where we will be working with all of the lower tiers, first off, and the region as well. I would say, at the moment, as well, as you may be familiar, OCWA supports the delivery of water in Peel, and so we will be working very closely with OCWA. We will be working very closely with the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. We'll be working very closely with the Ministry of Finance to talk about the financing.

I think there were some comments with respect to where it's been done before. Innisfil is a great example. We want to look at Innisfil and how they've worked to set it up. I know there are other communities who have done that as well.

We're also working with some of the investment opportunities and looking through people who have worked in municipalities previously who are interested in this model. We're working, as I said, with some of the investment opportunities, who are very interested in understanding how this model could work and whether there's an opportunity for them to support the infrastructure needs in that regard. We're bringing together all players and all aspects of it to understand the different perspectives that need to be considered as we go in.

The governance of it—we're also trying to understand the best governance model. I think that is one of the things when we look at the difference of what we're talking about

here. It's to improve the governance of water and waste water at the municipal level.

So we're working with all aspects and representatives in all of those areas, sometimes together and sometimes separately, to understand the different aspects of what we need to consider to make sure we get this right.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): Thank you.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Chair, how much time?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): You have about five minutes.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Minister, thank you for the response.

One of the key concerns—this is a different issue, on LTB, the Landlord and Tenant Board. What we continue to hear from Ontarians, both tenants and rental housing providers, is the need for a fair, efficient and timely process at the Landlord and Tenant Board. Delays in resolving disputes can create uncertainty and financial strain on responsible rental providers, who rely on rental income to maintain their properties, and for responsible tenants, who deserve stability and clarity in their living situations.

Can you please explain to the committee how the government's reforms to the Landlord and Tenant Board are striking the right balance, protecting tenants, supporting responsible landlords and ensuring that disputes are resolved more quickly and fairly for everyone involved?

MPP Catherine McKenney: I thought that was out of order.

Interjections.

Hon. Rob Flack: I'm sorry? I missed something there.

Mr. Brian Sauderson: You've got to read the act. They have control of the process, and then MAG has control of tribunals. You asked a question about operation of the tribunals; this is a question about process.

Interjections.

Hon. Rob Flack: All right. Now that we've got that settled, I think we all know that improvements needed to be made to the Landlord and Tenant Board. Remember, most people in this province, landlord or tenant, play within the rules. They're great agreements: A landlord rents to a tenant; the tenant pays the rent. That's how it's supposed to be. Where we have discrepancies—let's call them bad actors, both landlords and tenants—we have a Landlord and Tenant Board.

It takes too long, again, to get to the Landlord and Tenant Board. We've all acknowledged that. I think what this legislation, from a process standpoint, is doing is speeding up those delays.

I might add—and it's important to add—that not one protection for tenants that exists in the province today is being altered or changed, period. What we are doing, though, is bringing balance back to the Landlord and Tenant Board, and it's important.

Let me give you an example. You're a family of two. You have an additional residential unit in your basement, and you rent it out to somebody. Why? Because you need the income. It's how you're paying your mortgage. That person, being one of the bad actors—and I acknowledge

that there are some bad actors on the landlord side too—doesn't pay the rent, not because they can't but because they won't. That exists in the province today.

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That being said, we now are putting contingencies in place so that can be dealt with faster and more effectively. Because after all, that family requires that income, that rent, to pay the mortgage, to put food on the table, to make the car payment, to get their kids into hockey or soccer or whatever it may be.

We need to bring balance, to restore balance back. Respectful tenants, respectful landlords—it works. It's the adjudication process. We've added 40 more adjudicators. We are going to continue to improve upon that. This legislation, again, complements the need that MAG requires, the Ministry of the Attorney General, to get these adjudications done faster, while protecting—always protecting—landlords' rights, yes, but not one change to tenants' protections has been altered in this legislation.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Anand?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Minister. I don't have much time, but I want to start by thanking you for your leadership and the work that you're both doing, that your team is doing.

A house is a house is a house, whether it's a rental house, whether somebody owns that house or somebody is living in a community house. My question is about community housing. As the demand continues to grow, it is essential not only to increase the supply, but to ensure that the existing housing stock is maintained and preserved for future generations. Many communities face challenges with aging buildings, rising operational costs and the need for modernization, which puts pressure. Minister, what are you doing about it?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Minister, you have about 50 seconds to answer that.

Hon. Rob Flack: Okay. Community housing is an absolute, important part of the housing continuum in Ontario. We acknowledge that.

I met with many of the service managers in the province a couple of weeks ago, and one of the big factors we have to look at is keeping those community housing units in good repair. They're aging infrastructure and, again, that is why, when we sit down with the federal government, we want to see a national housing strategy extended so we can have consistency and the funding we need. Because we've got more community housing in Ontario than anywhere else in Canada and it's aging stock.

Again, we come back to infrastructure, right? We need to ensure that that stock is repaired and maintained in the proper way. I—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister. The time is out.

For the remaining eight minutes and 50 seconds, MPP McKenney has the floor for the official opposition.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Just before I start, I just want to make sure that I'm getting a commitment from the ministry that I will get the information provided on the

Canada housing benefit, the allocations to municipalities and how they've changed since last year. And also—

Interjection.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Is that correct?

Ms. Martha Greenberg: I just wanted to confirm: Did you want that for all or for Ottawa and Hamilton?

MPP Catherine McKenney: For all, please. And if there are any municipalities where it's lower—yes, perfect.

Also, just picking up on MPP Shamji's point, if we could also be provided with information on the numbers of people experiencing homelessness over the last, say, four years and how that's changed. Thank you.

I would like to ask a question about DCs. I know often you refer to Toronto, but I just want to refer to Ottawa for a moment. The average home price in Ottawa, because it's a very different city, is approximately \$650,000. The average DC is a bit harder to calculate because we have inside and outside the greenbelt, but overall, it's about \$45,000.

I get that removing DCs frees up, as you say, resources for developers to build, but how are you going to ensure that that, in this case, \$45,000 is passed on to the purchaser? Because you say often that we shouldn't be asking homeowners to pay for this. So how do you ensure that that very amount isn't passed on to the homeowner when they purchase that home? That it's not just driven by the market—which, I assume you believe in the market conditions that set home prices.

Hon. Rob Flack: Well, sure, I believe in the market conditions. I think we can look at ways to explore how, on a closing sale, on a purchase-and-sale agreement, that that could be identified. That's one of the things, quite frankly, I like about the lowering of the HST. People will see that rebate that goes directly to them. It doesn't get buried in some of the others' costs along the way.

Ottawa at \$45,000—thanks for saying it—is about the same as London. I think we would all acknowledge that a lot of municipalities don't even have development charges, but where the punitive development charges hurt is also where we have regional governments where you get two tiers of development charges. That's why I think Toronto and region is so high.

Your question is, how do we make sure that people get that savings in their pocket? I think we have to look, when you close a deal, that if the development charge isn't there, it's shown on the purchase and sale agreement.

MPP Catherine McKenney: So you will compel a developer in the purchase and sale agreement to say, "This home, yesterday, was \$650,000. Lucky you, you're buying it today, so it's going to be \$605,000?"

Hon. Rob Flack: I'm not here compelling anyone. I'm saying that we will look at ways to ensure that that accountability exists. I'm not going to compel anyone today.

MPP Catherine McKenney: But could you give an example of how that might work? I think that people—

Hon. Rob Flack: The example would be simply, if we got rid of development charges in Ottawa and there's a municipal service corporation in place and they didn't need it, then there would be no development charge to

charge. That is ultimately what we want to see. Development charges—when did they come into existence? Who knows that?

MPP Catherine McKenney: Unless you're going to tell me exactly how that's going to be passed on, I'm going to move to my next question, because that's what I want to know: How is that development charge going to be passed on to the homebuyer? Because we talk about making homes more affordable for people purchasing them. That's what I want to know.

Mr. Caspar Hall: My name is Caspar Hall. I'm the assistant deputy minister of the local government division at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

I think the minister said that the ministry could explore opportunities to see how that would move forward. If we're talking about municipal service corporations, a consideration could be to maintaining development charges or a thought could be exploring something like a connection fee on new homes and new businesses as well, where you would be able to show maybe the cost of that development charge over time. That could be something that would be on a particular water rate charge as well for new homes, and that could be amortized over a long period of time as well. That is only an example. That is not necessarily what the government may take on.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Just quickly, in the last couple of minutes that I have—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Three and a half minutes.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Three and a half—okay.

I want to just go back to your Housing Affordability Task Force, Minister. The top recommendation really was to end exclusionary zoning, legalizing more affordable units, townhomes and fourplexes in all neighbourhoods, as of right, across the province, and you've not done that. You've not followed through on that recommendation. Yet 80% of families in Ontario can't afford a single-detached home. I just wonder why you believe it is fair for families to be zoned out of neighbourhoods where they want to live in municipalities?

Hon. Rob Flack: I'm going to get ADM Fraser to answer that, please.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Certainly. With respect to exclusionary zoning, this would be things like additional residential units on a single lot. Through Bill 23, what was put in place across the province would be that there's a minimum of three per lot. In effect, that has been implemented across the province. That is the Planning Act minimum standard. Under the Planning Act, however, municipalities can go further based on local conditions. They could go to four, they could go to five—whatever they wish to bring forward in adopting updates to their zoning bylaw. So that is in effect.

MPP Catherine McKenney: But your ministry is not going to put in place the recommendation, then, from the Housing Affordability Task Force. Because that task force was very clear that it would take more than just three per lot, but that we would really have to end exclusionary

zoning, allowing for fourplexes and that gentle density in all neighbourhoods as of right.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Like I said, they've brought forward, across the board, in fully municipally serviced lands, the three-unit standard.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): A minute and 15 seconds.

MPP Catherine McKenney: I have a minute and 15 seconds.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You don't have to use it if you don't want to.

MPP Catherine McKenney: No, I'm happy to use it.

If I may, the fall economic statement does have housing starts collapsing across the province, and at the same time, we're looking at spending upwards of \$100 billion on a tunnel under the 401.

I just wonder: While we're seeing homelessness increase—and it is increasing—and home ownership moving further and further away from young families, residential workers, construction workers looking for jobs, would you say that there are better ways of spending \$100 billion? Perhaps spending it on new affordable homes or on ending chronic homelessness in this province?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have 25 seconds, Minister.

Hon. Rob Flack: Again, I will stand on our record. We've made historic investments in tackling the root causes of homelessness. We continue to invest with our municipal partners in homelessness prevention and protection. We work with partner ministries and other levels of government, protecting our most vulnerable.

I want to end by saying that the National Housing Strategy is coming to an end in the next two years. That's almost like tomorrow, because we need to have a longer-term commitment. I will be vigilant to make sure we get a new deal put in place.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much, Minister.

This concludes the committee's consideration of the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

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 1901, ministry administration program, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 1901 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 1903, local government, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 1903 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 1908, housing policy and planning, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 1908 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 1909, municipal and housing operations, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All

those opposed, please raise your hands. Vote 1909 is accordingly carried.

Shall the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs Housing carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare it carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2025-26 estimates of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to the House? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. Carried.

That concludes our consideration of this ministry's estimates. I'd like to thank Minister Flack, Associate Minister Smith and everyone here today for their participation.

There being no further business, this committee stands adjourned until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, November 19, 2025, when we will consider the estimates of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming.

Thank you, everyone.

The committee adjourned at 1503.

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