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HE-26

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HE-26

Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy

Estimates

Ministry of Municipal Affairs
and Housing

Office of the Lieutenant Governor

Ministry of Citizenship
and Multiculturalism

Ministry of Transportation

1st Session

44th Parliament

Monday 5 October 2026

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

Budget des dépenses

Ministère des Affaires municipales
et du Logement

Bureau du lieutenant-gouverneur

Ministère des Affaires civiques
et du Multiculturalisme

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Lundi 5 octobre 2026

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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

Monday 5 October 2026

Lundi 5 octobre 2026

The committee met at 1002 in committee room 1.

ESTIMATES

MINISTRY OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS
AND HOUSING

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 2026-27 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 from the members before we start? 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 all yours.

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you, Chair. It's great to be here. And thank you, all members—in particular, Jeff Beattie, who is our newest MPP in the Legislature, so welcome to the proceedings, MPP Beattie.

I'm joined here today as well by our deputy minister, the associate minister and members of our senior team, who are here to help answer any questions we may have.

My goal today is to not only show what this ministry spends, but what Ontarians get in return for our proposed 2026-27 total operating capital budget of nearly \$1.8 billion. For me, estimates comes down to a simple question: Are we using these dollars responsibly, and are Ontarians seeing the results and benefits of that investment?

Over the past several years, Ontario has seen enormous change, and with it, real challenges that touch everyone

and everything we do as a government. People continue to choose Ontario. Businesses are investing and communities are growing. New jobs are being created. All the while, we are protecting Ontario as we navigate the uncertainty brought on by President Trump and his trade war against our country.

Bringing certainty back to these uncertain times is the absolute focus of Premier Ford and this government. We also have a responsibility to make sure Ontario is building the homes and infrastructure needed for our communities to prosper. The status quo is no longer sufficient to navigate historically rapid population growth, interest rate shocks and unprovoked attacks on our economy.

At the ministry, our work to protect Ontario and responsibly manage these investments is focused on these core priorities:

- supporting the people who need them the most;
- streamlining and supporting municipal government;
- making housing more affordable; and
- building more homes.

Let me begin with our first priority, which is one of the most difficult challenges facing communities across this province, and that is homelessness. Let's be clear: This is not an issue that affects one town, one city, one region or even one province. This is a pan-Canadian challenge. Communities across Ontario are seeing growing pressure on emergency shelters, supportive housing and homelessness services.

Homelessness cannot be addressed by one ministry alone. It requires a coordinated approach across government, with health, social services and, yes, housing each playing an important role. We know municipalities are on the front lines working every day to support the people experiencing homelessness and, importantly, prevent people from falling into homelessness. No one government can solve this challenge alone; it requires national coordination guided by local expertise. To drive lasting, meaningful change, we need the federal government at the table, working in unison with every province and every territory in Canada.

Ontario represents over half of Canada's housing community stock, and I'm going to stop and repeat that again; it's an important fact to remember: Ontario represents over half of Canada's community housing stock—half of it, in this province alone. Our voice matters and now is the time for national leadership, shared responsibility and coordinated action, not one-off deals.

Right now, as validated by the Financial Accountability Officer, over 200,000 households are supported by programs through this partnership. We are leading the discussion to build on this success. Over 25,000 households received housing and other assistance to help them exit homelessness in 2025-26, an increase of 65% from 2022-23.

However, we all know there are still challenges. By some estimates, roughly 70,000 people are currently impacted by homelessness at some point in the year—not all at once, but at some point in the year. As the challenge evolves, our response must evolve with it. However, we need to address the entire housing continuum as we respond, from homelessness and supportive housing, through community and rental housing, all the way to home ownership.

As the co-chair of the FPT housing forum, Ontario will take a leading role to help facilitate and negotiate a new deal. That gives us an opportunity to build a stronger national framework for housing and homelessness: one that provides the funding that matches the challenges before us, the flexibility to adapt to local concerns and stable, consistent long-term funding to support effective planning. That is the need. That's what we're striving to accomplish.

These challenges do not respect provincial boundaries. If the federal government is going to be in the housing sector, they must be a strong and supportive partner in addressing these challenges. People who need help, along with supportive housing providers, should not have to navigate a maze of disconnected programs simply because governments have different jurisdictions. Together, I believe we can find new paths of success to provide those who exit homelessness new possibilities.

National leadership doesn't mean that we don't also respond to the emergencies happening right here at home. This summer reminded us of that responsibility when unexpected extreme weather touched many areas of our province. Ontario is here to help when help cannot be provided through private insurance. That is where the Disaster Recovery Assistance for Ontarians program comes in. I want to be very clear about that distinction: DRAO is not and was never intended to be a replacement for insurance. Again, it's not insurance. Insurance remains the first line of protection for insurable losses. DRAO provides a backstop for eligible losses from natural disasters that cannot reasonably be covered by private insurance.

Our ability to respond depends on good communication and information from our municipal partners. Local governments understand what happens on the ground. The information they provide to our ministry is vital to our assessment. That local knowledge is critical to our ability to activate DRAO. We cannot act without it. Local leadership is vital to getting support to those who potentially qualify.

This brings me to my second priority: streamlining and supporting municipal government. Together, we are reforming the way regional government works better to address urgent provincial needs or provincial priorities. In

eight fast-growing regions, we are using the new regional head of council model to strengthen leadership and coordination on shared priorities. These regional heads will work with the locally elected councils to advance provincial priorities, including housing, infrastructure and economic growth. The individuals under consideration in the regions are expected to possess exemplary leadership skills and have been going through a rigorous ministry-led process to ensure the best person for the job is selected.

1010

As we know, Ontario is facing unprecedented challenges, and we need local leadership equipped with the right tools to drive meaningful results based on our shared provincial priorities.

Another action we are focused on is tackling the affordability challenges that touch every corner of this province. Nowhere is that pressure felt more than in the cost of buying a new home—or a home, period. Owning a home remains a quintessential Canadian dream, and it is one that must never be allowed to extinguish. Despite our successes, it still takes too long and it costs too much to build housing in Ontario. We are constantly looking at ways to change this.

That is why our government is driving down the cost of housing from multiple directions. We are streamlining official plans, site plan control and also the building code. Importantly, we temporarily eliminated the full HST on new home sales. These reforms are delivering measurable results driven by the HST rebate. And now, new home sales rose 130% year over year in the second quarter of 2026.

But that's not all. We are reducing development charges while investing in infrastructure, and we are putting money directly back in the pockets of people who buy new homes. The Development Charge Reduction Program is a major initiative we announced in March of this year. Through the \$8.8-billion Canada-Ontario Partnership to Build, municipalities will receive funding to reduce development charges while building roads, water and waste water systems and transit needed to support new growth and replace aging infrastructure. Municipalities participating in the program are required to reduce development charges by 30% to 50% or more and maintain those reductions for at least three years.

This is fundamentally a different way of thinking about growth. We know municipalities need infrastructure—an insatiable need. We also know that loading too much of that cost onto the front end of a new home makes the home more expensive and the project harder to build, hence more unaffordability. That is why we are using provincial and federal investment to help municipalities reduce these upfront costs. After all, there is only one taxpayer.

We are also looking at new approaches to financing infrastructure. Bold, innovative ways, like the public water utilities model being advanced in Peel, are the direction we are heading. The objective is straightforward: create a sustainable model that finances water and waste water infrastructure over the long term—decades, if you will—rather than loading these costs on the upfront price of a

new home. The old way of financing infrastructure is no longer sufficient for the scale of growth that Ontario is experiencing. We need to build out differently, we need to finance differently and we need to make sure infrastructure is in place when communities grow.

Finally, our fourth priority ties all of this together: building more housing. Home ownership is not only one part of the housing continuum; it is the major part. That is why our rental strategy is so important. For too long, Ontario did not build enough purpose-built rental housing to keep pace with demand. We have changed that. Ontario is seeing the strongest pace of purpose-built rental starts in its history, and we are on track to surpass the 2025 record of 24,700 starts. In fact, purpose-built rental starts are up 41% this year alone. That's historic growth, and it's not happening by accident.

In 2023, we removed the provincial portion of the HST on qualifying new-build rental housing, and we worked with the federal government to remove the full 13% on qualifying projects. We've given municipalities the flexibility to reduce property tax rates on new, multi-residential properties. If we want rents to become more affordable over time, we need more rental supply. With more supply, we create more competition. With more competition, we see lower rents—and, folks, it is working. Rents are coming down across Ontario.

We know there is still more work to do. However, I remain confident in the direction we are headed, because we are not doing this alone. Working hand in hand with our municipal partners is crucial to our long-term success. Communities are built with everyone doing their part. Builders, not-for-profits, first responders and neighbours—they are built by people who choose to serve and communities who choose to lead and, importantly, by governments that choose to deliver.

Every dollar in these estimates belongs to the Ontario taxpayers, and it's our job to make sure each one is spent with a focused purpose that will deliver results. That is a standard our ministry team is committed to uphold.

With that, I will thank you and turn it over to Minister Smith for his remarks.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you. You have eight minutes left, Mr. Smith.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair. It's great to be back before the committee. I think Bob Seger on his 'Live' Bullet album said, "It's great to be back in Boston." Well, it's great to be back in committee. Maybe he was a little more—

Hon. Rob Flack: Bob Seger?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Yes, maybe Bob was a little more excited than I am to be at committee, but it's still pretty good.

Listen, the minister has covered a lot of ground this morning. Sorry if I go over a bit of it again. I will try not to cover it too exactly, but I do want to put my own perspective on things and spend a few minutes talking about something that really sits at the heart of the work we do at municipal affairs and housing, and that's building partnerships.

One of the great pleasures of my role as associate minister is getting out across Ontario, sitting down with mayors, councillors, municipal staff, service managers, home builders, community leaders and more, and doing just that: building those partnerships. I've always believed, of course, you learn a lot more by sitting across the table from somebody and hearing what's happening in their community than we do sitting behind these desks at Queen's Park. This is important work, but Ontario is a big province and we've got to get out and see it and talk to people, because we know what works in Toronto might not be what works in Thunder Bay, might not be what works in North Bay, might not be what works in Huntsville—one of the great communities in my riding that I'm proud to represent in Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Probably all of you know this, because I talk about it a lot, but I spent 16 years in municipal government before I came to Queen's Park. I served as a councillor at both the town and regional level. I served as a mayor. I was the president of Ontario Small Urban Municipalities and the president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. So I know what it's like to sit on that side of the table and, in fact, I came directly from that role to an MPP here at Queen's Park.

The other thing I know is that residents like to call offices looking for answers, and that when they call, it's sometimes a bigger challenge than the municipality can handle on its own, and so those are the opportunities where we all need to work together. I went through that as mayor of Bracebridge a couple of times, during significant flooding which damaged homes and properties across the community.

We've seen communities in Ontario face those challenges, and they are significant ones. When somebody's property is affected, when their home is damaged, when their business has been impacted, they don't necessarily care what level of government is responsible for what; they just want to know somebody is going to be there to help. That's why programs like the minister mentioned, the Disaster Recovery Assistance for Ontarians Program—or DRAO as everyone loves to call it, because yes, the world needs more acronyms—are important: to help those homeowners, those small business owners, tenants, farmers, not-for-profit organizations even, deal with costs following a natural disaster when those costs aren't able to be recovered by available insurance.

Actually, just recently, I announced some DRAO funding activations for this program, including some in my riding. That program continues to get out there and do good work. It's just one example of our government doing what people expect to do when things go wrong, and it's an example of what being a good provincial partner means to me too.

As the minister also talked about, we've taken that same approach to housing and homelessness. Our municipal service managers across Ontario do incredibly important work on the front lines in their communities. They know their communities, they know where the pressure points are, they know who the people are that they need to serve,

and they're responsible for delivering those services that people depend on. Whether that's homelessness prevention, emergency shelters, supportive housing or affordable housing, our role is to work with them and make sure they've got the tools and they've got the flexibility that they need to find solutions that make sense at a local level.

Of course, we need to keep building. We need more homes of all kinds in communities across Ontario, and to do that, we need to get more barriers out of the way. Sometimes those barriers are financial. Sometimes those barriers are procedural. We need to make approvals faster and more predictable. We need to make sure that municipalities have the roads, the water and the waste water infrastructure they need to support growth.

1020

We've tackled all of that, but we also need to talk about affordability. Not only do we need to create the conditions to have that supply built, but someone has got to be on the other end to buy that home. We took that action with the federal government on the HST, and those are big numbers: \$130,000 on a million-dollar home is a big number; \$65,000 on a \$500,000 home is a big number. No matter how you cut it, 13% is a big number that makes a meaningful difference to someone buying a new home.

Our government will continue to do that work, to work with people to make sure that not only are the conditions there for them to buy that home, but the local governments that also are ultimately the ones that sign off on that building permit are ultimately the ones that say, "The subdivision in this place makes sense. This mid-rise in this place makes sense. We've taken the opportunity to continue to build our community."

I'll tell you this: There was an old axiom—probably not invented by me, but certainly one I believe in—which is that if you're not growing, you're dying when it comes to municipalities. Municipalities simply must continue to grow. Cost pressures are real, but growth also brings opportunity, and that opportunity can be measured in myriad ways, not just in the opportunity to have more assessment to work with. So yes, from a financial point, communities need to continue to grow and raise that assessment base and be able to distribute the cost challenges that they have amongst a larger pie, but as communities continue to grow, it continues to promote the one thing that we all want for everybody, which is opportunity and prosperity.

I come from a kind of a mid-size-town perspective, but my time in those organizations that I referenced earlier—

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

Hon. Graydon Smith: —certainly gave me a larger perspective and the ability to appreciate those things that are the same from one community to another: the need to grow, the need to manage that growth, the need to work with the provincial government and the provincial government to be a strong partner is paramount.

That's why I'm excited to be in this role with Minister Flack, to talk about the programs that we're delivering today that do just that: that create the opportunity for communities to grow, that create the opportunity for Ontarians

ultimately to generate prosperity in the place that they love to call home.

Thank you, Chair.

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

We will now move to the question-and-answer segment, in rotations of 15 minutes for the official opposition members, 15 minutes for the third party member, 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 the Chair, if a member seeks to reclaim the floor during their rotation while the minister is responding, I will recognize the member and allow them to reclaim the floor to ask a new question.

For the deputy 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 start with the official opposition. Go ahead, MPP Burch.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you very much, Chair. Good morning.

Good morning, Minister, associate minister, staff. Before I start, I know you'll join us in congratulating and thanking all of the candidates across Ontario who are out there knocking on doors and doing all the things we did when we were running municipally. It's an important part of our democracy and I just wanted to thank all of the candidates that are putting themselves out there right now.

My first question is about municipal procurement policies. On page 19 of the briefing book, under municipal governance, the Ministry says it will "monitor municipalities for the effects of tariffs and trade and tariff response plans including changes to procurement practices." It also says it will identify municipalities needing support and provide "targeted and sector-wide capacity building."

We don't see any specific dollar amount in the briefing for procurement assistance. The main action that's taken place so far is the Premier has threatened to withhold funding from municipalities that don't support the Buy Ontario policy. That's fair. So my question, first of all, is: Will the province commit to providing specific funding, training or staff support to assist municipalities with this procurement practice?

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you, MPP Burch. First of all, just to make sure we're clear, the Premier did not suggest we were going to remove all municipal support, not at all.

However, we do buy, I believe, \$22 billion, as a province, combined. We procure a lot of things through our municipalities, and as such, we want to make sure that buy Ontario first, buy Canada second is a priority. I can say, for the most part—and I think the deputy would agree—I think we have a pretty good record in terms of that support, seeing what our municipal partners do.

That being said, when there are cases where it's not being followed, especially in these difficult times, we just want to make sure they understood that we're watching,

we're going to measure, and we're going to act if need be. Hopefully, we won't have to do it.

Deputy, do you want to maybe help me out with the specifics, please?

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

Buy Ontario applies to municipalities as it relates to fleet purchases as well as their capital infrastructure. Right now, we work very closely with the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement. It is their directive, but we—of course, with the partnership and the relationship with municipalities—are supporting them on the training, exactly as you said, so our regional offices do a lot of training with all the municipalities.

This is one area where, given that it's new, we are working very closely with municipalities; we will work with them very closely following the municipal elections to ensure there is appropriate training. And we're working right now to understand, should there be any cost pressures—we don't know what those are at this point in time; I think it's a bit too early to say. So we're working with municipalities and we're working with the association of municipalities to understand that.

Mr. Jeff Burch: So there's no specific estimate or amount of money that's been set aside? Okay.

Back to the minister: We just wanted to point out—and, as the opposition, we have been pointing out the provincial spending on American companies for things like school supplies, subway cars, highway maintenance, WSIB even. If the province expects municipalities to prioritize Ontario businesses, will the province cancel its contracts with American companies and select Canadian ones instead, to show leadership?

Hon. Rob Flack: Well, I'll speak for this ministry and not other ministries, but I can assure you—and I believe Minister Smith will agree—that we are taking an all-of-government look at procurement, where buy Ontario and buy Canada is a focus. Again, I won't speak specifically to other ministries or other procurement arms in government, but it is being investigated, it is being measured and it is being focused on with diligence and purpose.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Before handing things to my colleague, I wanted to ask a question on the municipal disaster recovery assistance, which you referenced. On pages 83 and 86 of the briefing book, the ministry says both the MDRA Program and DRAO provide financial support following natural disasters, yet both programs carry only a \$1,000 placeholder allocation for 2026-27, with additional funding dependent on program activation. The MDRA was activated for 14 municipalities in 2025-26, with \$1.7 million paid out primarily following flooding. The ministry administered applications for nine disaster events and paid more than \$850,000 to eligible applicants.

So given the experience in St. Catharines, Niagara, Ottawa etc. that you're familiar with, where recovery support has been slow and left municipalities and residents waiting for assistance, what is the province doing to reform and speed up the MDRA and DRAO approval processes, and ensure that municipalities and residents

have more predictable and timely financial support after a disaster in the future?

I know that you kind of pivoted to governance when you spoke, and I wanted to really focus on what the province is doing for its part on making the program more efficient and responsive to residents.

Hon. Rob Flack: Great question, and something, obviously, we've been dealing with quite a bit this summer.

But let me begin. Ottawa, Niagara, Toronto and other regions in the province were hit with many extreme weather events this summer, and we understand the pain and concern it has caused families, absolutely. So we respect that.

That being said, I think it's important to know—and we'll talk specifically about DRAO—what it is and what it isn't. I think you'll appreciate the fact that, I think on August 5, we sat down with the Niagara MPPs and our ministry gave an overview. On July 28, I believe, in Ottawa, and we did the same. What it isn't is insurance. I think it's misunderstood and, in some cases, miscommunicated. It is meant to be support where insurance doesn't kick in. It is meant to cover overland flooding from rivers, not sewer backup.

1030

To give you an example—and the expert is right behind me here, in terms of Ms. Collins, but I will say this: I think—and correct me if I'm wrong, Helen—in Toronto, Ottawa and Niagara alone, there will be over a \$1-billion payout from insurance. That's \$1 billion thus far. The first line of defence is to call your insurance broker and call your insurance provider, and that's what we've always suggested people do.

In Niagara specifically, what we saw was sewer backups—yes, terrible, hard, difficult, but DRAO is not insurance and I think people think it is, or maybe they think it should be, but today it isn't. By the way, our DRAO mirror-images all other provinces in terms of what the program is.

Mr. Jeff Burch: So would you say those programs, what happened, was exactly what should happen and that there's no room for improvement? Or is there room for improvement—

Hon. Rob Flack: Look, there's always room for improvement in everything we do, so I welcome any suggestions, any recommendations. I think you've seen me to be open and willing to listen and learn, so if there are things you can recommend to the government to do that make more sense—but remember, DRAO is not insurance. It was never intended to be.

I had a call from a person in Ottawa. It's actually a good story, because she phoned and said, "I'm quite upset that my neighbour didn't get insurance." She said, "I've had insurance since I first got married. It's a great provider"—blah, blah, blah—"and I've got insurance and it's covering my losses. But my neighbour is not getting the same loss coverage." I said, "Okay. So the government should step in and cover what insurance could because your neighbour didn't have good enough insurance?" "Well, yes." I said,

“Well, no. That’s going to just make insurance more costly for you.”

We can’t control what people buy for insurance. And you’ve got to remember: DRAO is for overland flooding; it’s not for sewer backup.

Mr. Jeff Burch: The municipalities in Niagara, for example, were critical of the program. Are you saying that it’s all a misunderstanding based on what the program should do, or is there room for improvement in terms of getting back to the municipalities and—

Hon. Rob Flack: So, maybe, Helen, do you mind—Helen is best, because she deals with it day in and day out.

The point is, we knew that there was flooding, number one. Number two, we contacted our municipal partners right away. There was constant communication and we—I’ll maybe let Helen walk you through specifically what it is and what it isn’t.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I’d like to hand things to my colleague very soon to ask some questions on housing, so if you could make it—

Hon. Rob Flack: But I think it’s important to hear.

Mr. Jeff Burch: —super quick, I would appreciate that. Thank you.

Ms. Helen Collins: Sure. Helen Collins. I’m acting for Sean Fraser, the ADM of the municipal housing and operations division.

There is certainly room for improvement in any program. I would never deny that. I would say we have worked quite closely with the affected municipalities, so that includes St. Catharines, Ottawa, Lincoln. We have sent Provincial Disaster Assessment Teams. They did not find uninsurable forms of flooding when they went to, for example, St. Catharines. In Ottawa, they did, and we did activate the program quickly. So there is certainly room for improvement, but we have worked closely with the municipalities.

In answer to your first question that I heard originally about the placeholder amounts, the reason for that is that the spending on the programs varies very considerably from year to year, depending on the particular events that occur. We can’t predict that in advance, so we don’t set a budget for those programs. Payments are based on eligible costs. So the government does fund the programs; it’s just not based on a budget. It’s based on the needs in any particular year.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay. I appreciate it. Thank you.

I’m going to hand things to my colleague, Chair.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP McKenney, there are three and a half minutes left.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Okay, yes. Thank you, Chair, and nice to see everyone back in sunny Toronto.

I just want to turn our attention to affordable housing. My first question is whether your provincial government or the ministry has begun negotiations yet with the federal government around the continuation of federal-provincial agreements under the National Housing Strategy. We know that they’re set to expire in 2028, the end of operating agreements, and there’s a lot of concern out there as to what that means when that cliff happens.

Hon. Rob Flack: Absolutely. So the quick answer is yes. It’s been an ongoing process. We recently had an FPT virtually, right after Labour Day, and basically set the stage to talk to the Minister of Housing, Gregor Robertson, to begin negotiations in earnest. We are waiting, frankly, for the federal budget, which we hope to see sometime this month or early November, at which time we have some tentative dates in November set aside where we’ll sit down in person and begin in earnest.

That being said, it is crucial that we get a new deal, and quickly. I think I’ve been consistent in that narrative.

I would also suggest that we need them to come to the table with other aspects to the deal, whether it be homelessness, and how and where Build Canada Homes can fit in a more logical way for the province.

It’s a big country with different housing continuums. Each province is unique. We certainly are unique. But again, we play a major role in terms of the overall National Housing Strategy, and I’m going to do my very best to negotiate and facilitate the best deal possible.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Thank you for that, but I just want to focus on the end of operating agreements specifically. We know that when they expire, there’s still a need to operate these buildings. I sat on the board, actually, of Ottawa Community Housing, where we have more than 16,000 units that are operated by OCH. Thousands of people depend on these units for affordability.

So I just would like to understand, of all of the units today that are affected by operating agreements that are expiring in 2026-27, how many will remain affordable? How many will continue to have an operating agreement moving forward?

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

Hon. Rob Flack: I would say our hope is that all of them would be. That being said, I’m not going to preclude what negotiations will do or not do.

I think the biggest risk, frankly, for the National Housing Strategy is not those dollars; it’s the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit, the rent supplements. I think that is the big “COHB cliff,” as we call it, that we’re facing dead on, and we need to come up with an agreement.

I can tell you that every single province and territory has been relentless in communicating that directly with the minister and his staff. So at the end of the day, I think we’ll get there; I really do. I’m confident. I can tell you the minister’s willing. I think the deputy would agree that there is a certain understanding and appreciation and absolute commitment to try and get this done.

Will it look the same as it is today? No, and I hope it doesn’t, because I think we’ve complicated it, and I think we can do a better job. We’ve got funding streams that are complicated to qualify for, to understand, that we can simplify and make more effective—as I say, take the agreement and use the “stop, start, continue” method, and that’s exactly what we’re doing.

It’s not going to be easy. We’re going to need more funding from the feds, frankly, and we can hopefully talk more about it this morning.

MPP Catherine McKenney: So not necessarily—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): I'm sorry; we're out of time.

Moving on to the third party: MPP Shamji.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Good morning, everyone. It's a pleasure to see the committee and the civil service here to discuss the estimates of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Minister, I listened very carefully to your remarks. I always do. I appreciate so many of the things that you have to say. One of the things I particularly appreciate from your remarks this morning was that we're not just here to review the estimates of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, but also to show that Ontarians are getting results for the projected expenses of your ministry.

I wanted to go back to a review of estimates almost exactly one year ago. You were sitting where you were, and I was sitting where I am, and I had asked you at that time about your government's progress on achieving its flagship promise of building 1.5 million homes by 2031.

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In response to that, I'm going to read to you from the Hansard, verbatim, your answer. I had asked, "Are you still committed to building 1.5 million homes by 2031?" Your word for word answer was, "I'm not focused on 1.5 million new homes."

Well, a report came out on Friday—I believe it was Friday—in which the Toronto Region Board of Trade now says it is impossible to build 1.5 million homes by 2031. This year, your government is on track to building only 58% of its housing goal.

Do you regret that statement? Do you stand by your belief that you are not focused on 1.5 million new homes?

Hon. Rob Flack: I 100% stand behind that statement. I still do. I'm not focused on that number. I think you will appreciate that we are in unprecedented times, with headwinds from President Trump and tariffs like we've never seen. In fact, we ran an election on it.

That being said, the housing industry, the housing sector, housing starts, when I took over as minister, were dead. Again, this is a crisis that's not political. It's across the country, especially in Ontario. It's affordability; it's uncertainty.

I stand consistent. I'm consistent in what I still say. It costs too much and it takes too long to build housing in Ontario. We figured that out. We also understood that governments don't build the houses—at least we don't believe that government should build the houses. What we do believe is that we create the conditions to get those homes built, and that's exactly what we've done. That's what we've brought through important pieces of legislation, Bills 17, 60 and 98. I think they're reducing the time it takes to get permits, reducing the time it takes to get shovels in the ground.

We also introduced the HST and DCRP reductions. We've created a climate, the conditions to get homes built. We're seeing sprouts of success. We're not there yet; we acknowledge that. That being said, we are seeing progress. We are seeing results, especially, I might add, in the purpose-built-rental sector.

So yes, I stand behind the fact that we are laser-focused today on getting the ship turned—it's not an easy turn—so we can head in the right direction.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Minister, since 2018, there have been three housing ministers and successive years in which the number of houses built goes down, not up. You now tell me you 100% stand behind no longer fulfilling your government's flagship promise of—

Hon. Rob Flack: I didn't say that. I did not say that.

Mr. Adil Shamji: So do you stand behind the promise of building 1.5 million homes by 2031?

Hon. Rob Flack: What I said is, I'm not focused on 1.5 million homes.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Are you still committed to it, focused or not?

Hon. Rob Flack: I am not focused on it. I'm going to remain not focused on it until we get the ship turned.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Yes or no? Are you committed to it?

Hon. Rob Flack: I am committed to building as many houses as we can humanly possibly build—not us, the—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Are you committed to building 1.5 million homes by 2031?

Hon. Rob Flack: That is a commitment the government made. I am committed to focusing on getting the results in place so that we can get more homes built faster.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Shamji, the comments go through me, please. Okay?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you. Certainly, Chair.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): It's just to keep everybody respectful.

MPP Smith?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I think it's important to note that the bills that have been brought forward—the work that has been done under this minister and under our government as a whole to clear the path to get homes built, to work with those municipalities that I talked about earlier as partners in getting homes built—have never been stronger.

We have successfully removed a huge amount of red tape from home building in this province. And it's not a one side or the other, that only the builders are rejoicing or only the municipalities are rejoicing; we have brought everybody together at the table. When you look at a number of the announcements that we've made, who's standing with the minister? The building community—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Chair, that's okay.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Municipalities are standing with the community, because they know that the steps that we've taken—with respect to the member, they know that the steps that we've taken—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Shamji.

Hon. Graydon Smith: —are focused on getting housing built in this province.

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

MPP Shamji, please.

Mr. Adil Shamji: What strikes me about that answer, Chair, is that even as the associate minister speaks about who is standing with him, he's talking about the building

community, developers, all of those people, but not the millions of Ontarians who are looking for a home.

Now, we started out by listening to the minister saying that it's not just important to talk about the estimates here, but actually making sure that Ontarians are getting value and results for the dollars that are getting spent. We now know they're not getting 1.5 million homes by 2031. And in the minister's last answer, he talks about passing this bill and that bill, which is all very wonderful—

Hon. Rob Flack: We think it is.

Mr. Adil Shamji: —but what outcomes does this ministry have since he took over to show that there has been success in building more homes and getting more people into homes?

Hon. Rob Flack: Housing sales were up 130% in July. Housing starts are up. Purpose-built rental starts are up 41% year over year, a record in three years. We're getting more homes built this year than we did last year, than we did the year before. We're seeing progress, and I'll stand behind the results thus far.

Do we need more? Absolutely. Will we see more? I'm confident we will. But again, without the municipal partners, without the builders, without the success of all those who actually build the homes, we can't get it done. They're on side.

I will say, the HST and the DCRP—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thanks, Minister. I just want—

Hon. Rob Flack: —have lowered a home up to \$200,000. It's called affordability.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I just want to jump in here, Minister, to point out—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Shamji, yes.

Mr. Adil Shamji: —that your own ministry's data from an FOI report that was released and was published in the news just earlier this year, September 9, said Ontario is going to hit 58% of its 2025 housing goal, which stands in contravention of exactly what you said in terms of more houses being built. Despite everything—

Hon. Rob Flack: Versus last year.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Yes, exactly—58% of its 2025 target. Each successive year is worse than the last one. And even if you choose to measure in terms of not housing starts but housing sales, the Canadian Real Estate Association, citing Ontario MLS home sales, shows that this has been the lowest August for housing sales in 25 years. So again, what actual results can Ontario citizens look to to say that they have gotten value from your ministry?

Hon. Rob Flack: Again, I think that Bills 17, 60 and 98 are going to—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Those are not results. Those are process measures.

Hon. Rob Flack: Respectfully, they create the conditions to get results. Again, governments don't build the homes. We're here to create those conditions.

HST removal on all new home starts is having a positive effect. The DCRP is just getting rolled out now. It's going to have a positive effect. It can lower the price of a home by up to \$200,000 on a million-dollar home

being built. I would say that's a very good result. That's a very good effort. That's very good focus. It will help immensely in building the homes we need across Ontario.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thanks, Minister. I must admit, I reject the notion that introducing legislation should be allowed to count as results and process towards delivering on your promises, because this government, since 2018, has introduced at least 10 or 11 pieces of legislation which have usually led to fewer houses being built.

As I tried to prepare for today and ask myself, "What is it possibly that could be leading to such disappointing results under your government's leadership?", it actually struck me. A short while ago, your government introduced strong-mayor powers, ostensibly for the purpose of building more homes. Then I just learned that the mayor of Windsor, Mayor Dilkens, who chairs your Housing Supply Action Plan Implementation Team, actually plans on using those strong-mayor powers to block the introduction of fourplexes in his community.

How is it possible that the person who chairs your Housing Supply Action Plan Implementation Team is using powers that have been given to him for creating more homes—how is it someone like that could be using that to build fewer homes, and how do you have confidence in someone who is actively working against your stated goal?

Hon. Rob Flack: Well, I don't agree that he's working against the stated goal at all. He's done a great job as mayor and continues to support our provincial priorities. Local issues in local communities are up to them.

We have—what is it, Deputy? As-of-right—

Ms. Martha Greenberg: As-of-right three.

Hon. Rob Flack: As-of-right three across the province. That's a local decision, and they're agreeing to do that there. So I will defer that answer to Mayor Dilkens. He's doing a great job and has been a great chair on our housing supply action committee.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Chair, I'll just jump in, if I may. Communities still need to be able to make choices that they feel are in the best interest of their community. As a former mayor, I can tell you that we always worked on the theory of managed growth to make sure that we could respect those in the community and the voices that they brought to the table while at the same time meeting provincial priorities. That is critical.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you very much. So if the entire Windsor council believes it's in their community's best interest to allow fourplexes and a single person using powers that were supposed to build more homes used those instead to build fewer homes and go against his council speaking in support of his own community, would you step in to make sure that more homes are built?

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Hon. Graydon Smith: First of all, I'd just say you're talking in a misnomer. You're assuming that because zoning would be allowed or a certain housing type would be allowed, that housing type would actually be built, and you cannot draw that correlation from A to B. You wanted to talk about—

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'm just asking a question about governance.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Well, you wanted to talk about results before, and we know that local mayors are able to make decisions that are in the best interests of their community to generate the results that work best for their community. That's why they have the authority to do that.

Mr. Adil Shamji: And, by that extension, you presume that councillors do not act in the best interest of their community?

Hon. Graydon Smith: We have created an opportunity for communities and mayors in those communities to make decisions in the best interests of those communities, in the best interest of what they see fit, and mayors are the leaders in communities, make no mistake about it. Council and mayors work together very, very closely; ultimately, it's the mayor at the end of the day that's the leader in the community.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I note that the housing tracker providing data on municipalities meeting their targets hasn't been updated since 2024, so perhaps you could provide an update now. How many municipalities across Ontario are on track to achieve their housing targets?

Hon. Rob Flack: Deputy, do you have that?

Ms. Martha Greenberg: I can speak with respect to the Building Faster Fund, which was how we measured the 50 who were given housing targets. This past year was the final year of the Building Faster Fund. It was a three-year program. You're going to have to bear with me as I count: 18 municipalities received funding under the Building Faster Fund for this past year.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Would you clarify which ones those are?

Ms. Martha Greenberg: Absolutely. Belleville, Brantford, Chatham-Kent, Greater Sudbury, Kingston, Kitchener, London, Milton, North Bay, Peterborough city, Pickering, Richmond Hill, Sarnia, Sault Ste. Marie, St. Catharines, Thunder Bay, Waterloo and Welland.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you.

The Building Faster Fund is budgeted at \$108.7 million this year, but most municipalities are in fact missing their targets because of market conditions outside of their control—and within yours. How much of that \$108.7 million does the ministry expect to pay out this year, and to how many municipalities?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): There's one minute left.

Ms. Martha Greenberg: Out of the municipalities that I listed, that is approximately \$60 million. There are a few that we will continue to work with—so what I read out of the ones that are confirmed. Sometimes a municipality may have some different data sources that we go back and confirm, and so we won't have the final number until we finish going through any sort of checks on data.

Mr. Adil Shamji: And what will happen with any remaining funds that aren't paid out?

Hon. Rob Flack: They go into the DCRP. All the funds, through the whole program, if they weren't awarded,

went back into infrastructure funding models that we used throughout the province throughout those three years.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay. In what ways do you plan on, if at all, extending and improving the Building Faster Fund?

Hon. Rob Flack: The Building Faster Fund will not be extended. Instead, we introduced the \$8.8-billion development charge reduction program to directly work with municipalities that applied to get part of that funding, which is more stable, longer-term. It's paid out over 10 years. They have to lower their DCs 30% to 50% for a minimum of three years, so that is the model which we're going to follow.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister. We're out of time for the third party.

We'll go to the government side. MPP Beattie, I personally welcome you to the SCHICP committee.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: Thank you, Chair, and through you: Thank you, Minister, for the presentation, and thank you for all the hard work that you're doing on this file. As you alluded to and as you made note of, I'm coming fresh from the municipal sector in Hamilton, where some of the very programs that you're speaking of have delivered and are having some big results, and we're very thankful for that.

But I wanted to pull it back, if I could, to the National Housing Strategy. There was some early conversation that we were having here, and I think that we can all agree we want to make sure that the program is delivering meaningful results for Ontarians who need support today. Of course, I'm speaking of people who are at risk of homelessness, of people who are in specific categories—seniors, veterans, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities and those fleeing violence, for example.

I'm wondering if you could drill down a little more deeply, Minister. As Ontario works with the federal government on this renegotiation process for the National Housing Strategy, what would success look like to you for our province, and what changes would you be looking for to ensure that the federal funding program is flexible, responsive and focused on helping people across Ontario access housing while it strengthens our communities and provides more benefits for local housing systems?

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you for that question. I'll answer it from a ministry perspective, but then maybe I'll turn it over to Minister Smith to talk from a more local or municipal perspective in terms of what success will look like, and talk maybe a little bit about our service managers and how we deliver some of these programs.

What does success look like? Well, first of all, we want to make sure we negotiate a new deal, because, as I said to MPP McKenney, we have a COHB cliff coming. We need to get a deal in place, otherwise there's 32,000-plus families in this province—and I think there's about 3,000 each year, 10% more coming on to the roll, so to speak, that will rely on that type of support. We have to get a new deal, and again, I'm confident that we will.

So what will a new deal look like? First of all, I've said it all along: I believe there needs to be more federal money directly in support of homelessness across our province

and across our country. Build Canada Homes is a great initiative; I think it needs to be part of the National Housing Strategy.

I'm giving you my opinion here. I'm not necessarily going to get everything I want, but what would success look like in my mind?

Build Canada Homes is a great program. It's capital investment. It is not operating dollars, which is great, but where does the operating funding come from? We have to become in sync with the province and the federal government in terms of announcements and how that looks. So a new deal, more money for homelessness and how BCH fits in are key to our success.

One of the things that I think we've done well through the Homelessness Prevention Program is emergency support. Emergency support is great, but it's very, very expensive. What we need to do is make sure that going forward, more of those dollars, in conjunction with the National Housing Strategy or deal, go towards shelters, goes towards wrap-around services, because acute care is not the place for people who require care. Homelessness should not be in the hospitals—unless, obviously, very much needed. So we need to redirect those dollars, if we can there.

I'm going to emphasize this again; I think it's an important point: Over half of Canada's housing stock exists in the province of Ontario, and there is a need today—this is where BCH can come in, as well—to repair and maintain that stock. It's 60 to 70 years old in some cases. I think MPP McKenney would know; you've got some aging infrastructure out there. There's a \$12-billion deficit, I'm told by the community housing providers, that needs to be invested in these facilities, and if we do so, we can bring them up to repair and add some capacity, and maybe that's a solution that we can look at. That's a big part of what I look at.

Finally, I think we need that funding to continue with the COHB, the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit. That has to be in there. That's almost the first box we check when we have a new deal.

Minister?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I think any structure for a new deal needs to look at what the old deal has done in terms of the positive outcomes in Ontario and build off that. We have an opportunity, as the minister said, to have conversations with the federal government about where the tweaks can be made. Ultimately, money that gets spent—as you know, being a municipal councillor at that level—is a bit of a stew of federal, provincial and municipal dollars.

Delivering these services isn't always all about dollars and cents, but they sure help for certain things getting done and getting looked after. Specifically around homelessness and homelessness prevention work, it has been a significant issue for communities for the last number of years, so bringing that into the fold is part of the conversation and is very much necessary. But I don't think there's any doubt that the programs as they exist today

have been largely effective when delivered by our local service managers.

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As I talked about in my opening comments, you see tweaks here and there for what works best in any one given area. The program can mean one thing in a large city, it can mean another thing in a smaller town, and it can mean something else again in the vast areas of northern Ontario, where help is needed too.

I think we're certainly on the right track. I'm pleased that Minister Flack is chairing that group this year and able to engage directly with Minister Robertson and have the conversations that reflect the need on the ground in Ontario, based on what we've learned over the last number of years.

Hon. Rob Flack: The one thing I would just wrap up with is, there are some really good things we do through the National Housing Strategy—I think, Deputy, you would agree—that bring great benefit to the people of Ontario that need it.

That being said, I'm a great believer in the whole exercise of stop, start, continue. Let's stop doing what isn't working and change it. Let's start doing what we need to do better and come up with new, innovative solutions, like I talked about with Build Canada Homes, potentially, and let's continue doing what's working.

I can tell you there's a willingness throughout all provinces and territories and the federal government to come up with a deal. We're hoping that our message was sent to Minister Robertson loud and clear, and we'll see what comes out of the federal budget, hopefully in the next few weeks.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: Okay. Thank you, Minister and Minister. Chair, thank you.

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

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Ministers, Deputy Minister and staff for coming and sharing your input, insight and time with us.

We know that families and young people are facing the pressure of housing costs. And we know as a government that to eliminate costs, we need to explore different options. One of the options that we came up with was removing the development charges from construction, so that we have removed barriers to families to purchase houses. Our government has been working with municipalities to reduce development charges, while also making investments in the infrastructure needed to support the new communities.

Minister, can you explain how the development charges removal/reduction is helping municipalities lower these costs, get more homes built and make housing more affordable for Ontario families?

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you for the question. I guess I would begin by saying that development charges came in a number of years ago—in the 1990s, I believe; some time back then. When you look back in history, the infrastructure that got built in municipalities was either built through loans or was built through grants. It was a bygone era. The

post-Second World War boom was on, and a lot of the infrastructure in the ground was put in place mostly after the Second World War.

That being said, as we move forward, we realized as time went on that no levels of government had that type of resource to put the infrastructure in the ground, so it really became—municipalities started taxing. People like to call them charges or development charges, yes, but they're levies. So you build a new home, you build a new business, and you are going to pay a tax to get that infrastructure in the ground. But what we found was that growth no longer pays for growth, so the cost to get the infrastructure in the ground on a house in Toronto, for example, in the GTA, can be up to 30% of the total purchase price of the home. And we've said for some time that it just is unsustainable.

So we've tried different measures. We've been very aggressive in terms of supporting our municipal partners with infrastructure funding, whether it was the Building Faster Fund or housing-enabling water opportunities. They've been great, but if you take a look at the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association or even AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, they will say that we have, over the next 10 to 15 years, a need of \$200 billion to \$250 billion to replace aging infrastructure or put new pipes in the ground.

So what this program has done, in conjunction with the federal government—\$8.8 billion; \$4.4 billion each over 10 years—is to provide municipal partners that will lower the development charges, lower the cost you would charge a new home buyer by 30% minimum and higher if need be. So we put applications out—and when did we close those applications?

Ms. Martha Greenberg: In mid-June.

Hon. Rob Flack: In mid-June—and we've been working closely with our municipal partners since. So \$8.8 billion will be funded equally over the 10 years. We've had some very, very, very good applications and some excellent announcements thus far.

So again, what people will see is, along with the HST relief with the DC reductions, a lowering of the cost of that new home and bringing affordability back to the menu.

For instance, I was in Barrie last week; we made an announcement there. We figured, on a \$600,000 home, someone's going to save around \$150,000-plus, HST and DCRP combined. That's a lot of money. That brings a lot of affordability back. It allows people to qualify for a mortgage. It allows people to make upgrades. It allows people to do a lot of different things they might otherwise not have been able to do.

Minister, do you want to add anything to that from a municipal perspective, please?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Yes—very, very happy to.

Chair, through you to the member: It is critical that this program get put in place and there's relief for homebuyers out there, and this is going to have a hugely positive impact on that.

But for municipalities as well—and the minister has talked about the infrastructure that needs to be built in

municipalities—it's a recognition that it's a heavy lift for them and that we'll be there to support them.

Ultimately, as I talked about before, we know that if communities are growing, they're succeeding. But there is a cost for that. AMO used to always say, "Growth pays for growth." It was a nice notion while it lasted. But the costs have gotten away for everybody on infrastructure. So it's appropriate that we bring a program like this forward now to assist with the infrastructure we know is needed to get these homes built, while at the same time providing relief for homebuyers out there.

Some people who may not understand development charges will say, "Well, you know, the builder pays it, and what's the big deal?" Well, of course, it gets passed on to somebody when they buy that home. So the higher the development charge, ultimately the higher the cost of the home. The lower the development charge, ultimately the lower the cost of that home.

Municipalities have I think somewhat blindly over the years loaded the background studies that ultimately set these rates, thinking that, when the building sector was going gangbusters and things were super strong and everyone was getting ultra-cheap mortgages, the opportunity to collect that charge would never end.

Well, times are different in 2026. We've recognized that, and we're taking the steps again that recognize the challenge for homebuyers, but also recognize the challenge for municipalities around the infrastructure that's needed for these homes. We have spent billions and billions of dollars in supporting municipalities in one way, shape or form in the last number of years in housing-enabling infrastructure.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thirty seconds. You have 30 seconds left. You can keep talking.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Sorry, I thought 30 seconds was no seconds.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You can go with that. I'm good with that.

Hon. Graydon Smith: It's okay. It would have been 30 more seconds of brilliance—but nevertheless.

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

We'll now go over to the official opposition. MPP McKenney.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Chair, again through you: I just want to turn our attention back to the National Housing Strategy. I'm just going to do a little bit of math here, if you'll bear with me.

According to CMHC—and I'm getting around to the estimates—in 2026-27, the federal government is providing the province with three buckets of money: \$22 million under OPHI, the Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative; \$334 million under the community housing initiative program; and another \$143 million under the COHB, so that is a total of \$499 million.

But according to your estimates briefing book, Ontario is planning to spend a total of \$724 million on the National Housing Strategy program. Here's where the math comes in: 724 minus 499 is 225. So I just want to verify: Am I

correct in understanding that the province is spending only \$225 million of its own money on the National Housing Strategy?

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Hon. Rob Flack: Just bear with me for a second and let me get to the right numbers. I can tell you for a fact that we increased our COHB funding above what we'd committed to through the National Housing Strategy.

Have you got numbers there?

Ms. Martha Greenberg: I'm just trying to see.

Apologies; I realized—do you need me to keep saying my name?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): No. You're good.

Ms. Martha Greenberg: Okay. Sorry; I just wanted to check on formality. I realized I didn't do that the last time.

I'm just trying to see if I have the break-out between the provincial numbers and the federal numbers. I think mine are aggregate numbers at this point in time. It is about 50-50, and I feel like I just need to confirm the overall number, because it should be about 50. Each program is split slightly differently. The province tops up COHB. I'm not sure that your number includes the top-up to COHB that the province provides, which is—

Hon. Rob Flack: That's \$43 million, I believe.

Ms. Martha Greenberg: This year, it's about \$40 million in top-up. So there's the base and then, as the minister noted, every year, we on-board additional households to COHB, and I'm not sure that includes the top-up to COHB as well. So I'm just going to quickly look at that in terms of COCHI, OPHI and COHB.

But it should be about 50-50. Each program, as I say, is not 50-50. There's ins and outs, and there's a program that the federal funds a bit more and then there's a program that the province funds a bit more. So I'm just going to quickly do that math.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Okay. What I'm just trying to verify is if the province is spending only \$225 million of its own money on the National Housing Strategy in 2026-27.

Ms. Martha Greenberg: I believe it to be a bit more than that, but I just need to pull the numbers.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Okay.

Hon. Rob Flack: It's 50-50, plus our supplements on top, if I'm not mistaken. We do fund more.

Do we have the exacts of what we spend—the extra—on COHB?

MPP Catherine McKenney: You could get back to me.

Hon. Rob Flack: It's \$43 million more. And COCHI is, again, a 50-50 deal where at the end of the year, if there are some residuals, we find homes for it. It's actually been a good program, both of them. And it's crucial, through this new National Housing Strategy, that we get that renewed, especially—well, all of it, but COHB is the biggest risk to the province, because if that comes on our books 100%, it's a pretty expensive ticket.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Okay. So if I could get a written response, Chair, just so that I have that breakdown and I know exactly how much of the provincial spending

is going into the National Housing Strategy programs, and then I'll move on.

I'm moving on to another question that's got some math involved. It's probably easier math, but again, back to the federal-provincial agreements. The provincial government agreed to increase the supply of rent-assisted affordable housing by 15%. That's 19,000-some affordable housing units by 2028.

We know that for the first three years, zero units went towards that target. But in the second part of the decade, your government committed to delivering only 5,313 over the next three years, and now, in the last three years, you're committed to delivering 7,232—again, add it up to 12,545, so significantly short of the 19,660. Does that mean that we will be over 7,000 affordable homes short on your commitment to the National Housing Strategy?

Ms. Martha Greenberg: This is the one area where, several years ago, we had a slight disagreement with the federal government on how they were counting our units. So there was at one point, I believe in the second—as you noted, the nine-year agreement was broken out into three three-year agreements, and in that second agreement, those years three to six were where the federal government was noting we were significantly under our count. That is through work—the minister noted that the units that are created in Ontario are not solely funded by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing; there are also supportive housing units and RGI units that are created by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, and those were not counted at that time.

As of now, in our last action plan that was submitted to the federal government, I believe we are at about 13,000 units that have been created, so the gap is still about 7,000 as of this year. We have, still, the remaining three years to close that gap. We have been working with service managers through the funding that was allocated this year and the next two years. Each service manager is given an approximate target on how to close that gap, and as of now, we are expected to be on track by the end of the NHS to hit the 19,000.

MPP Catherine McKenney: I wonder if I could get a written response again, because I think it's really important to understand from a detailed accounting of your progress towards that commitment how many new affordable homes, non-market homes, were delivered each year; how many you plan to deliver each year for the remainder of the agreement; and just, especially, a description of how the home was or will be added to that supply.

You talked about different types of supportive housing; I understand that. But are we looking at newly built? Are we looking also at acquired? Are we looking at conversions? I think it's important to understand, because we're in such a crisis. Homelessness is skyrocketing in this province and having access to long-term, non-market affordable housing really is the only way that we're going to stop that from continuing to occur.

Is that a written response that I'd be able to get from you?

Ms. Martha Greenberg: Yes. We report annually to CMHC and the federal government with respect to the NHS funding. Every year, we give them updates on our data so they have the latest data, and every year we update that. So we can pull from there, as well, in terms of what all those numbers are and what we're expected to hit over the next three years.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Okay. And what type of housing, like how that affordable housing is being delivered, whether it's through acquisition—

Ms. Martha Greenberg: We can give examples. How each service manager does it in their region may look different. They have different ways that they may achieve that, but we can absolutely give examples of what is included in that count.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Okay.

Hon. Rob Flack: And you'll appreciate that in Canada, we're the only province in the country that delivers the benefits from the National Housing Strategy through service managers—47 in Ontario, DSSABs in the north. The rest of the country does not use that model, so it makes our—at times, it's a little cumbersome. It's a good program, it's a good delivery model, but it makes it, at times, cumbersome.

I would point out again, as I said earlier, understanding your point and agreeing with it—homelessness is tough. It's the challenge of our times. That is why this new National Housing Strategy, using the Build Canada Homes infrastructure funding available, is key to success going forward. And it's not just about the capital; it's delivering the operating dollars to make sure that those units are affordable. That's the key.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Just on that, I did note that there was an announcement made by the federal government—federal and municipal government—in Ottawa not long ago on Build Canada Homes, and they talked about new investments in capital funding. But they also talked about delivering supportive housing, and I noted that our provincial government wasn't at that announcement. I wonder why that is.

Hon. Rob Flack: We noted that, too.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Okay. But you are committed to the operating funding for any supportive housing—

Hon. Rob Flack: We are committed to living up to the agreements in the National Housing Strategy. We need the federal government to come to the table to also help us with operating funding, because it's great to cut ribbons on shiny new buildings, but the operating funding goes on forever and we have to make sure that there's a balance there in terms of how we work together.

Again, I would say over 50% of the community housing stock in this country is in Ontario. There's a \$12-billion deficit there. What can we do to improve that, to add capacity on the existing stock that is in the province today? Not everything has to be brand new.

MPP Catherine McKenney: I want to just turn now to homelessness prevention. On page 84 of your briefing book, you say that the Homelessness Prevention Program

is intended to support “activities that prevent, address and reduce homelessness, including chronic homelessness, such as the creation and operations of supportive housing, community outreach, housing assistance, emergency shelter operations.”

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Minister, I do understand that service managers have flexibility to determine how this funding is spent locally. But according to the recent Financial Accountability Office, in 2026-27, we had \$546 million projected to go towards managing homelessness, if you will—so people already experiencing homelessness, towards shelter and homelessness programs—and a very small amount, \$110 million, that would go towards actual housing or other assistance to keep people from falling into homelessness or get them exiting homelessness.

It would be great to see those numbers turned around. Does your ministry have a target for how many people will actually exit homelessness into permanent housing and remain housed in 2026-27?

Hon. Rob Flack: I will turn that over to the deputy. Do we have a specific number? I don't believe we do. No, we don't.

MPP Catherine McKenney: You don't? Okay. That's unfortunate. Do you see the numbers continuing to rise? Is that the expectation? Or do you see them stabilizing? Do you see them reduced?

Hon. Rob Flack: I see homelessness as a crisis. We see homelessness as something we are working with our municipal partners to help—I won't say solve, but to alleviate, to support.

I would say that through the service manager model that we have, we see certain municipalities—in my own riding, St. Thomas will claim they will see the end of homelessness in the next year, where other municipalities just north, say London, will not. So it's not one-size-fits-all, unfortunately. Would we like to see better results? Absolutely. But we continue to work closely with our service managers, our municipal partners to make sure that happens.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Just to expand on that, through you, Chair: The member and I have had conversations about opportunities to approach this in new and unique and innovative ways. There are groups and individuals out there doing that, specifically around shelter use and youth diversion from shelters. These are all things that we continue to work on and ultimately will work on with our service managers, to see what can be deployed in what areas, where it will be most effective and where the problems are most acute.

As the minister mentioned, there are some areas that really have been able to take the resources and run with it—

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

Hon. Graydon Smith: —and in my riding, too, we've got a community that believes they are on the threshold of eliminating homelessness.

So we've certainly seen success stories through this approach. That's not to say anybody is resting on our laurels, but it is to say that it isn't always a question of dollars spent; it is a question of being innovative and open to ideas and getting the best return on the investment, measured in human success.

MPP Catherine McKenney: I look forward to working with you on those programs, because I really do believe that diversion is critical to stemming the flow of people into homelessness, but at the same time, I think there has to be an admission that it has been a mistake to rely solely on the private market to deliver all new housing. The government really has got to provide more money and resources to build the homes that people can afford and to build those in non-market—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much. You're out of time for this round.

MPP Shamji, for the third party. Please go ahead.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Through you, Chair, to the minister: Can you confirm that you will not be revisiting any changes to security of tenure in future legislation?

Hon. Rob Flack: I think we can.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you.

In Bill 60, it shortened timelines for evicting tenants. Of course, we all know that in the rental sector, there are good-faith tenants and landlords, and there are bad-faith tenants and landlords as well. As a result of the shortened timelines for evictions, do you have any projections for how many additional evictions the ministry expects in 2026-27, and has it assessed how many of these households will end up in the homelessness system that the ministry also funds?

Hon. Rob Flack: No, I have not. I can say, though, with confidence, that I think that this legislation was needed. It is working, and the most important thing we're doing in that sector is getting the price of rental cost down. Again, we're seeing that right across the province.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Renovictions and demovictions are pushing long-term tenants out of their homes. What measures are you taking to ensure that there aren't bad-faith evictions, and how many landlords were fined for bad-faith evictions in the last year?

Hon. Rob Flack: I don't have that number specifically.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Is this something that you're concerned about?

Hon. Rob Flack: We are concerned about any time anyone doesn't follow the particular legislation or regulations of the day, 100%.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Of course, the act is there to work on behalf of both sides of the equation, for landlords and for renters. I think when we hear from many people that are landlords—and I'm not talking large corporate landlords; I'm talking mom-and-pops. I'm talking myself and my wife when we bought our first home, and bought a home that specifically had an apartment in it so we could help pay our mortgage. There comes a time when you have to do what you think is kind of a risk-reward analysis of whether you want to be in that business. And we need people doing that. We've taken steps to—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay, that's fine. Thank you, Associate Minister Smith. That's not really my question. My actual question—

Hon. Graydon Smith: Can I just—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Shamji can take his time. Sorry.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you, Chair.

My actual question is recognizing that we all have our government or opposition roles here in the Legislature, but of course we have our constituency-facing roles. My office has received concerns about bad-faith tenants, but we've also heard concerns about bad-faith landlords as well. So what efforts are being made to address that side of the equation?

Hon. Rob Flack: Well, again, I think in Bill 60 you saw some of that. It's about balance. Ontario provides, we believe, some of the strongest tenant protections in the country. We need to do the same for landlords. When we have that, we get stable, predictable housing, and you create the environment where more people want to build purpose-built rentals. And we're seeing that in spades: up 41%, or 19,600 new starts this year. So we're creating that environment again—not building them; creating the environment to get that done. When people have choice—

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you, Minister. I must admit, I didn't hear an answer about what you're doing focused specifically on bad-faith landlords, but I think the lack of an answer speaks volumes.

I actually think one of the most effective things that we could do to protect both landlords and tenants is address the Landlord and Tenant Board. Tenants and landlords have waited an average of 15 months for LTB hearings, according to the Ombudsman. What's the current average wait time for tenant applications, and what is the ministry doing with the Attorney General this year to make sure tenant cases are heard as quickly as landlord cases are?

Hon. Rob Flack: I would defer that question to the Ministry of the Attorney General. That's under their purview.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Sure.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): The minister is correct: It is under their purview.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Yes, that's fair. Is it something you're worried about, Minister?

Hon. Rob Flack: I talk to the minister, the Attorney General, all the time.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay.

I note that the deadline for regional chairs passed on, I believe, July 13. Would you clarify for me how many applications you received?

Hon. Rob Flack: We are not going to talk about the numbers of applications or who applied. Like any person applying for a job, we're going to keep that confidential. But I can say that we are very pleased with the number of applicants we got. It's very strong qualifications, leadership experience of people who have served in the public sector in each of the eight regions that we're going to be appointing a regional chair.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Have interviews begun yet?

Hon. Rob Flack: Interviews have begun. It's a ministry-led process. We've gone through our first rounds. We're narrowing it down to the final candidates. I can let the deputy speak to this, but it has been a ministry-led process where candidates who applied and were deemed acceptable to be interviewed have been interviewed and will be vetted.

Deputy, do you want to speak to the process that we've been through?

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Mr. Adil Shamji: Briefly, if you don't mind.

Ms. Martha Greenberg: Absolutely, happy to.

As the minister noted, there was an application process; it was posted on a government website. The Public Appointments Secretariat was involved with respect to putting it on there. We listed what the eligible criteria are with respect to needing to meet certain requirements in the Municipal Act. We also then listed out leadership skills that would be required or desired to be met by each candidate and we listed what those leadership skills are—

Mr. Adil Shamji: If you could just maybe highlight what the timeline is for us to learn when those regional chairs are going to be.

Hon. Rob Flack: Shortly after October 26. The municipal election is the 26th; we will be appointing them subsequent to that.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay. Thank you for that.

Minister, looking at the ministry's estimates here, it's showcasing line items for provincial priorities which I think many people feel mask the fiscal reality facing local councils. Municipalities are bleeding cash trying to patch holes in health care, homelessness and addictions, crises that I think we can all agree belong squarely on Queen's Park's ledger.

In these estimates, where can you point to the actual line-by-line relief for property taxpayers who are subsidizing your government's refusal to fully fund provincial social services?

Ms. Martha Greenberg: There are many different lines in terms of funding that is provided to municipalities. That could be for housing, as we've talked about with respect to the NHS. We've talked about HPP lines; you see those. There is specific funding that is also provided by other ministries, especially for financial sustainability. I would point to the OMPF that we would find in the Ministry of Finance's line. As well, there is the gas tax working with the federal government that goes to municipalities, as well as all the infrastructure programs that go as well, and across other ministries as well. There are many different lines across many different ministries, I would say, that go to support any financial sustainability.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Which of those, if any, do you think will guarantee that property taxpayers won't see another double-digit tax hike this year because of provincial responsibilities downloaded onto their plates?

Hon. Rob Flack: We have provided historic funding to municipalities under this government for the last eight years—historic, more so than the previous government and governments before. We continue to hold our municipi-

pal partners in high esteem; that is why we continue to support them with all the programs we've put in place, especially infrastructure, especially the DCRP. It continues to work and we've got great municipal partners.

Hon. Graydon Smith: I mean, 16 budgets at the municipal level, both at the regional and town level, and I can tell you that not once did we sit around rubbing our hands saying, "How are we going to pay for provincial priorities?" We prioritized what was important in the community and dealt with our taxes accordingly.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'll tell you what is historic. Historic is municipalities across the province introducing double-digit property tax hikes.

Hon. Rob Flack: We don't set municipal taxes.

Mr. Adil Shamji: You create the conditions for them. You certainly do.

Let's point to homelessness, for example. The FAO, just a week or two ago, showed that this year alone, you guys are cutting funding to homelessness by a quarter of a billion dollars. That is something that municipalities have to pick up on.

Hon. Rob Flack: The commitment we made to homelessness prevention remains in place; the 40% increase we made three years ago remains in place. There was no cut to that.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I think the Financial Accountability Office would choose to disagree with you.

They went on further to say that not only is there a nearly quarter-of-a-billion cut anticipated under your government's watch, but that homelessness, which has increased by 23% in the last three years, is projected to go up by another 16% in the next two years. How does that fit with the promises that you've been making to the committee today?

Hon. Rob Flack: It fits that we need a new National Housing Strategy, and that's exactly what we're going to try and negotiate and facilitate over the next couple of months.

Mr. Adil Shamji: How does it strengthen your negotiating position with the National Housing Strategy when you are cutting to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars, a quarter of a billion dollars of your own funding, towards homelessness?

Hon. Rob Flack: I don't agree with your premise. We continue to fund and live up to the obligations we have under the National Housing Strategy, and we're going to negotiate fiercely, with determination, to make sure that we get our fair share and to make sure that we get increased funding from the federal government, especially towards homelessness.

Mr. Adil Shamji: It's not my premise; it's the Financial Accountability Office's premise. Your government's track record certainly is consistent with underfunding and projected underfunding now—16% over the next two years.

Hon. Rob Flack: I'll turn this over to the deputy for a sec, please.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Great.

Ms. Martha Greenberg: The programs that the FAO included, again, are only MMAH programs, not additional ministry programs that support supportive housing and homelessness. The FAO, I think, noted that the base programs that the ministry offers remain the same, so the HPP is consistent.

I think the FAO is speaking to how there were a couple programs that were one-time funding—that was the “new deal” program to Toronto and Ottawa—as well as some program funding that was provided during COVID. That COVID one-time funding was provided and ended over the last few years; this is the last year, I believe, of the new deal funding for Toronto and Ottawa, which was a one-off funding outside of HPP.

The FAO noted that the base funding remains the same and is not being reduced. It is the one-time funding that was included and then comes out of the budget after this year.

Hon. Rob Flack: But to be clear, we have not lowered the HPP funding in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Adil Shamji: It certainly isn't getting increased over the next couple years either, even as we look down the barrel of dramatically increasing—

Hon. Rob Flack: That's why we're looking at a national housing strategy.

Mr. Adil Shamji: The solution to every one of your government's leadership challenges cannot be to look for federal leadership on issues. We hear it over and over and over again in health care, child care, education.

When can we expect the Premier and your cabinet to put big-boy pants on and actually demonstrate the leadership that Ontarians deserve?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I think that if you had heard the answer that I provided to MPP McKenney—through the Chair—you'll know that we are working with service managers on a regular basis, to look to see where the best practices are, where those things that are working in one area actually can be converted into another area—where we can get the best bang for the buck, so to speak.

Although I always hate to talk about dollars specifically when we're talking about housing and homelessness—because what we're really talking about, is results for people that need the help, and we are doing that—we are working actively with those service managers. As we continue to make the investments to give them the flexibility to run the programs on the ground, we continue to look for new and innovative ways to run those programs even better.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'm glad that you speak to those service managers and providers. You're not the only one that does that; they speak to me and those of us in the opposition, as well. They all say that they're underfunded. At a time when homelessness has increased in the last three years by 23% and it's projected to go up by another 16%, what could possibly justify cancelling that one-time funding instead of doubling down and increasing it?

Hon. Graydon Smith: The one-time funding—I believe we're talking about the new deal funding for larger communities. Again, when we look across the province of

Ontario at all the service managers and the assistance that they receive, that funding continues.

The minister has been very clear about our expectation that the federal government will step up. As much as you want to try and eliminate them from the equation and talk about big-boy pants, they've got the biggest set of pants and they are the ones that can help us all on a national level—especially in Ontario, where we have, as the minister said, 50% of the community housing stock—to get the work done.

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

Hon. Graydon Smith: We all need to work together. It is not about one level of government bringing the magic wand and solving the problems; we work together.

Hon. Rob Flack: For clarification: The new deals have not been cancelled; they've just come to the end of their term. As you know, both mayors are asking to renegotiate, which I'm sure we'll sit down and do. So they're not cancelled per se; just come to the end of their agreement.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay. Are you telling me that there is a likelihood or probability that they will be extended?

Hon. Rob Flack: I'm saying that we have to sit down and negotiate, like we did the last time.

Mr. Adil Shamji: And you're open to that?

Hon. Rob Flack: Absolutely.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay. Thanks, Minister.

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

We'll move over to the government side. MPP Grewal.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Minister, Associate Minister and Deputy, as well as the MMAH team, for the great work that you're doing for the province of Ontario.

I just wanted to build upon my colleague's question earlier. MPP Babikian talked a lot about development charges and HST relief for families. Maintaining that Ontario dream and Canadian dream is also essential for everything that we do as parliamentarians to ensure that when people work hard, they make an honest living for their family; they're able to afford a home and then build something and have that pride of home ownership.

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And the great work that the ministry, in the objective, has been doing in terms of providing DC relief and also, at the same time, the HST relief that's in conjunction with the federal government: These are measures that have been able to reduce housing costs. But one thing that we all need to look at is, how are these measures then translating and trickling down to the homeowner or the buyer who is going to receive these benefits? What safeguards do we have in place to make sure that those people that are now purchasing these new homes are receiving the utmost benefit of the incentives that we're providing municipalities and builders to make these new homes?

Hon. Rob Flack: That's a very good question. And I'll tell you why it's a good question: Because if affordability is back on the menu, people have to see it. There has been some concern—how are they going to really see these savings? Well, if you go back to Bill 98, you'll see that we asked for transparency when it comes to DC reductions; that when we see development charge reductions, there will be transparency in the agreement, the purchase and sale, as with the HST. So it's critical.

If you built a million-dollar house, which is a very expensive house—but in the GTA, it's maybe that not expensive, when you take a look at land costs—you can save up to \$200,000, 20%, of the purchase of a new home. So it's meaningful. It will be transparent, the savings, and it's going to go directly into the pocketbooks, making life more affordable for the people of this province buying new homes everywhere.

Hon. Graydon Smith: The notion of cutting DCs, I think, is the single most important thing that we'll deal with in the coming years. Homebuyers will see relief, obviously proportionate to the amount of the charge that's in the community and the commitment by those councils to cut it. But that means, again, people are winning in communities big and small, and able to chase that dream of home ownership.

Back when I was a mayor, in and around 2015—and I don't want to date myself too much, or get the dates wrong—we had a builder in the community. Actually, it was earlier than 2015, because it was on the tail end of the 2008 financial crisis. That crisis kind of got to us in smaller towns maybe a little bit slower than it did to some other communities, but eventually, home sales started drying up for all the same reasons: People had financial concerns; they weren't necessarily willing to make the commitment; they were a little bit skittish about spending their money. The building community started to feel that, and eventually started to wrap up and pull stakes.

We viewed development charges in Bracebridge at the time as something that could be an incentive where everybody wins; that if we reduce or, in some cases, remove, commercially, development charges, it could be the incentive that gets building happening again. And it turned out, it was. Because when we did that—and we did it in consultation with the building community, in anticipation of how they thought they could adjust their market price to get more people into homes—the sales office opens up again. People saw that difference that it would make to them—and, again, this was over a decade ago. That development today is 100% built out and done. So it literally went from shuttered, doors closed, to a lower price for the purchaser and an opportunity to purchase a new home.

If I can just sidebar for a moment: This has nothing to do with the question, Madam Chair, but I just got a text that the longest-serving mayor in the history of the town of Bracebridge passed away this morning. I just want to recognize for Hansard, and for the purposes of this august chamber that we're in, that Jim Lang was a true community-builder who struggled with all the questions that

we're thinking about this morning. He was a good friend. I'll miss him dearly. The community of Bracebridge will miss him dearly.

Thank you.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Our hearts definitely go out to the family. That's heartbreaking news.

But it's great to see the relief that is being delivered to families and their ability to purchase a home; that buying power in their dollar is coming back to them; and the transparencies that your ministry and yourselves have put in place into the system. It's good to see that's available and people are able to then afford homes at a much better price than they once were able to.

I just want to yield the rest of my time to my colleague MPP Deepak Anand.

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

MPP Anand, please go ahead.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Minister, I want to move your focus to rental housing. As we all know, housing ownership—before that, housing ownership, sometimes the rental housing, and then, before that, if you don't have both, that leads to homelessness.

As we all know, Ontario needs more rental housing. Speaking about Mississauga or Mississauga–Malton, we have seen very low vacancy rates. We know that the government is creating the conditions for those builders to put shovels in the ground, while making sure tenants are treated fairly: things like building purpose-built rental housing, working with the federal government, reducing the development charges and to protect and strengthen protection for the tenants. These are the things which we have already done.

Can you help me to understand how these measures are helping increase rental supply while protecting both tenants and landlords?

Hon. Rob Flack: Frankly, with all the struggles we've had in the housing continuum and getting new homes built faster, the purpose-built rental sector has been the shining light. I thank all those who have had confidence to build those homes.

In 2023, I believe, Chair, we eliminated the HST on purpose-built rentals, and slowly but surely, we started to see shovels in the ground. And for the third year in a row—I hope, if it continues the way 2026 is continuing—we'll have record starts in the history of the province of Ontario in terms of purpose-built rentals.

This year alone, to date, we are up about 19,600-and-some, shovels in the ground, purpose-built rentals being built. That's an increase of 41%. So I would say what I'm hearing is confidence, and when the markets have confidence, markets will react.

I'll go back to my business career: In this sector alone—not that I was in this, but using the analogy—when you create supply, you create competition. When people believe in a market, they think that they can build a better mousetrap; they think they can build a better rental facility in a community or whatever it may be. And that's not just the large builder; that's, as Minister Smith called it, the

mom-and-pops, the small folks: the additional dwelling unit on their property, or a new family buying a home and renting part of it out.

So when you build supply—and that is exactly what we've been doing—you build competition. And with the competition, you're going to compete for the dollars, and what we're seeing is rents coming down right across Ontario.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Minister. I have another MPP who wants to take the next question, but before that, I just want to take a moment and thank you. Yes, we have seen the numbers: The amount of rent is coming down, especially in Mississauga–Malton. There are three buildings being built—purpose-built rentals—in Mississauga–Malton, so thank you for that. And thank you for being worried about homelessness and working on homelessness. It's not one-approach-fits-all.

I just want to take a moment to thank you for your work and advocacy and the willingness of everyone to participate and work together in a continuum.

Chair, over to MPP Firin.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Firin, please.

MPP Mohamed Firin: How much time do we have left, Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have five and a half minutes.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Five and a half minutes? Okay.

I want to thank both ministers, Minister Flack and Minister Smith, for being here today. Minister Smith, condolences to you and your community for the loss of the mayor.

I also want to take this moment to congratulate my colleague the new MPP for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Jeff Beattie. Congratulations, and welcome to Queen's Park.

Through you, Chair: Minister, throughout these estimates, we've discussed the important work this government is doing to build more homes, support municipalities, strengthen communities and help Ontarians access safe and affordable housing. These are significant challenges, and success requires action across a wide range of programs and partnerships.

Ministers, as you look across the full mandate of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, what successes stand out that are moving the needle to help housing affordability here in Ontario?

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Hon. Rob Flack: Well, I'll maybe begin and say lots of things stand out. Which one do you want to talk about first?

MPP Mohamed Firin: All of them.

Hon. Rob Flack: I really think that moving the needle on the HST and the DCRP implementation is critical and will continue to be critical, and I also want to point out that that shows you how the federal government and provincial governments can work in concert with our municipal partners to get meaningful progress put in place. So those are two defining moments.

I'm very happy about what we did in the last year with Bill 9 and the code of conduct. I think, again, it was kind of an all-party discussion and review. Committees throughout the province worked well. We came to a landing and I think, if I'm right, Deputy, the regulations close Friday, or the—

Ms. Martha Greenberg: The consultations.

Hon. Rob Flack: The consultations close Friday, so we hope to have those in place to the start of the next municipal cycle.

But ultimately, I think, again, Bill 17, Bill 16, Bill 98—important pieces of legislation. Frankly, in an old agrarian term, we've got a lot of hay on the ground. We've got to get the regulations put in place to make that legislation as effective as possible. Again, it was a busy year. I think we had eight pieces of legislation passed through the House, regulations being worked on and meaningful work being done.

Looking forward, I'd say the couple or the three things that we really have to focus on, that I'm focused on and that we're focused on, are the National Housing Strategy, getting it renegotiated; and standing up municipal service corps or public water utilities—in Peel first, but throughout the province because, as I said earlier, there's only one taxpayer and there isn't an endless pit of money to put direct dollars into infrastructure.

We're going to have to look at those municipal service corps. They exist; it's not a brand new invention in the world, but I think it can be a meaningful distribution channel to get that work done and continue to make sure regulations are in place. But again, come back to the National Housing Strategy. Over the next few months, it's going to be crucial that we get something negotiated and quick.

And I would just conclude by saying that while we have an insatiable appetite to invest, invest, invest, we have not raised a tax in eight, coming on to nine years as a government. We've not raised a fee, but we continue to focus on the economy, and when we focus on the economy and protect the economy, protect jobs, protect the people investing in their businesses and communities, that's where we see success.

So, \$150 billion is exactly what we brought into this province and the treasury in 2018. This year, we'll exceed \$220 billion, a delta of \$70 billion. And where did that \$70 billion come from? It came from hard-working Ontarians, hard-working businesses; they paid their fair share of taxes. Through that, Chair, we've continued to help protect Ontario—a \$70-billion delta, and all of it has been invested back into programs: health care, education, housing, infrastructure. We could go on and on.

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

Hon. Graydon Smith: I think the other thing I'd just highlight is that Ontario has become a very competitive jurisdiction for investments in alternative home-building technologies, which is going to pay dividends down the road.

This afternoon, I'm going to go visit another housing factory that's investing in the modular space. We've seen several manufacturers want to be in Ontario because they see the changes that we've made as providing an opportunity to do things differently and do things more cost effectively.

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

Only five seconds left, so I just want to say on behalf of the whole committee that we're sending condolences for Mayor Lang.

Hon. Graydon Smith: To be clear, Chair: I may have missaid it because I was just a little emotional. Mayor Lang was there from 1975 to 1993. He was the past mayor. I don't know if I said he was the past mayor.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Yes, past mayor—a great tribute to public service that he's done, so thank you.

Now, we have approximately eight minutes left, and it goes to the official opposition. MPP McKenney, would you like to go?

MPP Catherine McKenney: Yes, thank you, Chair. And yes, absolutely, my condolences.

Chair, through you: There is no city in this province where home ownership is available to middle income households, let alone moderate and—actually, not a city where a family earning minimum wage could afford a one-bedroom apartment.

We know that across Canada—and there's no reason why it would be different here—40% of people can only afford \$1,700 a month for either rent or mortgage. A colleague of mine, who is the head of the Alliance to End Homelessness in Ottawa and co-chair in Toronto, actually asked a room full of developers and real estate folks one day who could build for \$1,700 a month and not one of them put up their hand. They just cannot do it.

We know the three reasons why people fall into homelessness are financial reasons. They just don't have enough money to pay for their rent. If you have the money, you can probably find a home today or an apartment to rent, but they don't have it; it's financial. The second reason is a breakdown in a relationship; that could mean a youth not being able to stay in their home or it could mean a separation. The third is intimate partner violence.

Given that, and given that here in Ontario, again, homelessness is increasing—it is not stabilizing; it's increased 25% since 2022. Northern Ontario and rural communities are seeing the highest increases. I just wonder, given all of that, would you agree that it is a mistake to rely solely on the private market for the delivery of new housing that will meet the needs of everyone in the province?

Hon. Rob Flack: So, if I understand your question, just so I fully understand it, you're advocating that—

MPP Catherine McKenney: For a non-market housing provider—

Hon. Rob Flack: Okay, non-market. So who—

MPP Catherine McKenney: I'll use Ottawa Community Housing as an example. Again, I was on the board. I actually lived in Ottawa Community Housing back in the late 1980s.

Ottawa Community Housing is building more housing today in the city of Ottawa than anyone else. It's mixed-income. There is market rent; there is just-below-market rent. The COHB, hopefully, doesn't fall off a cliff and we're able to provide deeply affordable housing.

But Ottawa Community Housing provides housing to thousands; they're the largest landlord in the city of Ottawa. They're not the only landlord, but they are an option, and yet we still have a decade-long wait-list. So we have examples where non-market builders are building housing and it is working. It makes it available for moderate, median-income earners and low-income earners to be able to have housing.

Again, I just ask you: Do you not agree that we need non-market builders, in addition to market builders, to ensure that everyone—everyone; people who can only afford that \$1,700, where families who are earning minimum wage can actually afford a rental accommodation? Would you agree with that?

Hon. Rob Flack: I think I'm right when I say this—and Deputy, correct me if I'm wrong, or maybe you know: Toronto would be the largest community housing provider in the province, I think for sure. We have it today; we're not saying that's wrong. What we're saying is—

MPP Catherine McKenney: But we need more.

Hon. Rob Flack: We need more, but we also need to fix what we have. Some \$12 billion is their estimated delta in terms of what they require in terms of cap backs, capital expenditures, for repairs and maintenance. I would make the argument—and again, not diving into the weeds—that if you did that properly, if you took some of that investment, potentially through Build Canada Homes or however, you could see an improvement in the capacity increase through that housing stock. It's 60 to 70 years old. Do we need new? I'm sure we do. We do need new, but we also have to look at what we can do with what we have as existing stock. These are not my words; this is exactly what the community housing folks said to me when they came to see me six or eight weeks ago.

MPP Catherine McKenney: I'm going to ask you a quick question, because I believe I only have—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): The clock is going to get to noon shortly.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Oh, am I finished at noon?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Oh, wait a minute. Sorry. No, it's three minutes.

MPP Catherine McKenney: I have two extra minutes? Okay.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): No, you have three minutes.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Just on the HST rebate: According to Urbanation for that, the first three months of the HST rebate, which didn't just go to first-time homebuyers but went to anyone simply buying a second home—or many homes, really. In Q2—

Hon. Rob Flack: The first time, it went to first-time homebuyers. Then we expanded it to everyone, yes.

MPP Catherine McKenney: That's right, exactly. But in those first three months after this last HST rebate, 30% of the condos that were sold were bought in bulk. They were bought by investors in large bulk. That's very concerning to me, because they'll circle back around and raise those rents eventually. Because that's how we got into this mess, was with the commodification of housing.

We know that 30% of condos that were sold were bought in bulk by large investors. Do you know how many single-family homes were bought by either second-time homebuyers or homebuyers with more than one home or in bulk?

Hon. Rob Flack: We'd have to get that data, I believe, from the Ontario Home Builders' Association. Or is it—

Ms. Martha Greenberg: Are you thinking specific to the HST rebate?

MPP Catherine McKenney: Yes.

Ms. Martha Greenberg: Then I think we'd have to get that from the federal government.

Hon. Rob Flack: The federal government, yes. They handle it, so the federal government would have that number.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Okay. Are you concerned that 30% of condos were bought in bulk by large investors?

Hon. Rob Flack: Well, are you talking about the High Art deal? Is that the deal you're talking about?

MPP Catherine McKenney: Oh, that contributed greatly to it, yes, absolutely.

Hon. Rob Flack: Well, concerned—I think we can all agree that—you called it “commodification.” People were buying condos on spec, and the bubble burst.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Why didn't you just let those condo prices drop, then, so that people could afford to buy them?

Hon. Rob Flack: We didn't buy those homes; people came in and bought those homes.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Well, you gave High Art Capital \$300 million to spur that on, right?

Hon. Rob Flack: Didn't give it to them; lent it to them. A big difference.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Provided them the financing.

Hon. Rob Flack: With capital financing.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Fifty seconds left.

Hon. Rob Flack: On one hand, you want to see more supportive housing—

MPP Catherine McKenney: Yes, I do.

Hon. Rob Flack: —and 20% or 25% of what they bought is targeted to do that. That's a reality.

MPP Catherine McKenney: It will not be supportive housing. It will be affordable, and it is based on median income, so it's not affordable. I could provide that math too.

Hon. Rob Flack: But that was part of the agreement.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Can I just ask: Will those affordable homes be part of the 19,660 new affordable homes that you're committed to? I just want to make sure

that I get that in my response. It's just occurring to me now.

Ms. Martha Greenberg: I don't believe that those are the types of units that would count. We will confirm when we provide you with the response.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Okay, yes.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): There are five seconds left, so—

MPP Catherine McKenney: We can wrap it up.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Okay. Thank you very much. This concludes the committee's consideration of the 2026-27 estimates of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

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

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 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 2026-27 estimates of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and 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 2026-27 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. I shall report back; that motion is 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.

The committee stands in recess until 1 p.m. Thank you.

The committee recessed from 1204 to 1301.

OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy will now come to order. Before we begin the consideration of the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, we must vote on the estimates of the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, which was the second selection made by the committee.

As a reminder to everyone, per standing order 63(d)(i), the estimates of the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, if

selected by a committee, shall have no time allotted to them, and when these estimates are considered, the Chair shall put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates.

I will now call these votes. Are the members ready to vote?

Shall vote 1701, Office of the Lieutenant Governor, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare the vote carried.

Shall the 2026-27 estimates of the Office of the Lieutenant Governor 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 2026-27 estimates of the Office of the Lieutenant Governor to the House? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare that carried.

MINISTRY OF CITIZENSHIP AND MULTICULTURALISM

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): We will now consider the 2026-27 estimates of 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 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 from members before we start? Seeing none, 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, welcome again. The floor is all yours.

Hon. Graham McGregor: All right, thank you very much. Good afternoon, Chair. It's good to be back at the heritage committee. I actually started my parliamentary career on the heritage, infrastructure and cultural policy committee, so it's always good to be back in these chairs.

I want to thank all members of the committee for their indulgence for having us here today. I'm pleased to be joined by Deputy Minister Nosa Ero-Brown, as well as Jennifer Louis, the assistant deputy minister for the Anti-Racism Directorate; Michelle Gittens, the assistant deputy minister for the citizenship, inclusion and heritage division; Rebecca Ramsarran, the assistant deputy minister for the heritage policy and programs division; and Supriya Mahimkar-Patrick, the chief administrative officer and assistant deputy minister for corporate management and services. And joining us from the Ontario Heritage Trust, we have Helen Chimirri-Russell, the chief executive officer.

First off, behind that great leadership team that we have here at the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism is a larger team of dedicated public servants throughout my ministry and the Ontario Heritage Trust. Their support, their dedication and their hard work to support our communities each and every day is something I appreciate and I hope members of this committee also appreciate.

The Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism has a broad and diverse purpose, but at its core, our work is all about: (1) helping communities feel safe and supported, (2) creating economic opportunities for individuals to succeed, and (3) recognizing those who dedicate themselves to their communities and those who preserve the stories and places that make this province the best place to live, work and raise a family.

To give an insightful overview of my ministry and our areas of responsibility, I'd like to expand on how we share a common objective of ensuring that the people of Ontario feel united, supported and able to fully participate in their communities.

The Anti-Racism Directorate leads Ontario's anti-racism efforts by working across government to tackle racism, promote racial equity, increase accountability, and support policies and initiatives focused on economic empowerment and access to opportunity.

The citizenship, inclusion and heritage division helps strengthen communities through its Honours and Awards Program, volunteer recognition initiatives and key heritage regulatory programs, including archaeology and heritage planning.

The heritage policy and programs division helps shape the future of our heritage framework, leading policy development, delivering funding programs and providing advisory services that help preserve and promote our history.

Lastly, we do also oversee the Ontario Heritage Trust, the province's official heritage agency, which connects Ontarians to the places and stories that have helped shape our province through conservation, commemoration and public engagement initiatives.

Moving on to my next point, I'd like to share how my ministry's work is supporting our government's commitment to protecting Ontario. We're helping to foster safer and more united communities. We're supporting economic opportunity and the future success of Ontarians. We're recognizing individuals who contribute to their communities through volunteerism, service and leadership.

I'll talk a bit about the frame for why we do this work. We live in the best province, the best country in the world because we've got people who come from all over the world—different continents, different countries. They come from different faith backgrounds. But here in Ontario, with over 200 languages that are spoken in our borders, we are all united. We're all better together. It's our differences that actually make us the best province in the world and the best place to be.

Regardless of your faith, your background or your culture, everyone deserves to feel respected, everyone deserves to feel safe, everyone should know that they are

valued, which is why we continue to put forward initiatives to protect our community.

As I mentioned earlier, the Anti-Racism Directorate leads the province's effort to combat racism and hate. Each year, we report publicly on our progress through the anti-racism strategic plan. During the last year, our government delivered 67 initiatives under that strategic plan, and MCM continues to make good on its commitment: more than \$132.5 million to ensure all Ontarians can participate, contribute and succeed.

At the same time, we know that many communities continue to experience hate-related incidents that raise concerns about the safety and security of gathering spaces. Over the past year, we've heard from faith-based organizations, cultural communities and community leaders who emphasize the importance of ensuring people can gather safely to worship, celebrate and participate in community life. Through the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant, our ministry invested \$12.75 million to help 1,122 cultural or faith-based organizations strengthen their security measures. These measures include things like security upgrades—cameras, fences, doors, windows—staff training, proactive security assessments to know where the gaps are and other protective measures that help keep community spaces safe.

The Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant—which I may call the AHSP, because, of course, we love our acronyms here in the government, and indulge me if I do—is an important part of our government's work to protect Ontario. By helping organizations safeguard the spaces where people gather, worship and connect, we're helping ensure communities across Ontario remain safe and resilient.

Chair, one of the most important responsibilities of any government is to help our communities thrive. That means ensuring individuals can develop their skills, access opportunities and participate fully in the economy. When we talk about protecting Ontario, the government talks a lot about, and is working quite heavily on, building that future economy that all Ontarians can see themselves in. I view the work that we do at the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism as a crucial part of that, to ensure that when we build that future economy, it's an economy that everyone can participate in.

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One of those initiatives and an important part of that work continues to be the Black youth action plan, which supports initiatives to reduce barriers and increase opportunities for Black communities across Ontario. Throughout the past year, ministry staff engaged with program partners to continue delivering important services and supports through the plan. The Black youth action plan's economic empowerment program helps Black youth, young people and entrepreneurs unlock their potential and take an active role in shaping their future.

Since 2020, this government has invested \$182.5 million through the Black youth action plan, supporting better outcomes for more than 129,000 Black children, youth and families across Ontario. And since 2023, Chair,

more than 33,000 Black youth and young professionals have been supported through organizations funded through the BYAP's economic empowerment program, including:

- the Malvern Family Resource Centre, an essential trusted community hub that connects, engages and takes collaborative action in supporting its communities to thrive;

- the Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education, YAAACE, which works to mitigate inequities through a range of programs and services from academics, athletics, experiential learning, employment supports and more; and

- the OYA Black Arts Coalition, empowering Black artists and creators in the entertainment industry by enhancing technical skills, offering experiential industry training and providing access to professional development opportunities.

I'm proud to say that our government is investing an additional \$16.5 million this year through the 2026-27 Black youth action plan economic empowerment program to further commit to this work. This investment includes a new call for applications for community-based projects. It also included a new process to identify funders that will contribute financial support to approved initiatives, helping more young people access programs and services.

We hear commonly from the ecosystem out there, Chair, about how they wish that all the funding supports would collaborate a little bit further, and I really view our role as government with the Black youth action plan—not only do we have money that we can spend, but we also have the power of government leadership to bring other funders, other partners, non-profit or private or otherwise, to the table to help invest in some of this good work.

I'm very hopeful and optimistic. I can't share any numbers with the committee today, because the public services review of that application is ongoing, but I'm very hopeful and optimistic that we'll have a good result and be able to spend more than that \$16.5 million this year. I just can't tell you the exact number at this time.

I think it's also important to highlight that at a time when Black youth are facing challenges getting their first job, this investment will help connect participants with opportunities in emerging and high-demand sectors such as artificial intelligence, life sciences and advanced manufacturing and the skilled trades.

My ministry also recognizes why fostering a strong and supportive environment for Black entrepreneurs is imperative to strengthen our economy. We are creating jobs. We are driving innovation, strengthening local economies and building long-term economic resilience in Ontario.

Our new model for BYAP allows funders such as charitable organizations, private sector businesses, corporations, corporate foundations, and industry and sector associations to apply to fund economic empowerment projects through the Black youth action plan career readiness or entrepreneurship streams, or they can propose their own project ideas that align with the goals of the

Black youth action plan, and with those goals and priorities for the economic empowerment of Black youth.

On August 31, 2026, the portal went live for the Black youth action plan call for applications for community-based projects and funders. We look forward to seeing how this model can build on the work this government has done in the past to build a brighter future for our Black communities.

Our efforts to expand opportunities are also informed by advice and perspectives received from community leaders and stakeholders. Our government continues to benefit from the guidance of the Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity and the advocate for community opportunities, which are managed by the ministry. Drawing on their lived experiences and direct engagement with communities across Ontario, they provide valuable insights that help our decision-making, but also strengthen our understanding as a government of the needs, priorities and experiences of diverse communities, particularly youth and individuals facing barriers to social and economic participation.

I'm very proud of the Black youth action plan changes that I've noted for the committee. A lot of that feedback and direction came from consultations led by our advocate for community opportunities, who is one Patrice Barnes, who I think members of this committee will remember from the previous term of Parliament, who is a great community advocate and a great Canadian. Of course, Patrice is the advocate for community opportunities and also the chair of the Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity.

Since its establishment in 2020, the Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity has convened 33 meetings, provided advice on 50 policy and program initiatives, and collaborated with 16 ministries and agencies. I see a former chair who is here in the committee, as well, and I'd be remiss if I didn't thank one Mohammed Firin for his work on the committee as well.

The council brings community-informed perspectives to government decision-making. It has contributed to initiatives in education, employment, skills training, youth justice, mental health, anti-racism and economic opportunity. Most recently, the council provided advice that supported the development of Ontario's revised mandatory Black history curriculum for grades 7, 8 and 10. It has also contributed to policy discussions on early reading screening, artificial intelligence in education, school renewal and other education priorities.

The advocate for community opportunities continues to serve as an important bridge between government and communities as well, providing strategic advice and fostering collaboration across sectors and ministries. Since 2019, the advocate has held 35 engagement sessions and discussions, many of those in the last year around revamping that Black youth action plan. They've advised on 14 policy initiatives and engaged more than 550 organizations and stakeholders across the province.

Recent accomplishments to date include what I just mentioned: leading 11 Black youth action plan round

tables focused on workforce empowerment for Black youth, bringing together more than 50 stakeholders and community organizations and hosting a deputy ministers' senior leadership session on Black youth employment, with participation of eight ministries.

I view the advocate and the council's work as working together, and I view them, frankly, as vital to ensuring that community voices inform government policies and programs beyond just the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, having that educated lens from community, informed from lived experience to make sure that other ministries are serving our diverse populations to the best ability that they can.

Chair, while the council and the advocate helped to build stronger communities, I want to talk a little bit about some of the work we do to acknowledge the volunteers in our communities that that give their time to support local organizations. Every day, there are individuals who step up to support local organizations, mentor young people, assist seniors and help improve the quality of life in their communities. One of the great privileges of this ministry is recognizing the extraordinary folks whose leadership and dedication continue to inspire people around them.

Over the past year, we recognized more than 6,400 individuals whose volunteerism impacted the lives of others across the province. Programs such as the Order of Ontario, the Lieutenant Governor's Legacy Awards, the Volunteer Service Awards and the Ontario Medal for Young Volunteers recognize the contributions that often take place behind the scenes.

I say it like this, Chair, for the Volunteer Service Awards especially: People have a lot on their plate. To keep up with the cost of living, we're working longer hours. You work your job, you look after your own family at home, you might look after a parent who needs to go to the doctor, you might take your kid to a soccer game or band practice and that kind of thing. For individuals who do all of that and still find time in their day to give more time to any cause—and the Volunteer Service Awards doesn't discriminate; it could be a hospital, it could be a snowmobile trail association, it could be park cleanups. But for people that are giving their time back, it is one of the most important things that we can do as a government to support and to recognize. We had these Volunteer Service Awards ceremonies, again, recognizing about 5,000 individuals across dozens of communities last year.

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For members that are on the committee, I'd be remiss if I didn't congratulate Jeff Beattie on his recent election to Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. Jeff and any members who haven't been to one of these Volunteer Service Awards ceremonies in the past: Get out to them. It's inspiring. It motivates me to continue to do my work. I know Deputy Ero-Brown has attended a few of them as well. Well before I was a minister, I attended mine in Brampton, Ontario, and it was one of the most humbling things.

We all on this committee—members of this committee—all have titles in government, but there are thousands of community leaders who are just out there doing the

work. It's nice to see them recognized and, importantly, the smiles on their faces and the pep in their step that they get when they know that their government is recognizing them.

Another initiative that we do to recognize that we administer is the Ontario Veterans Award for Community Service Excellence, which is something that was brought through under this government's watch in the Honouring Veterans Act, 2024. I had the honour of assisting the Honourable Michael Ford to table that bill and pass that bill when he was unwell, Chair.

It was a wonderful experience, importantly, to see this House work together. I talked to other ministers, and they talk about getting legislation passed. It can be a very tough process, and it takes a while. We tabled that bill on a Monday; we had it passed on a Thursday. The reason for that is because every New Democrat, every Liberal, every Green Party MPP, every independent and, yes, every Progressive Conservative supported that bill to make sure that we could get it done in time for Remembrance Day. That's something that I am grateful for, and when we see 170 veterans that were recognized this year, I know that they and their families are grateful for the work of this House in that way as well.

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

Hon. Graham McGregor: Yes. Well, we've got a lot to do. We do a lot. There are a couple other things I wanted to talk about—the work we're doing under heritage framework transformation—we'll get to that.

The way that we handle archaeological files currently particularly, I think, leaves a lot to be desired. We are committed to modernizing that work. The standards and guidelines hadn't been updated since 2011; they're being updated now. We are, importantly, doing that work with the leadership of First Nations communities, collaborating with our partners to make sure that we get it right and that that work is done well and not something that we have to go and change again because we didn't take the time to get it right the first time. We're very committed to getting that work right the first time.

Other important work: The Ontario Heritage Trust—their plaque-unveiling program happens in communities across Ontario. I'm happy to talk about that in a supplementary, but I'm sure I'm coming up on my time now—

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

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you for your indulgence, and I'm happy to answer any questions that the committee members have.

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

We'll now begin the question-and-answer segment in rotations of 15 minutes for the official opposition members, 15 minutes for the third-party member, 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 the Chair, if a member seeks to reclaim the floor during their rotation while the minister is

responding, I will recognize the member and allow them to reclaim the floor to ask a new question.

For the deputy 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 start with the official opposition. MPP Gilmour, please begin.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I want to say thank you to the minister, the deputy minister and the team behind you and with you for all the work that you've done over this past year on some pretty important files. It's good to be here with you.

I want to start—Chair, through you to the minister—with a group that you actually mentioned towards the end there, Minister. I want to start with a group that his ministry licenses and depends on. This is Ontario's licensed archaeologists. A number of them have sent me their questions for the budget ahead. As you know, their livelihood depends on their licence, and their licence depends on submitting accurate information through the ministry's systems. So I'm going to put questions as directly as they put them to me.

This first one is: On September 28, the ministry updated PastPort to add an inquiry system for licensed archaeologists. Now, on October 1, just last week, the system was taken down for several hours for what licensees were told was a technical issue.

There is a budget connection to the IT section, for those who are wondering.

Licensees tell me that the actual problem was that one licensee could see and even change other licensees' records, including names, addresses, client information, project forms.

Now, the data breach was confirmed by the ministry on October 2 by email. Did the ministry notify the Information and Privacy Commissioner?

Hon. Graham McGregor: I'll defer that question to the deputy minister.

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Thank you, Minister. My name is Nosa Ero-Brown. I'm the Deputy Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, for the record.

First of all, I will say that we take our work very seriously—the work that we do with all of the licensed archaeologists in the province and our archaeology review officer. As the minister mentioned in his remarks, we are in the process of doing a serious transformation to our archaeology review program—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you, Deputy. Yes or no, have you informed the privacy commissioner about the data breach?

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: For that, I will call on Assistant Deputy Minister Michelle Gittens to come answer the question. But I will let you know that we were made aware of this breach. We are in the process of fixing—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you, Deputy.

Ms. Michelle Gittens: Good afternoon. My name is Michelle Gittens, assistant deputy minister of the division

of citizenship, inclusion and heritage. Through the Chair: Thank you for the question.

Member, we have informed the office, and as the deputy shared, we are working through the process.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you. How long was the data exposed?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Sorry; can I defer that to the deputy minister?

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Thank you. Chair; through you, I will ask Michelle Gittens to respond to the question.

Ms. Michelle Gittens: Um—

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: We can always get back to you with the response to the question.

Ms. Michelle Gittens: Yes.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay. Is that a commitment? Can we ask for that within the next 30 days, to get how long the data was exposed?

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: We will get back to you within the next 30 days.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you. Also, perhaps now or in the next 30 days, can the minister confirm whether the records were viewed or altered, including any cancelled project information forms?

Hon. Graham McGregor: We'll get back to the committee on that one.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: In the next 30 days; thank you for that.

Now, Chair, the ministry's capital budget—business application software is \$1,000. That's page 33. I'm wondering what money in this budget makes sure that the next update is tested before licensees' data is put at risk as it has been in the last week.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you for the question. That's one of the big opportunities we see with the heritage framework transformation.

Simply, PastPort is an old system. If you look at it, really, it's something that you'd kind of expect out of a government back in the late 1990s or the early 2000s. We are—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you, Minister. I'm looking for the number, the money. How much—

Hon. Graham McGregor: Sorry; I'm going to get to the answer.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: The dollar figure? Thank you.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Yes. So, going into next year, we'll be with a change and a shift in the way that we want to be licensing archaeologists and doing this work under heritage framework transformation. We're looking to move off of PastPort. So—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Sure. If the minister doesn't know the number, perhaps the deputy does.

Hon. Graham McGregor: I'm getting to the answer of the question.

So yes, we are changing it from PastPort into a new system. Of course, we made some improvements to PastPort in the time, but—sorry, do you mind repeating your specific \$1,000—what was that?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Yes. Right now, the capital budget for software is \$1,000. What money is in the

budget to make sure that the next update is tested before the licensees' data is put at risk?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Oh, okay. Yes, sorry. So we've got millions of dollars that we've put towards this. I'll defer to the deputy for the exact figure, but we've put a lot of money towards this.

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Thank you for the question. We have an RFS for that right now. As the minister mentioned, we are looking to upgrade PastPort, and we have request-for-services information out on the street right now.

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MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you. I can recall that.

Chair, there's another question that I'd like to ask. The government's own 2026 annual report on the anti-racism strategic plan counts this heritage framework transformation, including the IT system that we've been talking about and the changes, as part of its anti-racism work. It says that 80% of Ontario's archaeological sites are of Indigenous interest. Did the exposed records from last week include any information about Indigenous sites? If so, have the affected First Nations been told?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Deputy Minister?

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Thank you for the question. Chair, through you, if I may address: The system was out just for three hours. There were no records altered. It was just the PIF—what we call the project information form—notifications that were affected.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Okay. Thank you.

Now, we've heard many, many times through a lot of advertising dollars that this government says that Ontario is open for business. The ministry's own annual report for last year says that a 40-business-day service target is in place, but only for archaeological reports that proponents flag as priorities, and—

Hon. Graham McGregor: Yes.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'm not getting to my question.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Oh, sorry. I've got an answer.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'm getting to my question.

That is being met, they're saying, 90% of the time, as of March 2025. The briefing book says that there's a backlog of 3,000 reports that have been eliminated. However, licensees tell me that reviews can still take years—so it's very confusing—and that this holds up housing at a time where we are in the middle of a housing crisis.

So, I'd just like three numbers from you, Minister, and the three numbers are these: What is the service target for every report that isn't flagged as a priority? How many reports are actually waiting for review today? And how old is the oldest report waiting for review?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you for that. I agree with the member about the 40-business-day service standard only for expedited reports. That was something that, when I took office, I flagged as an opportunity for us to improve on—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Chair, I'm wondering if the minister has targeted reports, or—

Hon. Graham McGregor: Sorry. I'm trying to answer. You've just got to let me answer.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Yes. MPP Firin, point of order.

MPP Mohamed Firin: If the member could kindly let the minister answer the questions—if the member just wants to hear her voice, we could allow her time to just talk. But I think it would be ideal and beneficial for all the members in this committee so that we can hear the minister answer the question.

I appreciate you, Chair. Thank you.

Hon. Graham McGregor: He said it; I didn't say it. Again—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Just a second. Have you got the question out that you want asked, MPP Gilmour?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'd like three numbers, and if the minister doesn't have those three numbers, I'll move on to another question.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Yes. Number one is 40 days.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Service targets?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Yes. Expedited reports, regular reports—I removed the expedited review tunnel so—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Chair, I would like to reclaim my time. Thank you.

Hon. Graham McGregor: If you're not going to listen to the answer—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Gilmour, you're asking the questions. You can reclaim your time, but the minister is trying to answer.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you. I understand. I'm looking—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): If there could be a little bit more flexibility in this, because you do have another round coming and another round after that.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Every file is targeted for 40 days now.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'm going to reclaim. I am going to exercise my right to reclaim. It doesn't seem that the minister has had answers so far. What I'd like to ask—

Hon. Graham McGregor: I'd love to get to them.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Madam Chair, point of order.

Hon. Graham McGregor: My goodness. It's been a while since I've been at this committee, but I didn't know this is how we run business now.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Babikian, point of order.

Hon. Graham McGregor: This is how the business of government is run.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Okay. One at a time. One at a time. MPP Babikian has a point of order.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Of course, Chair.

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

Mr. Aris Babikian: It is our role here at the committee to ask questions to the minister or the witnesses. We have been in many hearings like this. We have the courtesy to give the witnesses, the minister, the deputies the time to answer the question. We cannot ask the question and, after a few seconds, interrupt them from answering the question.

I mean, this is not the decorum of this meeting. It is not doing any favour to the committee members, to this hearing, to the people who are watching us on TV, because if we are not going to give the minister and the deputies their time to answer the question, why we are calling them here?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you. Point well taken.

MPP Gilmour, if you would rather have written answers or just want to—you'll have to decide if you want to give the minister time. But, just, respectfulness would be—a little more grace, please.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you, Chair. I will give the minister the time, but recognizing that time is so limited. We have had committees that used to go all day. They now go two hours, and if we don't have those numbers, it's really hard for us to, in our role here, really hold the government to account, to use that eagle that we're supposed to be like. So I will take back that question and I'll ask another question.

Chair, licensees used to get a project tracking number within a day or two. Now, since the March updates, they're waiting much longer. The portal cannot always record what they actually found in the field is what the licensees are telling me. As we know, accuracy is a condition of the archaeologist's licence. They must be accurate.

The division services budget where the IT contract sits has been cut by \$1.78 million or 42%; that's page 55. Is there a dollar in this budget set aside specifically to repair "past posts," and how much?

Hon. Graham McGregor: PastPort.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: PastPort; pardon me.

Hon. Graham McGregor: It's not a cut. What we're doing is extending the time it takes to get the work right for heritage framework transformation. When we had initially gotten the money allocated for some of those improvements, we thought we would be in a place to go live this year. In dealing with First Nations partners and hearing from chiefs all across Ontario and from communities all across Ontario, something that really spoke to me was the need to get it right and to do the work a little bit—to slow down and make sure that we do this properly. So that money that the member's referencing—a lot of that money will be spent next year rather than this year, just to make sure we do things properly.

The other thing that the member will be noting is we are moving off PastPort. So there will be savings for the taxpayers there when we move from PastPort to our new IT system, which is currently being developed.

I got the answer out. That was awesome.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Hon. Graham McGregor: We're doing great.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Minister, would you commit on the record today that no licensed archaeologists will ever be asked to enter information that doesn't reflect their fieldwork just so that it fits into the system?

Hon. Graham McGregor: I don't know; that seems like a loaded question. Look, I'll commit to building the best system that we can to balance the needs of our communities; to work with First Nations partners to make sure that their heritage, their history, their cultural resources are protected; and, yes, as the member mentioned, to make sure that we move faster. The system we're building, tougher, faster, fairer, so that we can get projects, housing projects, economic development projects built on time—I can commit to doing the best work that we can in that regard.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: The licensees and the public share one general inbox; it's archaeology@ontario.ca. Licensees wait, they tell me, a minimum of 15 days for answers that they need so they can proceed. Is there money in this budget for a direct line for licensees?

Then, the second half of that is, of the ministry's 254 staff—that's page 24—I'm wondering how many are actually archaeology review officers.

Hon. Graham McGregor: I am going to defer to the deputy in a second on some of the specifics, but two things I want to highlight: One, the lack of information is exactly why we're moving to an updated system. Sending an email to the ministry and getting an email back isn't always the quickest way to get sometimes really basic information that licensed archaeologists need to have access to. So a lot of that data, a lot of that information in our future state is going to be accessible through an online portal.

The goal is also to have not only licensed archaeologists have access to this but also have municipalities, the proponent who hired the archaeologist—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): There's 30 seconds left.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Oh. It was a good question. We'll get to it in the next run.

The other thing is, that 15-day standard has become 48 hours. We answer emails in 48 hours—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'll reclaim and ask one last question. We'll see if we can get that in, and maybe I can get the staffing number.

Changes to the municipal assessments take effect January 27, and this is only three months away. I'm wondering if the ministry will fund training and educational materials for the licensees before the changes take effect, and on what date.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Well, we're going to have to wait until the next round for that answer, possibly.

MPP Tsao.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: It's always a pleasure to be at estimates. As I always do, I want to start by thanking the minister for being here today, and thank you to the members of the public service who put so much time and effort to prepare estimates. I know it's a lot of work and it's a lot of effort, and we appreciate the work of the public service. I'm looking forward to using this time to have a

constructive dialogue and maybe help the public understand a little bit more about the estimates, the books and how money is being spent in the province.

1340

Through you, Chair: Minister, I want to start by looking at the big picture here. Your ministry's 2026-27 total operating expenses, looking at right now, is approximately less than 1% of the government's total operating expenses. At the same time, we see two program areas responsible for anti-racism and citizenship, inclusion and heritage face a combined reduction of approximately \$8 million.

Through you, Chair, I'm wondering if the minister can explain to us, when his ministry is responsible for less than 1% of the total government operating expenses through these estimates and declining: Do you believe that the government is allocating enough resources to allow you, as the minister, to effectively combat hate in Ontario?

Hon. Graham McGregor: I would say, unequivocally, yes. As the member noted, we are a smaller-budget ministry, for sure. When you look at our total spend, you'll note a decrease of about 10% this year from last year—part of our work as a government to make sure we're getting the maximum value for taxpayer dollars, as it were. I think we are doing an absolutely fabulous job as a ministry with the resources that we have to accomplish the goals of the ministry that we talked about.

The Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant, I think, is one that I know the member appreciates. I know it benefits his community; it certainly benefits my community—and I think members of all the communities that are represented at the committee, 1,122 cultural and faith-based organizations that we were able to fund. These are things like getting a security camera out at the parking lot.

I'll give you an example. We had a mosque in my neighbourhood, in my riding, Jamiat Al Ansar—they had their collection box stolen. Through our grant, they were able to fund security cameras and security guards on busy holiday seasons to make sure that that collection box has security and the protection that it needs to and, importantly, that worshippers that are there are able to receive it.

I want to be upfront about the reductions that the member is referencing. Two reductions: One is a sunset program, the RAISE Program, which was funded for three years back in 2023. It was always intended to be funded for three years. We're very proud of the work, \$15 million over three years. We're very proud of the work of that program. It has now reached its conclusion.

Another reduction that the member is seeing is what MPP Gilmour was talking about, which is us moving some of the costs from our IT system from this year to next year, which was, I think, a very popular move for the archaeology sector and for First Nations communities, to make sure that this government gets the work right when we are making changes in that regard.

I think another piece of the reduction: We had a bit more infrastructure repairs under the Ontario Heritage Trust last year that we don't this year. I will caution: Just because it's a reduced amount this year doesn't mean next

year we won't have more that we have to repair. I think repair costs kind of fluctuate. I'd love to say that that is continuous savings for taxpayers, but of course, the work that the heritage trust does is important, so we've got to make sure that that money is there and we'll kind of read that going out into the other years.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Thank you for that, Minister.

I just want to stay on that a bit. I think you outlined pretty well where the reduction of the \$8 million is coming from. I wanted to look from a different angle here: when you're cutting \$8 million from programs that fight racism and hate, but at the same time, when we look at the estimates, we're spending more on administration and the ministry has actually added 21 new full-time staff members.

Minister, at a time when we see growing acts of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and a society where hate is now becoming too predominant, how can your ministry justify spending more on administration, hiring 21 new full-time staff, yet reducing the spend to combat hate by \$8 million?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you to the member for the tough but fair question.

Look, we had to hire some more staff in the ministry as well. You'll see that ministry administration number go up a little bit with just cost-of-living increases for salaries and wages. We need good people working in the ministry. We need them to be compensated fairly and well. Those compensation increases are across government. It's not something that the ministry has direct control over; those are cross-government initiatives. I think it's a reasonably modest increase; \$368,000 from last year to this year for an organization of our size, I think, is a justified expense.

The RAISE program, which was a support-for-entrepreneurs program, was sunsetted. But a program that I'm very excited about this year is the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant, and I'll tell you why. We know that we've invested \$70 million over the last four years into the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant, and we've been doing it in the same way for all of those years. We made some changes to eligibility requirements. We allowed religious child care institutions to apply; they weren't allowed to at the start. Short-term security guards and cyber security measures weren't eligible at the start of the program; they're eligible now.

We're making probably the biggest change this year to that program by opening up a special project stream which is for some of that intentional, community-led educational hate-prevention work. The members last year in the estimates were talking a lot about the Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant that we had in the past. This special project stream is not a new version of the Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant, but I think the work that we are looking to fund through that program is very similar.

I know that was a bit of a long answer. If the member would like, I'm happy to have the deputy minister give a detailed breakdown of those new staff and exactly where they're hired. Would you appreciate that?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Sure. Absolutely.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Okay. I'll defer to the deputy.

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Okay. Thank you very much.

Chair, through you, may I correct the record from earlier?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Yes.

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Okay. I had just mentioned about the incident that happened that took three hours. It was actually three days, so I read my notes wrong, and the issue, which was not a breach, was an incident that happened from September 27 to October 1, and only those with access to PastPort could actually see what happened. I just wanted to correct the record for that.

Okay. And then, going back to the question: The minister already responded around the increase in our admin that was related to across-the-board increases. You had also asked about increase in staff. We have 18 archaeological review officers with a total salary of approximately \$1.7 million.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Great. Well, thank you very much.

Minister, I know you already raised the issue of RAISE, which you noted was a sunset program, and therefore it's not continuing anymore. But I do recall at the last estimates committee meeting last year, you were singing the praises of the program, as you are today—rightly so; I think it has helped a lot of people. I understand you're saying it's a sunset program, but when a program is working effectively and is making an actual difference in the lives of Ontarians, especially Indigenous ones, was there consideration to extend this program or have it renewed in another form?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Yes. Thanks for that, and 100%. As a government, we're always looking to do the best we can and serve 16 million people that call Ontario home the best that we can as a government. I think looking at the RAISE—and, of course, we supported almost 1,500 entrepreneurs over the three years there—I think you have to view it in a broader context of what the Ontario government is engaged in right now.

We're seeing more government spending to support businesses than ever before in ministries like the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade; and labour, training and skills development—you know, a \$30-billion "Protect Ontario" package that this government has put forward in the context of Trump tariffs. I think you always are looking at which programs where can do the most effective job.

I think what the government has put forward with the previous budget in April and with the update you'll get in the fall economic statement, viewed in the totality, is a really effective package that the government has put together to support 16 million people who call Ontario home and all those jobs that are in jeopardy in your riding and in my riding.

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Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Through you, Chair: I'm going to push back a little bit more on that answer—

Hon. Graham McGregor: You don't have to.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: —because what we're talking about with RAISE is very specific. We're talking about

focusing in on Indigenous communities, which are traditionally underserved and face systemic barriers in society and in business. So to simply say that this money is going to benefit them through various stimuli that are being presented in your economic war with Donald Trump, I think it's a bit unfair.

This is a very important topic for me, to make sure that people who face systemic issues in society, due to either their race, religion or whatever it may be—that we, as elected officials, are always there to help them, not to give them something better, but to level the playing field.

Minister, RAISE helps and has helped, to your credit, to level that playing field. Rather than just saying, “Hopefully you’ll find something in the tariff reliefs,” what are you going to do to specifically help business owners that are facing systemic issues, that have benefited from RAISE, to ensure that there will be more that can benefit as well?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thanks to the member for the question. I want to be clear: At no point did I say that we hope. We will be there to support entrepreneurs. We will be there to support job creators.

You know, the member noted it's the Racialized and Indigenous Supports for Entrepreneurs Grant program, and one of the goals that we had every year was to increase the amount of Indigenous participation in it. We engaged First Nations communities directly. We engaged members like COO.

But you look at a program like RAISE, \$5 million, and then you look at a program like under the Ministry of Energy, which is \$3 billion of equity sharing in critical projects that are happening on treaty territory for First Nations communities. I think what you're seeing this government do regarding Indigenous economic reconciliation is simply work that no government has ever done before. This is generational changing activity that this government has engaged in.

The member says “I hope”; I say we will. We are engaged in this work. That \$30 billion for protecting Ontario, that Protect Ontario fund will be there.

Now, the member has brought up a really good point about the need for us to do what we can do within our context as a ministry, and one of those files that is really important and critically important is the Black youth action plan. I know it supports constituents of the member there, the member for Don Valley North. It certainly helps constituents in Brampton and across Ontario.

We have taken steps to make that program even more economically focused. We have the kind of skills upgrade and continuous learning pathway of it to get people into high-paying jobs, good careers. We're also supporting the entrepreneurship stream—

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

Hon. Graham McGregor: —to help them with their businesses.

Critically, for this year—this is the first year that we've ever opened up our doors for outside partners to try to contribute with us. The economic empowerment stream of

the Black youth action plan historically has been \$16.5 million. This year, by the end of it—and I can't give a number, because we haven't finished deliberations yet, but the member will see a higher number than \$16.5 million towards that program to support Black youth and young people in their entrepreneurial journeys, and I'm very excited about it.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I just want to reclaim—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have 15 seconds left, Minister.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: —just the last 15 seconds.

Hon. Graham McGregor: I had a really good last part.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: We'll do that on the other end.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): It's still counting down, you two.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: With the last 15 seconds, I just wanted to say, Minister, I was asking specifically about Indigenous, but I do appreciate what's happening for the Black youth action program. Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): We will now go over to the government side. MPP Babikian to start.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Minister, deputy minister and staff of the ministry for coming and sharing your input, your insight and your time with us to enlighten us, answer our questions and move on to bring better programs, better services to our residents.

Minister, I don't know if you want to take some of the time. I realized that you couldn't finish your notes, your remarks. If you would like to take the opportunity to finish your thoughts, and after then, I will ask you the question.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Yes, thanks. I'll talk a bit about the improvements.

Archaeology is a file that I've devoted a lot of attention to since becoming minister here. Some of the things that were referenced: We did uncover a backlog in 2024—3,000 files that were in the backlog of May 2024. That number has been zero as of April.

The files that were dealt with in 40 business days or less were files that were flagged for expedited review, and I always thought there was a better way to do that. Instead of just only getting back to people fast when they ask for an expedited review file, why don't we just get back to everybody fast and make that the customer service standard for the ministry?

Credit to the team behind me and the team behind them at the ministry: They took that ball, and they ran crazy far with it. They did an excellent job. We get back to people now in 48 hours or less. Now, if that slows down some of the review time and it's something that's been flagged to me by the team—it used to be 15 days; now it's 48 hours. We're hitting that target almost 100% of the time. We track it: 96%? Someone will get me—

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: It's 99%.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Yes, 99% of the time, we're hitting that 48-hour response time on email responses, because that customer service is important. Especially while we're making some changes, we feel like the sector needs to have reliable communication with the ministry. If you talk to archaeologists out there, they don't

feel like that has always been the case with the ministry. I put a real premium on it. If we're going to be regulating the sector, we had better be responsive to the sector in getting back to them.

At the same time, we also have to hold the sector accountable properly too. Archaeology is heavily detailed work. I mean, you see what they do in field season. It can be gruelling, what these folks go through. It is such detailed work that there are risks at times of inaccuracy to happen. When we lose archaeological heritage resources, when First Nations communities lose some of these critical pieces—frankly, pieces of their cultural identity—that's stuff that we can't get back if somebody just makes an error.

So the ministry does take the time to review the reports and go through them; it's important. It's important that we hold the sector accountable, that we hold proponents accountable and the rest of it. That being said, we can do it faster.

And so, heritage framework transformation: I've got to give credit to you, Aris—to you, PA Babikian—for your support with the ministry as a parliamentary assistant working on this heritage framework transformation. We are making this tougher, faster, fairer. We're spending less time dotting the i's and crossing the t's, and members will see some of the key pieces of heritage framework transformation laid out this session. So I don't want to skip ahead of the line—skip ahead of my own approvals, I guess—but we are creating a system that is more responsive, that gets answers quickly. It's outcomes-focused, but you're also going to see us hammer people when they get it wrong.

Look, there's a difference between benevolently getting something wrong and maliciously getting something wrong. If somebody's maliciously bulldozing cultural resources for our communities in Ontario or for First Nations partners that we work with, we're going to lay the hammer on them, and I'm not afraid to do that either. But for the vast majority of files—look, for the vast majority of files, nothing's found, and there needs to be some redundancy in the system; I get that. There probably doesn't need to be as much redundancy as we have in there. To hold those files up for two years, three years for a housing project or for a long-term-care home or something doesn't make a lot of sense either.

I'm really, really proud of the work that we're doing. I look forward to being able to present the House with a finished project. This time next year, we'll be in a completely different world when it comes to archaeology. I'd love to take credit for that myself, but that's the team behind me, the team behind them that have done that, but importantly, the archaeology sector as well: the Ontario Archaeological Society, the Group of 21, the licensed archaeologists that have engaged with us. They call me all the time about things that we could be doing better, things we're doing right, things we're doing wrong.

And critically, First Nations communities, who we have been engaged in consultation with—we say “in-market” on consultations since—we were six months last year.

We've been on since March this year, and we're continuing.

1400

When we talk about a partnership, we mean it, and it's work that we need to do right. It's work that we need to do well and work that I hope to present to the House, that I'm very proud of, that I hope members will support. With their support, I hope they feel proud of it as well.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Minister, as we know, many people from all over the world choose Ontario, Canada, as their home. They come here to provide a better life for their children, their families, and secure a life far away from persecution, killing etc. It's not an exaggeration to say that over 160 different groups call Ontario home from all over the world.

I am proud that our government brought that anti-hate grant and helped many faith-based and cultural groups improve their facilities to provide better security to their members, because we know—unfortunately, it is out of our control—we are living in a world where any event far away from here affects us and certain groups face that kind of hatred. But it is something that our government thought about and the anti-hate program helped them. I have met many people during different cultural events because my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt is quite a diverse riding, with so many different groups. All of them appreciate the program, and some of them even got it for more than one year.

Can you elaborate to the committee the benefits of this program, the anti-hate program? How did it improve the quality of life? How did it build a better, safer and more secure Ontario and Toronto?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you to the member for the question. The member put it really well: We're the best place in the world, and the proof of that is how many folks from around the world want to come here. We've got people of all different faiths that pray at churches, mosques, gurdwaras, mandirs, synagogues. They pray on different days: Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Some people don't pray at all. Some people pray maybe too much. Some people only pray when they've got a test or a job interview or something.

But we're all part of that united Canadian family, and that diversity makes us a stronger province and makes us a stronger country. When you go and look in communities like the member's community in Scarborough—Agincourt—which I've been in; I've visited—you see people from all different walks of life, all playing at the same park, all helping each other out, shovelling each other's driveways.

In my community in Brampton, we have a vibrant ecosystem of diverse cultures. I had the pleasure of being at an organization called the Black Founders Network on Friday; I was there for their fifth anniversary evening. It's a program that we've funded for a number of years. We put in a record amount of funding last year to make sure that they're supporting Black entrepreneurs. Some of the numbers coming out of that: \$48 million in real revenue created out of that program over the last number of years.

I was there at 6 o'clock and by 8 o'clock, I was back in my riding of Brampton North at the Brampton Soccer Centre for the Friends of Gujarat community garba. If you haven't been to a garba, it's phenomenal. It's deeply religious. It's a festival—Navratri, the festival for the goddess Durga. It's the whole community out there until late at night, dancing, professing their faith, but also just coming together as a community.

I'll tell you, garbas are a Gujarati thing, but the audience wasn't all Gujarati. There were people from all different backgrounds that were there engaging in that and celebrating that, and that's Ontario at our best, right? When people don't live up to that and you've got a small minority of people in our province that want to try to attack that or they view that as a weakness, not as a strength, and they go out and commit vile acts of hate, that's stuff that we've got to crack down on.

Credit to the members on this side, the Progressive Conservatives, who have put up \$70 million over the last four years—which they voted for and supported—directly going to faith-based and cultural communities to help protect them and keep them protected.

We just passed, in the last year in this Legislature, a private member's bill from Michelle Cooper, our Eglinton–Lawrence MPP, for a hate crime prosecution unit, so that we're able to hammer these vile individuals—I'll use parliamentary language, Chair, for how I feel about these people. But we're cracking down on these people and making sure that we put them behind bars and throw the book at them when they're there. The hate crime prosecution units under the Solicitor General—these are just things that, frankly, just weren't there, weren't resourced the way that they are today under this government.

While we need to celebrate our diversity, we need to crack down on vile individuals that commit hate crimes in our communities. We've got to protect communities the best that we can, but I never want that to get in the way of a simple celebration of the fact that we live on the best place on earth.

When you look at what we've done in Ontario, what we've done in Canada—no country has ever done multiculturalism the way that we do it here. In our current form, Canada is a pretty young country—150 years old—when you look at how old the earth is. What a gift we could give the rest of the world if we get multiculturalism right and we continue to get it right.

A lot of the work that we do as a ministry—supported by PA Babikian very, very capably in his leadership—is to make sure that we're doing that in Ontario, and it's work that I'm proud of and I hope members are proud to support as well.

Mr. Aris Babikian: How much time do we have?

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

Mr. Aris Babikian: Do any of my colleagues want to—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Racinsky.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Minister, I don't think I'm going to get to a question this round, but I'll get to it in a

moment. Through you, Chair, in the next round, I'll ask a question, but I want to take this opportunity, Minister, since you're here, to thank you as well as your staff for the Volunteer Service Awards.

I was able to visit the Volunteer Service Awards ceremony in Milton last week. We recognized volunteers with decades of volunteer service from members of my community—the Acton Agricultural Society, the Acton Boy Scouts. I met Ruth, who is a 90-year-old member of the Guelph Rotary Club and has served in that Rotary Club for many decades.

It's so important—because we're seeing volunteerism decline in our society; that's the sad reality—that we celebrate those amazing people that do go out and do the extra time, like you were mentioning in your remarks: volunteering, serving, making our communities better. Those volunteer organizations really are the things that make our communities feel like communities, not just subdivisions.

It's so important that we recognize those people, and I wanted to thank the ministry for putting that event on. It was a wonderful event. Everyone felt so celebrated and encouraged. I felt encouraged to see those hard-working people gathered in that room in Milton, along with my colleague Minister Hamid.

So just a heartfelt thank you from myself to all of you for that award, and I look forward to asking a question in the second round.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you. There's one minute. What would you like?

MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Okay. Quick comment, Minister: I am proud of our multicultural policy in Canada and Ontario and how we treat our new arrivals to our province. I remember when I was a citizenship judge, we used to receive lots of delegates from all over the world, asking about—

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Babikian, MPP Tsao has a point of order.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Are committee members not supposed to be asking questions about estimates rather than just retelling lovely stories?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): It's their time, just as it's your time to take.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Is this related to the estimates?

Mr. Aris Babikian: No, it's related to our multicultural policy.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: He just said no.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Yes, I mean, it's the topic.

Mr. Aris Babikian: It is the Minister of Citizenship who is here testifying.

I mean, if we cannot make that connection between our multicultural policy and how we treat our people—

Hon. Graham McGregor: Have a heart, Jonathan.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Anyway—

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

MPP Gilmour, you're up for your next 15 minutes.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you, Chair.

I would like to talk about the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan, if we can. I see that the transfer line is \$20.51 million this year and that's unchanged. Also, you've spoken a fair bit about that \$16.5 million for employment. Last year, it was \$4 million for student and family advocates and innovative supports for Black parents. That delivered 24 community programs. This year when I was looking at the briefing notes, it named only the \$16.5 million for employment.

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I wondered if you could say just a little bit more about what the \$4 million is buying, and specifically if student and family advocate funding is being funded at the same level this year as last year.

Hon. Graham McGregor: The answer is yes, funded to the same amount as last year. If the member would want, I'd be happy to call on the deputy for the itemized list of everyone being funded this year compared to last year—very similar.

I want to talk about the student and family advocates program that the member talked about. It's critically important. When kids are facing barriers—look, call a spade a spade: Many school boards have had anti-Black racism problems, especially—I don't want to say especially, but certainly in my community, Peel District School Board has had a history of issues like that. We were the school board that had the McCrimmon “McCriminal” problem, where a staff member was engaging in, frankly, just racist posturing. Having a student family advocate program to help kids navigate that educational system is critically important. I'm such a believer in it and I wanted to make sure—and I don't want to cut into the time for the member's future questions. I know that sometimes, while we're talking about the economic empowerment program and all the changes that we've made, we haven't made changes to the that \$4-million bucket of the innovative supports for Black parents and a few other funding streams in there.

I have a tendency to maybe talk about the programs we're changing, because I'm excited about what we're changing, but that is a program that is working incredibly well and I'm very supportive of and grateful for. I've gotten to meet a few of them. I remember talking to the Ottawa one and just hearing some of the stories of what they help parents with. No kid should have to deal with that crap—pardon. They're great programs and I'm highly supportive.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Chair, I would like to take the minister up on his generous offer to, in writing, get a list of last year's recipients and this year's. That would be very, very helpful.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Not in writing, but I can call somebody up right now if you want—we have it.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: No, just in the interest of time, I thought—

Hon. Graham McGregor: You don't think it's important for us to talk about it right now?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I have lots of questions that are important—

Hon. Graham McGregor: We could do it.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you. Would it be possible to have it in writing?

Hon. Graham McGregor: We will not be giving it in writing, but I'm happy to give it to the member now in the committee.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: All right. I'm going to—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Just a moment. You are required to give it in writing—

Interjection.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Okay, just a minute.

Interjections.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): It's up to the minister.

Hon. Graham McGregor: It is up to me, but I'll have a heart and we will get it to the member in writing.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you.

Hon. Graham McGregor: MPP Tsao was giving me some looks and I wasn't comfortable with how he was—we'll get it to the member in writing. Forgive me.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'm happy to hear that.

I wanted to talk a little bit about ways in which this budget year is going to ensure that more Black-led organizations can support youth, children and families. To do that, I want to just reference a moment last year, on March 27, when the ministry told more than 20 Black-led organizations it couldn't guarantee ongoing or equivalent funding. This was days before the fiscal year began, April 1. In May, the ministry told CBC that there was no delay, no change, but then in June, it announced it was restoring funding to the Durham Family and Cultural Centre, which by then had lost 90% of its staff—which, as you can imagine, deeply affects the families, the communities that it's there to serve and that we all want to see supported.

Of those 62 Black youth action plan recipients, how many had their funding interrupted, how many have been restored and on what dates did that money arrive?

Hon. Graham McGregor: I just want to be clear: It's not a funding interruption. Organizations under that program sign a transfer payment agreement year by year. It's not an ongoing funding commitment. I think it's an important note: While we appreciate the partnership of these organizations and they do phenomenal work, and we will have the money there to make sure that that work continues, these organizations are not government entities. To have proper scrutiny to make sure that they are doing what they say they will do, that the funding is going where it needs to be, we sign that transfer payment agreement year after year.

To explore multi-year partnerships—again, something the ministry has never done in this space—am I open to exploring multi-year partnerships with some of those organizations? Maybe. We can have that conversation. But I want to be really clear: When we're having a transfer payment agreement conversation, that transfer payment agreement goes until the end of the fiscal year. There's no guarantee that they will be a partner that we select for the funding in the next year. Of course, I don't, as the minister,

select those organizations either. It happens with public servants. I think if I was picking those organizations, I might be under a different line of questioning here at the committee.

Those transfer payment agreements have to have that scrutiny from the civil service. It has to happen every year. While you would look at this year's list and it would look similar to last year's list, that's not because of a guarantee in funding in any way. The money will be there for organizations to support Black youth and families. We're not going to say that this community centre or that community centre—we're not picking who delivers that service for more than a year at a time. That happens year after year, and the organizations know that.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: You can imagine, though—you've had relationships with a number of these organizations. They invest in the children and the youth and the families around them. Relationships take an extraordinary amount of time to build up—and trust. A disruption in funding and a big sense of confusion can really rupture the very relationships that we're looking for.

So when we move into this budget year, could we see stabilized funding for the sector, year after year, for each of those organizations? And if not that, a guarantee that funding agreements will be in place well before April 1, 2027, so that these organizations can plan for their staffing and plan to support those children and youth, and those children and youth are not abandoned for that period of time while we sort ourselves out?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thanks for the question. I'll iterate again: It's not disruptions in funding when we have to go through the transfer payment agreement process with every organization. They're not government entities. They're partners, and we're happy to partner with individual organizations to make sure that we're doing service delivery properly. It's not a disruption of funding when you're doing a transfer payment agreement—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: But you announced that you're restoring funding. If nothing changed, what were you restoring? These were your words, Minister—

Hon. Graham McGregor: One note about the Black youth action plan: We fund the Black youth action plan \$30 million per year. Since 2020, this government has put \$182.5 million. Under the last government, in 15 years in power, supported by the New Democrats, they funded the Black youth action plan for a grand total of \$6 million—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Chair, I'm going to reclaim my time—

Hon. Graham McGregor: We have put an astronomically, exponentially larger amount of funding—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Minister, the member has the right to reclaim her time—if I could, please.

Hon. Graham McGregor: —and believe it or not, the New Democrats vote against it every single time—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Chair?

Interjection.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Your mike is cut.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'm asking to reclaim my time. Can I have my time held, please?

Interjection.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Minister, I asked you to stop. Your mike was cut.

Interjection.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Okay. MPP Gilmour has the right to continue.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you very much, Chair.

I wanted to look at the programs that are going to be part of this \$4 million. Just to be clear, keeping Black students in school is still part of the outcome for that \$4 million; supporting mental health for youth is still part of that. I see you nodding—terrific.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Are you going to vote for it this time?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): His mike is not on. Go.

Hon. Graham McGregor: The mike's not even on. I'm just wondering—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Okay. Enough, Minister.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: One of the things that we're seeing here is that this ministry leads—it's very serious, you know, the anti-racism and the anti-hate work. We have seen that the initiatives are cut by 30% and we saw the Black-led organization spent months not knowing whether they had staff that would survive.

So I'm going to ask the minister for two commitments. First, will he table a complete breakdown of the cuts, the programs, the amounts, the changes that way, who has gotten the—actually, you've already said you'll do that. I think that's all right.

The second one is, will you commit to establish that no Black youth action program organizations will reach March 2027 without knowing whether their funding continues on April 1?

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Hon. Graham McGregor: To be clear, that \$4 million is part of \$30 million that we spend every year as a government on the Black Youth Action Plan—\$182.5 million since 2020. When the member's party was in power, before this government took office, they spent a grand total of \$6 million on the Black youth action plan—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'd like to reclaim my time. We're talking about estimates of this government going forward in this year, Chair, not estimates from the 1990s. Thank you. If I may—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Okay.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Again, this is a very serious—

Interjections.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you so much, Minister and Chair. I am reclaiming my time because this past month, a synagogue was shot at on Yom Kippur. Then, within a few days, an Islamic school received death threats, and a teenager was killed in Jane and Finch. This ministry is cutting its anti-racism initiatives by 30%, and it has also left Black organizations without funding for months at a time.

When my colleague asked you if this ministry given enough money to combat hate, you said, “Unequivocally, yes.” Minister, do you stand by that statement when Jewish synagogues are being shot at, when children in Islamic schools are being threatened and when our Black youth are dying on our streets?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you for the question. I’ll note the member talked about a 30% cut to anti-racism spending. That’s just not true, Chair. We are spending \$12.75 million on the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant. That’s something that’s a program that we’ve put \$70 million into, Chair, since 2023.

I’ll note that the New Democrats have voted against that measure each and every year at the budget. They vote against it in the budget committee. They vote against it at second reading, at third reading. They vote against it again in the fall economic statement.

For that member for Parkdale–High Park: Since 2021, the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant has delivered \$272,500 of funding for faith-based and cultural organizations in that member’s riding. That member has voted against the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant every time that member has had an opportunity since she took office—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Chair, I’d like to reclaim my time. It is not the opposition party that is currently in the middle of estimates and questions; it is this minister, and there is a massive cut in this ministry’s spending.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Where’s the cut?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Minister, your budget alone here—I’ve got to find the right document so I get the right number. Your own briefing note has a cut—here we go.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thirty per cent?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Now I’m going to lose my numbers—what is it, \$10 million from the budget from the ministry itself?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: You’re asking questions, not me.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Yes. Chair, I’m asking the minister the questions; I don’t know why he’s asking me the questions at this point.

What I would like to use my time on this last bit is how the communication services spent \$1.78 million on contracted services last year.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have one minute remaining.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: That was against the budget of \$43,000. Other ministries paid for “Protect Ontario” advertisements out of their own budget. Did this ministry money go to any “Protect Ontario” advertising, and if not, what did that money buy?

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

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you. I’ll defer to the deputy.

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Thank you, Minister. As the minister noted, the decrease that you see in our budget was because we sunsetted the RAISE program, and the minister already noted that. The other decrease—

Hon. Graham McGregor: Sorry, the communications budget.

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: The communications budget? What you see there, the increase, was related to the Order of Ontario. We also have campaigns that support our Ontario honours and awards programs.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you.

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

MPP Tsao, for your round.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I think I’ll take the first five seconds to allow everyone to take a deep breath and remember that we’re here for constructive work to make sure that the people of Ontario can understand what’s happening in our estimates.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Point of order.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: About the estimates—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): All right.

Mr. Aris Babikian: It looks like some people are—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Okay. All right.

Mr. Aris Babikian:—watching too much US Senate and House of Representatives hearings—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You don’t have to stop, MPP Tsao. You can keep going.

Interjection.

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

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Let’s take that breath, actually; I think we need it.

All right. So, Minister, in 2024, police-reported hate crimes in Ontario trended higher when we compare it to the national average. As you noted, your plan in these estimates commits \$12.75 million to the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant.

However, I wanted to understand—because I’m looking at the numbers in the estimates, and we see that number of over \$12 million, but then we also look at the transfer payment line, and that’s \$11.75 million. Can you help me understand the difference here?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Yes, thank you for that.

Administration costs: When we run a government program, we try to get as much money out to folks as we can, but of course with Transfer Payment Ontario, there’s money that has to be spent creating the program, checks and balances.

If the member will indulge me—

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Please, go ahead.

Hon. Graham McGregor:—one of the things we did this year is we opened up a new stream under the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant to support Jewish summer camps, because we saw and heard from communities that these camps were being put on lists online to be targeted. It made me sick. It makes me sick to think of it now, and it made me sick then.

I was at the BAYT synagogue with two dozen rabbis from different communities. I was there with many members of this Legislature. We saw the bullet hole in the glass after somebody had shot at the BAYT synagogue, and we were talking about what we can do better, how we can be a better government and respond more effectively to protect the Jewish community in Ontario. One of the recommendations we got was extending the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant to summer camps.

One of the things that we ran into in the administering of this program—so we rolled out, I believe, just over half

a million dollars. That was able to cover the swath of summer camps that applied to it. Obviously, we had to put rigours in place to make sure that we weren't funding anybody fraudulently.

One of the things that we got, which I was looking at just last week, were some organizations that don't have an address. Nobody knows who they are. They don't have a history; just trying to access government money, money that we put there to protect kids, that they were just trying to access under presumably fraudulent organizations. It's sickening to hear somebody would do that—money that you put for that purpose—that somebody would be trying to spend it in a way that isn't intended. But if we don't have checks and balances in place to make sure that that happens, we are running the risk of opening ourselves up to fraud. So that's one example of why administration has to happen.

We also have report-backs. Recipients of the grant have to report back what they spent the money on. It's not just a blanket \$5,000-to-\$10,000 cheque that we give organizations. It has to be spent within precise criteria. It's got to be spent on security guards, security cameras etc.

So we need to have those report-backs come back as well. In order to do that, you have to have staff look at that and they have to ensure that is happening properly. So as much as I'd love for \$12.75 million to directly be \$12.75 million, of course, there is an administration cost of just responsibly governing that we have to incur.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Thank you very much.

Staying on the AHSP program, I just want to check: Right now, my understanding is the 2025-26 intake is closed, and the 2026-27 intake has not opened. Can you tell me when that intake will open and when faith and cultural organizations will begin to receive money through that fiscal?

Hon. Graham McGregor: I'm allowed to share it, right?

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Oh, yes.

Hon. Graham McGregor: You never know sometimes with, like—oh, man. Since becoming a minister, the information you have—you don't always want to announce things before it rolls out. It's October 12?

Interjection.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Sorry, forgive me; October 15, we'll have the applications open up for next year. Importantly—

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: You heard it here first.

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Hon. Graham McGregor: Yes, you heard it here first. I think I just recorded the video for it. But, yes, October 15, we'll be rolling out the new program.

One of the things that we do with this program, which is important: We roll out the money as applications come in, because once we've identified that the money is going to be well spent, that it's going where it needs to be, we want to get that over to them as quick as we can.

So money is rolling out. Applications come in October 15. Give it three weeks, four weeks for us—normally, we'll have the first batch, and then we roll out the next

batches as it's ongoing, with a closing date of December—I'll get back to you on the proper closing date.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Sure. No problem.

Hon. Graham McGregor: But anyway, it runs for a few months. We close it, but we roll out the money as people are approved because, as you've noted, we want to get the money out as fast as we can.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Sure. Last year here at this committee, I raised the issue of whether or not the \$12.75 million for the AHSP was sufficient, or if you believe that it should be more. And I remember—I think you said something along the lines of, "I believe so." Now, we have the ability to have retrospect here, right? We can look back. Do you still believe so? And on top of that, I'd like to ask how many eligible organizations that applied did not receive funding in the 2025-26 year, because money ran out.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thanks. I appreciate the question from the member, and it's a completely valid one. One of the things that we rolled out this year is to prioritize applications that come first, but then also have a prioritization on communities that are most impacted by hate crimes. We want to make sure that we're supporting synagogues. We want to make sure that we're supporting mosques and other faith-based and cultural institutions that are severely at risk.

I will defer to the deputy on the exact number that you asked for, the eligible that weren't able to because their applications came later.

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Minister, thank you, and thank you to the member for the question. I would like to call on the assistant deputy minister, Jennifer Louis, to respond to that question.

Ms. Jennifer Louis: Good afternoon. My name is Jennifer Louis, assistant deputy minister for the Anti-Racism Directorate. The question was the number of organizations that were unable to proceed due to missing information—

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: No, sorry—due to the funding running out.

Ms. Jennifer Louis: Due to funding running out?

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: So there was no more money left to allocate to people that had applied.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Eligible organizations.

Ms. Jennifer Louis: The underspend—I'll have to get back to you on that. It was a small number. We normally work as hard as we can to make sure all eligible organizations are able to receive funding.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thanks, Jennifer.

Yes, forgive me. We'll get you that number.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Okay, I appreciate it.

So, continuing on this program, the AHSP: You spoke about it last year. You spoke about it here again, and I think there's a large uptake from people who want—

Interjection.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Well, that is actually the question—want to have an uptake in this program.

I'm just trying to read my notes at the same time while I'm doing this.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Oh. Sorry.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: It's hard for organizations to plan security with one tranche you get, and then you're hopeful that you might get something else or you might get something next year. And I know you've talked about the fact that multi-year funding isn't really necessarily a thing, but when it comes to the physical security of our synagogues and of our mosques and our churches and places of worship in general, is there a plan here to not have this start-stop kind of approach and have a multi-year funding program available?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thanks. Yes, as we fund the program, you always have to have an application open and an application close. It just wouldn't be a good way to administer the program if you had applications cycle all year round. The administration costs that the member talked about, the million dollars, would be a much higher number if we ran that year-round.

Now, the expenses are eligible for a much larger window than the applications are open. The funding is there. One of the things that we are looking at this year, to make sure that we're getting money where it needs to be, is seeing where we can limit some of the organizations that are at a lesser risk-rate probability of experiencing acts of hate, that are maybe receiving it for the second, third, fourth, fifth year in a row. That's a question we've really asked: How many \$10,000 grants for security cameras can you really spend? For some faith organizations, absolutely, they could continue to spend it, and I think really spend it well, year over year. In some cases, I think there's an opportunity to improve.

So that is where this second stream comes in as well is this kind of continuous education framework, proactive work—very similar to the ARAH grant—that we're looking to do. We're putting a bigger dollar figure there as well. And I think it's open to the member as well—when that's open, certainly flag applications or make sure that community organizations that the member is aware of—I've got to tell you, MPP Tsao—oh, and this is eligible.

Interjection.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Yes, sorry. To get to the answer to the member on the question for eligible organizations: 30 organizations. So I won't be sending that in writing because I answered it here, but—unless I have to. We can do that too.

Forgive me; where was I? Yes, that intentional work. And I know the member—I was about to say nice things about the member, which is why I probably forgot what I was going to say. You know, you see this guy out and about a lot of different places. You've got to respect somebody who shows up, and you certainly see the member out and about, so I know he's got lots of relationships with some of those organizations. So definitely make sure they're aware.

I know the member always makes sure folks are aware of the security aspect and how the program was, but we need all hands on deck to make sure we're getting the best, the strongest applications forward for that new stream, that special project stream, which I think is something I'm really excited for that I think will benefit a lot of people.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Well, thank you very much, Minister.

Last year, I raised the issue of radicalization and online hate, which I know, for some reason, a number of the members of the Progressive Conservatives refused to accept was happening online. In response, you told me that what was required was an all-of-government approach to combatting hate—online hate specifically, as well.

Now we're here; it's one year later. Please tell us how many ministers have joined this all-of-government approach in combatting hate, and how much money has been allocated to this all-of-government approach?

Hon. Graham McGregor: As the member knows, we're doing the estimates for the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, so forgive me for not having the numbers from the other ministries in the government.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Is any other ministry participating in this all-of-government approach?

Hon. Graham McGregor: As we're doing the estimates for the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, I can't talk about the money being spent at our other ministries.

I can tell you, in hate broadly and including online hate, we are investing more in the enforcement than we ever have before. For one example, we've put additional resources in the Solicitor General. You'll have to get the exact number from the Solicitor General, of course, but we put additional resources every year into the hate crime/extremism unit.

One of the things that they look at very closely is online activity and where that online activity starts from. Another thing that this member and I—forgive me, I don't recall the member's voting record on it; I imagine supportive.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have 50 seconds left.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Michelle Cooper, the Eglinton—Lawrence MPP, put forward a really important bill for the creation of a hate crime prosecutions unit. In the same vein, looking at online is one of those pieces.

And I want to be clear on online hate: It is completely real. It is nasty. It's disgusting. It's divisive. You've got to anticipate some of that is bot-driven or AI in the new scary world that we're in. You've got to call a spade a spade and see where that's at.

While not being a racialized Ontarian myself, on many of my posts celebrating different holidays, you see it's like bot after bot and sometimes real people calling you all kinds of foul things and foul names. And I think it's important that—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister. I'm sorry, we're out of time.

Over to the government side. MPP Racinsky.

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Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for your indulgence as well, members of the committee, for my nice story earlier. I'm really happy to see the Volunteer Service Awards continuing into 2027, as we see in the 2026-27 estimates.

But, Minister, my question is about our heritage policy. Previously, when I was on Halton Hills municipal council, I was able to be the vice-chair of the heritage committee. I was able to work with the Ontario Heritage Trust and bring Doors Open to Halton Hills to showcase a lot of the built heritage in our different communities. For the small towns across Ontario, that built heritage is very important. It's part of our culture, our heritage, the way we feel as a community.

Minister, I wanted to ask you if you could please elaborate on how the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism is supporting our local heritage across the province, the local heritage organizations that work to tell that story—like the Esqueving Historical Society in Halton Hills, as well as some of the buildings—and celebrating those that give small-town Ontario their unique feel and culture.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thanks to the member for that question and highlighting his real impressive record at municipal governments, at the municipal level. He's taken that here. It's a riding not too far away from mine and so lots of overlapping community members and organizations. I guess you've been elected a year and a half now—overwhelmingly respected for your work ethic, and I know that first-hand. So kudos. You're killing it.

To the question around heritage organizations, you mentioned the historical society. I think they would be a recipient of the Heritage Organization Development Grant. The HODG program—which is a bit of an awkward acronym—we continue to fund that year after year, supporting 165 organizations across Ontario, especially ones in small towns, in rural communities across Ontario, to be able to tell their stories and tell their history. I believe you can't know where you're going unless you remember where you came from. I'm very proud that the ministry supports that and continues to invest in that.

Another one is the provincial heritage organizations, the PHOO Grant, where we fund organizations like the Ontario Historical Society, amongst others. There are about 11 organizations that we fund through that. We've seen, in Ontario, 1,300 individual heritage designations between 2020 and 2025.

I want to bring up, if I could—I'll defer to the deputy, but I think the member would really benefit from hearing from our CEO, Helen Chimirri-Russell, on the work the Ontario Heritage Trust does. The provincial plaque program is an absolutely phenomenal one.

One I was recently at, the Galt Football Club in Cambridge—I don't know if members would know this: A Canadian soccer team actually won the first gold medal in the summer Olympics when soccer was in the Olympics. Yes, it was a group of guys from Galt, Ontario, but now within Cambridge.

That's the kind of story that I didn't know until I was going to the plaque unveiling, or reading about it before the plaque unveiling—just awesome pieces of our history that I think are absolutely phenomenal, and the Ontario Heritage Trust does a great job.

But I'll defer to the deputy minister to tell us a little bit more about that.

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

Chair, through you, I would like to call on Helen Chimirri-Russell, the CEO of the Ontario Heritage Trust, to talk to us a little bit about the plaque program that the minister mentioned.

Ms. Helen Chimirri-Russell: Hello. My name is Helen Chimirri-Russell. I'm the CEO of the Ontario Heritage Trust. It's a pleasure to be with you here today.

Through the Chair, to address the question about the provincial plaque program that the Ontario Heritage Trust delivers and the partnerships that we often have with local communities and municipalities: As the minister already said, this year, we have currently unveiled four new plaques. We have 1,300 plaques across the province. The program has been in operation since 1955, hence 1,300 plaques that are permanent physical public markers all across the province. As people move through the space of this beautiful province, they get an opportunity to understand the contributions of the people and the places and the events that have really shaped our community.

As the minister mentioned, this year, we did do a plaque to the Galt Football Club. We've also done one to Margaret Rae Luckock, who was one of the first of two female MPPs voted into the Legislature here in the province, and that was in Arthur, Ontario. And now it's slipping my mind about some of the other important ones that we've done.

We have one coming up next week, actually, which is going to be to the Farmerettes. This was an important program that was delivered during the Second World War, where young women were asked to volunteer in order to help with food production across the province.

So it's a really diverse and broad program, and we do partner with local communities who are able to identify events that happened in their communities and the provincial significance of those events. They partner with the Ontario Heritage Trust to create those markers, which we are able to then unveil with the community to mark those events, people, decisions that help us reflect on who we are, where we came from and where we're planning on going.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you for that, Helen. An important note for all members of the committee as well: if you want a connection with somebody from Helen's team and you've got organizations that have good stories to tell that Ontario should be telling, it's an open offer to reach out. They do a great job celebrating our history, and thank you so much for that, Helen.

If I may, MPP Racinsky and Chair, there was an issue that was raised by our colleague from the opposition about an incident regarding archaeology in the past week. We've got a clarification from the deputy. With your indulgence, I'd love to have the deputy issue a bit of a clarification on what happened.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Yes, go ahead, Deputy.

Ms. Nosa Ero-Brown: Thank you, Chair. Through you, I would just like to address MPP Gilmour's raising of the incident around PastPort. First of all, we take any incidents that happen like this very seriously. We know that the PastPort system is at the end of life, which is why the minister mentioned that we are undertaking the

heritage framework transformation to ensure that we have a new system in place to be able to support all of our processes.

As you know, this is late-breaking, so we continue to work through the processes to address the incident. It has not been classified as a breach yet. We have very robust internal processes, and if the assessment indicates that there was in fact a breach, then the proper process will continue to be followed, up to and including the IPC. Right now, it's only internally that we've made the notification, and if it's determined through our assessment that there was a breach, then that will be escalated further.

Thank you.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thanks for that. Thanks for the time, Chair.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Grewal.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you, Minister McGregor, and the entire team for the great effort that they've been putting in to ensure that these funds are reaching their applicants in a timely manner and supporting communities across the province of Ontario.

Today I want to talk a little bit about some of the ways we recognize the people that serve our community in fearless moments, especially our first responders. We know when Ontarians are facing their worst moments, our first responders are often the ones running towards danger.

I remember back in 2023, hearing about an incredible example of courage involving one of Brampton's very own, Fire Captain Jeff Clayton, who was off duty when he came across a serious two-vehicle collision on Highway 10. Both vehicles caught fire, with people trapped inside. Captain Clayton, alongside fellow firefighters, immediately stepped in despite the flames and the danger to their own lives. They were able to rescue both drivers from the burning vehicles. It's a story that's always stuck with me, because it really speaks to what our first responders are willing to do to protect others. Captain Clayton and his fellow firefighters were later recognized with the Ontario Medal for Firefighter Bravery.

Minister, I know you've spoken to a lot of first responders and met with a lot of first responders, and understand their commitment to protecting the people of Ontario. Can you highlight and tell the committee about what our government is doing to recognize their bravery, their honour, the hard work they do and the exemplary courage that they display on the front lines to ensure that Ontarians are safe every day?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thanks to MPP Grewal for that question—an important question. I never want to lose the opportunity to thank our first responders for rushing into danger and helping us on our worst days. You've got to realize that for Ontarians, when we normally deal with a first responder—fire, police and paramedic—that's our worst day. For them, it's just another day at work. They continually go above and beyond to support our communities, and we've got to acknowledge them.

As a government, I'm very proud that one of the things that we do at the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism is administer the Ontario Medal for Firefighter Bravery and the Ontario Medal for Police Bravery to recognize some of those individuals. I'd like to read out,

actually, for the committee some of the testimonies about what some of these individuals did and who received these medals.

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One medal that was given was firefighter Jesse Di Giovanni and firefighter Jack Rooney from Caledon Fire and Emergency Services. "On August 17, 2024, firefighters Jesse Di Giovanni and Jack Rooney were driving on Highway 410 near Mississauga when they spotted a vehicle overturned in a flooded trench. Bystanders were calling for help, saying someone was trapped inside. Without hesitation, Di Giovanni and Rooney entered the murky water and inspected the submerged car. Rooney located the unconscious driver underwater, but unfortunately the victim was stuck. Di Giovanni dove back into the water, unbuckled the seat belt and adjusted the seat. With help from an arriving OPP officer, they shifted the vehicle enough for Di Giovanni to free the driver. Di Giovanni and Rooney acted swiftly and selflessly in a life-threatening situation." That's one example.

Another example that I have here is Constable Matthew Cabral from the Waterloo Regional Police Service. "On February 5, 2025, Constable Matthew Cabral was on patrol in Kitchener when his cruiser's licence plate reader flagged a vehicle registered to a suspended driver. The suspect saw the police cruiser and fled, running a red light and crashing into another car. The suspect exited and approached Cabral, threatening to fight. Cabral deployed his stun gun twice, with no effect. The suspect tried to grab the officer's firearm and then returned to their vehicle, emerging with a hatchet. Cabral held his ground, issued commands and attempted a gunpoint arrest while keeping the public safe in a busy intersection. The suspect was eventually subdued with help from a second officer who arrived on scene. Cabral's restraint, quick thinking and courage under pressure protected the community during a dangerous and unpredictable encounter."

Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have three minutes.

Hon. Graham McGregor: I'll do one more, because it's important to get these on the record. I want to talk about Constable Joshua Gurney of the Owen Sound Police Service. "On September 24, 2023, Constable Joshua Gurney responded to a violent incident at an apartment building. The building's superintendent was ambushed by an individual armed with a hunting knife and bear spray. Gurney ran toward the attack area, pulled the victim to safety then placed himself between the suspect and the injured victim. The suspect turned on Gurney, spraying him and slashing at him with the knife. Struggling to breathe and speak, he drew his firearm and retreated backward while shouting commands. The suspect chased him. With nowhere left to run, Gurney was able to transition from his firearm to his conducted energy weapon and stop the suspect. The suspect was later found to have tied the knife to their wrist and possessed numerous other weapons. Gurney's courage and quick thinking under extreme danger saved the superintendent's life."

These are some of the stories of individuals and some of the individuals that we've been able to recognize with those medals for bravery. I think it's an important piece for the government to continue to fund and support. It is a part of these estimates, and I would say the funding for those awards wouldn't happen unless members of this Parliament voted in favour of putting that funding there.

So from our side, the ministry, who are able to administer these awards, thank you for continuing to support that. Hopefully you'll support it, in this vote about these estimates, and the critical work we do to acknowledge some of those individuals who just go way above and beyond the regular call of duty and support our province and support the great people within it.

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

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you very much, Minister, and thank you for recognizing these brave individuals in our community. It's important we share these stories and we have the appropriate funding to recognize them for their hard work, so generations after them will remember what they've done to serve their communities.

I'll share my time—whatever's left—with my honourable colleague Jeff Beattie here.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Forty seconds—MPP Beattie.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: Certainly. Thank you, Minister, for the presentation. There's a lot of breadth and depth to your portfolio, and I do appreciate the care and time that's been put into a number of these important issues.

I also want to acknowledge and say thank you for the kind words earlier on. I think you were speaking in terms of volunteerism, and I can say it's something that speaks to me very personally as a lifelong volunteer from a long line of volunteers in the community. My parents are volunteers. My grandparents are volunteers. And my four children, in their late teens and early twenties, have all embraced volunteerism as a lifestyle. So I think that the important work that is being done through your ministry's efforts to recognize those community leaders that are giving their own time to help make things better here in Ontario—it's well needed, and I thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much for your volunteerism and your family's volunteerism.

Okay. MPP Gilmour, you get eight minutes and 15 seconds.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you, everyone, for the conversation thus far. I wanted to just sort of correct my record around the cuts that I was referring to, most specifically the ministry cut of \$9.87 million. You've already spoken to a big chunk of that being the sunset of RAISE. By many accounts, including your accounts—your own report talks about how it supported 1,400 entrepreneurs and that 94% of those said it had a positive impact on their business.

This is part of what I was referencing when I was talking about how we're seeing a cut to the anti-racism work because this program has been sunsetted. I'm really surprised, because I expected to find new funding for a program where 94% of the individuals had a positive

impact, where this grant was doing incredible work for Indigenous, Black and racialized entrepreneurs.

I guess my question is, why did the government allow this program to expire without a replacement?

Hon. Graham McGregor: I appreciate the correction of the member's record about anti-hate money cuts. I'm glad the member now acknowledges there are no cuts to anti-hate money and we're continuing to invest in the way that we always have been—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Chair, I didn't say that. There's a \$9-million cut that we are talking about right now. Please do not put words in my mouth.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Sorry, but you said earlier that there were cuts to anti-hate money, and I asked you to tell me where they were—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: The RAISE program is a \$5-million cut.

Hon. Graham McGregor: But not anti-hate money.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: The RAISE program was supporting Indigenous and Black—

Hon. Graham McGregor: But not anti-hate money.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: But you understand that the two of them are connected—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You've both stated your sides. Carry on, Minister, with the answer.

Hon. Graham McGregor: As I said, I appreciate the member correcting their own record and acknowledging there are no cuts to the anti-hate money. Now, the RAISE program—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Goodness.

Hon. Graham McGregor: —was something that was invested in. It was a three-year program, \$15 million over three years, always intended to be a three-year program.

One of the great benefits of what we put forward—the member has talked rightly about the outcomes that we saw for entrepreneurs. This training that we had put forward, the RAISE grant—people always think about the money. They think about the \$10,000 that went to an entrepreneur. Of course, that money has been sunsetted for those individuals, but the training is something that lives on. For those 1,500 entrepreneurs we were studying, the average business revenue went up \$60,000. Those businesses are going to continue to benefit from the training they received.

Importantly, the DMZ continues to work on this training model and training businesses across Ontario for individuals from racialized backgrounds and making sure that that continues. I think this is an example of government investing money well. Of course, we're not spending tax dollars on that program anymore, but the DMZ is continuing to show that leadership and support folks.

Another thing that we are doing through the Black youth action plan is opening up an entrepreneurship stream under the economic empowerment stream, so that we are able to support Black entrepreneurs and Black young people getting into business.

One of the examples I had alluded to earlier, the Black Founders Network, ran out of University of Toronto just right over there, not too far away—Efosa, who is the founder of the Black Founders Network, which celebrated their fifth anniversary just on Friday—the fifth anniver-

sary of the Black Founders Network supporting an important community that too often doesn't have opportunities open up for them. We invested over \$700,000 in that program last year. Now, it was this party, this government, the PC government that put that money forward.

One of the numbers that is phenomenal that I heard: \$48 million in real revenue—not projections, not valuations. The businesses they supported through the Black Founders Network had created \$50 million of valuation, so, like, investments and angel investors and that kind of thing—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Chair, I'd like to reclaim my time.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister. MPP Gilmour is reclaiming her time.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: There are so many questions to ask; I appreciate it. And again, I'm surprised that a program that had such a lasting legacy is not being continued.

I also wanted to move into something that a congregant of mine raised on September 30, truth and reconciliation day, otherwise known as Orange Shirt Day. This is a Jewish community member, and she said that she's scared. And this is not the first time that I have heard from my Jewish constituents about the very real fear.

She spoke about the funding for buildings, for cameras, for walls, but what she felt was strongly missing was preventative. A camera security system may keep individuals safe, but it doesn't prevent those individuals from being targeted.

I'm wondering: In your estimate, could we not be doing more to do the preventative work? And what in your budget this year and in the future years would you imagine around preventing more of the hate that is growing in this country and in this province specifically?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thanks for the question. There are two points I'll make there—with the Chair's indulgence, of course:

One, security funding: Security cameras, doors, windows, security guards are prevention tools. When individuals are going to engage in that kind of act and they see a security camera there, they don't commit that act. When they see a security guard during the holiday season at a synagogue or at a mosque or at a church—

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I said preventative, not—

Hon. Graham McGregor: Yes, those are all preventative.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): There's about one minute left.

Hon. Graham McGregor: The second point that I'll make is that we also have the "special projects" stream this year. Members last year—I remember MPP Gilmour and MPP Tsao talking a lot about the Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant, and they said, "Where is that?", because that was, again, another program that had sunsetted over time. What we are doing with the "special projects" stream under the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant is looking to support some of those more proactive educational measures that I think the member might be alluding to.

I can't talk about organizations that we will be partnering with in the future. In the past, we have partnered with

organizations like the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, which I know the member would be supportive of us doing, the National Council of Canadian Muslims being another one that we partnered with in the past around the Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant.

So I can't tell you who we would be partnering with in the future, because we need to get those applications and have them looked at by officials, but that type of work—that educational work, proactive work—is exactly what we're looking to fund, so we're preventing on both sides.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you.

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

This concludes the committee's consideration of the 2026-27 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, 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 2026-27 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 it carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2026-27 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. The motion is carried. I shall report.

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

The committee now stands in recess until 3:30. Thank you.

The committee recessed from 1504 to 1531.

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION

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 2026-27 estimates of the Ministry of Transportation 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 Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria, Minister of Transportation; parliamentary assistant MPP Ric Bresee—maybe not—and Bruce Macgregor, deputy minister; along with other ministry officials and staff.

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 from the members before we start? Seeing none, I am now required to call vote 2701, 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. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the work the Ministry of Transportation is doing to keep people and goods moving safely across Ontario. I am joined here today by my deputy minister, Bruce Macgregor, and our entire team who you see behind us, with our ADMs from each of the divisions that are represented.

First of all, thank you for giving us this opportunity to speak before you and have this discussion and discuss the estimates for this year. We have a responsibility to deliver a transportation network that families, workers and businesses depend on every day, and that responsibility is especially important at a time of ongoing economic uncertainty. Gridlock, alone, is estimated to cost Ontario more than \$56 billion each year. That is lost time, lost productivity and a cost our economy cannot afford to ignore.

Our Plan to Protect Ontario includes reducing congestion; making travel safer and more reliable; and building the infrastructure that supports jobs, trade and long-term economic growth. That is why our government is investing over \$70 billion in the largest public transit expansion in North American history, including the largest subway expansion in Canadian history. We are investing \$31 billion to build, expand and repair highways, roads and bridges across the province. These are significant investments, but we are focused on what those investments will deliver: faster trips, more reliable connections, good-paying jobs and a stronger transportation network for the future.

We are also carrying out the essential work families count on every day: maintaining our highways, delivering driver licensing services, improving road safety and supporting connections to rural and remote communities.

Chair, I want to share today with the committee the incredible progress we are making on public transit. Across the greater Toronto area, major subway projects are advancing, with work under way on stations, tunnels and critical infrastructure.

Earlier this year, we broke ground on the elevated guideway and four new stations for the Ontario Line. Once complete, the line will add 15 subway stations in Toronto and put nearly 230,000 people within walking distance of rapid transit. Construction is also expected to support 4,700 jobs each year, providing opportunities for Ontario workers while building a line commuters will rely on for generations to come.

In Scarborough, we started major construction in July on the second of three stations for the Scarborough subway extension. The project will extend the TTC's Line 2 by nearly eight kilometres, put close to 40,000 people within walking distance of a subway station and support over 3,000 jobs annually during construction.

In August, we reached another important milestone by completing tunnelling on the Eglinton Crosstown West extension. That project will add more than nine kilometres to Line 5, creating a continuous rapid transit connection from Scarborough towards Mississauga. Construction of that line will support approximately 4,600 jobs each year and improve access to employment opportunities for close to 70,000 commuters across the GTA.

We have also completed excavation of the tunnel launch shaft for the Yonge North subway extension. The extension will bring the TTC's Line 1 into Vaughan, Markham and Richmond Hill; support over 4,000 good-paying jobs annually; and generate more than \$3.6 billion in economic benefits for this province.

The work does not stop at Toronto's borders. We continue moving forward with the Hamilton LRT, a planned 17-stop line that will accommodate approximately 50,000 riders each day. And work is progressing on the 18-kilometre-long Hazel McCallion Line, connecting both Mississauga and Brampton, including considerations of options to tunnel the extension. Together, these projects will give more people access to rapid transit and create better connections to jobs, services and growing communities.

We are making significant progress on GO Transit as well. Our government has invested more than \$15 billion through the GO Expansion Program to support faster, more frequent service on the network's busiest rail corridors. At the same time, our GO extension projects will improve connections for people in Durham region, Kitchener-Waterloo, Hamilton and Niagara.

Over the past year, we introduced the first weekend GO service between Kitchener and Toronto, providing an additional option for people travelling to work, events or to visit family. We also introduced daily round trips between Toronto and Stratford, providing another option and connection to one of Ontario's major arts and cultural destinations.

In July, we broke ground on the new Grimsby GO station on the Lakeshore West line. We completed major upgrades at the Bloor GO and UP Express station to improve connections and accommodate future growth of the Kitchener corridor. And in August, we began major construction to expand Durham College Oshawa GO station, as well as prepare for the Bowmanville expansion. That extension will add nearly 19 kilometres to the Lakeshore East line and is projected to support 17,000 daily trips and nearly 4.9 million annual boardings by 2041.

We are also supporting the people who keep transit running. Our continued partnership with Alstom supports more than 1,100 jobs operating and maintaining GO Transit and UP Express fleets, while serving more than 120,000 riders a day.

As we expand the network, we are also helping riders with the cost of using it. The signature One Fare program allows eligible customers to transfer between GO Transit, the TTC and participating local transit systems without paying a second fare. For frequent riders, that can mean savings of up to \$1,600 each year. Since its launch in 2024, the program has delivered nearly \$300 million in savings and supported 91.9 million free transfers.

Beyond the GO network, we continue to support municipal and community transit. This year, we provided nearly \$380 million in gas tax funding to support transit systems in 107 municipalities.

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We also doubled the annual support for the Ontario Transit Investment Fund and announced nearly \$16 million for five projects serving smaller, rural and remote communities. And, since 2019, Ontario has contributed \$7.3 billion to public transit through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. Whether someone takes the subway, a GO train or a local bus, our objective is the same: safer, more reliable and better-connected travel.

Chair, another major part of our work is building our highway network; maintaining that network that Ontario's economy depends on. Last year, we marked several milestones. Construction began on Highway 413, and, this year, we are advancing the work needed to deliver that new connection across western GTA. We recently issued a notice of procurement for the design and construction of its east section and the 427 extension, a package expected to be the largest contract ever awarded by the ministry. Once complete, Highway 413 is projected to reduce travel times by up to 30 minutes per trip. Construction is expected to support more than 6,000 jobs annually and contribute more than \$1 billion to Ontario's GDP.

We are also making progress on the Bradford Bypass, a 16-kilometre highway connecting Highway 400 and Highway 404. In May, crews broke ground on the west section at Sideroad 10, marking another step in major construction. The project is expected to cut some trips by up to 35 minutes, support 2,200 jobs annually during construction and contribute up to \$286 million to Ontario's GDP.

On the QEW, we are advancing the Garden City Skyway twin bridge over the Welland Canal. This is a vital connection for Niagara and cross-border commerce, along a corridor that supports the movement of more than \$1 trillion in goods through the Greater Golden Horseshoe each year. The new bridge will also support access for residents, businesses and visitors travelling to and from Niagara.

Across the rest of southern Ontario, we are advancing the infrastructure needed to support growing communities and major employment centres.

In southwestern Ontario, work continues to support the expansion of Highway 3 and improve connections from Highway 401 towards St. Thomas, including access to the PowerCo electric vehicle battery facility.

In eastern Ontario, we are expanding Highway 17 between Arnprior and Renfrew and supporting the re-

habilitation of more than 18 kilometres of County Road 49 near the Bay of Quinte Skyway Bridge.

We are also preparing future widenings of Highway 401 and 400 in central Ontario, including work on the bridges and infrastructure needed before new lanes can be added.

We also expanded the network of provincial highways posted at 110 kilometres per hour. By the end of September—by now—the new limit was planned to apply to nearly 89% of the highway network covered by the rollout.

In Toronto, we have issued a request for proposals related to restoring vehicle lanes on some of the city's busiest streets.

We are also providing up to \$353 million for the operating and maintenance of the DVP and the Gardiner Expressway, ahead of the planned transfer of ownership to the province next year.

And through the Connecting Links Program, we provided \$45 million this year to 20 municipalities for improvements to roads and bridges connecting with the provincial highway network. These projects vary in scale, but each addresses a practical need: a safer bridge, a more dependable route or better movement of people and goods.

We are bringing that same focus to northern Ontario, where safe and reliable transportation links are essential to daily life and economic opportunity. This fiscal year, our government is investing more than \$600 million in the northern highway projects, including expansion, rehabilitation and safety improvements. That includes work to twin and upgrade sections of the Trans-Canada Highway, which carries goods and connects communities from Ontario across the country. Last week, we marked another milestone where we began construction to widen Highway 11/17 between McGuire Road and Coughlin Road.

In June, we also started rehabilitation work on more than 16 kilometres of Highway 17 south of Echo Bay towards Highway 548, along with repairs and replacements to bridges along that corridor. On Highway 69, between Parry Sound and Sudbury, work continues to improve capacity and safety along a major route serving the mining, tourism and other regional industries.

In August, we supported work to relocate a section of the CN rail infrastructure, so a new interchange can be built at Highway 69 and Highway 522. The remaining 68 kilometres of Highway 69 widening work is planned in six sections, with four expected to be under major construction by the end of next year.

In September, we named a construction manager for the replacement of the Little Current Swing Bridge on Highway 6, the only road connection between Manitoulin Island and the mainland.

We are accelerating work on the more than 500 kilometres of planned all-season roads connecting communities and future development in the Ring of Fire region, with a road program now scheduled five years earlier than previously planned. This year, work advanced on Anaconda and Painter Lake roads, the Webequie supply road, the Marten Falls community access road and the

municipality of Greenstone's Geraldton Main Street Rehabilitation Project. These connections are intended to improve access for northern communities and help support mineral development and economic activity over the long term.

Road safety remains central to all of this work, especially on northern routes travelled by commercial vehicles and long-distance drivers. Over the past two years, we have hired 131 transportation enforcement officers across Ontario, including 39 just in the north. During the northern enforcement initiative, officers carried out more than 10,000 commercial vehicle inspections and laid more than 4,400 charges for regulatory and safety violations.

We are also upgrading northern rest areas, including a \$6.7-million improvement to the Earlton rest area that is nearing completion. We continue to build and improve truck inspection stations and add passing and climbing lanes to help vehicles move more safely and efficiently. Last week, we announced plans for the Shuniah truck inspection station on Highway 11/17 to operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, strengthening commercial vehicle enforcement along this corridor.

Winter maintenance is another essential part of highway safety. We maintain 94 road weather information stations across northern Ontario to help crews and contractors monitor changing conditions and prepare their responses. Following winter storms, our maintenance and maintenance requirements include restoring Highways 11 and 17 in northern Ontario to bare pavement within 12 hours.

We are strengthening our oversight over commercial driver training and testing as well. Following the AG's report this spring, the ministry established a dedicated integrity manager for truck driver testing and is developing a province-wide curriculum for commercial driving schools. This work is intended to make training and testing more consistent and strengthen safety standards for commercial drivers across Ontario.

Beyond highways, we are restoring passenger rail service in northeastern Ontario through the Northlander, which will connect Toronto to Cochrane. The province has invested more than \$100 million in rail infrastructure along the corridor and \$138 million to acquire more than 200 kilometres of track between North Bay and Washago. Earlier this year, we launched the Northlander phase of the provincial rideshare framework, establishing minimum standards for participating operators, drivers and vehicles in communities between Gravenhurst and Cochrane and in Greater Sudbury.

1550

The ministry also owns and operates 29 remote airports, which provide vital access to health care, education, policing, justice and other essential services for northern communities without road access. Elsewhere in the province, we are investing nearly \$10 million to support the modernization of Niagara District Airport and its potential for future commercial passenger service. And we remain committed to supporting the expansion of Billy

Bishop airport to meet future demand and improve regional connectivity.

We are also supporting Ontario's shipbuilding and marine sector. In July, we announced a more than \$90-million investment through the Ontario Shipbuilding Grant Program to increase shipbuilding capacity and support new—

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: —opportunities in the sector.

Together, our highway, transit, rail, airport and marine responsibilities show the breadth of the transportation system Ontario needs to maintain and improve. Every day, people rely on this network to get to work and school, attend appointments, visit family and move products to market. The work we have outlined today includes major construction projects, but also the ongoing maintenance, safety oversight and local services that make the system function. At a time of economic uncertainty, these investments and services are an important part of Ontario's long-term growth and resilience.

I look forward to the committee's questions about our plans and progress.

With that, Chair, I will pass it back over to you. Thank you.

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

For the deputy 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 start with the official opposition. MPP French, you start with 15 minutes.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you. Good afternoon, Minister. I'm glad to be back at Queen's Park—dare I say that I've missed this place?—and I'm looking forward to having more regular access to you and your ministry.

I also want to start out by acknowledging and appreciating the hard work that your staff has put into answering many of my letters—I didn't think I'd see the day, but thank you.

In the interest of time, I will do my best to be concise, and I would invite the minister to remember I don't mean to be rude if I have to reclaim my time. Here we go.

Minister, earlier this year, the government put MTO in charge of seizing city of Toronto property on Toronto Island and the mainland across from the Billy Bishop airport. You did mention Billy Bishop in your remarks. I'd

like to know if the minister roughly knows how much money this land grab is going to cost Ontario taxpayers.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Like we've said from the start, whatever is needed to protect for the expansion of the airport, we will keep—the remainder of which will then be given back to the city of Toronto. When it comes to the Billy Bishop airport, we made it very clear in our original press conference that we will give fair market value that the city loses—that value to the city for those lands at the airport that we are expropriating.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay.

Now, the expansion of Billy Bishop, as much as the Premier wants it, can't happen without the federal government, which, to my understanding, has said no. There isn't a reason to waste public money on seizing municipal property when the federal government has ruled out expansion. So, I'd love to know what you know that we don't. But will the minister repeal the Building Billy Bishop Airport Act, or at least confirm that we won't go ahead with this land grab since we would appear not to have a federal partner?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We will not repeal the act. We will continue to push forward what we think is the right plan for modernization at Billy Bishop, now being the individuals as a part of that tripartite agreement.

I think, as both the Minister of Transportation and the Premier, we have to look at our transportation infrastructure assets across this province and how we remain competitive, more resilient, self-reliant. And having an airport like Billy Bishop be developed that can support more access to the north for Ontarians, that can support more air travel and better pricing for consumers—I think that's in the right direction of this province. And so, we will continue to push for modernization of that airport and make its case both to the federal government and to other partners.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The federal government has said no; you're going to go ahead regardless.

I think it was one of your ministers who had hollered across the floor last session, which seems so long ago, that it was Prime Minister Carney who had asked for this. Is he still asking for the airport?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Look, there are discussions that continue to happen, just like any other project that you will have. We will continue to advocate for it, just like we did on our five priority subway projects.

It was our advocacy that got the federal government to put money into it. We will continue to push for better transportation infrastructure for this province, like Billy Bishop, and we will continue to advocate to the federal government to make a decision that is in the right interest of this province from a productivity and competitiveness perspective.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: You had mentioned in your remarks about the rest of the province, which is good, because I know that this government has been very focused obsessively on Toronto. But the northern Ontarians who are waiting and have been waiting for this ministry to fund upgrades to provincially owned airports

in northern Ontario—do we think it's fair to ask those taxpayers to pay for the seizure of Toronto-owned land in order to expand a federally owned airport?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Look, we've made historic investments into the north. Just this year alone, we will spend over \$600 million in the north on northern investments with respect to rehabilitation, new expansion. I was just up there this past week introducing another five kilometres of twinning.

When we look at airports across northern Ontario, we will continue to meet with them. We will continue to have those conversations on how we can better support that and work with the federal government to support better connectivity in these regional and northern airports. Billy Bishop would be a big part of that.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Well, I don't see how Billy Bishop is going to meet any of the needs of the northerners, who would like more than conversation. They would like that to move forward.

But I'm also going to move forward. I live in Oshawa. It's along the 401. Certainly, folks across the province are interested or amused at the plan for the 401 tunnel, if they think that it's a real thing. But the experts say that the cost of building a 50-kilometre, three-storey tunnel under Highway 401 could cost more than \$100 billion, with a B.

I understand a feasibility study is under way, expected to be completed by 2027. Minister, will you release this study to the public?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I think what we can be certain of is that when it comes to large infrastructure projects in this province, we are going to be full steam ahead in making sure that we build that transportation infrastructure for the future. Whether it's the 401 tunnel, whether it is the subway lines that we are building, we will absolutely get shovels in the ground and make sure that those are completed.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: See, I'm old enough and have been here long enough to remember when the Premier used to say things like, "Subways, subways, subways."

So here we are, talking about this tunnel, and I'm asking about the feasibility study. "Full steam ahead" doesn't answer whether or not we will have that accountability. Other democracies understand accountability. And so I would like to know: Will you be willing to share the study with the public?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We are accountable to the public. We campaigned on this tunnel. I remember being in Scarborough, one of the areas impacted the most by congestion on the 401, where I stood with the Premier and said, "We are going to look at this project, and we want to build it."

The people of this province have given us a strong mandate to build, to fix congestion. That's why we have the largest subway expansion in Canadian history, and that's why we will build big projects like the tunnel that will alleviate congestion along one of the most congested areas in all of North America. Congestion costs us \$56 billion a year in lost productivity.

1600

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you. It's my understanding from what you just said that you're not going to be forthcoming with that feasibility study, that that will not be made public. Is that correct? We cannot expect that?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Just like every one of our other projects, we will look at reports. We will look at the studies, and that will dictate, like any other project, how we move forward. But I'm confident that we know that this is a project that we need to move forward with.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Well, I think that accountability—I don't think that word means what you think it means, so I'm going to move on. Still with the tunnel, but I'll assume that the feasibility study—once the government reviews it, if they deem it not to fit the narrative, I guess we won't get to know.

But people are waiting for their own—as you talked about—transit and transportation networks. They are waiting for their own transportation. Taxpayers in Sudbury and Kitchener have been waiting years for their local highways to be widened.

So is it fair to ask taxpayers in Sudbury or in Kitchener to pay \$100 billion to add more lanes to a Toronto highway that's already the widest in North America, traffic notwithstanding, when these folks have been waiting for years and years for the ministry to widen Highway 69 and Highway 7 from two lanes to four? They're not asking for a three-storey tunnel; they're asking for them to be widened. Is it fair for them to pay for the tunnel in Toronto?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Look, those are both projects that are progressing under this government that were stalled for a very long time, whether it's Highway 7, whether it's Highway 69.

I was just up there just over a month ago in Sudbury, where we laid out our plan. I mentioned in my remarks that we're breaking it up into six sections so we can get that built quicker. We can get it built faster. Highway 7 is another vital project where we've already commenced early works, bridge widenings, land acquisition to ensure that we can move that forward.

We have the Grand River bridges that are currently in detailed design, so this province's plan for transportation infrastructure spans the entire province.

The 401 carries close to over \$2 billion of goods every single year across that corridor. That corridor is important not just to the people of Toronto but to the entire province and to the country.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you.

Minister, while I'm thinking about the Premier's wish list and areas of focus, I think that the big fascination with ripping out safety cameras and existing safety infrastructure is going in the wrong direction when we're talking about transit, transportation and community safety.

The municipal safety cameras, which you ordered to be removed last year—since then, the rates of speeding in Toronto have soared by nearly 400%. Fatal collisions in Toronto have reached five-year highs. A 15-year-old boy suffered a traumatic brain injury, several skull fractures—

a really awful story—after being struck near a school, where a safety camera had once been.

So I'm asking: Does the minister acknowledge that city streets have become more dangerous since you ordered the safety cameras removed?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Look, we gave cities an immediate injection of cash to be able to put further safety mitigation in place. Any of the areas that you have mentioned where there's an increase in speeding had the city or those responsible for those roads install a speed bump. You would physically not be able to get to the higher speeds.

We know that if a camera is still there, you get a ticket three weeks later, but if a speed bump is there, you're physically unable to get through that section or zone at a higher speed without a significant impact to your vehicle. So if we want to eliminate speeding in those safety zones, we need to install the speed bumps, and we need to install other traffic-calming measures that will reduce speeding 100% of the time.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Minister, you've reminded us about traffic-calming measures. On Parkside Drive in Toronto, which has seen multiple deadly collisions due to speeding, where a safety camera had recorded a driver doing 156 clicks in a 40, rates of speeding have soared by 560% since the safety camera was removed.

When asked about the speeding on Parkside Drive, the Premier said that the city should install speed humps and roundabouts. City officials explained they couldn't do that on a busy arterial road used by emergency vehicles, but they can install bike lanes on Parkside which would slow traffic down without interfering with emergency vehicles. The city of Toronto approved that plan after a lengthy study and public consultation. But then the minister passed a new law banning municipalities from installing bike lanes that would reduce the number of car traffic lanes.

We talked about this the last estimates. Last year, you said that you would not approve bike lanes on Parkside Drive. Given how unsafe Parkside has become since then, will the minister change his mind and let the city install bike lanes?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: You spoke about someone who was going 150 kilometres an hour. If there was a speed camera there today, they could still go 150 kilometres through that zone. But if you had a speed bump, you would not be able to go over that at 150 kilometres per hour—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: And if it's impossible to build that infrastructure in—

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: —so I am confident that they would be able to find a solution.

If Parkside Drive is 30 kilometres per hour—if that's what they've listed their speed at—that is very slow. If you install a speed bump there, that will continue to ensure that that speed remains at that posted limit.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: So the answer is no, Parkside Drive is not allowed to do bike lanes, even though it—

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: If it removes a lane for vehicles, no, there is no bike lane that would be permitted.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The ministry recently issued an RFP for work supporting the removal of bike lanes in Toronto, as you required in Bill 212. Do you know how much it will cost to remove these bike lanes?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We have it currently in RFP. That's the process that we undertake on any of our projects, whether it's a bike lane removal or a highway contract—any contract. So once those prices and bids have come in, we will ensure we pick the one that has the highest value for money.

What I can tell you is the people on Bloor, University and Yonge want their streets back. They want to be able to move quicker, faster, more effectively, efficiently. That's why we're restoring vehicle lanes on those, because lost productivity due to traffic is out of control in one of the most important cities in this province, and we need to restore common sense when it comes to bike lanes across—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It's not going to be safe and there will—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister and MPP French. Your time is up.

MPP Hazell, you can start.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I have 15 minutes, right?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You have 15 minutes.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Okay.

It's great to see you. Thank you for your presentation. I'll get right to the question.

I want to spend some time on your transit project cost overruns because that has a lot of taxpayers really, really concerned. For example, in October 2025, I did ask the Auditor General to do a value-for-money audit for the eight major projects that you mentioned in your presentation. I'm not going to list them, but I will list them after. As I said, Ontarians deserve to know whether these massive public expenditures are being managed in their best interest, because what we are feeling now is that us taxpayers are paying more and receiving a lesser service.

An example: the Ontario Line. For some reason—I'm just going to ask you if you can detail that for me, so I can understand, and for the folks that are listening in, especially from around Ontario, who give a really keen interest in transportation—has gone from \$10.9 billion to \$27.2 billion.

The Crosstown is open. I know it's years later, but thank you for giving us that in Scarborough. That has ended from \$4.6 billion to \$12.8 billion.

What I want to ask you today is: What is the current total cost estimate for the Ontario Line, the Hazel McCallion, the Hamilton LRT and, especially, the Scarborough subway extension? What are the cost estimates for each major Metrolinx project, and will you commit to publishing these updated figures every year alongside these estimates, so we don't have to have surprises as the years go by?

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Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you very much, MPP Hazell. First, I'll start with my general state-

ment that the cost of not building is far greater. We need to build transportation infrastructure like subways. We need to build infrastructure like the GO network. We need to make sure that we continue that positive progress that we have seen over the last eight years.

When it comes to—you quoted something from the Ontario Line. You took a number that had only construction costs, and now you are putting with that cost—the final representation of the number that you had stated included far more than just construction costs. When you quote a piece of a project, you have to also take into consideration the 30-year life cycle that you've quoted in there, the land acquisition cost and other costs that are associated outside of construction with those projects.

If you look at the issue of cost for transit, this is not an issue that is unique to just Ontario. You look at anywhere across North America. You look anywhere in the Western world, and you will see that there have been significant cost pressures on any transit projects. Why is that? You've had one of the most significant shocks to the supply chain with the pandemic. You currently are in an environment of both war and tariffs—

MPP Andrea Hazell: I get what you're saying, Minister. What I'm getting at is the non-transparency that we're seeing in these cost overruns. For example, you said what I'm seeing are construction costs: "You've got to look 30 years out." But maybe that is something that you should have been upfront with us about, not easing us into the pressure.

We know; we understand there are costs. There are manufacturing costs. It will increase. We know the number. But I am saying, give us that transparency up front, not years gone by. I'm asking: What are the estimated costs that you think are going to be for the next estimates that we have a discussion? Have you thought out that far?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: For example, when you chose to quote that first number on the Ontario Line, you only quoted a number that was a construction cost. The second number you quoted was an accumulation of not just the construction cost, but also 30-year-life-cycle maintenance costs and associated costs with both land acquisition and others. Those are costs that are developed through procurement. Every single one of the projects that I have quoted, that you have quoted, are transparently procured. It's an open-market bid; companies have the ability to bid those projects, and they do. That's the competitive nature of the environment that we live in.

The models of procurement that we have now deployed, after learning about how the Eglinton Cross-town contract unfortunately was structured, have given us an ability to introduce a progressive model of procurement, which allows us to work with companies to come up with a more transparent and the lowest price possible on those projects. Those are procured as the phases of those projects are reached, from development and design to construction to the rail element of it. That's why you see the release of those projects prior to—as the progress on that project is made.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Minister, thank you for detailing that for me; I appreciate that. But I want to go back to Metrolinx, because I think Metrolinx as an agency has one

of the most failing records in history in Canada, in Ontario. If you look back at eight years under Metrolinx, can you comfortably say that you have control, that you have taken accountability of Metrolinx also not taking responsibility and accountability through all the overrun costs, on being transparent with the public?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Let's speak to Metrolinx's record and give just this year alone. Let me outline some of the work that we have done: Mount Dennis station, open; EC LRT, now open; Finch West LRT, now open; Confederation GO, open; West Harbour station, now open, just in this year. Eighty million people are going to use the GO network this year alone, MPP Hazell. That is a record. Last year, we set a record with over 76 million people, because we've invested in the service-level enhancement into GO Transit. This is one of the second- or third-largest transportation agencies in all of North America.

When you look at the recovery that Metrolinx and GO ridership has seen and compare it to other jurisdictions, whether that's in New York, New Jersey, LA—any of those states comparable in nature to Toronto—we exceed them on recovery because of the work our team at Metrolinx has done. So we continue to make significant progress that changes the way people move in this city and in this province and we'll continue to invest in that.

Metrolinx and the team at GO Transit have done a significant job in making sure that both ridership is increasing, and these assets—whether it's GO train stations, whether it's lines—are coming on board, and we'll continue to make sure we do that. That's the largest in North America from a mandate perspective that we're conducting.

MPP Andrea Hazell: So while you present all of the great things that you're saying Metrolinx has done, the people of Ontario are not experiencing that. You mentioned the Don Valley Parkway in your presentation. I spoke about the Hamilton LRT, the Scarborough subway extension, the Ontario Line. These are massive, massive transportation projects that need priority and need attention so that they can be completed, and not keep extending and not keeping the cost being overrun. Because transportation right now in Ontario—the congestion is costing businesses and us billions of dollars. It's become a mental state driving to get into Toronto and out of Toronto.

So I understand you're saying Metrolinx and what they have done. Help me. Take me along with you—why we're still feeling all these pressures of congestion and they're not going away, while your major projects keep going further and further away from completing.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: MPP Hazell, thank you for your question. I appreciate your frustration, but that's what truly dictates our \$100-billion investment into transportation infrastructure.

For a very long time, shovels were not in the ground on big projects. Let's take, for example, the Ontario Line. That's the first time in over 60 years you will see tunneling happening in downtown Toronto, in the downtown core—60 years since we have dug a tunnel for public

transportation in downtown Toronto. That line will move 400,000 people every single day and it will significantly impact how people get across this city.

The same goes for the Scarborough subway extension; the same goes for the Yonge North subway extension. These are significant projects that are happening because the government invested in these projects—\$70 billion worth of investments into these projects, because we understand and appreciate the frustration of previous administrations not investing in these critical pieces of infrastructure.

So that's what our ministry—our officials, our team, whether it's at Metrolinx or MTO—is always focused on: getting these projects done quicker, faster, more efficiently, but ultimately, projects that will ensure that people can move that much quicker.

Scarborough, a community that you're from and I know that you have represented prior to politics and now that you're in politics—how long was that extension talked about? Probably 15 years of conversation. We actually have a tunnel-boring machine that just completed the tunnelling for that project. We have excavation completed on two of the three stations, so we're making significant, significant progress on those projects and we'll continue to do that.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Can I just ask you a quick question before I forget? You talk about the tunnel-boring machine. That was eight months of construction. I'm pretty sure that cost was not in your estimate. How much did you—

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Construction will be disruptive; there's no doubt about that, whether it's for residents or for others. As we build, there will absolutely be disruption, but it will be totally worth it once it's complete.

That Scarborough subway line is going to move 100,000 people every single day. How many cars is that going to take off the road? It's going to take thousands of cars off the road every single day. It's going to make everyone's commute that much better. You can leave your car at home, jump on the subway, and you'll connect to the entire system with the enabling of those three stations. That's the same for the Yonge North subway. You can ditch your car in Markham, in Richmond Hill, in York region and you can get up to the city of Toronto in 22 minutes less than you would have before, per trip.

So these investments that we're making will advance each of those causes of getting people moving more effectively and efficiently through this province.

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MPP Andrea Hazell: I want to move on to the ONxpress cancellation. I was trying to keenly listen to see if you will be speaking about that; I'm not sure if you mentioned that.

There was not a lot that was said to the public about the ONxpress cancellation, and I'm pretty sure that cost was involved in your transportation budget estimates. So can you help me to understand—because of the job loss, because of this massive contract that was cancelled in year

one—what are the consequences to your budget? How much was paid out?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: There was zero operational disruption because of that contract changing back over to Alstom. We did not have Deutsche Bahn, or the ONxpress program in that sense, take ownership of the fleet in any way. The system did not operate any different. No one felt any change, because the decision was made that that individual counterparty was not meeting the criteria and targets that were set out as per the contract. That's why we continued to work with the existing team that had been managing it from prior years. So there was no impact to service levels as that contract switched.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I'm going to challenge you on that, because that's not what we understood, because you had a train derailment at Union Station and you had another one in Oakville that almost happened. So when I look at the cancellation—

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

MPP Andrea Hazell: Already?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Just this round. There's another round.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Well, now I've lost my train of thought.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Derailment.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Ironically, derailed.

MPP Andrea Hazell: There was one that was derailed, and there's a second one that almost derailed. We've got one in Scarborough that did derail.

I am looking at the cancellation of the ONxpress contract. They were supposed to provide service to the track and to the train. You're saying that did not have any effect on these two train derailments?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: No. No impact.

MPP Andrea Hazell: So can you explain to me what estimate you have in this budget to help with the train derailments and services that the GO is not seeing right now?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We put billions of dollars into safety at Metrolinx. You measure our record on rail safety against any other transit agency in North America, and we are the highest.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you, Minister. Moving on to the government side: MPP Grewal.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you, Minister, and the entire team here at the Ministry of Transportation, for everything that you do to keep our province moving. I know it's a massive, massive file.

A lot of the conversation that we've been having here today is around transit, highways and infrastructure in and around the GTA or the greater Golden Horseshoe. But I'd like to move this towards our northern communities because they're a vital part of our province, and they also deserve the same amount of attention that we're getting down towards here in the GTA.

Minister, you've been in and around the north a lot lately and announcing new safety measures, especially when it comes to our transit enforcement officers and

when it comes to the investments that we're making in our inspection stations, the investments that we're making in twinning highways, as well as other projects in that area. You've highlighted in your speech over \$600 million of investments that are going into the north.

I just wanted to get your view on what are some key projects that we're working on, and what are some good changes that we can talk about for our northern communities and investments that are being directed in that direction?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you very much, MPP Grewal. We have a significant amount of dollars being invested into the north. I'll start with an overview, and maybe I'll ask my deputy to expand upon some of those projects.

I'll start with transportation enforcement officers. As I mentioned in my speech, over the last two years, we've hired 130 of them and significantly increased the amount of roadside inspections. I think last year over 115,000 inspections occurred. But along with that, we're putting over \$600 million every year into developing the north.

But one of the most important projects that we are developing is the Ring of Fire. Right now, every access point in and out of the Ring of Fire is currently under construction. We were up in Webequie. We were up in Marten Falls, Anaconda, Painter Lake. For all of those, whether it's from an early work perspective or construction perspective, we have started construction on those elements. That is a significant opportunity for us, as a province, to see that through.

I'll ask Deputy Macgregor to maybe expand upon that a bit more, as well, with respect to some of the work we're doing in the north.

Mr. Bruce Macgregor: Thank you, Minister. Madam Chair, I'm Bruce Macgregor, deputy minister.

We are working vigorously on Highway 11, Highway 17, on Highway 69: all gateways to the north and connected to the renewed prosperity out of the mining sector in the north, but also serving the population. We're reactivating the Northlander train service through North Bay to Timmins and beyond to Cochrane, where it meets up with the Polar Bear Express, all the way to Moosonee.

We are proudly working, as the Minister has pointed out, on the matters of transportation safety, not only through transit enforcement with commercial drivers but in a tight partnership with our colleagues at the Ontario Provincial Police. We are very much seized with developing and continuing safe highway access connecting northern communities.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you very much, Deputy Minister and Minister for your remarks.

But just before I finish up on the topic of northern highways, I also wanted to talk a little bit about winter maintenance on these highways. As we're now changing seasons and moving towards the winter season, I believe there's a lot of work that the ministry has been doing to make sure that those bare pavement standards are some of the best across the country. And other investments that have been made to ensure that those contractors have the

resources and tools that they need—if you'd like to highlight, maybe, some of those investments, please.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Absolutely. Thank you very much, MPP Grewal.

We have approximately 17,000 kilometres of provincial highways maintained by contractors operating on behalf of the ministry. And we have a bare pavement standard that, within 12 hours, has to be met. We can see that just this year alone, we're clearing and hitting that standard almost, on average, four hours before. That is meant to be.

And you look at the investments that the government has made into that: Just last year alone, we spent close to \$400 million on winter maintenance, both in the north and across the province, which is up over 6%, year over year.

Then you talk about equipment that we have added. There's almost 300 new pieces of winter maintenance equipment that we've asked and worked with the contractors and invested in that have been put in place over the past several years to be able to better respond to weather events that happen in the north.

On top of that, just this year, we added close to 23 portable variable-message signs. We've added 652 cameras to improve monitoring and travelling information. We're working with our team at 511 to make sure those are updated quicker, faster. We are working with our provincial policing partners to see how we can maintain our roads and work together collaboratively on that.

We work with all of our contractors. We hold them to account any time that we hear that they are not addressing the needs that they are contracted to do. And so we'll make sure that we continue to have that work reviewed annually and make sure that they're delivering the best standards.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you for your commitment to building Ontario—not only you, but the deputy minister and the entire team as well, building this province, building the subways, building the highways, roads and connections we need to continue to have Ontario as the thriving engine of this country.

I'm just going to pass over my time to my colleague here from Hamilton, Jeff Beattie.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Beattie, please go ahead.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: How many minutes?

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

Mr. Jeff Beattie: Okay, I'll do my best.

Thank you, MPP Grewal. Thank you, Minister for your hard work on this file.

To continue the theme of building, I just wanted to first say thank you for a number of the provincial priorities that you've highlighted. They are also very much priorities of the Hamilton community, such as our Hamilton LRT, QEW expansion and, of course, the Confederation GO, just recently put into service in Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

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Minister, if I could go back a little bit: In my term at council, the job that I just came from, one of the big priorities that I was working on was to make a connection between our Hamilton HSR system—the transit system for Hamilton—and Niagara region's transit system in smaller

towns such as Grimsby and Lincoln adjacent to the riding, with an ultimate goal of making a connection point into the Casablanca GO or the Grimsby GO that you were speaking of earlier.

To drill down onto the Ontario Transit Investment Fund, Minister: In small communities—I mentioned Grimsby or Lincoln joining the larger city of Hamilton—even a small, modest expansion of the transit system can have such a tremendous impact: people trying to get to work, people trying to get to school, skills development, going to a medical appointment or even just shopping for groceries. These communities often face very different challenges in terms of the scope of these projects as compared to larger urban cities, so I'm really encouraged.

I'm wondering if you might be able to drill down a little bit on the investment fund, particularly highlighting that these communities need a more flexible transportation solution that works for their residents. Minister, if you could just elaborate a little further on this fund, how it's helping communities to address their local transportation needs and how the increased investment will support a practical, sustainable service for residents that have fewer transit options?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Absolutely. That program has been vital for helping smaller, rural communities connect to larger transportation infrastructure.

When we look at one of the challenges, it is about: How do you get people to larger networks that could connect you across the province? If we look at the GO rail network—you mentioned Confederation GO in your remarks. You mentioned some of the other transit partners, whether it's Niagara—we want to build a system in which, whether you're a senior, whether you're a student or whether you're getting to and from work, public transit can be a viable option for you.

We recognize that not everyone lives in some of our more densely populated areas or populations across the province. Transit generally makes more sense around denser populations, and so we have to subsidize to a higher degree those communities that are a bit more remote, rural or smaller in size, less dense, to get them into—it could be as simple as a community centre or it could be as integrated as into a GO line that could then take them into a different part of the province, whether that be the city of Toronto or a place like Niagara Falls.

That program really allows us to partner with other transit agencies and other partners that can look at some of those smaller communities, where a higher level of subsidization is needed to get people onto public transit. We invest almost up to 50% of that cost on those projects, where you will see, in smaller communities, it could be anything from a fixed route or an on-demand service that is then created. It could be as simple as getting seniors to a community centre or it could be getting individuals from a certain part of the town to work, to hospital appointments or those connecting into greater networks of transportation across the province.

When we look at transportation from a transit perspective, we look at: How do we build a system that can support all parts of the province? How do we build a system that can support every area in this province and

recognize that each region is very unique in its own way? This program allows us to carry out some of that work. It's very significant from our perspective on how transit can change the quality of life for an individual. Having a bus come pick you up and take you into the town for a day can really help, for example, seniors, take them to the community centre, take them to a medical appointment.

That's what we really want to encourage with the OTIF program: more rural, smaller communities looking at transit as a viable option, investing in it, and then developing their networks through that.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: Thank you so much for that.

How much time do we have left, Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Three minutes.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: Three minutes? Okay. Well, I'll pass it on to the next on the list. I believe that's MPP Racinsky.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Racinsky, please go ahead.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you, Minister, for coming before us this afternoon and sharing updates on our tremendous, tremendous plan to build our transportation network here across the province. I just wanted to thank you and your staff especially.

We talk about big projects like the Bradford Bypass, Billy Bishop airport, and rightfully so; they're very important. But even the smaller projects, like the roundabout, finally, on Highway 6 and Wellington County Road 22—great progress on that project is under way right now. That's a terrible, notorious intersection with fatal collisions continuing to take place at that intersection. Once that roundabout is completed, hopefully next year, that's going to be a tremendous improvement for the people of Centre Wellington.

I was at an event in Rockwood recently for the municipal election—a big topic there, a lot of thanks and kudos to your ministry, for fixing the sunken manholes on Highway 7 through Rockwood. That was one of the top issues for the community of Rockwood and you got that fixed. That's important, too, and people care about those kinds of things. So thank you for the small things that your ministry does.

But I want to ask you about GO Transit and our GO Transit expansion. In my riding we've got the Acton and Georgetown stations along the Kitchener line, and Guelph as well. Many hundreds of my constituents commute daily on the Kitchener line. I wonder if you could just expand more about our expansion of GO Transit and specifically the Kitchener line.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Yes, thank you very much. One of the most exciting lines, and one of the lines that continues to grow highest in both ridership and individuals on it, is the Kitchener corridor.

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Just this year, we announced an agreement in principle with CN for dedicated GO tracks where we purchased a part of the subdivision. Those types of investments, although they seem very technical, allow for more service to be delivered.

Along that line this year we introduced, for the first time ever, weekend GO service. That has been a significant change and a welcome change along the Kitchener

corridor. We've seen a great amount of people and interest on that. We want to continue to expand services like that.

Along that same corridor, we also expanded into Stratford. And so you see that the investments this government is making are continuing to build upon the progress that we are making every single day, month, year on GO Transit. We know how important it is for the people along that entire corridor, whether it's in Acton, Georgetown, Guelph, Kitchener or Waterloo, all the way into Union Station. We'll continue to make those investments.

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

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I just want to say good afternoon to the minister. I want to thank him for his work. I want to thank everyone who works at the Ministry of Transportation for their work, and I see many in attendance here today.

I'd like to first begin—most of my questions will focus on transit, of course, but I would like to return to the 401 tunnel. Now, a question was asked about the feasibility study and whether the results would be made public. The minister essentially did not say yes. Therefore, it seems like it won't be.

My question is simple: How much have you spent already on this tunnel with regard to this feasibility study or any other thing? What is the dollar figure, not the rationale, not the justification? How much have you spent on this 401 tunnel thus far?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Like every one of our projects, once we have completed the procurement process of that project, once the work has been completed, we do publish those numbers and those dollars. That will be the exact case with the 401 tunnel, as it was with every one of our transit projects, every one of our highway expansion projects.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Okay, but—

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We are currently in the process of that feasibility report, as you know.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: But my understanding is that a feasibility report, or the study, would have already begun and you would have obviously worked out a deal. How much have you spent on that report? What is it estimated to cost? How much have you spent thus far?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, what I can tell you is, whether it's through the Ministry of Transportation or through our team at Metrolinx, we're going to continue to look at every option when it comes to congestion relief.

When it comes to building this tunnel, it's an important project that we want to put forward, and we're going to continue to study it and get shovels in the ground.

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Mr. Tom Rakocevic: All right, so no answer to how much you've spent thus far. All right, so let's move on to transit.

Looking at the estimates before the committee, Metrolinx is showing an operating subsidy of \$700 million, but when you look at Metrolinx's own business plan, which you approved, it says it needs \$1.2 billion. So which number is real? Is it what they're saying? What's

the real number, because there's a discrepancy of \$500 million here.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Look, there's always planning that happens throughout the year on what could be a projected cost, what the dollar value of that could be. There are many things that can happen within that year that could change that: anything from a high ridership—and we have been seeing higher ridership. It could be with respect to capital cost being higher or lower in certain parts of those projects. So those values can change year over year and those subsidies are based off of that as well.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: But this is a huge discrepancy. I mean, we're talking—essentially, at the same time, we're hearing it's going to be \$700 million, and then at the same time we're hearing it's going to be \$1.2 billion. Like, this is a massive discrepancy.

I would actually like to move on to the next part of that, which is: Metrolinx is probably one of the most top-heavy organizations that's out there. In fact, I believe the ratio of manager to worker is one to two. They have just added 11 new vice-presidents, to bring the total to 135. In fact, that's more than there are members of provincial Parliament in Ontario.

And what are the results? Every project starts late, they end late and costs continue to balloon. I think the cost to build transit and these types of projects in Ontario is among the highest in the world. I think only New York can compete in terms of the actual cost per kilometre.

When you look at the results, the Finch West LRT did open, and this goes through my community; it goes through the Premier's. The thing is, when you look at the results of that, it opened two years late, which is 50% more in terms of timeline because it was supposed to open in 2023. It was supposed to cost \$2.5 billion, but it ended up costing \$3.7 billion, which is, again, a 48% increase in terms of cost. And now that it's been open for a year, still, people within my community will wake up and there will be orange pylons all over Finch Avenue West, delaying traffic—that thing that you say that you don't want to see—and there's no construction in sight. In fact, these pylons will stay up for sometimes days on end, and it doesn't even seem clear as to what they're still doing with regard to that.

Why does Metrolinx need so many vice-presidents? Why is it so top-heavy and why do we see these types of results, which is just delayed projects and constant overspending?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: First of all, on the topic of general cost: These are not unique to just Ontario. This is not just an Ontario issue; this is an issue across any jurisdiction in the Western world, and that's something that is caused by a variety of issues. We can get into those, but I know that's probably not what you want to get into, whether it's the pandemic or the supply chain shocks that we have seen.

But ultimately, when you look at the mandate that Metrolinx has, there is no other organization in North America that is delivering more from a capital perspective than Metrolinx, whether that's our five subway priority projects or whether that's GO Transit and the ridership numbers that we have right now. There are no comparable

transit agencies that are undertaking that scale of work and that amount of work in the time frame that we are doing—nowhere else even in the world, other than maybe France. There is nothing greater happening from a transit perspective than what is happening in Ontario, because previous governments failed to invest in that transportation infrastructure.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: All right. I understand, but these projects are still taking 50% time to open. Many of them have absolutely no idea as to when they're going to open.

When you look at comparables, yes, the cost of everything has gone up. That's true. But when you look at other jurisdictions, they don't pay anywhere near the cost per kilometre when it comes to these projects, and it just doesn't make sense. How do these costs continue to balloon and how can there be this much delay?

In fact, if the delays didn't happen, you would be able to say even more is being done. So what is the actual reason? I mean, this is why the NDP continues to ask for a public inquiry, so that everybody can look and make a decision here. Taxpayers are paying billions of dollars for these projects and waiting so long for them to open.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: If you're comparing to a jurisdiction—for example, in Asia—

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Or in Europe. You can look at Europe.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria:—you do not have the same environmental or labour standards, whether it's the costs or any of those elements, that are reflected in what we do here in Canada or in Ontario.

Now, let's look at the Ontario Line. For 60 years, no one has tunnelled in downtown Toronto—for 60 years. The Ontario Line is the first project to have tunnel-boring machines in one of the most dense areas in North America and one of the most complicated areas in North America. So transit is going to be expensive, and it is going to be difficult to build.

We didn't build for over 30 years, right? The Finch was the first project that was opened for a new transit line in over 14 years in Ontario. There's obviously a learning curve that was involved in that—

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Minister, I just want to—because the time is limited. We are comparing apples to apples. I'm looking at jurisdictions like places in western Europe.

If you look at the Finch West LRT, there's only a small portion that was tunnelled—most of it was just above ground—and yet still, this is how much it took. It took longer, it cost a lot more, and we see this everywhere. But I do want to move beyond that.

One of the other things I wanted to touch on was—again, I started with this figure of \$700 million versus \$1.2 billion. You said there might be discrepancies; there might be unaccounted-for costs. Well, there is actually a number of \$500 million that we've heard about not that recently. This was something that was asked in the Legislature but never got an answer to.

Some time back, a developer close to this government made a claim that they should be paid \$500 million for air rights over Union Station: air rights that they didn't even own, on a property that, I think, Metrolinx paid only \$79

million for. We're looking at a number that's far beyond that. Metrolinx balked at that and said no. They were fighting it tooth and nail, and then all of a sudden, a settlement happened and then everything became hushed.

My question is: What was the amount of this settlement, who authorized it, how is it being paid for, and where does it appear, here in the estimates?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I don't get involved in any expropriation matter with respect to the pricing or the settlement of that. That is a matter that is dealt with through the agency and their legal team, nor do I have any information on that.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: But, sir, there's a line item in here, because, ultimately, it would have been paid. So there is an accounting for it—a certain amount of money, an unspecified amount that nobody knows. Any attempt to look into it has been blocked.

We just want to know: What is the actual amount of that money? Where is it? It is somewhere in the estimates. It's not a legal question. This is estimates committee. There's a dollar figure amount that was paid to make this go away, even though Metrolinx was fighting it. Many people weighed in, like experts saying that they couldn't understand the rationale for this. None of that is what I'm asking. We just want to know: How much did this cost? What was the amount to settle?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I don't know that number, nor have I been advised of that number. I don't get involved in legal matters, nor does the Premier, nor do any of our representatives, as members of provincial Parliament, get involved in that process.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: But you're the boss, so that means someone, somewhere, under you, made a decision to sign a cheque at an unspecified amount. You're saying that neither you nor anyone in the decision-making authority have any knowledge whatsoever what the amount is? You just said, "You deal with it and don't even tell me"? Ultimately, you sign off on the final costs of transportation.

You're saying that this was not brought to your attention?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Look, expropriations are very common in transit and in any project that you do, whether that's building a bridge, a highway, a road to the Ring of Fire. Expropriations will happen. That's the part of building public infrastructure that is going to continue to happen. It's not going to stop today. It's not going to stop tomorrow. If you want to build these big projects, expropriations will happen.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: No, but there was an—

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We extract ourselves from that process. It's a legal process. Lawyers dealt with it, the agency dealt with it, and that's the answer I'm going to give you.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: All right, we'll move on. But, I mean, a government colleague thanked you for potholes—something like that—so you'd imagine a dollar figure amount having to do with this. The settlement was there. This was purchased, it was expropriated and then these

were additional costs on top of it. You're claiming that you have nothing to do with it, and you don't know? Okay. I'll move on.

Finally, the last two questions I have in the time remaining is two-way, all-day GO. Of course, we are waiting on electrification of the lines. This is a very, very ambitious project, and of course the faster you can get through to the electrification, the faster that you'll be able to bring in two-way, all-day service. Of course, when you electrify these lines, you're able to run more trains and they go faster. The question is, how much longer do we have to wait? How much has happened and how much longer are we going to have to wait on a number of these lines?

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Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: As you can see, we are enhancing service across all of the lines. Every couple months, every year, you will see significant enhancements in service. The electrification is a part of our GO expansion budget. It happens anywhere from signalling upgrades to the electrification upgrades that will continue.

Now, you look at any one of our lines—because of the service levels, we've been able to enhance some of the work that we have already done on making this system more efficient. We're going to hit over 80 million passengers on GO Transit, and that's enabled through the investments that we are making to get more people and more services on the GO rail network. Those investments will continue to be carried out over the next couple of years as segments are electrified; as dual tracks are installed, for example, like I just stated in the Kitchener line. That will enable more service levels to those areas.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Okay. This is something I will be following up on with regard to individual lines in the future. I mean, this is something that's so important. We hope to see it get done, and I'll continue to ask about that, but thank you for that.

In the two minutes I have remaining, I just want to move on to my final comment and question.

In the past, the province of Ontario used to pay 50% of the operating costs for transit agencies like the TTC, and this provided reliable service. This allowed riders to know that their fares would continue to be affordable, that speciality services that the TTC would provide like Wheel-Trans and other things, even low-ridership lines, would continue to operate. Because sometimes people work off-peak hours; they might have a nighttime job that they're going to.

A previous Conservative government eliminated that entirely. Since then, it's essentially always transactional. It's always temporary with expiring amounts or based on different things like gas tax, which could vary. Without that reliable funding on the year-to-year basis, it's hard to plan, and it essentially causes municipalities to have big financial pressures when it comes to the fare box. It makes it very difficult for them to continue to deliver specialized services like Wheel-Trans or off-peak-hour services.

Have you considered—and if not, why will you not consider—bringing in higher levels of reliable operating

costs, if not up to the 50%? I think that would really help transit agencies across the board.

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, thank you for your question.

The gas tax is a very reliable formula. Agencies will know based off of ridership, based off of some of the work that they do, the amount of dollars that they could expect. We installed the One Fare program. We've saved riders close to \$300 million because of the One Fare program, and that's a significant savings—\$1,600 for some of those individuals that are using it on a daily basis, on a more regular basis.

Those are the transformational pieces of work that we're doing for transit—

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

MPP Andrea Hazell: I'm going to continue on Highway 413. I want to challenge you on the numbers that you gave as a benefit factor, why you stated that there is a case for building Highway 413. You said that it would save time, and I forgot the time you said it will save. How much time you said it was going to save us?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thirty minutes.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thirty minutes. Experts say it will save less than a minute, so where is that case supporting your validation of how much it is saving? Where is it published?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: MPP Hazell, I would ask you to please come with me to York region, Halton region and Peel region and see for yourself the excessive population growth, the traffic and the gridlock that is there today. This project will absolutely help alleviate that.

Over the last couple of years, we have seen a significant growth in population across this province. We have seen increased gridlock across this province. And we know that building additional highway infrastructure is not only going to get people moving quicker and faster—30 minutes in each direction—but it will ensure that you can get goods to market that much more efficiently and effectively.

MPP Andrea Hazell: But I could also come back and say to you that building a highway, when we're not even making our transit network that we have right now work efficiently to get people out of their cars and into that transit—wouldn't you say that that's the priority, where our billions of dollars should be spent before, so we fix the existing before we build the new? That's what I'm getting at.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, we are investing three to one in public transit, MPP Hazell. If you look at our \$70-billion-plus, close to \$80 billion, over the next 10 years, we're investing \$30 billion into our highway network over the 10 years, so we're almost three to one with respect to transit investments.

Look, the approach that we have taken is an approach of making sure that there's choice. Whether it's a highway, whether it's commuter rail, whether it's the Northlander that is going to serve people all the way to Cochrane, people need to be able to get around, and there's an

opportunity to do that with every mode of transportation, whether it's a highway, a subway, LRT, GO rail, or any part of our transportation network.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Again, I understand what you're telling me. I get it. I'm just looking at the pain that Ontarians are going through. We're building new without cleaning up our existing infrastructure. That's where I'm coming from.

I have another question. I'm going to do rapid firing right now for you, because I don't know when I'm going to start coughing again.

What is the ministry doing in 2026-27 to reduce congestion on the 401 through Scarborough, right now, such as better transit ramp improvements—it's kind of really scary coming off those ramps—or incident management, rather than waiting decades for a tunnel? I need immediate work to get them to relieve the people of Ontario of the stress that we face in congestion every day.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: There's a variety of measures that we take. We've optimized, in some examples, when there's construction happening, that we're doing it in off-peak hours, whether it's the ramps that you talk about or rehabilitation work that we are doing on the 401 to make it a smoother ride.

The reason that we are studying the 401 tunnel is because we see the challenges that it will have. If you look at the 401 right now and you look projected in the next 10, 20, 30 years, it's going to double with respect to the time that we're going to be stuck behind a wheel in that corridor. That's why we need to make those investments today that will benefit people for the next 20, 30, 50 years. And that's what we want to continue to do: mitigate and use other measures.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I have another quick question, sorry. Can you tell us for the record: What is the current cost estimate for Highway 413? How much is being spent on it in 2026-27? I was looking for that, which vote and line in these estimates contains that spending.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: MPP Hazell, for all of our infrastructure projects, once the model of procurement is complete, then those will be posted, but we have to make sure that there's a competitive nature of that bid. And once as many companies as want to participate bid on that and they close that final price, then that cost is then released at a future date. But we don't jeopardize that process of procurement by stating a price beforehand.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I want to go back onto my sweet spot: GO expansion. All of us talk about the electrification, because we know that with electrification we save time. That's a validation. You mentioned in your presentation about—I think there's a launch of 15-minute, all-day, two-way. But Ontarians are still waiting to see the benefits of that. The GO expansion, you promised all-day, two-way, 15-minute service after the ONxpress cancellation.

When will Scarborough stations, preferably on the Lakeshore East line and the Stouffville line through Kennedy, Agincourt, and Milliken, actually see that service? This is key. Is the funding to deliver it included in these estimates? Can you bring me along with you and

help me to understand what you're spending to improve these crucial services?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: They're very crucial services. You look at the Lakeshore East line, and there's significant work happening on that; the Stouffville line, significant work happening on that. It's a variety of measures that will be undertaken.

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Within that \$70 billion that we have budgeted for public transportation, the investments that we are making through that budget will directly impact, whether it's the Lakeshore East line—the electrification of that—or the Stouffville line as well. That could be something as simple as a signal upgrade. It could be something as simple as laying additional track. It could be, in some areas, dual tracks that are—

MPP Andrea Hazell: Is that happening now, or is that pushed to 2033?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: No, that work continues to happen in conjunction. The reason we have been able to increase the ridership on each of those lines, whether it's Lakeshore East, for example, one of our best-performing lines, or Lakeshore West—the reason we were able to have such a high number of trains that are running today is because of the investments that we have made.

This year alone, we'll see about 80 million people use GO Transit. That's going to be up from 77 million people last year. Every year, because of the service enhancements we're making, or keying them to special events like FIFA, a hockey game, a basketball game or a concert—we're actually keying services to big events in the city, so their journey to and from the city can be that much more efficient. That's why you see such a high number in ridership year-over-year growth.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you for the detailed information.

I just want to touch a little bit on the One Fare program. How much is the province spending in 2026-27 to compensate the TTC and other transit agencies for revenue loss under the One Fare program, and is that funding guaranteed beyond this year? Can you just talk to me about that funding model?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I'll maybe ask my deputy to fill in on that, if you're okay with that.

Mr. Bruce Macgregor: Madam Chair, the costs for the One Fare program annually are about \$190 million, distributed amongst all of the participating transit agencies, including very substantially the TTC.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: And that saved individuals over \$1,600 a year because they don't have to pay that double fare. Someone travelling every single day saves a significant amount of money. It makes transit that much more accessible.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Yes. I understand about the savings and I understand about the accessibility.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: And we'll continue.

MPP Andrea Hazell: And I also know the funding model as well, that it's not updated. So, I'm just saying,

you mentioned \$190 million. That is paid through all the transit agencies that participate in the program.

What about loss of revenue? Because you said things are changing. So I'm putting this question back to you. Things change; there's a loss in revenue. Who is going to be compensating or taking accountability and responsibility for that at the TTC level?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: MPP Hazell, through the One Fare program, you have seen more people get onto public transit. You will see this as a driver of people getting onto transit because it makes it that much affordable.

Take for example a student: You've got to go to TMU. You're coming in from, let's say, Mississauga or Brampton. You have to pay not only your GO fare if you're using GO Transit, and then your TTC fare. That could be \$6 a day back into your pocket. You might have chosen a different mode of travel if you didn't have that ability to save on that \$6 a day of TTC fare.

But more people will be encouraged to take transit because of One Fare. It will not reduce revenues. It is inherently going to promote the use of public transit across the region. That's why we put Bill 98 forward too, to make a more streamlined approach amongst all agencies.

MPP Andrea Hazell: The reason why I am pushing you on this is just in case there is a shortfall of revenue, because anything can happen. I could tell you right now, the transit agencies are doing a lot with less, and so they cannot go back into their operational budgets to pay for any shortfall. I just want to put that on record.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: But can I just state that for the TTC, for example, on both Eglinton and Finch, we're covering \$300 million as part of the Toronto-Ontario new deal, as well. So we have stepped up significantly to support the TTC from an operational perspective, and every single one of our capital projects that we are doing in the city of Toronto requires no capital investment by the TTC as well.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Okay. That's good to know.

My next question: The province is spending \$376 million on the dedicated gas tax funding for public transit this year. I hope I got that figure right: \$376.6 million.

Will the ministry update the formula in 2026-27 to reflect ridership growth? For example, Scarborough is growing; we see this month over month. And how much more funding would that mean for growing communities like Scarborough?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: There's always a conversation that our team at MTO is willing to have on transit funding and transit infrastructure funding. That is something that we always keep a very open mind to.

The gas tax formula is something that has worked for the past many years, and there are many inputs into that. If you're driving higher ridership, that will ultimately mean that you will benefit significantly from that formula to get more money in the future. We've had many conversations with transit agencies across the province on that, the sustainability on that, and we'll continue to be open to that, including any views that you might have, MPP Hazell.

So we have a very open mind to transit. We have invested more than any other government has ever invested into transit infrastructure, and we want to continue to make transit a good option for people to travel in.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I want to state for the record that yes, we have to invest in transit and infrastructure, and I welcome them. I just need things to get better sooner—prioritizing the right infrastructure and transportation projects to ease that pressure and that pain. There's always room for opportunities and being transparent and holding Metrolinx up to a higher standard of accountability.

Time?

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

MPP Andrea Hazell: I want to move into commercial vehicle safety. I'm going to be very quick.

I want to put this on record: When I heard about the series of neglect and oversight that has happened in the commercial vehicle safety space, as the transportation critic for the Ontario Liberal Party, I jumped on that right away, because we have seen so many accidents with truck drivers on the road.

But the worrying part of that is when a truck gets into an accident, it's fatal. So I welcome the improvement that you've done. I hope that you can be doing more improvements, as well, because I think this is a very, very important aspect of improvement on the road, following the Auditor General finding that one in four truck driver training colleges have never been inspected.

Can you tell me: In your 2026-27 estimates, how have you invested to make sure the work has continued to go?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Yes. So, 130 new enforcement officers have been hired by the MTO. We conducted over 115,000 inspections just in 2025, and we're on record to conduct just as many this year. We're doing enforcement blitzes.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities has undertaken, in the next six weeks, to review every single one of those schools that have also been registered to give truck training.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you. Minister, I'm sorry; we're out of time.

We'll now go to the government side. MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Minister, Deputy and all the rest of the staff for coming and giving us your input, your precious time and your insight to make life easier and better for our residents in Ontario.

I have been a resident of Scarborough for 35 years, and I have seen a day-and-night change between the eight years since 2018 when our government was elected and the 15 years before that. Scarborough was ignored. It was a forgotten part of Toronto. But in the last eight years, we have seen substantial improvement.

I will come to the public transit and transit system also. But we have made major commitments to Scarborough residents when it comes to health care, when it comes to education, when we opened a new medical school in Scarborough; we're building a new hospital, we're building community centres, we're adding dialysis machines.

But when it comes to transit, two of the stations on the Stouffville GO line are in my riding: Agincourt and Milliken. We built two brand new stations, first class, with comfortable parking, easy parking spaces, access to wheelchairs, and residents are quite happy. And of course, we increased the frequency of the trains on that line.

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People in Scarborough have been waiting for a subway, and the Scarborough subway extension is now a reality. We are digging two stations out of the three. I have been fortunate to visit the McCowan station three times, to see the advancement and the development of the digging. I have to say that Diggy Scardust is doing an amazing job in digging under the 401 tunnel. So we appreciate, in Scarborough, what your ministry is doing when it comes to public transit.

Minister, can you update us on the current status of the Scarborough subway extension and when you forecast the work to be done so that the people of Scarborough can start riding the subway?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you very much, MPP Babikian, for that question.

I think the most important part of the Scarborough subway extension is how many people will be able to use it every single day. We're projecting, and probably will exceed, over 105,000 boardings every single day.

We marked a pretty significant milestone just this past month where we completed tunnelling and we broke through the final segment on the Scarborough subway extension. One of the big parts of that project, obviously, is the tunnelling, and we went under the 401 there as well. Any time you're tunnelling underground, you never know what you're going to find as you're tunnelling, but we're very excited that we hit that significant milestone.

We've also hit very significant milestones with respect to excavation and construction of stations. Two of those stations—we know we were just there a couple of weeks ago as well, marking that significant milestone. So people in your community will start seeing that also be realized very soon.

We're making progress on this project very quickly. We know how important this project is for the people of Scarborough. That's why, thanks to advocacy from individuals like yourself, Scarborough finally got what it deserves, which is a rapid transit option eight kilometres in length, and something that will deliver results and make it that much more efficient for people to get around.

We'll continue to update as we mark these major milestones, and we're going to continue to make sure that we deliver a system that is going to be integrated very well into the existing system, but ultimately bring a lot of relief for the people of Scarborough and get them the transit that they deserve.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you. I will cede my time to my colleagues.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Okay.

MPP Beattie, go ahead. There's nine and a half minutes left.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: Thank you—lots of time for good questions, Chair.

Minister, we've talked a lot about the road network. We've talked a lot about the rail and transit network. I'm wondering if I could make a splash and talk about the marine network. That pun was intended, Chair.

I have the great honour of representing the community of Hamilton, where, as you know, we have the one of the largest, if not the largest, freshwater ports in the Great Lakes system. And particularly, as we try to diversify our economy, find new markets for the goods that are produced here in Ontario, I see an increasing need to, of course, expand our marine transportation network.

In fact, I was at the Port of Hamilton with Minister Oosterhoff last week, and we were watching as raw sugar was coming in from Costa Rica to be processed in Hamilton for distribution to markets here and across the country as well. We watched as a freighter was being loaded with Ontario-grown corn from our rural communities that was being shipped to markets in Ireland, of all places. I think that that speaks to increased potential around the world for Ontario-produced goods.

Minister, I'm wondering if you might just illustrate some of the work that's being done to expand our marine transportation network as well as our very robust Ontario shipbuilding industry, producing good-paying jobs for Ontarians.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Yes, thank you very much, MPP Beattie.

That's actually, I would say, a very significant part of the network that recently, over the last two years, has seen significant progress. And it's the advocacy, whether it was from local leaders like yourself on municipal council, that saw a sector that had been neglected or left Ontario for some time—to have that be revived is a message that the Premier heard loud and clear and something that he actioned on as well.

So there have been a variety of measures that we have put in place. I remember when I first assumed the role and MPP Grewal, who was a parliamentary secretary before that, also undertook the first consultation around the marine sector strategy. That strategy has truly now transformed into being something real, with a division within the Ministry of Transportation office dedicated for marine transportation.

And then recently, in our past budget, not only as an office, but a significant investment of over \$215 million targeted towards that sector—what will that mean? That will mean that we can enhance the marine sector from a manufacturing perspective and hopefully attract new jobs, new companies to invest. Looking at what some have been able to do, whether it be in Quebec or the east coast—they have a very robust and strong marine sector, whether it be on the manufacturing and shipbuilding side of it or others.

We want to replicate that, because we know Ontario has a significant competitive advantage when it comes to manufacturing. And how we're able to do that is through not only the shipbuilding grant program—which we announced not too long ago, which was about a \$15-million grant program that supported everything from equipment and facilities to worker training—but then the subsequent program, which is going to focus on marine and shipbuilding as well, which is a larger investment of

close to \$200 million that we are currently in the process of undertaking.

We know that, through that program, you will see a significant amount of investment and interest. I already have—speaking of being in, whether it was your by-election or others—stakeholders in that area are very excited about what marine could truly mean.

An expansion of that—whether we're talking about ports of entry or whether we're talking about marine infrastructure—is another competitive advantage for our province to be able to get our goods to market. Whether we're talking about ports in Thunder Bay, in Sault Ste. Marie or in Hamilton and Oshawa, there are opportunities here for us to really be able to get trucks off the road, to move goods in a more environmentally sustainable manner and one in which reduces gridlock across the province.

There are a significant amount of opportunities that the marine sector really can provide to this province, and we know that that investment would lead to thousands of good-paying jobs being created across the province as well. So we're very excited about the outlook for the future on the marine side and the team that we have leading it.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: Fantastic, and thank you for tying in the connection point with a lot of conversation we've had here in terms of gridlock and how marine may play a really important role in trying to alleviate gridlock in the Ontario network.

I'll pass my time to MPP Firin.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): MPP Firin, you have four minutes.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Thank you, Minister. Thank you to the deputy and the rest of the team, as well, for taking the time to be here today.

Minister, as you're aware, we're investing over \$236 billion into infrastructure. I understand about \$70 billion of that is into transit.

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I also understand the 15 years of neglect by the previous government, where they built nothing. I think one time you mentioned in the House an upside-down bridge was built at one point. I understand that your work is actually cut out for you.

I want to talk to you about rapid transit. It was good to have you in my riding of York South–Weston at the Mount Dennis station, which was opened recently. That will get transit riders in my community to where they need to go faster, and I thank you for that.

Our government is making investments in rapid transit to change how people move across their communities and the opportunities they can reach. Minister, could you walk us through the government's rapid transit program, including the benefits and the progress on all projects that will serve Ontario's growing communities?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you very much, MPP Firin. I remember that announcement we made at Mount Dennis. It's a story that I often quote with many people, because we met a lady there who was very excited about the opening of the Mount Dennis station. In

conversation, it truly helps put into perspective the billions of dollars that we put into our public transit infrastructure.

I remember she told us that every day it takes her anywhere from 45 minutes to about 55 minutes to get to her work, which was at that time in downtown Toronto. The opening of this station would eliminate her journey to being about 16 minutes, because she could get on at the Mount Dennis Station, jump on a GO train or Line 5, which is also connecting through there, and get to her place of work that much quicker.

If you think about that, every single day she was travelling anywhere from 45 to 55 minutes a day. Mount Dennis Station reduced that to about a 16-minute trip for her. So every single day—take a 30-minute saving per day, per trip—it's an hour back in her day that she now has, that she never used to have. That's five hours back in her week that she has now that she didn't have. So that person is then able to spend that time—whether it be with a family member, her kids—doing something that she wants to do, rather than being on the road or stuck, whether it be in transit or on the roads.

That's truly the transformative nature of transit: the quality-of-life enhancements it can bring, the greater productivity it can bring. If you're only in transit for 16 minutes versus 55 minutes, you're obviously going to be in a better state of mind, because you're travelling that much more efficiently and effectively in the city and in the province. That's what we want to continue to do.

We saw for 15 years absolutely nothing being built in this province, none of these investments that we needed to be carried out. Now we have a government under Premier Ford that is investing in public transit, that is investing in highways and bridges across the province.

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We want to replicate that story across the province, across the country. People are very excited that we have finally moved on from a previous government that wasn't investing in transit to one that is investing in transit and investing in highway infrastructure across Ontario.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Thank you.

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

The last bit goes to the official opposition: MPP French, for about eight minutes.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I think where I had left off had been about bike lanes. Just a refresher that the city of Toronto has said it would cost \$48 million to remove the bike lanes. It's going to be a lot of unnecessary destruction of existing transportation infrastructure. It's going to create major construction chaos that is going to impact the city of Toronto, businesses that will all suffer massive destruction—destruction that, Minister, you're responsible for.

This government has also said that the cost would be limited, and now the scope of ripping out the bike lanes unnecessarily has ballooned. So I'm wondering, Minister, if you have an estimate, since we're here at estimates. What will be the final total for the bike lane rip-out?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: MPP French, that's currently in an RFP format right now, which is being bid on by multiple vendors, and so we—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I know. If you had to guess.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I don't want to dictate the market. I think it would be best for that process to continue to play out and receive those bids and then we can go from there.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. Thank you.

Sticking with the idea of the Premier's focus on Toronto, I think everyone knows how unhappy the Premier is to not be getting his private jet. What have we paid for that plane?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Point of order.

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

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: We're talking about the estimates for the Ministry of Transportation. I'd like to see where that is in the Ministry of Transportation's estimates.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I would like to—

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): That is a very good point, MPP Racinsky.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I would very much like to say that an airplane is a mode of transportation. I think any decision of this administration regarding transportation is open to questions.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Maybe another question. Thank you.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. So, I guess, are we leasing that private jet? Is that in the estimates? The Premier's travel costs should be in the estimates. Is it the same jet? Does he get to visit?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: That's not procured to the Ministry of Transportation, so we can't speak to that.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. I will move on to something that most assuredly is.

Minister, in 2016, Ontario's Auditor General identified serious integrity issues within the road-building industry, specifically regarding asphalt testing quality assurance.

The region of Durham implemented an enhanced road-building standard that has reportedly tripled the projected lifespans of the region's roads, which improves our commutes locally and saves money for drivers and taxpayers. They're really good roads. They don't have to replace them as often as some others—actually, so much so that, in 2025, the Good Roads gave them the Good Roads' Municipal Paving Project of the Year Award.

Why I'm bringing this to your attention, and have in a letter, is that the ministry's regulatory proposal, 26-MTO003, is what I'm interested in here. This regulatory proposal would require all municipalities to use provincial road-building standards that include OPSS.MUNI—or however you read municipal stuff—1101, which governs asphalt quality. We all want our roads to be better and those communities that have roads that are substandard, I can appreciate need to be improved. I would hope that those that use a better standard don't have to be diminished.

When I asked the ministry and wrote you that letter about whether you would confirm that municipalities that

have adopted enhanced road-building standards to address those quality integrity issues—I'm hoping that they will not have to, as I said, lower their standards. I understood from your letter that they will be able to seek an exemption if they can demonstrate that an alternate standard better addresses local conditions, performance objectives or asset management needs. Can I reassure the region of Durham and others who use better standards that they can continue to do so?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Well, I can answer that. The process around standardization is because you can have every municipality, every county, every region using a different type of mix for a road. I would say that the Ministry of Transportation—the roads that we have standards for are probably some of the most travelled-on roads in the entire province and in the entire community. The standards that we use and that we standardize to will save the industry and municipalities costs. It will bring certainty around the process and any time that there is a local—what you've mentioned here—would have the opportunity to apply to the ministry for an exemption.

The process of standardization around the Ministry of Transportation's standards, I would say, would be a good move for the entire province because we have some of the highest standards in the province.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I can appreciate the need for that harmonization. I've been meeting with many folks. I just know that from the taxpayer and safety standard, if we don't have to pay to replace our roads as frequently or if we have better testing—I would hope that the ministry would even adopt those, either as the standard or continue to reach towards those improvements. I'll let what you said in the letter stand and hope to be part of an ongoing conversation, if possible.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): A minute and a half.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Minister, can you confirm that the Lakeshore East express to Oshawa is actually coming back, and do you know when?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: A hundred per cent, it will be coming back. It's impacted by East Harbour station construction that is actively happening right now. Once that construction completes, that track alignment will be put back in place and that line will continue.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you.

I had sent a letter to you; I know that you're familiar with the enclosed mobility scooters that are all over our roads. Some municipalities have banned them; others don't know what to do with them. There's a current pilot project where the window is closing.

The e-bike classification stuff that your ministry has been working on, I don't think encompasses these mini-EVs—which I'm sure have a place, but it can't be willy-nilly. I think you're familiar with these, so I would ask: What is the plan? How is your government going to ensure that those enclosed mobility scooters are safe in our communities and that other drivers are safe on our roads?

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): You've got eight seconds.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We just posted a regulation on this and we take that very, very seriously. In

the coming weeks, we'll have an update that addresses each of those concerns that you have put forward.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you. I appreciate the time.

The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott): Thank you very much, everyone. This concludes the committee's consideration of the 2026-27 estimates of the Ministry of Transportation.

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 2701, ministry administration program, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 2701 accordingly carried.

Shall vote 2702, transit, carry? All those in favour, please your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. I declare vote 2702 accordingly carried.

Shall vote 2703, transportation safety, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare vote 2703 accordingly carried.

Shall vote 2704, transportation infrastructure management, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. Vote 2704 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 2706, integrated policy and planning, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. Vote 2706 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 2707, operations, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. Vote 2707 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 2708, oversight and agency governance, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. Vote 2708 is accordingly carried.

Shall vote 2709, commercial transportation safety and enforcement, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. Vote 2709 is accordingly carried.

Shall the 2026-27 estimates of the Ministry of Transportation 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 2026-27 estimates of the Ministry of Transportation to the House? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. I declare it carried.

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

There being no further business, this committee stands adjourned until 10 a.m. on Tuesday, October 6, 2026, when we will consider the estimates of the Ministry of Sport.

Good night, everyone.

The committee adjourned at 1734.

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