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JP-15

Standing Committee on Justice Policy

Comité permanent de la justice

Estimates

Ministry of the Attorney General
Ministry of the Solicitor General

Budget des dépenses

Ministère du Procureur général
Ministère du Solliciteur général

1st Session
44th Parliament

Wednesday 7 October 2026

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44^e législature

Mercredi 7 octobre 2026

Chair: Lorne Coe
Clerk: Isaiah Thorning

Président : Lorne Coe
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
JUSTICE POLICYCOMITÉ PERMANENT
DE LA JUSTICE

Wednesday 7 October 2026

Mercredi 7 octobre 2026

The committee met at 1300 in committee room 2.

ESTIMATES

BUDGET DES DÉPENSES

MINISTRY OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

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

On this afternoon's agenda is the review of the 2026-27 estimates of the Ministry of the Attorney General. As a reminder, the ministry will be considered for two hours, with a 20-minute opening statement from the minister followed by questions and answers in rotations of 15 minutes for the official opposition, 15 minutes for the third party and 15 minutes for the government members for the remainder of the allotted time.

From the ministry, we are joined by the Attorney General of Ontario, the Honourable Doug Downey; the Honourable Michael Tibollo, the Associate Attorney General; and 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? Okay. I don't see any, Mr. Clerk.

I'd like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that the purpose of considering the estimates is for the members of the Legislature to determine if the government is spending money appropriately, wisely and effectively in the delivery of the services intended. As Chair, I will allow members to ask a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee to ensure that they're confident the ministry will spend those dollars appropriately. In the past, members have asked questions about the delivery of similar programs in previous fiscal years, about the policy framework that supports a ministry approach to a problem or service delivery, or about the confidence of a ministry to spend the money wisely and efficiently.

However, it must be noted that the onus is on the members asking the questions to make the questioning relevant to the estimates under consideration within the scope of the estimates. Otherwise, I'll rule the question out of order.

I'm now required to call vote 301, which sets the review process in motion. We'll begin with a statement from the minister for up to 20 minutes. Minister, I'll let you know when you've got one minute left in your 20 minutes, so please begin. Thank you so much for being with us, and thank you, Minister Tibollo, as well.

Thank you, sir. Please start.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have no doubt you will tell me when I have one minute left, and we will all be very aware.

It really is a pleasure to be back at estimates. It's a great chance to talk about some of the great work that we've been doing and provide some answers for the public as well.

I'm joined today, as you can see, by the Deputy Attorney General on my left—your right—and by the Associate Attorney General Michael Tibollo on my other side. Of course, the parliamentary assistant, as part of the committee, is here as well. In addition to us, we have several of our internal leaders, our assistant Deputy Attorneys General from various divisions, and they're sitting behind me and available to help give some responses as needed. Again, I'm thrilled to be back here—a chance to reconnect.

I'll just start by reiterating that Ontario's justice system is fundamental to safe communities, it's fundamental to public confidence and it's fundamental to a strong economy. People need to know that the law will be upheld, victims will be supported and disputes can be resolved fairly and without unnecessary delay.

When we think about the justice system, sometimes people think about only the criminal law side of the justice system, but it is much more than that. It's the backbone of our economy in creating certainty and predictability for people to resolve their disputes in a fair and accessible way. Businesses and investors need that kind of confidence in our institutions.

That's why our government is continuing to build a justice system that is modern, that is accessible, responsive and resilient—one that protects communities, supports victims of crime and earns public confidence every single day. We'll get a chance to explore some of those concepts in action.

Since the ministry's last appearance at estimates, our government has continued to make significant progress across the system. I'm pleased to provide the committee with an update on some of that work.

But before I do, I want to recognize the justice sector partners whose collaboration helps make this progress pos-

sible. The Court of Appeal for Ontario, the Superior Court of Justice and the Ontario Court of Justice, along with partners across the justice system, continue to work with us to modernize services, strengthen capacity and improve access to justice for people across the province.

Chief Justice Tulloch, Chief Justice Boucher—newly sworn in as the Chief Justice of the Superior Court—and Chief Justice Nicklas are unparalleled leaders in Canada in terms of collaboration and working together to make our system work better and to make it work well for all sectors of our society. The ongoing collaboration is central to our work to build this stronger system and underscores our commitment to keep communities safe and protect Ontario.

Ontario is continuing to modernize how people and businesses access justice, with a focus on services that are easier to use, more responsive, better connected. It's about making the justice system easier to navigate and giving court users, justice sector partners and front-line staff both the tools and the processes they need to deliver justice effectively. Our government will continue taking strong action to break down long-standing barriers, bring more services online and deliver meaningful change for communities across our province.

The last time I appeared before the committee, we had just launched phase 1 of the Ontario courts public portal, making it easier for users to submit documents and manage court-related payments online. It was actually over Thanksgiving weekend last year that 100 people from all sectors of the justice world got together—physically together—to get ready for the launch on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving. That launch went very well, and most of you probably have not heard about it. That alone is success in an electronic launch. So I'm very proud of this. I will talk more about it when we get into it today, but it has been a really unparalleled success.

For the first time, court users in Toronto have a single, modern, online access point to complete some of the most common court-related tasks, including filing documents, paying fees, accessing hearings and, of course, more. The portal currently supports civil, family, small claims, bankruptcy, Divisional Court and enforcement matters, as well as family proceedings in the Ontario Court of Justice—effectively everything except criminal, but that's coming. It's coming soon in the new year.

Since launching last October, the public portal has attracted more than 60,000 registered users and received more than 340,000 submissions. It's been very active. It's been really road-tested—and constant improvements before we start to scale it out across the province.

But the numbers tell us something important. People are using the service, but it's really only one perspective. We're continuing to expand the platform with the goal of supporting proceedings across the province over the coming years.

As I mentioned, next year, we're planning to expand the portal to include Toronto criminal proceedings, followed by further regional expansion between 2028 and 2030. Again, in the technology world, it's a very fast deployment,

but it's very solid. We're being watched from around the world. We'll talk about that too.

In addition to that, this past April, in collaboration with the Court of Appeal for Ontario, we also launched the Ontario Court of Appeal public portal, which allows members of the public and legal professionals to file online, process payments and search for appeal cases.

Since both portals launched, over 65,000 users have registered, and over 12,000 filings have been submitted through the Ontario Court of Appeal portal. These are impressive figures and a crucial measurement of success as we advance our plan to reduce wait times and make justice systems more user-friendly than ever before.

Beyond online filing, though, we're improving how people participate in proceedings. In 2021, our government invested \$65 million to expand the use of virtual and hybrid hearings across the province. To date, we've equipped 275 courtrooms with modern technology to support hybrid hearings. By the end of this project, we are aiming to upgrade a total of 338 courtrooms with modern audiovisual systems.

These upgrades are about more than technology. They give courts greater flexibility. They improve access for participants. They help build a justice system that is more accessible, is more responsive and is more resilient.

But technology alone can't modernize the system. We also need the people, we need the resources and we need the physical capacity to deliver justice effectively. That's why our government is making record investments to strengthen the sustainability of Ontario's world-class justice system. By 2027, our government will have invested more than half a billion dollars to address court backlogs and build a more sustainable system for the future. Within that half a billion dollars, it includes an allocation for up to 52 net new judges to the Ontario Court of Justice and the hiring of nearly 700 additional crown prosecutors with both victim support and court staff.

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This past June, we've also announced the appointment of 27 new justices of the peace to the Ontario Court of Justice. They joined the 42 we announced in 2025 and the 45 we announced in 2024. These investments are delivering results. Internal crown reporting indicates that, in 2025, cases stayed due to section 11(b)—commonly known as Jordan—account for approximately 0.05% of all cases disposed. That's one twentieth of 1%. That's an important indicator of progress, and we will continue the work required to sustain it.

Alongside our investments in court capacity, we're bringing justice services closer to the communities and the people who need them through justice centres, which our government launched in 2020. They connect justice-involved people with supports that can include health care, mental health, addiction services, housing, social services, education, employment supports—all in one community setting. By bringing the services together, justice centres are helping reduce re-offending, connecting people with appropriate supports and pairing accountability with the practical help people need to help them move forward. It's dealing with why they're there and not just what they did. We will get into

some of the stats potentially during the session. They are remarkable, and they are also being watched from around the world for the success that they're having.

I'll give you one example. In the Ontario Court of Justice, the Toronto youth justice centre, with support from five community satellite locations, enhances prosecution, enhances case management, bail, sentencing and reintegration for youth charged across all 16 police divisions in the city of Toronto. This helps to hold the youth accountable, it helps keep communities safe and it delivers early intervention to break the cycle of offending. I'll share some of those numbers later today.

Taken together, our modernization and capacity-building efforts are helping to create a justice system that is more accessible, more responsive and better equipped to deliver timely outcomes. There's more ahead, but the progress we've made clearly reflects a commitment to build a stronger system for people who are coming into contact with the system and for people who are being affected by individuals who are coming into contact with the system.

Another part of the work that we're reforming are the rules and processes that determine how civil cases move through our system. This is why the civil rules review is such an important part of our broader modernization work. Former Chief Justice Morawetz and I launched the review in 2024. Through consultations with the bar and the judiciary, we identified areas that needed targeted change and could improve efficiency and access to justice for the people of Ontario. The review hadn't been done for 40 or 50 years, and it was time. We had to change how we're doing things.

Fast-forward to last December: The working group delivered its final recommendations. I want to thank everyone who shared their experience, their expertise and their practical perspectives throughout the review. Their work has given us a solid foundation for lasting reform. There were over 200 submissions—sophisticated submissions—on how the system could work better, but the one thing everybody agreed on: The status quo is not acceptable. And so we are moving forward.

The recommendations are wide-ranging, but they share a common purpose: to simplify processes, reduce unnecessary steps and make it easier for cases to move forward. Clearer rules and more efficient processes can mean the difference between unnecessary delay and meaningful progress. It also sends a message to our economic investors and those who would come to our jurisdiction that they will have a system that will work for them when they need it, if they need it.

The more efficient courts are, the better it is for everybody in Ontario. Our government is building on the historic measures we have already taken to strengthen our court capacity to keep the community safe and hold offenders accountable. In May, the Solicitor General introduced the Protecting Ontario's Streets and Communities Act to take decisive action to streamline court processes, improve enforcement and support victims of crime.

Among the proposed changes are amendments to the Provincial Offences Act. It would streamline processes

and resolve less serious cases faster. Defendants would be allowed to enter guilty pleas without appearing before a justice, helping appropriate matters move through the POA court system more efficiently and reducing pressure on judicial resources.

The legislation would also allow restraining orders issued in other Canadian provinces and territories to be enforced in Ontario without requiring additional court declarations, helping to close the gap in protecting the vulnerable people that now reside in Ontario.

We're also taking steps to build on the successes of dedicated prosecution teams like the major auto theft prosecution team, the intensive serious violent crime bail teams—and there are others.

We have launched the first Canadian cyber security special prosecution team in cryptocurrency. We are on the leading edge of it, and we have the best minds that work to protect the people of Ontario.

And as part of that work, we're moving forward with a dedicated prosecution team focusing on retail theft, prioritizing serious cases and providing early investigative advice to police. It will strengthen prosecution capacity, support local businesses and improve safety in and around stores and shopping centres.

At the same time, Ontario is advocating for further federal Criminal Code amendments to treat assaults against security guards as an aggravating factor at sentencing.

Together, these proposed measures and actions will strengthen enforcement, increase oversight and help protect communities across the province.

We all know bail is a critical part of that work, particularly when serious and violent offences are involved. The intensive serious violent crime bail teams bring together dedicated crown attorneys and professionals with the expertise needed to prepare strong cases in complex bail matters involving serious and violent offences. Since they were launched, the teams have been involved in more than 5,600 cases, strengthening the crown's ability to put the best available case before the court in serious and violent bail matters. It's a part of our government's plan to help the courts resolve cases faster than ever and keep dangerous offenders behind bars.

The bail system must be stronger. It must be more responsive and have real consequences for violent and repeat offenders. That is why we are continuing to strengthen digital tools to track repeat offenders and those who fail to comply with bail conditions, including work to create a surety database that will help streamline and strengthen surety checks. The principle is straightforward: Court-ordered conditions must be meaningful, and there must be real consequences when those obligations are not met.

That commitment to safety extends to Ontario's court-houses and everyone who enters them. Since 2018, our government has made a multi-year commitment of more than \$250 million in investments to strengthen court security and justice infrastructure, supporting more than 2,100 completed security projects across the province. That work includes security system upgrades, single points of entry, improved

video and audio surveillance and upgraded access control systems.

We will continue to work collaboratively with the Ministry of the Solicitor General, municipal leaders, the judiciary, police services and Infrastructure Ontario to ensure that all court locations have the necessary security measures in place.

As I've said before, the safety and security of our province is paramount. Safe, secure courthouses are a fundamental requirement of justice systems wherever you are, and people need to be able to trust that. Our government will continue taking action to underscore that commitment, strengthen the safety and security of our courthouses and protect Ontario communities.

For victims of crime and vulnerable communities, a strong justice system must provide meaningful support when they need it most. In the past year, our government has continued to invest in services and advanced legislative changes aimed at protecting victims and vulnerable people.

In January, we invested an additional \$2.3 million to expand access to the independent legal advice program, which provides free legal advice services to victims of sexual assault. As part of this investment, we are expanding program eligibility requirements and extending access to supports for victims of human trafficking, intimate partner violence and other sexual offences.

We have also doubled the amount of legal advice time individuals can receive, up from four hours to eight hours, based on an individual's unique needs. This is in addition to our recent \$6.4-million investment in child victim/witness programs and the independent legal advice programs, announced in the 2024 budget.

In August, our government announced that \$5 million in cash and proceeds seized from criminals would be reinvested through the Civil Remedies Grant Program to help 26 law enforcement agencies and community and Indigenous organizations fight crime and strengthen public safety across the province.

Alongside these investments, and through the Protecting Ontario's Streets and Communities Act, we proposed amendments to the Victims' Bill of Rights that would give victims of harassment more recourse to sue their harasser for compensation. The proposed changes would also provide up to \$50,000 in debt relief for victims of human trafficking through an expedited trauma-informed process, helping survivors build their lives without the need to go to court. These changes would prohibit the collection of coerced debt and prevent that debt from being considered when determining whether to provide financial products or services to a survivor.

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Human trafficking survivors would also have access to a designated survivor support organization that would help negotiate the removal of coerced debt and assist survivors through the trauma-informed dispute resolution process.

Our work to protect vulnerable people includes strengthening enforcement of the Blind Persons' Rights Act—people who rely on guide dogs, who are often denied access to

public places, making it hard for them to fully participate in their communities. These changes would give police and other enforcement officers clear authority to issue tickets for offences under the act, including when services are denied to a person accompanied by a guide dog.

Supporting victims and vulnerable people is central to our work to strengthen public safety. Our government will continue to work to protect victims, to hold offenders accountable and strengthen confidence in Ontario's justice system.

Now, I've shared a wide range of updates today. I've just scratched the surface of a few of them. I look forward to getting into them, but none of the progress would be possible without the dedication of the people and the partners that make Ontario's justice system work every day: those municipal partners; the judiciary; victim services groups; the hard work of the Associate Attorney General on bail reform; the hard work of the PA on POA reform, drawing on her extensive background in the POA courts prior to politics. Everybody has all hands on deck and, of course, the ministry—I actually think that it's the strongest ministry in government. We can duke that out later with the other ministers, but I am so well served by expertise and really innovative people focused on the things that matter to the people of Ontario.

Taken together, these initiatives are about confidence: confidence that the system is accessible, that the courts have the capacity to move matters forward, that victims are supported, that offenders are held accountable and that the rule of law is upheld. That confidence is essential to safe communities—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Excuse me, Minister: You have one minute left.

Hon. Doug Downey: That confidence is essential to safe communities and a strong economy. It helps people trust the institutions that serve them and gives businesses the certainty to invest, grow and create opportunity in Ontario.

We will continue to modernize justice services, strengthen capacity and work with our partners to build a system that is accessible, responsive, sustainable and worthy of public confidence.

I do look forward to your questions on any range of things, and I appreciate the support from the others that are here to help answer those questions if there's a second level to it.

I will stop there, Mr. Chair. Thank you. Merci. Meegwetch.

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

Committee members, we'll now begin the question-and-answer segment in rotations: 15 minutes for the official opposition, 15 minutes for the third party and 15 minutes for the government members for the remainder of the allotted time. 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'll recognize you and allow you to reclaim the floor, but please ask a new question.

For the deputy minister this year, welcome, sir; assistant deputy ministers, welcome.

Staff, if you're called to the table in front of me, please state your name and your title the first time that you speak so that we can accurately record in Hansard who we have before the committee today.

I'll now start with the official opposition through MPP Wong-Tam, when you're ready, please.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Welcome to you, Attorney General, as well as the associate minister and the entire complement of staff that you brought here to the committee, and thank you for your presentation.

Minister, I'm curious to know—I know that the percentage of individuals who are detained in the corrections facilities, detention centres, is still sitting at over 80%. They are on remand, legally innocent, waiting trial. That number has not moved in the nearly four years that I've been sitting and serving on this committee and in this Legislative Assembly.

I'm curious to know why we are not seeing any real progress in speeding up those trials, which as you know is critical to the long-term public safety of our province—as well, it undermines people's faith in the justice system.

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

Hon. Doug Downey: Thanks for the question. There are a couple of things happening at the same time. We are seeing record numbers of cases come in, but because we've built capacity, we're actually disposing of record numbers. In 2024, we disposed of 245,160 cases, which was the second-highest count ever on record. And then in 2025, it was a very close number, 245,012 cases, which is the third-highest count ever on record. Our clearance rate in 2023 was 104%, so doing more than we were doing intake. And this year to date—I won't read every year because I know you have more questions—we're over 100% by a hair.

We are, in fact, getting more through the courts, and there are a variety of reasons for that, but I won't take up all your time by running through them all.

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

New question, please.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: What we're seeing in the corrections system with respect to overcrowded jails, overcrowded detention centres, has worsened, and your government has now quietly removed the minimum standard for sleep area, which has now cleared the way for more triple bunking.

And because the percentage of those who are on remand/awaiting trial has not moved, is there anything else that your ministry can do to ensure that that number goes down so we can see quicker access to trials and access to justice in this province? Because it's been four long years, it hasn't changed. What else are you up to?

Hon. Doug Downey: It's making the system move faster but fairly. It's adding that capacity. It's those extra 52 judges. Some 98% of criminal matters go through the Ontario Court of Justice as opposed to the Superior Court, and that's where we're putting the investments of the extra judges, along with the extra staff—700 more FTEs. And that's already happening, it's already happened. Those are two parts.

The other part is legal aid, which I don't know if we'll get into questions on legal aid, but we have increased the threshold, virtually doubling it, for an individual with no family. And that's really important, to make sure that people have the resources they need when they do come in front of the courts.

We are, in fact, doing a number of things. I don't want to get out of my lane on the Solicitor General's matters, but I can tell you this: We are spending billions and billions of dollars building capacity in the remand, in the jail system, so things are, in fact, happening. We're seeing more cases through the system, and they're much more efficiently being done.

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

New question, please.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you, Minister, for your response. It's unfortunate, I think, and it's perplexing to many on why this investment is not actually moving the dial on better results for Ontario taxpayers.

I'm going to move on, just because I do have more questions, as you noted. On page 81 of the estimates briefing book, we see that the 2026-27 operating expenses for the Indigenous justice division funding is nearly \$1.6 million less than the previous year. Can you explain why that funding was cut, and what services were impacted?

Hon. Doug Downey: I'll start with: Numbers do get reallocated; there's not a cut in there. That's not the way to characterize it. But we are doing more in other parts of the ministry that directly affect the Indigenous population.

One example I will give is the Kenora justice centre. I think we've talked about justice centres before, but it is a resource and it is working and the numbers are stark. The recidivism rates are dropping in half for the population being served. Some of the resourcing is happening in that space.

There are other things that are happening that the Indigenous justice division is very much a part of, in making sure that services are provided from victim supports all the way through to hearing matters.

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

New question, please.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Minister, I'm sure you understand that the Indigenous justice division has a very specific focus on reducing the over-representation of Indigenous people in the justice system, as well as for victims and for offenders. Are you not concerned that this drop in funding will lead to worse outcomes and, more importantly, that will undermine that specific goal?

Hon. Doug Downey: I am not concerned about the excellent work that the Indigenous justice division is doing. Part of my goal with Indigenous justice is to do it in a smarter way.

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The best example I can give you are fly-in courts, that we are using technology to have remote hearings in those fly-in courts so that an individual doesn't have to get on a plane and travel to another community, be taken out of their community. I think I've said before at committee: What it looks like in practice when that happens is the accused, the

victim, maybe a witness and another will get on a little six-seater plane and have to fly together out of their community to another community to have a hearing. We've put in place all sorts of technology and processes to not make them have to leave their community. That's just doing justice smarter. Is it more expensive? No, it's not, actually. It saves money. I think we're being smarter about justice rather than putting money in something and pretending that it's getting something accomplished.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank—

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

New question, please.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank—

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: If I could just add onto that, I'm particularly interested—

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I will give—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Minister Tibollo, could you do that through me, please—

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: I'm sorry.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I will give you a question to—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): —before you respond. Thank you.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Sorry, Chair. I'd like to take my time back.

I have a question specifically about fly-in courts, so, Minister Tibollo, it might be appropriate for you to respond.

I'm just going to follow up on a question that was asked by MPP Sol Mamakwa last year regarding fly-in courts. It's an issue that I know the MPP has been very passionate about. He's raised it on several occasions. You will recall that there was a case regarding a 23-year-old by the name of Tyresse Roundsky who was fatally shot in the Wapekeka First Nation in a fly-in courtroom which was operating out of a youth centre because they do not have a permanent location for a court in the north. I think you would agree that it's so important that people in the north are safe in their communities and that they stay close to home as often as possible, yet community members and legal observers have reported that virtually nothing has changed since last year.

You can decide on who is going to answer this, Ministers: Because the people's time is limited and I do have more questions, can you concisely state why it's taken your ministry so long to make those real and lasting improvements in the courtrooms around safety for our fly-in communities in the north?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): To the question, Minister Downey.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'll start. Wapekeka was a tragic incident. I spoke to Grand Chief Fiddler, of course, and others around this immediately. We have, in fact, been putting in security and other safeguards, in coordination with the First Nations, to have those discussions, to find the right balance.

But as I was saying in my opening statement, the amount of security that we have invested in this province since 2018 is really quite a bit. It's record numbers. It's because the system was left. It was left. Nobody was investing in the system. Whether it was the Liberals or whether it was the NDP supporting the Liberals, nobody was paying attention.

All of a sudden, we're spending money and putting in magnetometers and wands and other security, and everybody wants to talk about it. So we are doing the work, and we are getting it done. We're doing it in First Nations, and we're doing it in courthouses across Ontario.

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

New question.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Yes, thank you. I appreciate that answer.

Minister, I'm going to stay on the issue around courtroom safety just for a little bit longer because I know it's an issue of significant concern, especially for our Ontario employees who work in those courtrooms.

In February, a prosecutor was attacked in a Peterborough courtroom. Her attacker lunged at her from the prisoner's box, which did not have plexiglass on the front. The prosecutor had personally raised this safety concern about the lack of Plexiglas for over a decade, and then she was attacked.

Minister, can you inform the committee and Ontario taxpayers if the prisoner's box has now been properly funded and equipped with Plexiglas? And has it now been taking place around the province? Are we seeing this in every courtroom?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Minister.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you for the question. I can't speak to specific incidents, but I will answer the question in a more general way if I can.

The standard for safety protocol has been reviewed in every courthouse, whether it be Plexiglas, whether it be anchors for shackles to keep the individual from coming over the bench if they happen to have shackles on. We've looked at everything. We've looked at entryways. We've looked at pathways. We've looked at judicial security. We've looked at staffing security. We're doing a top to bottom across the system. We're not waiting to take action; we are investing a lot of money and a lot of time into making sure those pieces are in place.

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

New question. You have four minutes left.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm just going to stay on this point for a little bit longer, just because I want to know if there's anybody in the ministry staff who can answer the question of whether or not the Peterborough courtroom, where you had a prosecutor who was physically attacked after 10 years of complaining that they needed Plexiglas in the prisoner's box—has it been installed now?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Minister.

Hon. Doug Downey: The answer is yes.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: And how long did it take?

Hon. Doug Downey: To install it?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Since the complaint; since the attack. Was it immediately after? Did it take an attack in order for the ministry to respond to that?

Hon. Doug Downey: I will tell you this: Every time there is an incident of any sort, our court services division is very responsive, and we always react immediately—always.

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

New question, please.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I am hoping that it doesn't take an attack or some serious injury in every courtroom until we see all the courtrooms properly attired with the investments to make them safe workplaces to be.

My question to you, Minister, is how many more courtrooms in Ontario are still without these essential safety measures? And if you cannot answer it here—I understand it's a lot to respond to—are you willing to provide this answer to me in writing? I want to see a capital list of deficiencies of what is needed in order for every courtroom to have their state of repair fully fulfilled.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: So security isn't just a list; it's an assessment in each area. It depends on the courthouse. It depends on what's happening in that space. It's not really a checklist of, "Here's all the courthouses. Here's all the courtrooms. Do they have this, this or this?" The assessment has to be done by the local police, whether it be OPP, North Bay, Toronto or whoever the local police are. They work with the ministry on the assessment. That security assessment is pretty pivotal to deciding what needs to happen in different spaces.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Have the assessments been completed?

Hon. Doug Downey: I would say that we are never done with security. We're always assessing and reassessing based on evolving facts.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Is it 50% complete? You know how many courtrooms there are. How many outstanding assessments?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: They've been assessed since the beginning of time with the police doing the assessments and making recommendations and otherwise to government. It's just unfortunate previous governments didn't do anything about it.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): New question. You have a little over a minute.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Minister, you've had eight years to address the lack of security, the building deficiencies in those courtrooms. That's eight years where we should have seen building assessments done. We should have seen a list that was provided to the people who use those courtrooms, and you should have allocated funding to it.

I'm disappointed that you cannot answer this question. I'm disappointed that you believe that you need to continue to review. We're looking for specifics, and, Minister, I was hoping you came prepared with more for this committee today.

Hon. Doug Downey: I understand that you would like me to give you a list of things that were assessed by the police. If the committee asked for something in that vein, then we'll consider it.

I can tell you that, just like personal safety, ongoing review is always important, depending on the context that you're in and the place that you're at and what is happening. So I actually find it odd that you think that safety is a one and done. It's an ongoing part of our culture to

make sure that our staff are safe and to make sure that our judicial partners are safe, and we'll continue doing that very important work.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, Minister. Your time has elapsed.

I'd like to move, please, to the third party with MPP Collard, s'il vous plaît.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you for being here today, Ministers, for our annual meeting on the main estimates. It's always a pleasure to go back and check about whatever improvements you might have been able to accomplish over the last year.

I will start with maybe a simple and easy question. It looks like there is a \$24-million increase for administration of justice. Can you tell the committee what taxpayers can be expecting as improvement as part of that additional money?

Hon. Doug Downey: Absolutely, and thank you for the question. Taxpayers can expect to see their system work more efficiently. We've created capacity both electronically, human resources—the FTEs; we've increased judges. Of course, with judges comes capital, and so we've had to add to that as well. Just by scale, 300 judges was the Ontario Justice complement and it's now 356. That's a significant increase in capacity, plus the FTEs that go into it.

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What they can see is things moving more efficiently, things moving in greater volume—I touched on some of the volume earlier. You can also see that we're doing things a little bit differently. Things like the justice centres, which are, again, dealing with individuals for what brought them there and not just what they did, are more resource-intensive, but they're better for the entire system because they allow somebody to off-ramp from coming in contact with justice again.

I'm sure you have more. I'll stop there.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: You did talk about efficiency, and part of that efficiency is reducing court delays. How is it—are you measuring that success in terms of reducing court delays?

Hon. Doug Downey: We can measure by the volume of cases that come through the system. Some of the early numbers—the disposition of cases is just a hair under 250,000 per year at this point. It's a very large number. In the past, it was not that high. Even though cases were coming in, they weren't coming out of the system, and the backlog was being created. Those are some of the numbers that I mentioned.

In 2023, we were clearing 104% of what was coming in. We're seeing the effect of those investments by making people get an answer to the question they're there for much earlier.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that answer. New question, please.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: In relation to court delays, we have to look at the time to schedule a trial. Do you have data as to how long it takes, on average, for criminal matters, civil matters, family matters to get a scheduled trial?

Hon. Doug Downey: We do have some data on that, of course. The MOU that we have with the judges—and there's an individual memorandum of understanding with each judge—is that we can collect data, but we can't release it without their consent. And so, there is data collection happening. Some of that I can share; some of it is more difficult to share.

But I can tell you that the time to trial, on average, has come down in the criminal sector. We know that because section 11(b) Jordan matters have dropped. So we know that that's happening, and we know our dispositions are up—our percentage of what's going out versus what's coming in.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that answer. New question, please.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I don't know if you'll have the answer to this, but you did mention that cases that had been thrown out based on the Jordan principle are something around 0.05%. Do you know how many of those cases would be in relation to sexual assault cases?

Hon. Doug Downey: I don't have that at my fingertips. I can tell you, in terms of prioritization of matters, sexual assaults are a high priority. One is too many, absolutely, and we are going to drive to zero.

We're also working with the federal government on the very issue of Jordan, and we have a recent decision from the Supreme Court on how to calculate time for Jordan. That will also help. But we're working with the federal government on potentially them bringing in legislation to actually help even more. We want the number to be zero.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: From the estimates, we can tell how much is being spent, but we don't really have information about whether the system has enough staff like court reporters, clerks, trial coordinators, interpreters and other professionals. How many court services positions are currently vacant across Ontario and what's the vacancy rate?

Hon. Doug Downey: I don't know if we have an answer on the vacancy rate from CSD, but I'll tell you, the magnitude of the enterprise—we have about 10,000 staff in the Ministry of the Attorney General, so we are constantly recruiting, constantly. We are finding that we're, in some areas—and I'll pick on Ottawa because that's the clearest. Because of competition for public jobs, it's sometimes difficult to fill all of those spots, because the federal government is looking at the same pool of people and so there is a dynamic there. In other areas, there is no concern with recruitment. But we are constantly recruiting at court services division level for everything from clerks to—just everything, just absolutely everything—counter clerks—

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I would like to ask the same question about the judiciary. Like, how many judges' positions do you have and how many judges' positions are currently vacant?

Hon. Doug Downey: Yes, so again, fairly constant recruitment, and you can see on the website some of the

positions that are open—so it is publicly available for many of them—due to illness, retirement and the additional that we've added. I can tell you, in sense of scale for turnover, in the seven years that I've been in this seat, I have appointed 181 judges. That's a lot; that's a lot of turnover, so we do constant recruitment.

The committee—we changed how the judicial advisory committee operates so that it's faster. They do interviews. If somebody is qualified, then they're in a pool. There was one example where an individual was elevated to the Superior Court and within a couple of weeks, we were able to go in the pool and fill the spot. So that is moving faster.

We are in—I shouldn't guess, but we're always in the 20-plus range to try and fill those spots. And if I can do a short advertisement, in the north, it's sometimes harder to find individuals, and it's just numbers. The bar of Timmins is about 45 people and they're not all practising criminal law or family law or even interested in being a judge, so it's that kind of thing.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for the answer. New question, please.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: So, linked to the shortage of staff, we have seen courtrooms unable to operate because there was just not enough staff. Do you know how many scheduled courtrooms were unable to operate because of that reason? Do you have that information or can you tell me which region was most affected by that type of closure?

Hon. Doug Downey: Yes, that perception isn't actually a reality today. That perception was rooted in when we first opened the Toronto courthouse, that billion-dollar state-of-the-art courthouse with 73 courtrooms. It's an incredible, incredible building, but it's like opening a new house; it's like moving into a new house. There were bumps and there were glitches, but that got solved almost immediately by reallocating staff from other places. And the electronic—the hybrid hearings and otherwise helped facilitate that. So we're just not having that issue.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Yes, so I'm trying to identify the reasons for the backlog. We looked at different things like positions and courtroom availability and all that. You're saying it's not that, so what is it that we need to address? If you're saying that we're able to have so many more hearings now, what's creating the delay in people getting their day in court?

Hon. Doug Downey: It's just the magnitude of the volume. We are now over 100% of what comes in goes out, so we are clearing more cases than we're bringing in. We're taking the backlog down. That just doesn't happen overnight; it's a consistent, focused effort that we've been doing.

It exists now because it existed before. It existed well before our government came in, but we got to work at it and we're chipping it down.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response. New question, please.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: What do you need to make a difference?

Hon. Doug Downey: One thing that would be very helpful to make a difference is to have more Superior Court judges.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: More judges.

Hon. Doug Downey: But I don't have any control over the Superior Court judges in terms of the allocation. What I have done in the Superior Court is added nine new associate judges, which sit in the Superior Court but we pay for them, as opposed to the Superior Court judges that are paid for by the federal government. So we're doing more than our part to try and create capacity there, but I need the federal government to add more judges to the system.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response. New question, please.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I will turn to victim services. I'm trying to understand what the \$27-million reduction looks like. The voted estimates show victim services decreasing by approximately \$12.7 million and victim/witness assistance decreasing by \$13.8 million. At the same time, almost \$59 million appears as a statutory transfer from the victim services fund. Can you explain what has changed in the funding model?

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Hon. Doug Downey: I'm happy to explain it, because I can understand it would be a little confusing. There has been no reduction across the system, but there has been a realignment of who does what.

We wanted the Ministry of the Attorney General to focus on victims and victim services that are courtroom-based or that directly connected to trials. The other victim services were transferred to MCCSS and to other places where it made more sense for them to be, because they already had existing programs or supports. So there was a reorganization of the victim services funding for some of that.

I have a quick note from MCCSS that they've invested \$1.4 billion over the duration of a plan to end gender-based violence. They were in a better position to do some of the work than we were. That's what you're seeing: the shifting between departments.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for the response.

New question, please.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Again with victim services: The estimates identified millions of dollars in transfer payments for victim services that include partner assault response programs, special victims' projects, the child victims' program and civil remedies grants. I think those are all under your purview.

I'm just wondering if it would be possible at all to supply the committee with a complete list of every community organization that is receiving funding from vote 306 in 2026-27, the program under which they receive money and the amount allocated to each organization. And maybe provide the comparable amounts to 2025-26, just to see if there have been reductions and what organizations are getting to deal with their mandate.

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

Hon. Doug Downey: So I don't know if you want to talk about PAR a little bit, in terms of what's happening there, but I'll start and just say: Some organizations will receive more, some will receive less, depending on what programs they're running and depending on their capacity. So where it's a transfer to a third-party agency, it often depends on what it is they're asking for and what it is they're planning to deliver.

The most important thing is to know that there has not been a net reduction in investments in this area. In fact, there's been an increase across all of our ministries to deal with human trafficking and gender-based violence and other matters.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response. New question, please.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I want to talk about the new cash bail rules. So the court has suspended the application of the bail rules—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Excuse me, Madame Collard, you have one minute and 15 seconds.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you for letting me know.

Just after two weeks, after the bill was enacted, do you know how many people whose bail had been stayed were in jail because they could not pay? Like how, during those two weeks, where the bail was in effect—before the court suspended them.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'll answer very succinctly: It's not how the system was set up and not how it works. They were released when a judge or a JP decides they should be released. Then they need to post their bail, and then we'll take action if they don't post it.

In no circumstance is somebody not released because they didn't post their bail. But I'm happy to talk more about how it's set up and how it mechanically works.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response. You have 23 seconds.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: That's okay. I'll come back next turn.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): To the government, please. MPP Ciriello.

MPP Monica Ciriello: Welcome to both the minister and the associate minister. Thank you so much for being here today—and the entire MAG team. You know, as the parliamentary assistant, it's truly a privilege to be able to serve in this ministry alongside all of you.

I hear the same thing, no matter where I go in the province: "Under your leadership, we are continuing to protect Ontario and make courts more efficient." On that same vein, our government, we know, is ensuring a fair and accessible justice system for all of the people in Ontario, and we want to maintain a world-class justice system. A part of that is a review of the civil rules. It's an important part to ensure that we maintain that world-class justice system, and I think we can all agree: The more efficient the courts are, the better it is for those that rely on it.

My question is focused on the Civil Rules Review and the work done to date. Ontario's civil justice system plays an important role in protecting rights, resolving disputes and providing the certainty that people and businesses

depend on. However, many of Ontario's civil court rules were designed for a different era—I think it was mentioned about 40 years ago. Over time, processes have become increasingly complex, costly and time-consuming for the people who consistently rely on them.

That's why, in 2024, you led the charge with the Chief Justice of the Superior Court of Justice and launched the Civil Rules Review, which represents the most comprehensive, extensive review of the civil procedure in over a generation. Through extensive consultation with the legal community and justice partners, the review has looked at opportunities to simplify court processes, reduce unnecessary complexity and make the civil justice system more accessible.

We know that a modern and efficient civil justice system is not only important for access to justice, but it also supports confidence in our institutions and Ontario's economic competitiveness.

Can you share with the committee about the progress that has been made for the Civil Rules Review and how this work will help make Ontario's civil justice system faster and more affordable for the people and businesses who rely on it?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: Yes, thank you for that question.

I may share a comment. Minister Tibollo may or may not want to wade in. He has direct experience in litigation in the civil world.

This started because it had to start. I'll tell you, one of the marks of success is that the trial lawyers association and the plaintiff personal injury bar got together with the defence bar and personal injury bar and put in a joint submission. That's how much we're collaborating and bringing people together to try and figure out how to make the system run better and more efficiently. Quite frankly, you talk about delay and how we're crunching through that in the criminal space—the civil space needs help, and we're giving it that help.

Chief Justice Morawetz, when he first was appointed Chief Justice, he had two things on his docket that he wanted to do: one was modernization and the other was in this space—the civil rules stuff—and we got into both of them.

The civil rules are way too complicated. Lawyers—experienced lawyers—struggle to understand whether it's this route or that route, and there are just so many facets to it. So the consultation went out; it came back; we got it in December. I have to thank all the people that put so much work into it. We've been working since January. Because we were a little quieter in January, I spent several hours on Teams calls crunching through, putting things into an order, into different buckets.

I hope that you will hear more about bucket number one that is coming forward this fall to start the journey of implementation, and it's going to be super exciting.

I don't know, Minister Tibollo, you want to—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Associate Minister, please. Thank you. To the question.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: The work is incredibly important from so many standpoints, but from an economic standpoint—from businesses, especially foreign businesses that are coming here looking to see whether it's a place they want to invest in, they want to know they can get timely justice. They want to know that they can get a fast hearing, an affordable hearing, especially when they're selling products into the jurisdiction and they get pulled into a system that they don't understand. And again, the complexity of the system makes it hard for them to actually be able to feel the confidence they need to want to invest.

So the work that's being done is critical to building that stronger economy and ensuring that people have access to justice, whether it's them or someone that is looking for a time in court and being able to access it at a reasonable cost, given the fact that the complexity makes it that much more expensive. So it's great work in bringing us to an important conclusion.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response.

New question, please. MPP Allsopp, when you're ready, sir.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Chair, through you, good afternoon, Attorney General, Associate Attorney General, Deputy Attorney General and assistant Deputy Attorneys General. Glad that all of you are here today to answer these questions.

My first question refers to some of the international discussions that you've been engaged in, Minister. As you know, our government is continuing to build on a plan to modernize justice services, increase access to justice and keep communities safe.

For those who don't know, your experience working in Ontario's courtrooms before elected life gives you a unique perspective and understanding of how the system works. As a former court registrar, you carry the instinct needed to deliver on that bold modernization plan. That is why your international justice mission to Singapore and to Vietnam was so important. We need to harness the good ideas and modern solutions, and continue to deliver the changes and reforms that serve to benefit the people who access justice and those who deliver those services across the system.

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At the same time, Ontario is committed to strengthening relationships around the globe. In the face of US tariffs and Donald Trump's unilateral attacks on our sovereignty, we need to stand up and strengthen the partnerships we can depend on and build new ones where they may exist. This is fundamental to strengthening the conditions for businesses to grow and create jobs, support economic growth, and build a stronger and more resilient economy for the future.

Minister, can you please share an update on the exchanges with international leaders and key take-aways from your recent justice mission to the Indo-Pacific, and discuss with the committee how Ontario's presence overseas underscores our ongoing work to modernize the justice system and to protect Ontario?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): To the question, please, sir.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you for that question. Usually, the first question is, “Why those places? Why would you go there of all places?” The answer is because they came here.

Vietnam has been here more than once to look at our system to see how we’re doing things. They’re moving into what they call the new era, and their growth is at the 8% to 9% per year, where ours in Canada runs much lower than that. They’re trying to modernize and are modernizing in a variety of ways. So they were here to see what we were doing. That was not the primary purpose of the trip, the Vietnam part, but it was right next door to where the primary purpose was.

Singapore was here in March. Singapore came here because they are very advanced in a lot of their systems, but they’re actually near the end of life of a core part of their court systems. They came here to see what we did with court digital transformation, which I referenced launched last October.

I just want to explain what that is. Because we have the Ontario Court of Justice and the Superior Court of Justice, the division of powers—section 91 and 92 in the Constitution—dictates what goes where. What was happening, say, in family law at the Ontario Court—it had a different back-office system. This is all nerdy tech stuff. It had a different back-office system than the family law at the Superior Court, and same with criminal and same with other stuff. So we were running six or seven different back-office systems. It was partly because of personalities and partly because of history that that just never got addressed—very inefficient for our system. We had to have tech people know every system.

That’s why we launched CDT. The Premier, Minister Mulroney at the time and Minister Bethlenfalvy all saw the wisdom and the vision in this, and we received approval for \$166 million to launch the courts digital transformation which collapsed those six to seven systems into one. That’s what got launched, is the one.

Singapore saw this. They came over. They wanted to adopt best practices, and we struck up a good relationship. And then they hold an Indo-Pacific law tech conference. They asked me to come over and talk about it, and I ended up on a panel with Chinese court administrators. I talked to the head of IT in Russia. I was on the panel with somebody from New Zealand—very different experiences.

In addition to the panel and what I talked about and shared and talked with the others about, we had about 20 separate one-on-one meetings, individual meetings with different parts of the of the sector. The vice chief justice in Vietnam and Sarah Sackman happened to be there. Minister Sackman—who has been over to our jurisdiction before; she’s in England—and I were asked to present at a British committee similar to this but in the justice committee in Britain, so I had done that remotely.

We’re working with our international partners to learn more, do things better, and I do have a number of take-aways in terms of how they’re approaching it. It doesn’t scale directly across. We have different governments, we have

different backgrounds, different realities, but the thinking and the process make you stop and say, “Why are we doing it this way and what are we missing out on?” I could spend the entire committee time talking about what people are doing around the world as it relates to AI, what they’re not doing and where the human is in the loop. It’s really an important conversation to be having. I would not have been tuned into it except for those conversations in Singapore and in Vietnam.

That’s part of what we’re doing. People are coming here and the justice centre is seeing people from all over the world and our other provinces. The Chief Justice of Newfoundland and the Attorney General of Newfoundland came specifically to see what we’re doing in that space.

I’ll stop there, but there’s lots going on well beyond our borders. It’s not all just giving; we’re taking ideas as well.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you, sir.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Government members, you have three minutes and 53 seconds left for questions. I have MPP Darouze, please.

MPP George Darouze: Thank you, Chair, and through you, I want to thank you very much for being here this afternoon, Minister, and, of course, the associate minister, deputy minister and the whole MAG team.

Since day one, our government has been clear—your visit to Ottawa with our stakeholders, our officials, and you heard also from Chief Stubbs many times—that the people of Ontario deserve to feel safe in their neighbourhoods, at work and in their communities.

For years, our government has led the charge in calling on the federal government to deliver meaningful Criminal Code and bail reform to ensure violent and repeat offenders are held accountable for their actions and keep communities safe across the province and the nation.

At the same time, our government has made significant changes and delivered key reforms to strengthen the justice system. But we can’t do it alone. As Attorney General, the advocacy and steps our government has taken to pressure the federal government to do the right thing and deliver meaningful change finally came to pass.

This past summer, it was great to see you stand with the federal government and mark royal assent of Bill C-14, long-overdue legislation and Criminal Code and bail reform that underscores many of our thoughts on crime proposals, including reverse onus bail for serious offences and consecutive sentencing.

At the same time, we continue to take action, and under Premier Ford, we are already building a strong, more responsive system with real consequences.

Minister, can you tell us more about how our government is continuing to hold the federal government accountable and what measures the province is doing to protect Ontario?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Attorney General, you have one minute and 50 seconds, sir.

Hon. Doug Downey: I will simply start by saying that it starts at the top. The Premier is very clearly dedicated to reform at the federal level, and we’re supporting that by having constant conversations at every level. Whether it be

me directly with Minister Fraser, the Deputy Attorney General with his counterpart, we have constant and productive conversations.

I was happy to see Bill C-14 come forward as a start. We think more needs to be done. We're having those conversations, and of course, the Premier is reinforcing that on his level. So it's an all-team approach to making sure that we're going to have positive change, and I'm glad to see some of it happening.

We're doing what we can in our space. We've already done the intensive bail and review teams and other stuff that I touched on. So when you heard the federal government say, "We'll do our part, but you have to do your part," my response was, "We've done our part; we're waiting for you to catch up." That is exactly what's happening, and they're now hearing from stakeholders, police and others that we had been hearing from for some time, so I'm optimistic.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response.

We're back to the official opposition with MPP Wong-Tam, please, for your questions.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much, Chair, and through you, I'm coming back to my previous questions regarding court construction and the capital backlog to make those courtrooms safe.

Minister, I just want to get some confirmation, because there was a contradiction between what you said and what's in the estimates book, which shows that we're seeing a decrease of at least \$1.7 million of expected expenditures with respect to court construction. Because you were not able to provide a detailed list today of what that backlog is—that's perfectly okay, but I want a confirmation from you, Minister, that you would be able to provide in writing to this committee a detailed list of the capital improvements needed to make Ontario courtrooms safe, including information about whether or not it's funded and the expected timeline on construction.

If you can make a commitment to the Chair today, then I would be satisfied with that answer, that we'll see that list coming forward.

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

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm sure the committee will consider whether it wants for the materials or not, and we'll respond accordingly. But the amount of money that we're putting into court capacity, physical court capacity, is at high, high, high levels.

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I can tell you, when I came into this, Chair, in 2019, the Brampton courthouse, for instance, had been announced by the previous Liberals. They had said that they did the courthouse; they, in fact, only finished half the courthouse. The other half was not only not done, but they had not allocated any money for it.

We've finished it. It's long done. We are reviewing—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Excuse me, Minister. MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much, Minister. I'm hoping to take back my time. I just needed a yes-or-no answer on whether or not you can provide that list.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): I'll need a new question. I will grant the time, but new question, please.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Sure. I'm hoping to get that answer for my previous question.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Minister, on page 141 of the estimates briefing book, as noted previously, there's a significant decrease of funding to both victims' services and victim witness assistance: a \$12.7-million decrease for victims' services, which represents a 39% cut; a \$13.8-million decrease as well as in victim witness assistance, which represents a 41% cut.

Minister, you have explained that this is a sort of inter-governmental transfer to MCCSS, that they are now responsible for those programs which have traditionally resided in the courts and the legal system.

Minister, I'm sure you know that stakeholders will find it problematic and challenging to deal with two ministries. Can you tell the committee who made that decision, and why you believe there are benefits to that?

Hon. Doug Downey: I've brought in an expert to talk about the accounting because your premise is incorrect, but I will tell you this: I agree that it's cumbersome for an organization to have to deal with more than one ministry. That's why we did the transfers.

But I'll turn it over to the person who has a substantive answer on the accounting.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): For the record, could you introduce yourself, please. Thank you.

Ms. Erika Cotter: Hi. My name is Erika Cotter. I am the CAO and ADM for the corporate services division in MAG. I'm also a CPA by trade.

I just want to clarify a little bit, in addition to what the minister spoke about, about some of the programs that were transferred.

One of the things that is impacting the numbers that you're seeing this year is actually related to a technical accounting change. For the Canadian generally accepted accounting principles, there was a requirement to change what we have in place for the Victims' Justice Fund, which funds many of the programs. The two service lines that you've spoken to are now being treated as designated purpose accounts. These used to be treated as special purpose accounts. Per the rules, this had to be restated in this fiscal year, so you'll see that change in the public accounts as well as in the estimates going forward.

It changes how we actually recognize the revenue. This is basically because of how the restrictions on those funds are. As you know, the Victims' Justice Fund is dually funded by both federal legislation and provincial legislation. The items that are provincially legislated are considered to be internally restricted and need to be accounted for differently under the Canadian GAAP rules. So while it presents differently in the books, there's no change to the actual funding. That's why you see a reduction into the

lines, but a separate line now shows that surplus because we're now showing it as a change in the net assets, because we're showing that we're holding that money as opposed to it being deferred for financial purposes.

I hope that clarifies that a little bit—or maybe it over-complicates it—but it is a very technical piece.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response. To the question, please.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you for the reply. I recognize that there are some accounting variances and programmatic changes you're trying to sort of sit within.

But what I'm interested in is understanding the impact to the front-line workers who will now have to deal with two ministries. You know that victims' services had traditionally been sitting and housed in MAG. Those workers work closely with prosecuting attorneys. They work closely with those who are in the pipeline—hopefully not seeing disruptions to court supports. We are already hearing complaints from victims and witnesses that it's very difficult to access the service. It is not easy as it is right now. MAG is deeply entrenched within the statutory rights under the frameworks of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights, whereas MCCSS is not. And so, there is concern within the sector that this is going to create additional bureaucracy, it's going to alienate those who need that service as quickly as possible without waiting and lag behind more paperwork.

Was there any consideration to the client experience before making this change? If so, what did you do to make sure that the transition was going to be smooth for them?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Attorney General, to the question, please.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm happy to pass it to the expert first, and then I may make a comment.

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

Ms. Erika Cotter: In relation to the victims' services programs that you're speaking about, like the victim service assistance program and the Victim/Witness Assistance Program, there have been no changes to those programs. Those remain with MAG, and they have actually received additional full-time equivalent staff throughout the past year that we've actually internally pressure-managed to provide additional services through the ministry. We've actually increased services.

Some of the programs that have been transferred over are more aligned with the services of MCCSS as opposed to the ones where, as you speak, they work very closely with the prosecutors and the teams in supporting those victims and witnesses. We've actually increased our contribution to those programs, and there's been no decrease in services.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm assuming that consultations were done with the sector before these changes were made?

Ms. Erika Cotter: Yes.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Okay. Thank you. That was a really helpful explanation.

I'm just going to move on. With respect to the Landlord and Tenant Board: Minister, last year at estimates before this committee, you informed our committee that the current

backlog of cases at the Landlord and Tenant Board at that time was 35,800 and that your goal was to get a balance backlog of 30,000 cases by the end of the fiscal year.

What is the current backlog at the LTB, and have you been able to reduce it to the 30,000 balance backlog as you say is the ideal?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you for the question. It is below 35,000; it is not at 30,000. I don't have the number top of mind, but it's in the middle.

But what we have done is we're processing more cases, and this is the same challenge you heard about in the criminal system. We have record numbers of applications, but we also have record numbers of dispositions. So while we're dealing with record numbers of intake, we are still grinding down backlog.

I'll stop there. I think that was your question.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: So, Minister, because there hasn't been significant improvement to the case backlog, you have not reached that balance backlog of 30,000. What would it take?

Hon. Doug Downey: The complexity of cases is a challenge. We have added more adjudicators. We started with 40. As of today, I think we're sitting at 85, 84—in that range. We've more than doubled the number of adjudicators, so that's definitely helped.

What would it take if we would go back to what was traditionally normal intake? It would be much simpler. It used to be 80% of the cases were nonpayment of rent, and now it's about 50% that are strictly nonpayment of rent, with other things attached. So the cases are more complex.

What will it take? There are new rules that came into effect September 21. I think that will help as well.

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

New question. You have four minutes left for questions.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Through you, Chair: Minister, since you were talking about those new rules and specifically government Bill 60, Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act—the Landlord and Tenant Board has made several changes now to this process. Do you have a sense at this time of how those changes under Bill 60 have affected the LTB backlog? And is your ministry expending any additional funds to address it?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): To the question, sir.

Hon. Doug Downey: I think there are two parts there. The first part I understand. The second part you may have to clarify.

The first part is, is it having any effect? It came in on September 21, so we're merely a couple of weeks past some of those changes.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): For the clarification, please.

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Hon. Doug Downey: And then the clarification is—you said, are we spending more money, or more resources—or something?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Well, I mean, yes. Will you be sending more resources? You would have known when you drafted the bill, when the government tabled the bill,

when we debated the bill, what anticipated changes you would have had. Is it starting to meet those expectations?

Hon. Doug Downey: Most of the rules that were in that Bill 60 that are now in effect were not resource-intensive rules. They were changes to process, so they won't have an impact on the need for an investment in some physical thing or more bodies or anything like that. It was just changing some of the rules on how the system functions to make it more efficient, to let people get to the hearings faster and get decisions out faster.

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

New question, please.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Chair, through you again: Minister, on page 10 of the briefing book, it states that your ministry "is closely monitoring the progress of criminal cases in Ontario courts to ensure that they proceed through the system efficiently."

In 2025, Minister, sexual assault cases had the second-highest average number of days to resolution in Ontario, and that was 352 days. The only category of longer delays was other sexual offences, at 374 days. There have now been 1,639 sexual assault cases that did not make it through to trial in 2025.

Are you able to explain to Ontario taxpayers, to members of this committee, how many of those sexual assault cases, sexual offences, didn't make it to trial due to the inefficiencies in the court system?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: I think MPP Collard asked a similar question in terms of the sexual assault matters. So what I will tell you is, in sexual assaults, there are different rules than there are for other criminal matters. The guidance comes from the Supreme Court on how something progresses, and it's targeted at victims and supporting victims and whatnot.

We are talking with other jurisdictions. I was talking with some from Quebec, not that long ago—not the politicians, but some people in the system. And we're talking to other jurisdictions, because those rules apply to all of us. It is needing more time than an equivalent case that is not a sexual assault. So we're having those discussions about efficiency, but it is highly prioritized to make sure that we're not hitting the Jordan wall. And we'll keep on that until we're at zero.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): New question. You have 40 seconds.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Minister, I didn't quite get a response in your reply. Really, what we're trying to get at is how to improve the system for survivors of sexual violence and other offences.

Earlier this year, your government had voted down Lydia's Law, which would have required the ministry to meaningfully track delays, stays and withdrawals in Ontario's court system. This is something that survivors, their advocates and lawyers have been calling for. It would have helped you answer my question if that law was in place today, because you would then be tracking it differently and recording it differently, and there'd be a different level of

public accountability, and it would help Ontario understand the problem. Can you—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you. That concludes the time for the official opposition.

I'd like to move, please, to the third party. MPP Collard, s'il vous plaît.

Mme Lucille Collard: I'll move to a subject that I am particularly affectionate for, and that's talking about French-language services with the court system.

Minister, last year, I raised concerns about the quality of French-language interpretation during virtual hearings, particularly at the Landlord and Tenant Board. I don't know if you remember our conversation, but I brought forward the experience of a lawyer representing a francophone client who described a process where participants had to speak in short segments then stop, wait for interpretation and then continue. His concern was that the process was cumbersome and did not provide francophone litigants with an experience equivalent to that available to anglophones.

So I would like, a year later, to follow up on that, because ultimately the question is not simply whether interpretation is technically available; the question is whether a francophone appearing before an Ontario court or tribunal receives the same quality of access to justice as an anglophone.

I'll start with asking what action has your ministry taken since these concerns were raised to improve the quality of interpretation in virtual proceedings for francophone litigants? Because I know you said you modernized and improved the systems in our court system. So has this problem been addressed?

Hon. Doug Downey: Again, it's an ongoing challenge to recruit and have adjudicators who can operate seamlessly, but we do have a good number of adjudicators, and we cross-appoint them. If they have language skills, we will cross-appoint them to more than one tribunal so that that proficiency is available.

In addition to that, I think I mentioned last year—I don't remember, but I do remember you asking this last year. In evaluating somebody's French, we have a third party do the evaluation so that it's not just a "What do I think?" as the person doing the interview. I don't do the interviews, but you know what I mean. That was happening at the judicial appointments committee, where it was relying on somebody on the committee who spoke French to do the evaluation. We've now instituted a third party on that.

I had been approached after you asked me that question by somebody who said, "I've been through the test, and it's not tailored enough to the adjudication space. It is a French competency, but you could do better." So we've gone back both for the JP committee and the other committees to make sure that we're having the right tests for the right people so that we get them—once they come in and they're deemed proficient, that they actually, in fact, are for that role. That has changed in the last year.

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

New question, please.

Mme Lucille Collard: You actually partially answered one of my later questions, but I was talking specifically about

interpretation services when you don't have a judge that's able to speak French. More specifically, do you have simultaneous interpretation now available for all French-language or bilingual virtual hearings before Ontario courts and tribunals? Because we know we don't have the capacity in terms of judges to be able to try those cases in French.

Hon. Doug Downey: Okay, sorry. I didn't answer your first question properly, then, because you were talking about interpretation, not adjudication.

Interpretation services largely are third party. We bring them in as needed on any number of languages. Obviously, French is a primary. We continuously monitor who is available for that and whether they're competent or not with the third-party services.

I haven't heard anything since last year—you raising that—from others, and I have talked to tribunals about it. I have talked to Justice Rouleau. I have a French advisory committee. Some of the members on the committee are tribunal members, so there is a discussion that happens in that space as well. I haven't received fresh complaints in that space, but if there are some, definitely, we want to hear it.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Okay, does that mean—because I was going to ask you, do you measure whether francophone litigants experience additional delays, longer hearings or adjournments because French-language interpretation is required? You don't track this?

Hon. Doug Downey: I don't know that we do that as a metric for the French language, in particular, but we deal with, as you can well imagine, many, many languages and interpretation services.

You don't need an interpreter, but when I was in Vietnam, we had an interpreter. It slows down the conversation by the nature of what it is. I ended up doing three different kinds. There was one that was real-time in my ear. There was one where the other person spoke and then they gave it to me. There's different ways of doing it.

It does slow down when you have to have an interpreter, for sure, but I don't know that we measure that in particular for French as opposed to any other language.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: All right. Well, French is not any other language. French is—

Hon. Doug Downey: No, no. I say “or any other language.”

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Well, we do interpretation here in committee rooms. We had an entire hearing on main estimates for francophone affairs yesterday all in French. Interpretation was provided, and it was quite efficient. I think some members—MPP Gualtieri used it. Some other members were able to speak French, but I think it was pretty efficient, and they were able to follow the questions and the responses in a timely manner.

So did you invest in any kind of interpretation services for francophones across the court system?

Hon. Doug Downey: If you're asking if we've invested in new—

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Yes, money.

Hon. Doug Downey: New, I'm not aware of, but the existing, we continue to provide.

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M^{me} Lucille Collard: Right. Because the existing one, as I mentioned, doesn't work because it's an interpretation where the person has to speak, say a short sentence, stop, wait for the person to translate and then continue. It's just very inefficient.

Okay, it doesn't sound like it's been addressed in a meaningful way. And since you're not tracking whether francophone rights are affected by the lack of availability of French-language services, we'll have to look at it in a different way.

Just moving on with access to justice in French, your ministry has missed its own target for bilingual staff three years in a row. Are you working on meeting that target, which was supposed to be at 65%? You're still not meeting that, I believe.

Hon. Doug Downey: It absolutely remains a priority. I do want to address a bit from the last question, though, because I want to clarify if I can. You're saying that we need simultaneous translation as opposed to translation services? I just want to capture that that is what you're talking about. It's not that we don't provide the service; your suggestion is we're providing the wrong service.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Right. Yes.

Hon. Doug Downey: Okay, thank you.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: You said that you're still trying to reach the target of 65% of designated bilingual positions. How far are you from that this year?

Hon. Doug Downey: It remains a priority. I don't have a current number for that. I don't know if you're working off something from the estimates that gives you a baseline.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Yes, it seems that it's still at 60%, so we're 5% shy from your target—which is not very ambitious, I will say.

Okay, I want to move to the capacity of judges. According to the JAAC annual report, in 2024-25, there were 60 applicants that met the highest standards for French. I'm wondering why you're not appointing more French-speaking judges.

Hon. Doug Downey: Those numbers may—and I would have to cross-check this—an individual who applies to four different spaces may show up as four, as an individual. Again, the numbers that you get in the annual report sometimes double count. And part of the reason that that happens, or that you can't tease that out, is because we don't know who they are. I don't know who they are. I can't cross-reference whether it's an individual or whether it's four different people, in terms of how that happens.

But your question is why do we not have more French on the bench?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Yes.

Hon. Doug Downey: We do the evaluation. What you're looking at, I think, are the are the applicants. Is that—

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Yes. There were 84 applicants that indicated an ability to conduct a trial and write a judgment in the French language. Of these, 60 applicants were

assessed as meeting the superior level of French proficiency by testing that was done within the five-year validity period for the proficiency test.

It looks like we do have applicants that meet the language requirements, yet we don't see enough of those on the bench. Why is this?

Hon. Doug Downey: The reason is because they do the French proficiency before they—as they apply, they have to put the certificate in that they're proficient. If they're not recommended, I don't even know they applied. The number that come through as recommended, that's the number that we need to cross-reference with French proficiency.

But I can tell you, when I'm looking at applications, and there are some locations—the Chief Justice decides if a particular opening is for bilingual, bilingual-preferred or just “no commentary.” I can tell you I've appointed people who are bilingual—and that's a tipping point for me—to a space that doesn't require it, because the more we can do, the better. But I need them to pick from, and I suspect that that may be part of the challenge.

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

Mme Lucille Collard: I think that with Bill 10, you're getting a bigger list of people that may be recommended. You see that list of applicants that are recommended, so you would know how many of those are francophone or have bilingual capacity. We know that even in designated regions, such as Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, we still don't have enough judiciary capacity to address the French-language requirement. Are you paying attention to that list that you're getting to make sure that you're trying to appoint francophones or bilingual people where it's needed?

Hon. Doug Downey: Absolutely, I am. Part of our challenge is some of the areas—and again, I mentioned Timmins earlier. I do have a list of how big the bar is in different areas. And so, we're trying to drill down, and the Chief Justice is similarly concerned—I don't know if you know Associate Chief Justice LeRoy, as well—for both the JP bench and for the judge bench, to encourage people to apply. We're really being proactive about it and we're prioritizing areas like that.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): New question. And you have two minutes and 59 seconds left.

Mme Lucille Collard: Just quickly then, talking about the French capacity of justices of the peace, information on the French-language abilities of new judges is published every year, but not for justices of the peace. Is that something that you could consider doing? Because a lot of the justices of the peace preside over bail hearings and provincial offences, so it would be useful for francophones to know if we have francophone justices of the peace.

Hon. Doug Downey: I will take that to the chair of the JPAAC committee to talk about the annual report and what's in it and what's not. We'll note that.

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

Mme Lucille Collard: I'm just going to turn to human trafficking, because of my Bill 41 that will now be included in Bill 119, which, as you know, is very important legis-

lation, and I've been talking to you a lot about this. I've been waiting three years for the implementation of those measures that survivors have been waiting for. They were so hopeful and are still waiting.

So I'm just wondering, now that the government has chosen to incorporate those measures in a government bill, what funding has your ministry allocated in these estimates specifically to implement those measures?

Hon. Doug Downey: It's part of our overall funding in that space. I want to thank you for your collaboration and leadership on this piece. Bill 41 is a very important bill that we, of course, rolled into another bill, and it will be very effective.

In terms of resources, we're not treating it as a separate bucket per se, but we're making sure it has the resources to be effective. Some of it is rule changes, as you know, and some of it is going to take an adjudicator to look at things. We'll make sure that that is resourced. But it's not a sort of separate agency that is doing the work, so it's not a line item to transfer X amount of money into that project, if I can put it that way.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response. There are 34 seconds.

Mme Lucille Collard: Just quickly—I'm hoping you're going to collaborate with Minister Kerzner because that's under his bill. And who's going to be responsible for implementation? Is that going to be your ministry or his?

Hon. Doug Downey: It crosses boundaries, but we're taking the leadership role through MAG.

Mme Lucille Collard: Okay, so I can bug both of you then.

Hon. Doug Downey: You can keep bugging me.

Mme Lucille Collard: Okay. Thank you.

Le Président (M. Lorne Coe): Merci beaucoup.

Mme Lucille Collard: Thank you. C'est tout.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Gualtieri, please, to your question.

MPP Silvia Gualtieri: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for the presentation, to the minister, the associate minister and the deputy minister, along with your capable staff. It's always a pleasure to interact with my friends and colleagues from the office of the Attorney General.

Minister, our government has been clear that proceeds from unlawful activity should not be allowed to benefit those responsible. Where possible, those resources should be redirected to help protect communities, prevent victimization and support the people affected by crime. That is exactly what the Ontario Civil Remedies Grant Program does. Cash and proceeds seized from unlawful activity, through civil forfeiture, are reinvested into projects that fight crime, strengthen public safety and provide supports for victims across the province.

From 2026 to 2028, Ontario is reinvesting \$5 million to support 27 not-for-profit organizations, law enforcement agencies and Indigenous communities and organizations. These investments are helping organizations address priorities including human trafficking; intimate partner and family violence; gun and gang violence; hate crimes; and victimization affecting children, youth and other vulnerable communities. It is a practical approach to

public safety, taking resources connected to unlawful activity and putting them back to work in communities, supporting victims, helping prevent crime before it happens and strengthening the organizations working every day to keep people safe.

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Minister, can you tell the committee more about how the 2026 to 2028 Civil Remedies Grant Program is turning proceeds from unlawful activity into meaningful investments that support victims, fight crime and help protect communities across Ontario?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Attorney General, please.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you so much for the question.

This is a really, really important area, when we have proceeds of crime and we can put them back into the community to help people. I was in Ottawa with MPP Darouze for one of the announcements, and both organizations that received money were—I can't even say how thankful they were to have the resources to do what they do. And they were protecting victims; they're both social service agencies. One was a non-profit—I think, MPP Darouze—dealing with women in precarious situations. It allowed capacity building for them. What better can you do with proceeds of crime? You take this money or these assets—and it can be assets; it can be luxury purses; it can be all these things that show up when you go down this road—and turn that back into the community to let people build capacity and help people who are victims.

It's not a direct line from the proceeds and the victim. It's not a direct piece. It's also not a situation where they're seized by the police and the police get to use that to go buy a boat or something. It's adjudicated through an independent group, application-based, from communities. So the people will make applications—these two organizations in Ottawa did just that—with criteria. They are scored, and then they are awarded some of the money. So that's how it works.

The proceeds of crime—I think people think about it differently. Because you see stuff on TV that's sort of—they seize the money, and then the same people turn and use it. That's not how it works. It flows through to organizations that have to apply and actually have checked off the boxes to make sure that it's credible.

MPP Silvia Gualtieri: Thank you.

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

MPP Ciriello.

MPP Monica Ciriello: Focusing a little bit more on victims, we know that support for victims is one of the most pressing concerns for residents in our communities across Ontario. I know it's something that's really important in my home riding of Hamilton Mountain. They want to know that we're standing up for victims and that we are doing so across the province.

I know that our government has taken crucial steps to help prevent and address gender-based violence, deliver supports for survivors and hold offenders accountable. Last year alone, we invested \$5.6 million in the Child Victim/Witness Program and another \$750,000 in the Independent Legal Advice for Survivors of Sexual Assault

Program. These investments are directly helping survivors navigate the justice system at every stage when they need it the most.

Can you expand on these important investments as well as the programs?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Attorney General, to the question, please.

Hon. Doug Downey: Yes, thank you for that.

I'm going to start with the victim/witness piece because it touches on a very vulnerable part of our society, and I was involved in this area before I was elected. We have victim/witness programs across Ontario. They provide service for young people who are either being witnesses or they're victims.

It's generally a physical space that is not a police station to go give their statement. If I can sort of walk you through what you would see: you walk in the front door—the one in Barrie; the headquarters is Orillia—and there's often a COPE service dog. And the one thing I found fascinating when I first started to learn this area: If you walk into a room and there's a dog lying down, your blood pressure comes down because you perceive that there isn't imminent danger. So they have service dogs—and Boost in Toronto, similarly, they have their service dogs. The child will come in. A police officer may come in to take a statement but dressed in maybe jeans and a T-shirt to take down the temperature a little bit. There are witness rooms where they can take the statement and it can be filmed or viewed. It's just a much more appropriate space for them to do the work they do, and it's really incredible work that they do.

When the idea was launched by the federal government many years ago—Peter MacKay launched several of them—sometimes, they were given with only three years of money. That's a shame. They would just get up and running, and—but the idea was, the community would then support it. That is what's happened. The communities have supported them in their different spaces, whether it be London or Guelph or otherwise.

We saw an opportunity to support them directly, because some of them—I'd rather them spending time with the children and spending time on services and less time on fundraising. We had an opportunity to do that, and so we did do that. It remains a sustainability challenge for some of them, but they do amazing work—just incredible, incredible work.

Victims' services writ large—I want to use this as a commercial, if I can. The Victim Services Awards of Distinction—if you haven't received it, you will be receiving it very soon. Every MPP receives it. It says, "Please send us applications to be considered," and a committee evaluates them. We've given out, over the last several years, 109 recognitions of excellence for either individuals or organizations across the province.

For those of you that have been involved—and several of us in here have; I think MPP Wong-Tam and MPP Collard have as well—we do an online ceremony because then we're not wasting non-profit resources travelling to Toronto for something. It's really a lot of fun to hear people's stories and celebrate them among their colleagues.

So that's my plug. It's coming soon. Please reach out and have organizations and individuals recognized for the awesome work they do.

Victims' services as a delivery service: You've mentioned a couple of really important ones. In times of crisis, legal services—the ability to not have to think about, “How am I going to pay for this advice? But I need the advice,” is just critical. That is working. And like I said in my opening, we've doubled the amount of hours from four to eight. We were finding four was just not enough. People are in crisis and they need the help, so we're providing that help.

Victims' services across our government—as you well know, when you talk about anti-human trafficking and our strategy, it reaches many departments. We're just one piece of that puzzle. It can be health care, it can be the MCCSS, it can be SOLGEN—it's us and several others.

Our strategy of \$345 million over five years is an addition, and so our total is \$650 million over 10 years. That's our commitment across our different sectors. You'll see some of that in my estimates, you'll see some of that in others, but it's one effort. We're just making sure the system works in concert and that each part of it is resourced.

There's just so much to do in that space. We can talk about intimate images, we can talk about all this other stuff, but it's an area of great need, and we're stepping up.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response.

New question, please. MPP Allsopp. You have five minutes and three seconds, sir.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: My question is for the Associate Attorney General. I know that throughout your time in government, you've been a steadfast advocate for building a stronger, more modernized justice system that holds offenders accountable and diverts them from a life of continuous interaction with the courts and jails. Certainly, justice centres are a good example of a policy solution that this government is undertaking to break the cycle of offending.

I was wondering if the AAG could provide an overview of the progress that's been made by the government on justice centres and maybe provide an overview of the benefits they bring when it comes to enhancing access to justice, holding offenders accountable and keeping communities safe.

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

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you for that question. I'm certainly very happy to talk about justice centres because you are right. For me, when it comes to issues of mental health and addictions, one of the questions that was asked earlier that I didn't get a chance to answer was going to focus exactly on the importance of upstream investments, the importance of providing the supports and services that hopefully will keep people out of the justice system, or if they get into the justice system, will make sure that there aren't high rates of recidivism. Justice centres are just that. Justice centres provide those opportunities. It's an approach that our government has taken.

I want to reiterate a statement that was made by the Attorney General that I think is extremely wise and important

as an aspirational goal for us—and that's to connect justice-involved people with supports that include health care, mental health and addiction services, or housing assistance. That is transformational to the system and something that we need to do, understand and, perhaps, do even better.

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I've had the pleasure of visiting all of the justice centres we have, as the Associate Attorney General, and the one that was most impressive for me was Kenora, because of its focus on Indigenous-led healing; the ability to look at the individual from an individual standpoint, as opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach, which unfortunately happens when systems get big and systems need to process individuals. That holistic, individual-centred approach is why the justice centre in Kenora is so effective and so important from that standpoint—and really visionary. It is being looked at, as was mentioned by the Attorney General, by many other jurisdictions, other provinces, because of its innovation and its ability to address key issues that will ensure that the justice system isn't continuously bringing people through, like a revolving door, and, even though we add capacity, servicing the same individuals over and over again. It breaks that cycle, and that is extremely important.

Kenora—I want to give that number: Since 2023, the justice centre there has processed more than 1,200 cases involving youth and young adults aged 12 to 24, helping improve access to justice, but also reducing the recidivism rates, which is the key if we want to break these cycles. What I mean when I say “access to justice”—it's that justice centres have an innovative, highly collaborative model that enables intake assessments for accused individuals, quick movement to procedural justice services, then referrals to wraparound care and supports, which is extremely important. These are the things that give us an effective resolution and accountability, and it's where we are investing money, because, again, we're seeing the outcomes from them. So this is a community-based or community-centred approach. The person receives their social supports and has their case managed all in the same building.

Justice centres aim to expand access to justice by shifting from the traditional courtroom framework towards a process that merges legal accountability with immediate social intervention—the physical, procedural and systemic barriers that may prevent marginalized and at-risk young adults from receiving the opportunities, the legal outcomes, that offer a fair resolution for the offender and bring that security back to public safety and the broader community.

I want to add, as a testament to this: In May of this year, Ontario justice centres were recognized with the Ontario Bar Association's president's award for how they transform access to justice. So the legal community is noticing and recognizing the impact and the merit of this work.

And from that baseline in Kenora, and other justice centres, as well, in London, Toronto—

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

The time has concluded for the government members.

We'll now move to MPP Wong-Tam, for the official opposition. You have 10 minutes. Please start.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much, Chair. Through you, again, to the minister: I want to take a moment now for us to review some adjudicator efficacy. In the past, I know you have talked very proudly about how this number needs to go up in order for us to clear the backlogs. So we're just going to take a look at what has happened in the past and what's happening today.

In 2018-19, when in-person hearings were the norm, the Landlord and Tenant Board had 51 adjudicators who resolved 48,480 cases through in-person hearings, so that was an average of 950 cases per adjudicator.

Based on the revised information that we know through Tribunals Ontario, which is the watchdog of tribunals in our province, in 2024-25, we now have more adjudicators—so it's good that we've hired them. There are 133 adjudicators now resolving 70,294 cases that year through hearings mostly online—actually, almost a majority online—but that number of average cases per adjudicator has now dropped to 528. So on average, one single adjudicator is actually presiding over 422 fewer cases than they would if they were being held in person.

I know, Minister, you speak a lot about efficiency, so I'm going to give you a chance to explain to the committee on why you think there has been such a sizable drop in efficiency in LTB adjudication.

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

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, MPP Wong-Tam.

Correlation and causation are two different things, as you all know. What has changed in that period, and I touched on it in my last round of answers, is the complexity of cases that they're hearing. They're hearing not only more complex cases, because the simple nonpayment of rent is fairly straightforward—it's almost binary—but when you get into applications for any number of other things, it gets more complicated.

That number dropped from 80% to 50%, so that 30% delta of more difficult cases is just a percentage number. But the net number of cases that we're having come into the system has gone to record levels. So it's not just a matter of 30% in raw numbers; it's actually that category scaled over the increase. So we're having way more cases that are way more complicated, and it's taking longer to have people have their matters heard for that reason.

If you have a tenant application, we want it to be a fair hearing. We want it to be that they get to tell their whole story. They may not be represented, or they may have some help, but inevitably, if it's a complicated piece, it takes longer to make sure that they get their story out and that they get their evidence on the table.

That's what is causing the difference in the per-adjudicator caseload; it's the complexity and it's the volume.

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

New question, please.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Minister, I know you have provided a comparable answer in the past and you have stressed the importance to get those adjudicators up and

running as soon as possible. You have stressed in the past about the need to train. Your messaging today is that the cases are more complicated. You have more adjudicators. It has been a year since they have been trained up, and we are not seeing the number fall—we're not seeing the number of backlogs fall, I should say.

We're seeing adjudicators preside over fewer cases despite the fact that we have more adjudicators and they have been trained. So the performance between last year and this year is that we're not getting better results.

Minister, you have heard repeatedly from various parties that in-person hearings will get cases resolved faster. There are the in-hall conversations. There's the opportunity for dialogue that's a little bit more dynamic. And looking at the drop of LTB efficiencies, do you think there's something to be said that cases can be faster resolved through in-person hearings as opposed to Microsoft Teams meetings?

Hon. Doug Downey: I think for people to have to travel out of community to other spaces is not, by definition, more efficient nor less costly.

I think it's a false equivalency that you're creating, because I'm saying that if somebody is charged with a—a I'm going to use criminal as a parallel. Somebody is charged with a DUI and yet those numbers are dropping relative to the number of complex sexual assaults and murders. You're saying, "Yes, but the trials are longer so you're less efficient"—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Yes. Point of order, please.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Yes, thank you. I think the Attorney General is talking about criminal matters that are highly complex, which call upon several witnesses, including forensic, and I'm talking about interpretation of Landlord and Tenant Board and the interpretation of residential tenancy rules—much more clear-cut, I would say.

So I'm just going to reclaim my time. I think I would like to spend my final few minutes talking about Legal Aid Ontario, because I think it's noted that, on page 21 of the estimates briefing book, there is a decrease in the estimates funding for Legal Aid Ontario compared to the 2025-26 interim actual expenditures. The estimated expenditure for 2026-27 is approximately \$315.5 million compared to the previous year, which was sitting at \$346.7 million.

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Can the minister please explain why there is over a \$30-million drop in actual funding to the LAO?

Hon. Doug Downey: There is not a net drop to LAO. The piece of the puzzle that you're missing is the Law Foundation of Ontario. Lawyers' bank accounts accrue interest, and that interest goes to the Law Foundation of Ontario. And 75% of that goes directly to Legal Aid. So, as those numbers go up, then their need for government resources goes down.

I'll give you an example. Legal clinics alone over my time have had increases of over 25%, so there is not a decrease in that space, but it's not necessarily as clear in our estimates because the LFO is not under me; it's in a different space.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response.

New question, please. Two minutes and 37 seconds.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm really glad the minister brought up the strong financial position that we're seeing today, largely because of higher interest rates. I think we can all appreciate that when LAO and the foundation are in a stronger financial position, more Ontarians can access their service, which is so critical to accessing justice.

However, interest rates do fluctuate and financial positions do fluctuate. We all know that; we all have bank accounts. Will the minister commit to ensuring that Legal Aid Ontario has budgetary stability even if the interest rates decline?

Hon. Doug Downey: It has been a constant for me all through my time to make sure that we have stability in the sector. But because of the increased interest rates, what we have done is we've increased the threshold to qualify for legal aid. Where an individual who had no children had to make less than \$20,000 to qualify, now it's \$45,000. We're serving more than 180,000 more individuals each year because of that increase, so that's the investment of that excess interest.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I recognize that the minister did, in 2025, implement a three-year increase to financial eligibility thresholds for services. Now that we are halfway through that timeline, that three-year commitment, can you speak to whether or not there are plans to extend that increased threshold so that more Ontarians can access legal aid?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): One minute, sir.

Hon. Doug Downey: We are watching what our projections were and what they're turning into. It is critical to me that we have a sustainable and a stable legal aid system. So it will continue to be a conversation, but a year and a half in is too early to say what's going to happen necessarily a year and a half later. But it's a live issue, and it's something where we want to make sure that the system stays stable and we can serve as many people as possible.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, and you have 20 seconds—actually not quite 20 seconds.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Then with my few seconds left, I just want to thank the minister and the ministerial team for coming forward and presenting at committee. Thank you very much, and thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Well, thank you very much for your questions and responses. I'm letting the clock run right now.

This concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of the Attorney General.

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

Are the members ready to vote?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Just a point of clarification—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Sorry. This will be the third time I'm trying to seek clarification. Will I get my requests in writing—the lists of courtrooms that have deficiencies, capital backlog, with timelines and expected investments to come forth?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): The committee Clerk will respond. Stand by.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: The Clerk essentially said that if the minister does not make a commitment in the committee, then we can expect no answers.

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

All right, I'm going to carry on. Are the members ready to vote? All right.

Shall vote 301, ministry administration, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? It's carried.

Shall vote 302, prosecuting crime, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It's carried.

Shall vote 303, policy, justice programs and agencies, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It's carried.

Shall vote 304, legal services program, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It's carried.

Shall vote 305, court services, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It's carried.

Shall vote 306, victims and vulnerable persons, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It's carried.

Shall vote 307, Political Contribution Tax Credit, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It's carried.

Shall vote 308, Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It's carried.

Shall vote 309, courts technology and transformation, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It's carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2026-27 estimates of the Ministry of the Attorney General to the House? All those in favour? Opposed? It's carried.

This concludes our consideration of the ministry's estimates. I would like to thank the minister, the associate minister, the deputy minister and all the staff that attended. Thank you for your participation.

The committee will now recess to 3:30.

The committee recessed from 1507 to 1530.

MINISTRY OF THE SOLICITOR GENERAL

MINISTÈRE DU SOLICITEUR GÉNÉRAL

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Justice Policy will now come to order. On this afternoon's agenda is the review of the 2026-27 estimates of the Ministry of the Solicitor General.

As a reminder, the ministry will be considered for two hours, with a 20-minute opening statement from the minister followed by questions and answers in rotations of 15 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 15 minutes for the third party members of the committee and 15 minutes for the government members of the committee for the remainder of the allotted time.

From the ministry, we're joined by the Solicitor General of Ontario, the Honourable Michael S. Kerzner, and 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 here

this afternoon 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 of the committee before we start? I see none, Mr. Clerk.

I am now required to call vote 2601, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement from the minister for up to 20 minutes.

Minister, I will let you know when you have one minute remaining in your statement so that you have the opportunity to sum up. Sir, the floor is yours, please.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm delighted to be here today and joined at the table with two incredible public servants who I feel represent the ministry so well: Erin Hannah, who is our Deputy Solicitor General for corrections, and Mario Di Tommaso, who's our Deputy Solicitor General for public safety. We are joined further by exceptional people at the ministry: assistant deputy ministers and representatives from the Office of the Fire Marshal, including our own fire marshal, Jon Pegg.

Mr. Chairman, when we go back in time not that many years—when I go back in time, just for the time that I've had the privilege of being in this role, from June 2022, I have seen a lot. It has given me a perspective of our province, both in its size but also in its diversity. I've gone around this province with an eager curiosity to listen and learn and I have trail-blazed on my own strategy of wanting to listen especially to those that keep us safe every day.

In my remarks, I'm going to talk about my journey because I think it goes to exactly why, in these four years and four months which I have had the privilege and honour of a lifetime to see for myself something that I did not know before I had the privilege of becoming an MPP here in this Legislature—the 1,947th MPP to be exact. But I also find, Mr. Chair, that we tend to underappreciate those people who keep us safe.

I wanted to talk about my own journey, and I'm going to speak about our public safety and our corrections just the same because behind the veil of the police services and the fire services and the people that work in our corrections institutions and probation and parole offices and in our animal welfare division and in our coroner's office and the Centre of Forensic Sciences are people that come to work because they chose this. They chose it as part of their career, and these are exceptional people.

Our government was elected on a simple pledge that Premier Ford enunciated with incredible clarity: to protect Ontario. I've spoken about this, Mr. Chair, in the Legislature. It's not just to look at it only with an economic lens, but we do know, when we have safe communities, people will invest. Entrepreneurs will come forward because they feel they have an environment to develop their products and see a little seedling grow into a tree. People will raise their families and move into communities. People will send their kids to school, and they'll go to work and shop and worship because everything revolves around public safety.

Protecting Ontario, yes, means having a great educational system. It means having great health care. But for

me, there is nothing more important than our public safety. And that's why at the heart of our ministry, it is policing, it's corrections, it's fire, it's animal welfare. It is our office of the coroner. It's the Office of the Fire Marshal. It's the Centre of Forensic Sciences.

And please, let me give a shout-out to the finest police service anywhere in the country, part of our ministry: That's the Ontario Provincial Police, led by one of the finest police leaders anywhere, Commissioner Carrique.

Every single day, on the policing side, as I said, we have seen transformation occur. It is because the government has come forward since the fall of 2022, when I was in office, but even prior when the Minister of Health was in my position and before that, the Associate Attorney General. We've seen policing go to a direction where we were able, thanks to the will of the Legislature, to debate the Community Safety and Policing Act, CSPA—probably the most consequential piece of legislation anywhere in the country, especially now. My predecessor, Minister Jones, took it on the road; I finished it. I worked hard with the Deputy Solicitor General for public safety to get it through to the finish line, supported by some incredible people at the ministry, some of whom we're lucky to have here today. It means that we have new legislation and new regulations that mirror the expectation, the tone of our government to keep people safe.

Along the way, something else happened: We recreated and reimaged our Ontario Police College, because you can't just say you're going to put more boots on the ground if you don't have a plan to do it. I remember very, very well, in the late fall of 2022, the nugget of an idea to transform how we look at that college. I didn't believe, by the way, that we would be able to execute the vision as quickly as we did.

Let me give the committee some perspective. We took a college that had three classes a year, or what we call three cohorts, and we asked them to go to four cohorts. We asked them to increase the class sizes, if there was demand, from about 400 to 525. We didn't know if the demand would come forward as rapidly as it did, but it did.

Last year, we had the newest highest record of police officers getting their basic constable training at approximately 2,100. It is something to see, when you see a march past, as I've had the privilege, with the Deputy Solicitor General, the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville, the member from Hamilton Mountain and others who just come for their interest, to see how does this happen. When you see a class graduate, you're at that moment in their lives.

In the most recent march past, just in September, I talked about the fact that, in Ontario, some voices are not always so audible, some are more quiet, some overpower others. The role of a police officer is to be a good listener. I spoke in our province to the cadets that we have to find the best in ourselves, as part of the journey, so that you take the role as a police officer, your badge and commission, with great respect to uphold the law.

The words of Commissioner Carrique, as he badges class after class, the Ontario Provincial Police's new recruits, is still something that you have to hear to believe. And as

minister, I've had an opportunity of participating in many of those badges.

So, yes, we have reimagined how we can put more boots on the ground to keep people safe. I want to thank the chiefs and the associations from across our province who have come forward, eagerly, and have promoted the fact that the tone of this government is one of respect to those people who keep us safe.

C'est pourquoi, monsieur le Président, je suis fier, toujours et tous les jours, de tous les pompiers, tous les policiers, tous les premiers intervenants, qui travaillent fort tous les jours et qui assurent la sécurité de notre province.

This is something that is so important—that we have to have their backs—and it's something I'm proud of.

1540

We have also looked at our OPP infrastructure. Mr. Chair, I went up early in my tenure, in July 2022. I'll never forget it. The Deputy Solicitor General for public safety was there. I saw for myself our current OPP academy. It was in a state of yesteryears—that's the politest way of describing it. It served its purpose well, but I knew it was time to move on.

Our government was bold. We came forward and we said that we wanted to reimagine the Ontario Provincial Police Academy for the next generation so that, those who came years ago, who had a good facility then—we should offer the same to those who are coming now and in the future. Thanks to the leadership of Premier Ford, we are well on our way. The same for the Ontario Police College in Aylmer, Ontario—we are well on our way to reimagine what the next iteration will look like.

We came forward to say that we need new OPP detachments, a new regional headquarters, and look at the modernization plan within the OPP as being absolutely essential to keeping Ontario safe. The members of this committee, including my friends on the other side, know that there are so many municipalities—over 300 in Ontario, medium size and smaller size—that depend on the OPP to keep their communities safe, and we have moved forward with different plans of modernization.

We've looked at the policing costs, which are an important factor to determining how much municipalities' residents pay as part of their taxes, and we've worked very, very hard with our policing partners. Our police officers and everyone who helps us on the public safety side deserves to earn a fair wage, and I have long championed the fact that they need to be paid commensurate to the role they have. I'm going to say the same thing for those in our correctional system and those who are probation and parole officers, because they are equal heroes.

We've made major investments in community safety and policing grants. The numbers are actually staggering. When I did the math, just in the last four years, it's over a billion dollars. It's led by the Community Safety and Policing Grant. That's the first one—but wait, there's more. We had the auto theft grant. We had the Bail Compliance and Warrant Apprehension Grant.

We know, just from reannouncing last week with the Preventing Auto Thefts Grant, that it is making a differ-

ence. I was in Peel yesterday. Mayor Brown repeated the figures, that the auto theft numbers are going down. They didn't go down on their own; they went because of the men and women of our municipal, First Nations and OPP police services that have worked hard, who have strategized, who have formed units and who have been relentless.

Our government has not sat idly by. I said yesterday, as long as there are people in our society who want to destabilize us and steal our cars and knock down our doors and threaten our children with drugs and luring, as long as there are people who want to bring illegal guns into our community, then there's work for this government to do, and that's exactly what we're doing.

We came forward with a creative joint air support unit to provide funding to the greater Toronto area police services—including Ottawa, including Niagara, including Windsor—with helicopters, because this is something that most people thought we already had. York region has had helicopters for a while, and Durham had a helicopter for a long time that could have served as, perhaps, a museum piece for another period of time. That's why we came forward. I was there last week in Durham to see their new helicopter unveiled. Eyes in the sky means criminals will have fewer places to hide, because when a person is stealing a car, they don't respect the judicial municipal boundaries. It doesn't happen.

And we came forward. We came forward with an approach to address our border security—not to replace the work that the federal government is doing. I support the work that the federal government is doing, especially with their CBSA investments. That has been very good, but Ontario said, we can't wait for the whole build-out to occur, for the RCMP to be replenished with people that it needs or people to be hired for CBSA.

We came forward with Operation Deterrence, and it made a dramatic difference. We came forward with an announcement recently, Mr. Chair, of a \$32.5-million investment called Operation Deterrence 2.0, which will provide—and hopefully, we'll be talking about it real soon—a \$30-million initiative to help municipal and First Nations police services on the border or on strategic waterways to acquire equipment that they badly need. I'm thinking of Thunder Bay; I'm thinking of Sault Ste. Marie; I'm thinking of the stretch between Cornwall all the way down to Oshawa; I'm thinking of Niagara. I went to Niagara and I couldn't believe—I didn't know this—that they don't have marine assets for both Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. We're going to change that through this grant, and that's important.

Mr. Chair, let me speak about corrections. And again, I want to showcase our incredible Deputy Solicitor General for corrections. She shares my passion, my curiosity, but also my degree of urgency and dispatch. Deputy Hannah is an exceptional leader.

When we looked at our correctional system, we knew we had work to do. It's not only that the Ontario Liberal government of yesteryears—but not that long ago—closed eight jails. It's not only that, as a result of closing eight jails by the Ontario Liberal government then, they took 2,500-plus beds off-line.

We had to reinvent the strategy for a simple reason: Our population is growing. And even if there is that fraction of 1% of people that can't live within the norms of society and obey the laws—as I like to say, things have to matter; our laws must matter. That's why we have to invest, and we are, and we're reinventing it as well.

We knew we had a lot of work to do in short order, so we've addressed this practically. We said that we would put new spaces into our system in the short term, in the medium term and a little bit further out. That's why we've come forward with rapid builds, the first of which will come online real soon.

We said we would adopt a modular build approach where we can build, again, more quickly with simpler technology, and such has been the case in Thunder Bay and in Kenora.

We said we would hire more correctional officers. We've hired thousands of new correctional officers, and we have more work to do.

We said we would renovate our old, old facilities and bring them up to a much higher standard that's fair for those people who work there—our heroes, our correctional officers and their support staff—and we're doing that.

We said we would hire more probation and parole officers because they bear an enormous weight when a person leaves our facilities until they're reintegrated, because at the end of the day, we know when we have fewer people who come back, then we have safer societies.

All of this is while we're calling on the federal government relentlessly to change the laws so that we toughen up the rules on bail reform. And I'll call it like it is: They're listening. They've got more work to do. But if it wasn't for the advocacy, especially—I think the monumental moment for me was going with the member from Hamilton Mountain and the Attorney General and the Associate Attorney General and the then Associate Solicitor General—who's a great minister, the member from Milton—and the deputies—I don't think the call would have been heard. When you sit in a room with your provincial colleagues and territorial colleagues from across the country, you can make an effort to coalesce a strategy for people to move it forward, and that's what happened.

I'm very, very proud that we are well on our way. And people in Ontario realize that they can trust our government to be held accountable to what we say we will be doing. I feel, Mr. Chair, as Solicitor General, my role is to be accountable. It's to be accountable in the chamber; it's to be accountable in the committee; it's to be accountable to the public who has to make sure somebody is on their side.

1550

I want to also talk for a minute about what we have done on the fire safety side. We have come forward with the Fire Protection Grant. As I said, and Fire Marshal Pegg knows it, it was planting a flag because we listened to the OAFC, we listened to the OPFFA. I was with Greg Horton at the fire memorial this past Sunday, and I have to tell you something: The work that the government has done in tandem has been nothing short of tremendous. So—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Excuse me, Minister. You have roughly a minute and 20 seconds left in your presentation.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you.

So I wanted to acknowledge what they have done.

The estimates before this committee reflect the breadth and importance of the work of this ministry I lead.

Our government will never stop ensuring police officers, firefighters and first responders have the tools they need. We will live up to the commitment of Ontarians to protect them and to keep us safe.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

We'll now begin the question-and-answer segment, in rotations of 15 minutes for the official opposition, 15 minutes for the third party member and 15 minutes for the government.

As the Chair, I'll allow the members to ask a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee, to ensure that they're confident that the ministry will spend those dollars appropriately. In the past, members have asked questions about the delivery of similar programs in previous fiscal years, about the policy framework that supports the ministry approach to a problem or service delivery, or about the confidence of a ministry to spend the money wisely and efficiently. However, it must be noted that the onus is on the members asking the questions to make the questioning relevant to the scope of the estimates under consideration. If that does not occur, I will rule the question out of order.

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 assistant deputy ministers and other staff here today: Please state your name and your title the first time that you're invited up to the table where the minister and the deputy ministers are seated, so that we're able to accurately record in Hansard who we have speaking before us in response to a question.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to everyone attending today.

Minister, I want to start with the Joe MacDonald survivors' scholarship fund—the estimates show \$400,000 for 2026-27, unchanged from \$400,000 shown in the 2025-26. When we heard from the police chiefs and families last year, during the Bill 75 hearings, we heard concerns that money in this fund was sitting unused year after year after year. Can you tell us how much of that \$400,000 actually went unused in the 2025-26 fiscal year?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I can't specifically say how much of the money was unused. But what I can say is that we can't predict how many applicants will come forward on a year-to-year basis who then qualify for the Joe

MacDonald fund. I know the member opposite debated—and I think she supported our change to broaden the scope, so that we would allow people who want to pursue a college diploma or bachelor's degree to have a right of further study. I think, if I recall it, the member was supportive of the changes we want to make. And yes—to the member's point—we want more people to come forward and take advantage of it.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Minister, I appreciate that, but I'm looking for the actual number. How much went unused?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'll ask the Deputy Solicitor General if he wants to add some thoughts.

I think the salient point is we allocated money, but if it is not applied for that meets the criteria of the fund, what the then rules are, we can't pay people more than what their application is based on the rules we have, and they were clearly defined to seek, as an example, an undergraduate degree here in Ontario or a college diploma degree.

Deputy Solicitor General?

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

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

As we all know, Bill 75, Keeping Criminals Behind Bars Act, 2026, formally established the Constable Joe MacDonald Public Safety Officers' Survivors Scholarship Fund in legislation, and what that act did was expand the criteria and the eligibility. So, thankfully, this model of paying out the survivors for education support—

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Mr. Chair?

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: —is based on the number of applications.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Deputy.

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: I simply don't have that number in front of me—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): All right. Thank you, Deputy. Thanks for that response.

New question. MPP Stevens.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you: I was not asking for an entire accounting system or a revamp of what the Joe MacDonald survivor scholarship is; I was simply asking why the \$400,000 was unspent and if so, how much of it is still sitting there.

Listen, on Bill 75, the official opposition proposed amendments to this fund, and the government voted against every one of them.

What specific steps are being taken now to ensure that families who are eligible—as just mentioned by you, Minister, actually now about the program—can access it and that the funding isn't simply sitting unused?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, Mr. Chair, I'll call it like it is: That's a real good question.

Just a week ago, when the member from Hamilton Mountain and I were in Ottawa for the time-honoured

ceremony of the national peace officers' memorial, we sit the night prior with the families. I addressed exactly what the member from St. Catharines asked me. We make sure that we are communicating, take advantage of it.

Unfortunately, Mr. Chair, we have lost police officers this year in the line of duty who gave their lives so we could live. There will be, unfortunately, more people who will be able to access this fund. We need to promote it. We will promote it.

I'll take the member's comment under advisement. It's a good question.

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

New question, please.

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

How many additional families do you expect to reach out, as a result, to the Joe MacDonald survivor scholarship this year?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Just since this year, again, we have lost—several families whose children will come of age. But it's not only on the policing side, and therefore we have to communicate it. I will work diligently, Mr. Chair, to develop a communication strategy that will remind the associations that this fund is there. It is there.

And I might say, as an example on the public safety side, the Survivors of Law Enforcement, the SOLE organization, promotes this amongst themselves, but we will make sure it is greaterly communicated. It's a fair question, it's a good question and we'll act on it.

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

New question, please.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you: I hope that we re-evaluate the official opposition's amendments and take them into consideration as well.

I'm going to move on now, Minister, and I want to turn to Ontario's new cash-for-bail system. About a month ago, implementations were put on hold following an injunction grant after challenges brought by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and the Criminal Lawyers' Association. This legislation was subject to concerns about its constitutionality before implementation proceeded.

Minister, can you tell this committee how much taxpayers' dollars has been spent to date on legal fees and associated costs related to this court process, and what additional legal costs the ministry is currently expecting?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: That's a question for the Attorney General, who I understood may have given his deputation earlier.

What I can tell you is that as Solicitor General, I have confidence in the judicial system that the judges will, when it's their opportunity, set the terms of the deposit commensurate to their judicial decision. We're not going to interfere in that process.

1600

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you very much for your response.

New question, please.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Through you, Mr. Chair: Minister, I'm not asking about the merits of the case. I'm asking what this litigation is costing the taxpayers of Ontario.

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Again, from the perspective of the direction, that question should be asked to the Ministry the Attorney General, in my opinion.

I'll ask the Deputy Solicitor General if you wish to expand further.

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

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: No. I agree with you, Minister. That is a matter for the Attorney General to explain. I simply don't have any knowledge on that. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Okay. I agree. It's out of the scope of the estimates, please.

New question, please.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Through you, Mr. Chair, again to the Minister: Minister, I want to turn to page 110 of the estimates. Institutional services are increasing by approximately \$91.1 million, bringing the 2026-27 estimates to just more than \$1 billion. Can you walk this committee through exactly what is driving that \$91.1-million increase?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'm going to ask Deputy Hannah to comment, but I'll give some perspective. I said in my opening remarks that we were hiring over 3,000 new people; we have. What I didn't get a chance to say in my remarks is we have reimagined our health care system within our correctional system as well. We've made major investments, so our running costs are higher, and our population count is higher because our population in Ontario has grown.

Deputy Hannah?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Please for the record, your full name and title.

Ms. Erin Hannah: Erin Hannah, Deputy Solicitor General, correctional services, Ministry of the Solicitor General.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): To the question.

Ms. Erin Hannah: Expenditures have been going up year over year for a number of reasons. I will say that the large bulk of our increases relate to salary and wage dollars for our staff.

The minister alluded earlier that we have been hiring more staff to support our institutional services. That's inclusive of correctional officers; health care staff such as nurses, pharmacists; allied health care professionals like social workers and addictions counsellors. The vast amount of our increase has been related to salary and wage dollars.

We also have employee benefit costs that come commensurate with adding additional staff. We've also seen increases, although to a lesser degree, in our operational costs associated with uniforms, inmate clothing, food that we

need to provide, obviously, for people who are housed 24/7, 365 days a year.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Through you, Mr. Chair: Is this primarily staffing you're saying, operating cost and inmate population pressures? Or is it something else? Can you maybe provide a dollar breakdown of the major components of that increase?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Chair, again, I'll restate to the member opposite that we have reimagined a new build-out of our correctional system. We've been very transparent. Wages have gone up. We brought in more people because we brought in more spaces and we have more people in our facilities, so there has been an incremental change and an increase.

But I would add, what price would you put on keeping Ontario safe?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response.

New question—you have three minutes and 58 seconds left.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Through you, Mr. Chair: When we're trying to figure out where Ontario taxpayers' dollars are going and they're hidden in numbers, I would say that we have to find out for the average Ontarian taxpayers so that we have answers and transparency.

To the minister: On the next page, page 111 gives us some important context. The average daily inmate count has increased substantially over the past two years by approximately 1,794 inmates, or roughly 19%. At the same time, we're seeing correctional facilities operating at approximately 127% of capacity.

Now, your government is planning billions of dollars in new correctional infrastructure, but those facilities are not solving the capacity problem today—today. What is the government doing right now—today—to bring Ontario's correctional systems back to a safe and sustainable operating capacity?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I've been very transparent. I've been transparent in the Legislature. We said we would put in 1,000 new spaces in the shortest possible order. We've delivered that target. I've been specific where: the regional intermittent centre in London, Ontario; the Toronto Intermittent Centre in Toronto. I said we would bring beds back in the Ontario Correctional Institute. That's the OCI. I said we would look for every nook and cranny with bed optimizations, with rapid builds. We are well on our target.

The member opposite speaks about rising population counts in our facilities. That's true. However, in the last year or so, they've been rather stable, which is good too. It's giving us a chance to continue our next phase of build-out, add more spaces, to keep Ontario safe.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Through you, Chair: Can you give us specific targets for reducing the current overcrowding and a timeline that we're going to be able to achieve it?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to add 2,500 new spaces as soon as possible. They will be rapid builds, which are the tensile membranes which are going up in different spots in our facilities. It's the modular builds. It's bed optimization. We are well on our way.

I'll point to this: I'll be in Thunder Bay, I hope, in early November to see our new facility again. That's in the hundreds of new spaces. We want to do it in the short period because it's fair to the correctional staff, who are heroes, who work there. We want to do everything we can to make their work environment safer for them too.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): You have a minute and three seconds left for your next question, please.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'll move on to correctional health services, Minister.

I want to turn to the health services on page 178. The estimates show funding increases from approximately \$174 million to \$222.7 million, an increase of about \$48.6 million, or 28%. I want to be very clear here: We support appropriate health care in correctional facilities. We know front-line correctional officers and OPSEU workers face incredibly demanding work conditions.

With seeing an increase of this size, can you tell this committee specifically what programs and services account for the additional \$48.6 million, and how much is directed towards mental health and wellness supports—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, but the time has elapsed for questions and responses from the minister and the deputy ministers.

We'll now move on to the third party. MPP McCrimmon, please, when you're ready with your question.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Thank you to the minister and your team for being here today. I really appreciate it.

I'm really happy to hear about the increase in OPP numbers. That's actually a really good thing. We need them on the ground; we know we do, especially in rural areas. I know that they're still hurting when it comes to response times.

But we're still dealing with OPP officers who are dealing with mental health crises. Can you tell me how many officers are currently on stress-related leave, and what are we doing to actually address this crisis in the OPP?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for the question. To the minister, please.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you to the member from Kanata-Carleton for recognizing that the OPP is an essential service for so many parts of Ontario. Like anybody else who's a first responder, we have to make sure they're well so we can be well.

We have a number of programs in place at the OPP. I'll let the Deputy Solicitor General talk more about that. But we're proud of the investment that we made with the Wounded Warriors health consortium. We're proud of the work that Runnymede health does every day. We are proud that the OPP—while I don't direct the OPP, or any police service in the province, I do support their efforts to making

sure that there are pathways to return to work for those members that are suffering from PTSD.

Deputy Solicitor General?

1610

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: Thank you. It is a concern; we do have a substantial number of OPP officers that are off on long-term disability. I don't have the exact number for you, but I do commit to getting back to you.

One of the things that we've done at the OPP is we've started a number of studies that have concluded, as a result of which, one of the key things is we've started a pillar that looks after the mental health and well-being of OPP officers. We now have a chief psychologist and six other regional psychologists to deal with their mental health.

Over and above that, this government provided the Ontario Provincial Police Association with annual funding of \$1 million to look after the mental health of all OPP officers—both on duty and retired, and their families—through an online portal. That is available.

Over and above that, we have a \$45-million investment over three years, and it's called the Mental Health Supports for Public Safety Personnel Program. That's available through Warrior Health as well.

And over and above that, we have also provided funding to municipal police services for online mental health services as well.

We are concerned about the mental health of all of our public safety personnel. We have mental health collaborative tables specific to policing as well. That is led through the health division in our ministry, led by Assistant Deputy Minister Melanie Mayoh.

So we are focused on mental health for all public safety personnel.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response. New question, please.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

There was an Auditor General's report on the OPP that came out, and from what I can find, maybe 20% of the recommendations that the Auditor General made about doing a better job looking after the OPP have been implemented. Are there any of those particular recommendations that are being funded in the estimates, and I just can't see it?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: What I would say to the member opposite is, in addition to the programs that the Deputy Solicitor General mentioned, the government is also investing \$3.18 million to launch the Ontario Immediate Family Wellness Program.

I think what is important is this story is evolving. More people are coming back to work. They are supported by an incredible OPPA—Ontario Provincial Police Association—and by great leadership at the OPP. Programs will evolve, and we listen to them. We listen to our associations so that we can respond.

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

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: According to your own office, 81% of the people in Ontario jails are on remand. That

means they're awaiting trial and still presumed innocent. They have not been convicted.

Ontario jails are at 127% of capacity. If 81% of them have not been convicted, what are we going to do in order to reduce the number of people being held on remand? Is that a reasonable number? Is there anything that we should be doing to reduce that number?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Yes, there is a lot that we are doing. We are making dramatic investments on the Attorney General side to hire more crown attorneys, to hire more judges and to make sure that through the—if you just go back now, we have people who can appear in front of a JP or a judge online from the facilities.

We are going to continue to invest in our judicial system. But you have to remember, while the remand population is undeniably high, it is also because we have some real bad people that are there. We have people that have either done something very, very bad and are awaiting sentencing or are waiting to be heard in front of the judge or the JP.

We can't take a chance when it comes to protecting Ontario. We have to make sure that we err on the side of the public to keep them safe, and that's what we're going to do.

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

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Surely, there has got to be a process by which we can discern which people are a significant threat and which are not. When 81% of the people in jail have not been convicted, that's a really high number. So what aren't we doing so that we can screen out the people who would not be a threat?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Chair, I appreciate very much the question from the member from Kanata–Carleton.

Listen, this is up to the courts. The courts are the ones that have to adjudicate through our judicial system, that is independent from government, the guilt or innocence of a person. I feel our job in the ministry is to make sure that if somebody is arrested, we don't contest the arrest. We accept in our correctional system—and the Deputy Solicitor General can speak to that. When a person is arrested and they appear in the admissions process in our correctional institution, we receive them.

Deputy?

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

Ms. Erin Hannah: Yes, I'd just reiterate and underscore the minister's point that corrections does not make the determination of whether or not someone is remanded into custody. That is entirely the decision of the judiciary. We are the accepters, and we actually have no authority to refuse to accept individuals who the court has remanded to custody. So I would respectfully say that that's a question for the Ministry of the Attorney General.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response. New question, please.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: But bail is your bailiwick, right?

Ms. Erin Hannah: No. From a bail policy perspective—and Deputy Di Tommaso can also add to this—we certainly work very closely with the Ministry of the Attor-

ney General, but whether or not someone is granted bail is again a decision of the judiciary.

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

We're straying a bit, in terms of asking questions on bail, outside of the scope—just a caution, okay? All right?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Well, but there's—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Let's proceed with your questions, please. Thank you.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: There's \$8.3 million, but in bail compliance. Is that you, or that's the Solicitor General?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Yes.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Bail compliance, then—\$8.3 million for the Bail Compliance and Warrant Apprehension Grant. Do you know how many officers that's going to fund? It's kind of spread a little bit thin.

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'm really proud of the Bail Compliance and Warrant Apprehension Grant. It was a major investment, and I'll let Deputy Di Tommaso talk about its impact. But the reality is we had enormous interest from our police services to build out a strategy and hire more people dedicated so that we could find people who need to be found.

Deputy Solicitor General, maybe you can speak to the impact of the grant.

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

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: Absolutely. That grant was rolled out to the OPP, municipal police services and First Nation police services to enhance bail compliance monitoring. What police services did was they accepted that money. They created bail compliance units, and then they targeted the top offenders known to them in their respective jurisdictions.

So what we saw was an increase in bail compliance charges that automatically lead to a show cause hearing in the courts on a reverse onus basis. That is perhaps contributing to the increased number of people on remand.

Over and above that, we also doubled the repeat offender parole enforcement squad from five to 10 teams. We also rolled out the provincial bail compliance dashboard, which has a substantial number of police services that have been onboarded and a substantial number of offenders who are on that particular dashboard.

All that to say, this government rolled out a specific focus on those folks who are before the courts, who are on bail and who are violating their bail. That led to an increased number of folks being arrested and detained.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you very much for that response.

MPP McCrimmon, you've got four minutes and six seconds left for questions. Next question, please.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: So you can't give me the numbers related to that grant, how successful that grant has been?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'll again just state—and I'll pass it to the deputy—I have heard nothing but incredible feedback from the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police; from the PAO; from the TPA, Toronto Police Association; and the OPPA. That grant, in my opinion, broke the back of the narrative that people could just get away with it, not be found. The repeat offenders parole enforcement unit—we call it the ROPE—has been tremendously impactful.

Deputy?

1620

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

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: I would also acknowledge that I have heard nothing but success stories from the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, from other chiefs, from front-line officers. I can't get you the number of arrests that have come about from that particular grant, but I commit to getting you that information. All I know is that it has been exceptionally successful, and I am advocating for its continuance going forward as well.

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

New question, please.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Good. I happen to agree with you.

It's got to be cheaper to keep them—if you can, if it's suitable; not everyone is suitable—in the community under supervision, rather than putting them in jail.

Do we have a program that's up and operating that way to help communities deal with people who have been put under supervision in the community? Is it being successful?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'll call a friend, the Deputy Solicitor General for corrections, in just a second. But I can tell you, we partner with some great agencies: with the John Howard Society, with the Elizabeth Fry Society, with other societies that help us as well. We have some very creative programs to try to make sure that a person doesn't go back down that rabbit hole again.

We want the rates of recidivism lower. That means we have a responsibility to be creative too.

We have some great programs. I saw it in Monteith correctional centre, up in Iroquois Falls, where there is a pathway to become a tradesperson. We have a responsibility, but we have worked tirelessly, believing in the concept that if we reduce the rates of recidivism, it will dramatically keep people from reoffending and keep communities safe.

Deputy?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Deputy minister of corrections, please.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Just a quick thing, because I know I only have a minute left—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): You have one minute and nine seconds.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Are you working with the Attorney General to increase this kind of funding for bail supervision and bail beds, things like that?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'll pass that question, with your permission, to the Deputy Solicitor General.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Deputy Solicitor General?

Ms. Erin Hannah: The Ministry of the Attorney General has the Bail Verification and Supervision Program. We are working with them to look at exploring how that program could perhaps be enhanced to expand its reach. Right now, criteria-wise, it's very much focused on high-risk offenders that are connected to certain types of charges.

From a community correctional services perspective, we don't have any authority, technically, to supervise people on bail. We're really focused on individuals who are under a probation or parole order and/or are released with GPS monitoring and a community supervision order. We have a number of different programs that we work at, through our probation and parole officers across the province, in 122 offices, to support people in a variety of different ways to help them find a different pathway, hopefully, to disconnect from the justice system.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, Deputy, for that response. That concludes the time for the third party.

We'll move, now, to the government, and the parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General, MPP Gualtieri, please.

MPP Silvia Gualtieri: It's such a pleasure to be in committee with the minister, deputy ministers, ministry staff officials and their capable staff. As the parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General, it is a privilege and an honour to serve in this capacity and to examine the province's efforts to strengthen public safety.

It is clear that the recruitment, training and retention of police officers are critical components of a robust and responsive policing system. Ontario's communities—urban, rural and remote—are facing increasingly complex public safety challenges, and the need for well-trained, well-supported front-line officers has never been greater.

Could the Solicitor General elaborate on how the government is ensuring that recruitment efforts continue despite the challenges? Additionally, what measures are being taken to ensure that the expanded training capacity, particularly in new or temporary locations, meets the rigorous standards expected of Ontario's police officers? And how is the ministry working with police services to ensure that these new recruits are effectively integrated into their communities?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank my friend the member from Mississauga East—Cooksville.

I'll say this to her: The numbers speak. Since June 2022, when I was sworn in, I have seen 17 march pasts go through the college. I have personally been there for 15 march pasts. I have personally seen 8,000 people go through the college in four years. The numbers speak for themselves—8,000.

What I can tell the lady opposite is that when the government waived the tuition fee and invested \$34 million a year, people came forward, because it was a barrier of entry. When the government removed the other barriers of

entry forcing people to have a post-secondary degree or a diploma—even though we know 95% of them did, but not everyone. So I asked the ones that don't—because there's one or two in every class that I meet. They have other life experiences that are just as important. They came forward. So I believe, when we cleared the path for people to consider a career in policing by removing the obstacles, they came forward.

But more than that, Mr. Chair, it's an attitudinal change thanks to Premier Ford and our government, thanks to the members of our PC caucus that believe that we have to have an attitude of encouraging people to take a career path in public safety, because it isn't easy. And I'd say the same thing for our correctional officers as well. They are no less important to me.

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

New question, please. MPP Allsopp.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you, Solicitor General, for being here today.

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

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

Could the minister provide further insight into how the PATT team is structured to ensure rapid interprovincial coordination and intelligence sharing, particularly with federal and municipal partners?

Additionally, what mechanisms are in place to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of these initiatives, and how will the government ensure that the recent decline in auto theft is sustained and not simply a temporary disruption in criminal activity?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Solicitor General, to the question, please.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you to my friend from the Bay of Quinte.

People in Ontario are sick of cars getting stolen. And they don't just get stolen because we're at the mall only; they get stolen because people will break down your door at three in the morning and demand your keys. The thing was getting out of control.

I went to the port of Montreal to see for myself, shockingly, the fact that there was very little oversight in our railcars being inspected at the port of Montreal. We had an auto theft summit, so we raised the discussion, and we said to the federal government, "Get yourself in gear because it's a big problem."

We have come a long way. The auto theft grant that the member speaks of has paid dividends because police services have brought in dedicated resources. Without those grants, they wouldn't have been able to do the job that they did.

Mayor Brown yesterday in Peel said what Équité has been saying. Équité Association states that auto thefts in

Ontario are down substantially this year. We want to see it coming down. That means we have to work with the auto manufacturers, with our insurance company, with the insurance bureaus, with the police services. It's something that we're not taking our foot off.

Finally, the government re-announcing our commitment to the prevention of auto theft grant is a reaffirmation to Ontarians. Just as I said in my opening remarks, as long as people are stealing our cars, there's work for us to do. That's what we're doing.

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

New question, please. MPP Ciriello, and you have nine minutes and two seconds.

MPP Monica Ciriello: Oh, the pressure's on. Okay. Thank you, Chair.

Minister, Deputy Ministers, thank you so much for being here and for all of the incredible work you do to protect this great province each and every day.

Corrections and the hard-working corrections officers are incredibly important to public safety as well. We know this includes the investments into improving and expanding correctional infrastructure. As these projects move from planning and design into construction and implementation, it's important for this committee to understand how these investments are being prioritized, how they align with broader correctional reform goals and how their impact will be measured over time.

1630

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

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you, Mr. Chair, to the member from Hamilton Mountain. She's 100% right. We knew when we came to office in June 2018 that there was a lot of work to do. Coming out of the pandemic, when I became Solicitor General in June 2022, I wanted to focus everything that I could on understanding where the opportunities were to go further and faster.

It is this commitment of \$3 billion, we said, where we would build in the short term, where we would build in the medium term. We said we would bring 1,000 beds online in the shortest possible order, and we've achieved that. Now we're going further and faster.

But it also means hiring new people, new correctional officers and support staff. We're talking 3,400 people. We're talking about expanding, as the member said, programming. I want to give a special shout-out to the many chaplains and native inmate liaison officers, or what we call NILOs, who do tremendous work.

At the end of the day, we want to make sure that the investments that we make keep people safe. If it helps send a message—maybe that is happening, Mr. Chair, that the message is resonating. The government takes public safety

seriously. We've made the investments, but we're saying, "Don't commit a crime in the first place. Don't visit one of our facilities. Stay on the right side of the law."

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

New question: MPP Darouze.

MPP George Darouze: Through you, Mr. Chair, thank you, Solicitor General, for being here this afternoon with your team.

I did ask previously, in the first estimates, a question to the Attorney General. I'm going to go back to the same topic. Communities across Ontario continue to express deep concern about repeat violent offenders being released on bail, only to reoffend and pose further risks to public safety. This issue has become a focal point in discussions around justice reform, and it is clear that the current bail system is not adequately protecting victims or deterring high-risk individuals.

The government has consistently emphasized the importance of being tough on crime and ensuring that our justice system prioritizes the safety of law-abiding citizens and front-line officers. Given this context, can you outline the specific steps the government of Ontario has taken to advocate for meaningful bail reform at the federal level? What is the government's position on the necessity of making bail stricter for repeat violent offenders, and how does this align with broader efforts to strengthen public safety across the province?

Furthermore, how does Ontario view the federal government's recent bail reform measures? Do they go far enough in addressing the concerns raised by law enforcement and communities, or is there more that needs to be done to ensure accountability and deterrence?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: To my friend from Carleton, yes, our government has been advocating for bail reform for years. We had a debate in the Legislature. We bring it to every FPT meeting that I've been at. We'll be here in Ontario in December for our next one. That will be number five for me and even more for the AG.

I can tell you this: The federal government is listening, and it is about time. I am very grateful that the Premier and Prime Minister Carney have a good relationship where they can have serious discussions.

We came forward with that \$112-million Bail Compliance and Warrant Apprehension Grant investment because we can't wait, and we know that we can't wait alone for the federal government. That means we have to have the police services working in concert with different government levels to make sure that if people break their bail conditions, they're re-apprehended.

One thing that we did is, and I'll say this to the member from Carleton—the bail dashboard, was a great, great tool. It came as an idea right at the start of my term, and thanks to Minister McGregor, my associate at the time, and Minister Hamid, my associate at the time, we actually saw it to fruition. It's hard to believe, but a relatively small investment that was integrated in a short period of time has

allowed police services across our province to have real-time information on somebody who's breaking their bail or court-ordered conditions. So, yes, we're not waiting.

As I said before to the member from Hamilton Mountain, we're going to stand with the people of Ontario. Somebody has to know we're on their side—and we are.

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

MPP Sarrazin.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Minister, we have heard about the Public Safety Radio Network and its crucial role as public safety infrastructure in Ontario.

Could the Solicitor General provide further details on how the new PSRN will improve operational coordination among different emergency services, particularly in cross-jurisdictional incidents? Additionally, what measures are being taken to ensure that front-line responders are adequately trained and equipped to transition seamlessly to the new digital network, and how is the ministry ensuring that the remaining zones' transition stays on track to meet the two-year completion target?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'm going to say just a couple of words, and then I'll pass it to the deputy.

Let me just say this: The Public Safety Radio Network delivers critical radio communication to over 38,000 Ontario public service emergency and first responders. This is a critical piece of technology.

Deputy Solicitor General?

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: Minister, you're absolutely right—38,000 front-line users. We have 40 million transmissions over that analog voice system each and every year, and we have 476 towers that use that system. It is dated. It is old. It is being held by duct tape.

That's why we're moving to a brand new system called the PSRN. It will be digital. It will be text-based as well. So we're rolling that out. It's a \$765-million investment. We are in the middle of transitioning four zones. The southwest zone has already transitioned onto the new system. We are in the process of transitioning the southeast zone just now. And we are working on transitioning the two northern zones by June 2027. So we are on track, we are on budget and we are making some significant progress. All of this will certainly enhance officer safety of all the users who are on that system.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): I'm going to move to the official opposition and MPP Stevens, please.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you to the minister: I'm going to reiterate the question I asked before I ran out of time.

I want to turn to the funding for health services, page 178. The estimates show a significant increase in funding in this area, from approximately \$174 million in the 2025-26 estimates—so let's go back to the estimates here—to \$222.7 million in 2026-27. This is an increase of about \$48.6 million, or 28%. Even from the estimates of 2025-26 to present, we see an additional almost \$77.5 million was allocated.

I want to be clear that we welcome investments in health services within our correctional facilities. We know that the correctional staff face incredibly challenging work and conditions, and the mental health and well-being of

front-line correctional officers and other OPSEU workers is something that we have consistently advocated for. At the same time, inmates also need access to timely and appropriate health care.

With that significant increase in funding, can the minister outline specifically what programs or services received this additional funding in 2025-26 and what new initiatives or expanded supports are being introduced in 2026-27, particularly when it comes to the mental health and wellness supports for our front-line OPSEU correctional staff?

1640

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'm going to share my time to answer with the deputy. I just want to say this: We have created a new vision for a dedicated health care division within the ministry so that we can modernize the health care model that we're providing in our correctional system. That means having better primary care, having more resources for our correctional staff and providing a new centralized approach that is executing on our vision to provide better care within the institutions.

Deputy Solicitor General?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Excuse me, Mr. Chair, through you: I'm specifically asking about the \$48.6-million increase. Where is that money going?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tyler Allsopp): I'll direct that to the Solicitor General.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you, and I'm going to promptly pass it over to the Deputy Solicitor General.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you. So you can be clear.

Ms. Erin Hannah: Thank you, Mr. Chair and Minister.

The increase that you are referring to is in the health services division operating expense. Similar to your earlier question about the institutional services operating expense, the large bulk of that \$48-million increase is associated with salaries and wages and benefits for front-line health care staff, specifically \$39.2 million of that \$48 million.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Through you, Mr. Chair: Again, thank you for that answer. Can you provide a dollar amount for the new or expanded mental health and wellness supports available for the correctional officers in 2026-27?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tyler Allsopp): To the minister to refer.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'll promptly pass the mike over to the Deputy Solicitor General.

Ms. Erin Hannah: That operating expenditure is really associated with the front-line health care staff that primarily are on the ground in institutions. That includes some of the examples I gave earlier—it's the front-line nurses, pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, social workers, addictions counsellors. It also includes the centralized office staff.

When you're asking about our investments into supporting the mental health and well-being of our front-line staff, inclusive of correctional officers and others—we have a number of investments. That's not in that oper-

ating line. If you would like me to share some information about the strategy, I'm happy to do that.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: If I can ask for that in writing and forward it to me.

Ms. Erin Hannah: As a follow-up? Sure.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Yes, follow-up, please. Because the \$48.6-million increase, to me, is substantial, but if we can't identify today how much is going towards our front-line staff and mental health supports, then there's a little bit of a gap there, I feel, in my opinion.

Ms. Erin Hannah: To be clear, what I was saying is that expenditure line doesn't include that investment.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Okay, thank you.

Through you, Mr. Chair: Minister, I want to turn to the Ontario Police College that you alluded to in your introduction. During the 2025 elections, I remember the Premier committing \$1 billion to essentially rebuild and overhaul the Ontario Police College. But in these estimates that I've been going over, I see \$50.7 million in operating expenses for the police college in 2026-27, which is approximately \$7.3 million less than was budgeted for in 2025-26. Minister, can you explain what accounts for that \$7.3-million reduction?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tyler Allsopp): Minister, to the question or you can refer.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: We are on our way with the Premier's vision to reimagine the Ontario Police College and, with your consent, I'll ask our great assistant deputy minister, Ken Weatherill, to step forward.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tyler Allsopp): Please state your name for the record.

Mr. Ken Weatherill: Thank you, Minister.

For the record, my name is Ken Weatherill. I'm the assistant deputy minister, public safety division, and I oversee the Ontario Police College as part of my responsibilities.

To the question of where's our investment: Our investment has been taken to increase our staffing, to support the delivery of basic constable recruits from approximately 1,600 to 2,080 per year. We hosted a fifth intake last year to meet the needs. We've also made structural investments to the college that are currently under way by expanding the track, by expanding the firing ranges and by working on the gate system which surrounds and provides security to the college.

With respect to the investments that you mentioned related to the \$1-billion investment, we are currently moving forward with submissions for consideration through Treasury Board to modernize and expand the Ontario Police College, to meet the training needs of the sector to move forward. That information will be coming forthwith.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Can you direct me? Where in these 2026-27 estimates is the \$1 billion committed for the overhaul, which you just explained, of the Ontario Police College reflected?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Again, I'll pass it back to Assistant Deputy Minister Weatherill. But I'll say this: We are moving forward. We haven't knocked the building down. We haven't spent a billion dollars. What we are doing is we are being incremental, and we're being very transparent with

what we are doing now, making sure that the existing facility meets the basic needs for what we call the basic constable training.

Assistant Deputy Minister?

Mr. Ken Weatherill: Thanks, Minister. You're absolutely right. Those investments are on the table, and they're to be invested.

What we have done thus far with a portion of that \$1 billion is to invest in two new gun ranges and modernize the third gun range. We have expanded the track to double its capacity, doubling the footprint. And we are working on the gate. We have increased, additional parking. And we have modernized the facility, created extra space with tensile membrane structures, to support the delivery of mandatory training.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I just want to be clear. I'm not asking about the \$50.7-million operating budget. I'm asking about the \$1-billion capital commitment that was made by the Premier. Where is that reflected in the 2026-27 budget? Can I have an answer?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'll be very happy to give the member an answer.

We haven't spent it yet. The assistant deputy minister was very helpful in saying how we have spent the money that is in the estimates thus far.

Our vision is to see a new college built, and we're going to do that, just as we're going to execute our vision at the Ontario Provincial Police Academy, which is of equal need and urgency.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'm wondering what fiscal year we will be seeing the \$1-billion capital commitment come into the estimates.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: We're going through the process. There's a staging process. We are, right now, at the very beginning, and we will be moving it forward. So it will not be appearing imminently, but it will be made clearer as we move forward with our plans.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I was looking for a timeline for when this funding will be reflected in the government's estimates, but I'm not seeing that. I understand it may be a multi-year commitment.

My question is, how much of that \$1 billion is actually being allocated in 2026-27, and where is that amount reflected in the estimates? I have not gotten the answer.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: We have not yet gone to Treasury Board for that expenditure. We are where we are today. However, we have a vision. It's a good vision. And it's a good plan.

I would invite all members of the Legislature, as they have time, to go out and see the facility that we have today.

That's why we want to make the critical investment of standing with our men and women who will come in the years ahead to serve Ontario but have their basic constable training in a first-class centre that we're proud of.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'm going to move over now to my questions on the PAWS and animal welfare enforcement.

1650

Minister, I want to turn to that PAWS enforcement. The planned budget appears to decrease from approximately \$46.8 million in 2025-26 to \$42.7 million this year. I'm seeing roughly a \$4-million reduction. And the interim, actually, expenditure—for 2025-26 approximately \$49.9 million. At the same time, the province now has full responsibility for animal welfare enforcement and communities have continued to call for more enforcement officers.

Why is the planned funding going down at the same time the province has assumed full responsibility for enforcements?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Chair, there are a number of factors that go into that expense, including the timing of shelter care which is a very large expense and it varies year to year. I'll ask the assistant deputy minister, Ken Weatherill, to offer his clarity on it.

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

Assistant Deputy Minister, please, to the question.

Mr. Ken Weatherill: Thank you, Minister.

Through the Chair to the question: The minister is absolutely right; the bulk of that reduction in spending is a result of shelter and veterinary care. We have identified efficiencies. We've partnered with another of the commodity groups to assist in some of the expenditures, so we've been able to reduce that.

It also varies year over year, as a relation to some of the animals that we need to take into care, such as a couple of dogs might be X number of dollars, a couple hundred head of cattle would be significantly more. Those are driving factors as to why those numbers are reduced.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you: I'm looking for an answer on, through the minister and through your team—and I appreciate the answers that you're giving. However, I'm looking more towards enforcement. I get that animal shelter takes a line out of your budget, your \$42.7 million this year and roughly \$4-million reduction. However, can I ask the question then, how many enforcement inspectors are currently working across Ontario?

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: PAWS enforcement, sorry.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Chair, to the member opposite from St. Catharines, we have approximately 100 provincial animal welfare inspectors.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response. You have 17 seconds.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Oh. Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for answering my questions. I might just have a few given to you at another time where we can sit down and chat.

But thank you for answering my questions, and I want to acknowledge that we are in estimates and that's why I've been asking for dollar figures and questions of what's going on in 2025-26 to—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Your time has elapsed.

On to the third party with MPP McCrimmon, and the clock is ticking. Questions, please.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Thank you to everyone who has come today to give us the answers we're looking for.

So I'm a very kind of linear thinker. The OPP budget is coming up to \$2 billion now, with a \$64-million increase. Do you have priorities for that additional \$64 million and do you have targets and outcomes that you're hoping to achieve?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thanks, Mr. Chair, and to the member from Kanata–Carleton: It's a very pertinent question because police services have to set their priorities. She's right; the OPP is part of our ministry, and we have had contractual obligations, firstly, that have caused our budget to increase, and secondly, we've been filling positions that have long been empty.

But specific to your question, I'll ask Deputy Solicitor General Di Tommaso to provide greater clarity on their priorities—or how they set their priorities and how they measure it.

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: Through you, Mr. Chair: Absolutely, the Ontario Provincial Police does have a strategic plan. It's a four-year plan. It is developed and renewed and refreshed almost annually, but that plan is currently being revised right now, and it does have key performance indicators depending upon what it is that is of most concern to the ministry, to the commissioner as well. For example, when we have an increase in impaired driving, road safety becomes a key priority. Key performance metrics are developed with regard to how we look after that very particular public safety issue. So that looks after increased enforcement, increased court charges laid, increased impoundments. All of that is measured. It really depends on what is of most concern right across the province.

One of the issues that we're looking at right now is, for example, border integrity. That is a key pillar of the OPP. It's a strategic priority. We are looking after border integrity by Operation Deterrence 1.0 and, right now, Operation Deterrence 2.0 as well. We're looking at how do we assist in better securing our borders with our partnership with the RCMP and the Canadian border security agency as well.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response. New question, please.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: The bad news is that there were two polls done this summer, one in Toronto and one in Mississauga, and 45% of Mississauga residents said the city was less safe than one year earlier, and 51% of Toronto residents said the city was less safe than one year earlier. When you look at that, how are you going to communicate with people—if that's not true, if that's just how they're feeling, and the data, the statistics, the evidence don't support that, how do we make people feel more safe?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I very much appreciate the question, because the job of a government—whoever the government is—whenever they are in office, is to protect

their population. It means that we have to constantly be innovative.

I go back to the lady opposite that the Community Safety and Policing Act was a great example of an initiative that our government took to bring forward a piece of legislation that goes with the times that we're in. World-wide criminality is completely undeniable. The lady from Kanata–Carleton knows that, but she also has great experience, with a sophisticated military background, to know that as criminals become more sophisticated, governments, their agencies, their policing partners need to do that as well. It is something that—we have to work in tandem with our police services, with our federal government, with municipal governments as well.

But we're not going to stop. I think the investments in putting more boots on the ground, being strategic with our investments, coming forward with pieces of technology like the bail dashboard, as an example, are things that we're doing.

Yes, criminals are becoming more sophisticated, and so are we.

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

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Minister, your ministry's operating budget is now \$4.83 billion—\$300 million more than last year. Are you looking for some particular public safety outcomes with this additional money? What kind of measurable improvements are you going to be able to show to the people of Ontario?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I thank the member opposite.

We're showing the people of Ontario that we're a government that cares about them, that's on their side. We're telling the people of Ontario that we have within the ministry the flagship police service within Canada—that's the OPP—the investments as part of the numbers that the lady from Kanata–Carleton referenced—and she's right: We have a big budget. The OPP represents a very large portion of that budget, and so does corrections.

I have to always—and I'd like to say to my friend opposite that we have a very good relationship with the OPSEU union that represents our correctional workers, because I care about their welfare. I care about their success within their careers. So it is a constant, 24-hour-a-day objective of myself as Solicitor General, of Premier Ford as Premier to protect the province. That's what we're going to keep doing.

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

1700

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: So let's talk about corrections. And I think it's particularly important because there's still coroners' inquests; they are still recommending improvements in mental health staffing, nursing and access to psychiatrists and health care delivery.

So, Minister, why are coroners' juries in 2026 still recommending that your ministry increase psychiatrists and nursing staffs inside Ontario correctional facilities?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you. Mr. Chair, I appreciate the work that the coroners' inquests do. We read them. We consider them. We act on a lot of what they say, and we talk about it, most importantly, within the ministry.

I'm going to ask the Deputy Solicitor General to talk about the monies that we've spent in that category, which the member from Kanata—Carleton has raised, so we can answer her question with some clarity. Deputy?

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

Ms. Erin Hannah: Right. Thank you.

So I think the question—if I heard correctly, Mr. Chair—was related to why coroners' juries are still making recommendations about increasing health care staffing within correctional facilities. It's a fantastic question. I will say that, like the minister, I greatly respect the role that coroners' inquests play.

I will say that we have a backlog of inquests, so some of the events that are being looked at by the juries actually happened several years ago. While the ministry has tried to present its information to demonstrate the progress that has been made, that is not always digested and reflected in the recommendations from the juries. We are finding, as you alluded to, that they repeat certain recommendations to the ministry.

The progress we have made from a health care transformation perspective in the last few years I think is exceptional. The minister alluded to the establishment of a dedicated health services division that is responsible for taking a clinical oversight approach to the delivery of health care in corrections. One of the messages that I deliver to my team, and we talk about, is a vision of moving from a correctional system that happens to deliver health care to a health care system that is operating in a unique environment. And that's a fundamental difference to our approach.

We have brought on more health care staff. We are working to change our recruitment and retention practices so that we can be a more attractive destination of employment, for nurses in particular but also other health care professionals. We're starting to see the fruits of those efforts, and I think we'll continue to see that reflected in the number of staff we have, which is why our salary and wages dollars are going up, and also in the outcomes that we see for individuals who are incarcerated.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response.

New question, and you have five minutes and 20 seconds.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Are all of our mental health and health care positions within the correctional services all filled? Are there any vacant?

Ms. Erin Hannah: We always have a level of vacancy. I mean, there's a natural level of vacancy that would occur in any operation that is so large and decentralized as correctional services in Ontario. Just to note, we are the largest correctional service in Canada, including the federal government, so just want to be clear about that.

So, yes, we don't have all of our positions filled. Some of the approvals that we've received to fill some of the

health care gaps that we've identified with the minister's support are in process of recruitment.

We've been working with Treasury Board Secretariat to launch talent pools so that we can actually hire more people in bulk and have them identify different regions that they're willing to work in, so that we're not running individual competitions and we can speed up the time to hire. We've seen a decrease of like six weeks in the time to hire. It was a really long process.

We're also starting to see more interest. We've had a few job fairs where we're starting to see students coming from the nursing schools, from pharmacy programs actually show up at our job fairs and want to learn about the correctional services environment.

So it's a work in progress, I would say. We still have a level of vacancy, but I think we're making gains.

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

Three minutes and 55 seconds. New question please.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: The last topic is emergency communications. So I have a large riding—suburban, rural—and communications is always a challenge, especially in the rural part of the riding.

Now, I would like to know about the Public Safety Radio Network. That's a program that's ongoing right now. Do we know if it is on schedule? Is it happening the way it should?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): To the question.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you, again, to my friend from Kanata—Carleton.

I said it before, actually, to a question the government members asked me: 38,000 Ontario public service emergency and first responders in Ontario help governments manage these situations. It's a lot of people; it's a big investment.

I'll ask the Deputy Solicitor General for community safety to provide additional clarity.

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: Thank you for the question.

Through you, Mr. Chair, we have already transitioned the southwest zone onto the new system. We are in the middle of transitioning the southeast zone onto the new system, which is digital. What we have yet to do is transition the two northern zones, and those two northern zones are proving to be the most difficult zones to transition to because we have fewer towers up in the north, as you could imagine. Those towers that we do have don't have the necessary generators to provide the power to operate, so one of the things that we're doing is we are renewing all of the generators to power those towers. And because these towers are farther apart, we do have issues with regard to the clarity of the transmissions.

All that to say, we are alive to all of the concerns that our public safety personnel have—because it's not just police. It's also firefighters up in the north; it's also paramedics, ambulance, you name it. They rely on those systems. So we are aware, and every time we turn on a tower, we test that tower to make sure that it is working properly. When it is not, we hold our two contractors—Bell Mobility and Motorola—to account, to make sure that

we have sufficient coverage, and we will not sign off on that coverage unless we are satisfied that it is providing the radio service that we need.

So that work is a work in progress in the two northern zones, and that contract expires in June 2027. I don't believe we will meet that deadline. We will have to expand or extend that contract for, I believe, maybe another six months to one year to get that work actually done. It is a complex system, and we've started this work way back in 2018, but we are getting to the end. There is a light at the end of the tunnel.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response. You have 56 seconds. You might get a quick question in.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: The federal Next Generation 9-1-1: Now, are you helping municipalities do that? Is there money for that?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Minister.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I really appreciate that question because, yes, we've put over \$250 million in NG9-1-1 supports.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: There you go. You've got to end it on a positive note.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Not only that, but we have helped them through multiple rounds. We're now in round 4. And it's amazing when you see police services switch over to NG9-1-1.

I want to thank the member for her question because it's a very good question.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: I guess I'm done.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): That concludes the time—it's 11 seconds, so there's not enough time for another question.

Over to the government. We have MPP Allsopp with the first question from the government.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Chair, through you to the Solicitor General—and maybe even if Deputy Solicitor General Di Tommaso, who's responsible for public safety, wanted to provide some insight as well, I would certainly appreciate it.

The question is about the launch of Operation Deterrence in January 2025, which I think signalled a renewed commitment by the Ontario government to strengthen border security and enhance enforcement at international crossings. This initiative, alongside the expansion of the OPP's Joint Forces Border Drug Interdiction Task Force, represents a strategic approach to combatting illegal border crossings and the flow of illicit goods. These efforts are commendable and necessary, especially given the complex and evolving nature of organized crime and transnational threats.

As you know, Solicitor General, this is something that's incredibly important in my neck of the woods, in Bay of Quinte, as we sit right along the shores of Lake Ontario, directly between Montreal and Toronto. So we do have a significant amount of illegal goods that have flowed into our communities, especially given our geographic location, being on that 401 corridor and being smaller to mid-sized municipalities. Often, criminals think that there's an opportunity to get illegal goods, illegal drugs, even human trafficking through that portion of southeastern Ontario.

My hope was that you could provide further detail on the operational scope and objectives of Operation Deterrence—you mentioned earlier Operation Deterrence 2.0, which we're very much looking forward to—including how it coordinates with federal agencies such as the Canada Border Services Agency and the RCMP.

1710

Additionally, what else is the government doing to reduce illegal border crossings and the trafficking of guns and drugs, and how will these efforts be scaled and sustained over time to ensure continued protection of Ontario's borders?

I do just want to put a plug in: You mentioned earlier that there would be \$30 million to help support communities with infrastructure along the water. I will certainly be asking that Chief Rodd and Deputy Chief Meeks put in for that as well because I think we could use some work in Bay of Quinte.

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I really want to salute my friend from the Bay of Quinte for his incredible representation of the community, especially in the aftermath of what was a massacre in the making at the Sons of Jacob synagogue. MPP Allsopp was a pillar of strength when we really needed it, so thank you.

When the Premier reminded all of us in the Legislature that the borders of Ontario stretch 2,400 kilometres from Cornwall in the east, to Pigeon River/Fort Frances in the west, he sent me on a journey. The good news is, it wasn't over just a few days, because it's a long border. But I travelled from Cornwall to Pigeon River. I didn't get as far as Fort Frances yet; it's the next stop over. It goes to show you just how vast our province is. And while we have a lot of waterways, we also have unprotected land crossings.

We didn't wait for President Trump to tell us that we have to take our border security to a very serious level. That's why we came forward with Operation Deterrence 1.0. We made the investments primarily to allow the OPP to have a higher complement of staffing within the jurisdictional borders of our province to provide extra security and policing protection there. But we advocated very strongly to the federal government: "You have to work in tandem with us." I said in my opening remarks, thank you to the federal government that has made an announcement to strengthen CBSA staffing levels and technology. That's important, because right now, we are doing the powerlifting or heavy lifting in lieu of the federal government having an adequate and effective complement of staff.

So Operation Deterrence 1.0 made a big difference; 2.0 will provide, as the member for Bay of Quinte said, an opportunity for police services that are on the maritime or waterway borders to acquire additional assets they may not have been able to acquire. When you look at how we came forward with the joint air support unit, it was again a good example of saying, "We have to be integrated." Marine, air, personnel, technology—it goes in tandem.

It's a great question, and we're going to continue not to stop, but to use this incrementally, step after step, to show Ontarians just how seriously we take their public safety.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, Minister, for that response.

I take a new question with MPP Ciriello, please.

MPP Monica Ciriello: I'm going to bring the conversation back to connectivity. Just a few weeks ago, I actually had the opportunity to tour our dispatch centre—which falls in my riding of Hamilton Mountain—and Hamilton's official launch of the Next Generation 9-1-1 Program. To see that on the ground and the difference that it makes in the community—I really want to thank you for the investment to make that happen.

Connectivity is essential for public safety right across this province, and we know it's the government's responsibility to improve that emergency response. The Public Safety Broadband Network has long been recognized as a transformative innovation that can significantly enhance the operational effectiveness of all emergency services.

Minister, can you elaborate on the specific steps the government is taking to accelerate the deployment of Public Safety Broadband Networks, including timelines, funding commitments and how provincial input such as Ontario's pilot findings and government recommendations is helping the federal policy development process? How is SOLGEN working to support the advancement of a nation-wide Public Safety Broadband Network in Canada?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General. We are leading the discussion across Canada. In fact, every province and territory is looking to us for leadership. The federal government has also embraced the work that we have done. We are by far and away further than any other province in terms of our adopting of the Next Generation 9-1-1 technology.

Let me just give some context to the member of—and I'm going to ask the deputy to say a few words too—what does this mean? We're providing an opportunity for real-time sharing of information where an officer may be at a scene or an individual who has called. The rapidness of getting real-time information that can help save lives is immeasurable.

The government's \$250-million-plus investment has taken what appeared to be a monumental task—the member from Kanata—Carleton said, and she's correct, rural Ontario, urban Ontario is different. We have to make sure that the Public Safety Broadband Network can provide a surety to all Ontarians that we'll be able, with dispatch, to get to the scene of an emergency.

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

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you: We are so concerned about public safety telecommunications that we have our own division within our ministry that is focused on NG9-1-1, on PSRN and Public Safety Broadband Network as well, led by Assistant Deputy Minister Joy Stevenson.

In Ontario, we have 120,000 full-time first responders and 100,000 volunteer first responders, all of which need that dedicated digital data communication. Ontario did complete our very first pilot in partnership with Bell back in 2025. At the time, we were the only province that completed that pilot.

We looked at 57 towers in both Kingston and Oshawa, and it was a resounding success. We have been advocating for the federal government to move forward on the plan for all provinces in Canada. Canada did release its TNCO report—it's a temporary office on telecommunications—and there were five recommendations and 10 principles embedded in that report. We have adopted that report, and we are supporting it completely. We have Band 14 allocated towards this PSBN.

All that to say is the federal government unfortunately has been ragging the puck and dragging their feet a little bit with regard to moving forward on what a national PSBN would look like. We are advocating that maybe we move forward with a shared public safety commercial broadband network in partnership with some of our commercial carriers, where public safety would pre-empt and be prioritized over commercial traffic. That's the model.

We have reported back to Public Safety Canada on a number of questions that they asked because they consulted with all provinces in the fall of last year. We provided a 150-page response to that consultation process. We are continuing to advocate.

As a matter of fact, just today, we had the federal-provincial-territorial meeting on emergency management. One of the agenda items was the Public Safety Broadband Network. We are advocating to the federal government to move forward. Let's get on with it. You have to come up with what the entire organizational structure is going to look like.

We are in good shape, provincially speaking. Ontario is the lead in moving forward with the Public Safety Broadband Network in order to keep our first responders safe.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, Deputy, for that response. Thank you, Minister.

I have four minutes and 43 seconds. MPP Darouze, please. New question.

MPP George Darouze: Thank you, Chair, and through you: Minister and of course your team, it's very nice to hear about that, and thank you for giving us that information because it's very important. We know Ontarians are really safe when they go to bed at night and when they wake up in the morning to go to work.

Over the past several years, Ontario has faced increasingly complex public safety challenges, from auto theft and organized crime to pressures on our correctional systems, border security and the evolving needs of first responders. In response, the government has introduced a series of targeted initiatives and investments aimed at strengthening the province's public safety infrastructure and enhancing the capacity of law enforcement and emergency services.

Can the Solicitor General provide a comprehensive overview of the government investments in public safety today? I know this is a lot to unpack, Minister, but it is important at committee, especially when doing estimates, for the public to hear the numbers. We appreciate your answer.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Minister, to the question, please. You have three minutes left in this question.

1720

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'll just draw back my memory to my opening remarks, because it was sharing a vision of where we were and where we're going. It's a \$3-billion commitment to reimagine our correctional system. It's hiring thousands of new people. I will always give a shout-out to our incredible correctional officers and probation and parole officers. It's saying to Ontarians, "We know our population is growing. So, therefore, where are we building more spaces?" I've been transparent and I've gone across our province, as Solicitor General, to see for myself.

That's \$3 billion. We have to reimagine how are we going to have police colleges and OPP academies in the future. We have a plan. The assistant deputy minister has said where we are as per the estimates with the monies we've presently spent at the Ontario Police College to improve the facilities right now, for today.

We said we would come forward with investments with Operation Deterrence 1.0, which provided funds that are in the estimates as to allowing the OPP to have additional resources. We said we would come forward with the joint air support unit, and we already have helicopters flying in the sky in Peel, in Durham and with the OPP, and that's important.

We said we would help fight crime and fight it hard by catching the people who are stealing our cars, and that's the Preventing Auto Thefts Grant—and just this last week, we re-announced that for another year that is going to go forward. We said we have to address those out on bail who think we're never going to find them. Well, we are. That's the \$112 million in the Bail Compliance and Warrant Apprehension Grant.

And we've invested monies through the Community Safety and Policing Grant—over \$1 billion just in the last number of years, which allow a police service to set their priorities and to execute on it. We're not stopping.

That's an excellent question, and I'm hoping I gave you some examples as to what we're doing.

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

You've got one minute and 12 seconds for a supplementary. Parliamentary assistant Gualtieri, please.

MPP Silvia Gualtieri: Minister, we have had various discussions and conferences—and also during AMO—on the rise of retail theft.

Minister, as retail theft has become a growing concern for businesses and communities across Ontario, store owners and employees are increasingly reporting incidents that affect their sense of safety, and increase the costs and put additional pressures on local economies. We know that our government has made public safety a priority and has

worked with police services and community partners to address these challenges.

Could the Solicitor General provide an update on what our government is doing to combat retail theft and support police in holding offenders accountable?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Twenty-five seconds, Minister.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Let's pass Bill 119. Let's debate it. Let it come out of the committee. Let's send it back to the chamber.

But really and truly, yesterday, when I was in Peel, I so very carefully listened to the fact that organized retail crime is a major issue. We're going to work to make sure that the community's safe—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, Minister, for that response.

We're moving back to the official opposition who have approximately eight minutes for questions. MPP Stevens, please, when you're ready.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I didn't think I would have this opportunity, so I want to thank you for that. The time is flying by here.

Minister, I'm going to go back to the PAWS animal welfare enforcement and ask you a few more questions on that.

Minister, as I said, the planned budget has appeared to decrease—roughly \$4 million in reductions. And, you know, in Niagara, we have seen within Marineland—the lack of effectiveness of animal welfare enforcement played a significant part of the story at Marineland.

I'm wondering if I could ask the minister, with this decrease of \$4 million, is it fair to say that the reductions might be within PAWS enforcement inspectors? You only have 100—that's the number I received, just this afternoon—provincial inspectors.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, Mr. Chair—and I thank the member from St. Catharines—I think ADM Weatherill talked about it. There are timing issues, amongst other things, of storing of animals, of veterinarian care. But really and truly, the numbers speak for themselves: 136,000 inspections and investigations since 2020 that resulted in over 17,800 orders being issued, 2,300 charges being laid and an incredible almost 15,000 animals removed from situations negatively impacting their welfare.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Through you again, Mr. Chair: I guess my question is, I understand that there are many efficiencies, but what specifically accounts for the \$4-million reduction? Is it enforcement capacity being reduced, or are you saying the same level of enforcement will be delivered for less amount of money across Ontario with less amount of inspectors? And I'm just wondering because, as I said, we saw it was a crucial part that happened with Marineland in Niagara, and I need to ask that question, if it's the enforcement problem.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Through the minister, please, for the referral.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Let me just comment on Marineland. Animal welfare inspectors were there almost weekly. They were there countless times. They did their job, but they were not the operator of the facility; that was a private business. The role of the animal welfare team was to go in there, make inspections, lay charges, issue orders. They did their job, but—

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chair, but I think my question was not to focus completely in on Marineland. Let's focus in on the \$4-million reduction instead. I think my question was, is enforcement capacity being reduced or are you saying the same level of enforcement will be delivered for less money?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'm going to ask ADM Weatherill—but I'll say this: No, we're not reducing the animal welfare services team. We're not doing that at all. But there are variables, as there are within any ministry, and timing issues. With your permission, Mr. Chair, let ADM Weatherill again repeat the variances on the veterinarian costs and the sheltering costs.

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

Mr. Ken Weatherill: Thanks very much, Minister, and through you, Chair, to the question: Specifically, we are not reducing the size of animal welfare services. We have 201 total as our complement for animal welfare service, of which 100 are front-line investigators and inspectors. They are supported by veterinarians. They are supported by other special major crime investigative teams that are displaced appropriately across the province to ensure that we have the right assets available for where they need them. We have become more efficient at our deployment as a result of understanding the footprint better.

Just to specifically deal with it as an example: With Marineland, we conducted 250 inspections since 2020—

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'm well aware.

Mr. Ken Weatherill: —and 33 orders were issued, so we are not pulling back on orders. We are using the legislation to the best of our ability to ensure that those that are offenders are being held accountable through the appropriate processes, ma'am.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for the response.

New question.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I guess I'm not going to get the answer to where the \$4-million reduction is and where the efficiencies might come in the next year.

So anyway, let's focus in on our emergency service telecommunications. I'm mindful of my time; I've only got three minutes and 30 seconds left approximately.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): You've got less than that, two minutes and 32 seconds.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Oh, no.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): The only clock that counts is the Clerk's.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Okay, sorry.

So Minister, I want to turn to emergency services. Through you, Mr. Chair, the estimates appear to show a \$23.7-million reduction in the operating expense budget. This area supports critical public safety communications including the Public Safety Radio Network, Next Generation 9-1-1 and Public Safety Broadband Network.

Can you explain significantly what is driving that \$23.7-million reduction? I just want a quick answer.

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'll call it like the umpire calls it; it's a good question, and it's a timing difference.

I'll ask Deputy Solicitor General Di Tommaso to provide greater clarity.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Deputy Minister, you have one minute and 40 seconds to answer the question.

1730

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you: Typically, what happens is, when Bell, for example, does not meet its contractual obligations, they are not paid for the invoice that they submit, so that money is reprofiled into the next fiscal year. That happens on a regular basis, where we reprofile substantial amounts of money because Bell has not met their obligations to provide that which they are required to provide in their contract. It happens on a regular basis—

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Sorry to interrupt. Thank you for that.

So the \$23.7 million is going to Bell?

Mr. Mario Di Tommaso: No, it's being reprofiled into the next fiscal year for payment once Bell provides its obligations under the contract.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Very interesting.

Minister, I want to ask about policing costs associated with Ford Fest this year. Given the policing and security requirements associated with a large public event, can you tell this committee how much was spent on it?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I didn't hear the whole question. Please repeat it.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Given the policing and security requirements associated with a large public event, can you tell this committee how much was spent on policing for the Ford Fest this year?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: The Toronto Police Service provided—I don't direct the Toronto Police Service. They provided service, and they called in other people from other services to assist them, as any other event would, as well. So that is something that you'd have to direct—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that response.

That concludes the time for questions and answers. And this concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of the Solicitor General.

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

Shall vote 2601, ministry administration, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It carries.

Shall vote 2603, public safety division, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It carries.

Shall vote 2604, Ontario Provincial Police, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It carries.

Shall vote 2605, correctional services, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It carries.

Shall vote 2607, agencies, boards and commissions, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It carries.

Shall vote 2609, emergency planning and management, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It carries.

Shall vote 2610, strategic policy division, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It carries.

Shall vote 2612, Inspectorate of Policing, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It carries.

Shall vote 2614, emergency services telecommunications, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It carries.

Shall vote 2615, data insights and strategic initiatives, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It carries.

Shall vote 2616, health services, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It carries.

Shall vote 2617, infrastructure, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It carries.

Shall the Chair report the 2026-27 estimates of the Ministry of the Solicitor General to the House? All those in favour? Opposed? It carries.

This concludes our consideration of this ministry's estimates.

I'd like to thank the minister, everyone here from the staff supporting the minister, deputy minister and assistant deputy ministers.

Thank you to the Clerk. Thank you to legislative research and Hansard.

And thank you very much to all the committee members for your tremendous work over the last three days of estimates going forward.

This committee is now adjourned until Thursday, October 8 at 3 p.m., in committee room 2.

The committee adjourned at 1735.

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