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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

### CAREGIVERS

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should implement an Ontario caregiver support benefit (OCSB) to provide direct financial supports to unpaid caregivers who play a vital role in our health care system and enhance the quality of life of the people they care for.

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for their presentation.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Today, in the province of Ontario, we know that over 4.2 million Ontarians have self-reported as providing unpaid care for their family and friends. Speaker, when I first brought this motion forward in 2024, that number was much smaller. That's because we have an aging population—more seniors today than we've ever had before. It's also because, since I brought this motion forward, guess what has happened? Newfoundland and PEI have joined Nova Scotia in providing a caregiver benefit. They understand these supports save money in other parts of the health care system.

In Niagara, we have one of the oldest communities in Ontario, more seniors than other places.

The reality is that caregiving work touches our lives in so many ways. I can think of my own wife, Rita. She spent her career in public education, became a principal, and then when her dad got sick, Rita chose to retire a year early so that she could be there for her dad, take care of him—that's what caregivers do—all the way up to the time he passed. She did the same thing for her mom, and she's currently a caregiver for her aunt.

The work that caregivers do can be anything, from administration support, like booking medical appointments, filling out forms, speaking to health care professionals, to medical assistance, like helping their mom or their dad with their medication, to emotional support, like being there for that loved one, making them feel like they are respected, and dignity and love from the people in their lives.

And that's what this motion is about. It's about treating our unpaid caregivers with respect and dignity. There's often a real financial cost that comes with caregiving. Many caregivers have to dip into their savings or take a loan, in some cases quit their job, drop out of school to care for their moms, their aunts, their dads, their grandparents and in some cases even their kids.

Caregivers spend an average of 10 to 20 hours per week on care. That's a part-time job. It should be compensated like one. That's what this motion is about: ensuring that we're there for our caregivers, with direct financial support.

We know, from the research done by several organizations, about the issues caregivers are facing today in the province of Ontario. Nearly 300,000 caregivers have reported financial hardship because of their caregiving responsibility; 77% have dipped into their savings; 30,000 caregivers have left their employment because of caregiving needs—think about that.

We know our moms, our dads, our grandparents want to age in place at home and live with their families, in their communities, with dignity. Think of how a caregiver benefit could make that a reality for so many of our loved ones right across the province.

I want to be clear: This isn't coming from myself here. We have an excellent organization called the Ontario Caregiver Coalition, which has done so much to improve research. Research points to the average out-of-pocket of caregivers: $758 per month. That's nearly $9,000 a year. That includes paying for hospital parking, by the way. That still isn't free in Ontario—when you have one of the richest provinces in Canada.

This isn't the only organization. We receive letters of support and statements from health organizations right across the province, Speaker, from Young Caregivers Association, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Alzheimer Society, Community Living Ontario, MS Canada, Ontario Parents Advocating for Children with Cancer, Heart Niagara, the Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence—all here in support of this benefit. They call for this benefit because they believe it should be a non-partisan issue, and that's right.

Statement after statement is calling on all elected officials—the Liberals, the independents, the NDP, the Greens and the Conservatives—"to stand with Ontario's unpaid family care partners."

They point out to the research saying caring and caregiving is going to give patients—it keeps people out of the hospital hallways and off the wait-lists in long-term care.

In fact, these organizations all put together a letter, signed and addressed to the Premier of Ontario, asking him to support this motion.

We also know about the issues facing our long-term care and our home care right now. We have a massive wait-list for seniors waiting to get into long-term care. Over 50,000 people—seniors—are waiting on lists for long-term care. We know that many of those seniors end up in long-term care when they don't want to go, when they'd rather be aging at home. A direct benefit for caregivers would greatly reduce the burden on long-term care and the retirement home system and make it easier for workers to be at home.

We also know that women are most impacted with the caregiving. We know women are 50% more likely to report caregiving than men. We know it impacts their work more than men. This motion to create a paid benefit for the caregivers is a real way for us to promote equality in the workplace and at home.

I'm now going to read a statement from a mother in Niagara who reached out to me after our last debate for the caregiver motion. She is now the board chair of Ontario Parents Advocating for Children with Cancer. Her name is Emily Hammond. "In 2011, my son, Griffin, was 22 months old and was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive cancer. My world changed in ways I could never imagine.

"I became his primary caregiver through 48 weeks of chemo; 25 radiation treatments to this tiny, innocent face; countless scans; MRIs; hospital visits. I was his mom, but I was also his nurse, medication manager, appointment coordinator and advocate. I also had to step away from my full-time job.

"The financial and emotional stress was crippling. We needed support from everyone around us: our loved ones, our parents, but most importantly, our government. But at that time, there was little caregiving leave and financial support.

"It took us"—think about this—"over 10 years to pay off our debt we accumulated from Griffin's sickness. Families shouldn't have to spend the next decade recovering financially for trying to get health care for their children—not in Canada and certainly not in one of the richest provinces in Canada.

"Today, Griffin is cancer-free. I want people to know that he's growing into an incredible young man. I'm proud to be his mom and grateful for the people and organizations that did what they could to help.

"But now, it's the government's turn to acknowledge the need to help caregivers. It's why I support this motion, and I hope all parties step up and do their part."

We can all send a message to Emily: It's possible to work together and create a caregiver benefit. A program similar to the one in Nova Scotia and PEI could replace—listen to this; it's incredible—up to 7.8% of Ontario's long-term-care beds at a time when we have 50,000 on a wait-list to get a long-term-care bed. Each dollar represents a benefit that caregivers can replace by up to $2.69 spent subsidizing long-term care. This benefit would immediately save close to $500,000.

What is this? I say to my colleagues on the other side that this is a win-win-win, easy. It's the right thing to do for our moms, our dads, our grandparents, our aunts, our uncles and our kids, giving them the chance to age in a place like home. It's the right thing to do for Ontarians living with a disability who too often fall through the cracks of our social service programs. It's the right thing to do to advance the cause of gender equality in the province of Ontario. It's the right thing to do for our health care system, our long-term-care system, our retirement homes and our social service sector, which are really struggling right now. It's the right thing to do for caregivers who are there for us when we need them.

**1810**

My suggestion is that we pass this motion so that we're there for our caregivers today, tomorrow and in the future. Because you know what? Anybody can end up being a caregiver at any point in time in their life. It can happen like that.

I'm going to finish by telling a story about my daughter. In her early forties, about nine months ago, she had a heart attack. It's called a SCAD heart attack that only happens with women between 40 and 50 years old. It's a blocking of the blood vessel and, just like that, it changed her life. She was a school teacher, but she needed a caregiver to help her get better. That was her family. She's got three beautiful daughters. They were the caregivers. She had family members that would help her. That can happen to anybody.

So, I'm saying to my colleagues on the other side: Support the motion. Send it to committee. Listen to the stories that are out there. We can all do better in the richest province in the country. Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I want to thank my honourable colleague from Niagara Falls for bringing forward this motion and giving recognition to those who give up their lives to take care of their loved ones. And I want to say that I'll be supporting this motion.

I want to structure my remarks in the following way. I want to salute one of my constituents, Guy Paquette, who's an unpaid caregiver for his parents in Kingston. He wrote a petition, "Support for 24/7 Family Caregivers," that has been circulating and continues to come in. I just presented another batch of petitions earlier this week. It's a petition asking for support for 24/7 caregivers, including some kind of financial support for them. And these petitions just keep coming in.

But I want to tell the story of Guy Paquette, because he's a perfect example of somebody who would make very good use of a caregiver support benefit. He's somebody who's very deserving and somebody who I think just has a wonderful story to tell.

The story starts six years ago. Guy Paquette owned a store in Kingston called Bagot Leather. Bagot Leather was a great business in downtown Kingston. A few years before, it was in the mall out west. I remember when I first went there—it was over 25 years ago—I bought some high-quality luggage for the first time in my life that was guaranteed for life. This luggage was guaranteed for life. Guy Paquette and the Bagot Leather store have repaired

that luggage several times, and I still own that luggage. In fact, when I come to Queen's Park from Kingston, I use one of those pieces of luggage.

He had a great business, but then COVID came and businesses had to make a decision. Guy decided he would keep his employees on just in case. He wanted to treat them well, so he didn't just lay them off. He thought, "Okay. Well, I'll just pay my employees for a few months while we ride out COVID." He thought it would be short, but he had in his mind that he should take care of his employees. Unfortunately, the shutdown lasted longer than his business could and Bagot Leather went out of business because of that.

I think a lot of businesses tried to do right by their employees and guessed wrong, and selling luggage was not a great business when travel was cut down by so much. But Guy was optimistic and, being a business person, he thought, "Okay, I went out of business, but no problem. I'll just start another business"—very optimistic, entrepreneurial guy. But then his elderly parents' health deteriorated and he had to take care of them, so the new business never started. Savings were depleted, but he still had to take care of his parents, and he couldn't—you know, he's a business guy, so he couldn't start another business to replace his income.

Guy is taking care of his parents 24/7, and he's doing a job that the public system does not have to spend money on because he's taking care of his parents. A little support for somebody like Guy would go a long way, because he's capable of—and he does and spends so much of his time providing care which would otherwise come at public expense.

I have encountered so many people in my riding who give up their own lives to care for family members, and they need a little help for extra respite. They need a little extra help to prevent burnout. They need a little extra help to reduce financial anxieties—a little help which would save the public purse a lot of money when it comes to care.

I'm glad that my colleague talked about some dollars because, if you think about it, allowing caregivers to stay as caregivers, just helping them out enough so they can stay as caregivers, it's a tremendous return on investment and a savings, because the public system is not paying for the care that they're providing. For this reason, I support this motion.

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** It is really a pleasure to be here this evening. I want to thank my colleague the MPP for Niagara Falls for continuing this absolutely critical fight for caregiver benefits in Ontario. This is a fight that's been going on for some years now. And I also want to thank all of the people who are here with us today who have been leading this fight from the community side. It has been extraordinary.

And I would say, Speaker, there's not a person in this room, I would imagine, who hasn't experienced both the privilege and also the burden of being a caregiver at some point in your life. Now, I don't know that for sure, but I can also say with some more certainty that, if you haven't, you will. Whether it's a sick child or a vulnerable person in your family or an aging parent, I think everyone in this room will have this experience at some point.

Today, I want to say this benefit and this motion are more relevant than ever before, because life is very unaffordable right now; life is difficult. The number of people who this would benefit is greater than ever before as well, and the reality is that people want to recover, they want to stay and they also want to convalesce at home.

But what I really wanted to say this evening and the reason I'm here today is that a lot of people out there tell me that government and politics can't make a difference. They've lost hope that we can actually change things here in these halls, in these chambers. And I always say, "You know what? We can change things." That's what we do here. We change laws. We make laws. This is an opportunity for the government—I think every member of the opposition, independents etc., we are in support of this legislation. I think I can say that quite confidently. What we need is the government to come on board.

This is a real opportunity to send a message to all those people out there that it does make a difference, that it's possible to hope, to believe, to organize, to make life better, to work together to make people's lives better. So I really would encourage the government members opposite: Let's do this. Let's make this a reality, and let's help people like the folks above, who have been fighting so hard for this legislation.

**1820**

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Mr. Dave Smith:** I'll say, I have some conflicting opinions on this. We have the opposition who have come forward with something that I'm sure is well-meaning. One of the challenges I have is I was always under the impression that family is there to help family. Many of you know that my daughter had stage 4 cancer. I was part of the caregiving group for her. My other daughter had to go to her grandparents for about a month and a half while my oldest was in SickKids—13 weeks she spent at SickKids. It was a very difficult time. I truly understand the emotional effect of it because I lived through it.

It never dawned on me that I should go to the government and say, "You need to give me some money." I always thought that family was there to support family. I always thought that was part of my job as my daughter's father, to do those things and to support her.

When this legislation came forward, I got looking into some of the things that we're doing here in Ontario, and I didn't realize we actually do have a caregiver credit—the Ontario caregiver credit—that people can apply for to receive funding for when they're helping their loved ones. I didn't realize that we've spent an additional $1.1 billion in community care to help people get help at home when they have a loved one who's sick and they're providing supports for them. These are things that we already have.

Then, when I look at what this legislation is, it isn't well defined. What defines someone as a caregiver? Now, in

my case, my wife and I had just separated. Should both of us have been considered caregivers? If we were still together, should both of us have been considered caregivers? How do you define that? Where is that point? That's one of the challenges I have with this motion, that it really doesn't define what caregiving is. It doesn't set any of those boundaries. How do we define that? How do we say who should get it and who shouldn't?

And I come back to—perhaps it is my own thoughts on it. Perhaps I'm alone in this. But I do believe one of the responsibilities of family is to look after family. And my job, first and foremost, as the father of a cancer child, was to look after her and to look after her needs. And I was off work. I was off work for more than six months. My wife—

**Interjection:** You're salaried.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** I was not salaried. I worked an hourly wage, just slightly above minimum wage, and I had to drive from Peterborough to Toronto every week for 40 weeks for her to have chemotherapy. I understand the stresses. I understand the challenges that are put on people because I lived it.

But I come back to, that's my job as her father, to find a way to get her here, to find a way to get the treatment that she needed. That's what families do, and I struggle with the idea that someone else is responsible. My responsibility, first and foremost, was to my family, and my family stepped up because their responsibility was to the rest of their family.

I do applaud the member for bringing this forward and raising the idea that we should look into it. I don't believe that this motion, though, is the appropriate motion. I think it's good to start the conversation, but this is not the right motion for us to move forward with. This is not it. We have supports right now. Perhaps we can take a look at some of those supports, but to suggest that this is the path that we should go—I don't believe that's the responsible way.

I do believe that as a family member, we need to be looking after our family first and foremost. I do believe it starts there. I do believe that we have supports within the community. I know the supports that I received. I know the supports that my family received for it. I know the struggles that we went through for it. I understand all of that.

And I know the opposition is going to say I'm heartless. I'm not. I lived it. I understand. It is a challenge. It's a severe challenge for everyone. How do we go about doing it in a way that makes the most sense? And I do believe, first and foremost, that family is there to support family.

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** I am very pleased to be joining, in this conversation today, the Ontario NDP and my MPP colleague from Niagara Falls. We're calling on the PC government to support a caregiver benefit in Ontario and support a motion that is proposing direct financial support for caregivers.

Speaker, this is a motion. It isn't a private member's bill; it's a value statement. I have had the opportunity to debate many of them where we talk about what we as a House believe in, what we support and what we would like to see move forward. And then we leave the details to be figured out.

Some of you know that I was very close with my little grandma, who passed away just over a year ago, who made it to 104 years old and five months.

*Interjections.*

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Yes.

I want to take the opportunity to thank the staff at Hillsdale Estates in Oshawa. They looked after her there. I appreciate them.

While she still lived at home and when she was fortunate enough to have the funds to live in a private retirement home, she had a different level of care. She was lucky to have me as her person, and I was even luckier to have her as my person. Sometimes I was her caregiver, but I'm able to say that from a position of advantage, of privilege, because she had enough funds to look after the expenses of what she needed. We were in that financial position.

But since being elected, it has been my privilege to meet folks of all ages and life stages who are caregivers for aging loved ones, for adult children with complex needs and many others who need more than just our thanks; they need support. And not everyone needs support, Speaker, but when they do, we think that the government should understand that.

Today in the province of Ontario, we know that over 4.2 million Ontarians have self-reported as providing unpaid care for their family and friends. The work that caregivers do can be anything, from administration support, like booking medical appointments, filling out forms, speaking to health care professionals, to medical assistance, like helping their parents take medication, and emotional support. Being there for their loved one can be complicated, it can be basic, it can be every day, it can be sometimes.

Part of the conversation today has been about family and supporting family, and my grandma was very lucky to have me to support her. We also know that caregiving has a disproportionate impact on women. It's not exclusively women, but we know that women are 50% more likely to report as caregivers than men, and we know that they are 50% more likely to leave their employment versus male counterparts.

Folks who miss out on wages when they have to take time off, folks who are spending hundreds of dollars every month to provide care—we can imagine the financial pressures that can force families to choose institutional care despite the preference of maybe wanting to keep them at home, to make very difficult choices. And we think about that. We think about our parents, our grandparents who want to age in place at home, live with their families in their communities with dignity, perhaps. A caregiver benefit could make that a reality for so many of our loved ones right across the province of Ontario. There's no one-size-fits-all. In terms of defining a caregiver, I think that that would come out in the details as we all, hopefully, will support this motion—which is a value statement—to move this forward.

Speaker, Christine in my riding—her mother was in her late eighties, with advanced Alzheimer's disease; her father, in his early nineties, was recovering from a triple bypass surgery. She lived in Oshawa for 30 years. Her parents were up north, but until she was able to get them into a care home that could meet their needs, she spent the better part of two years travelling back and forth when she could, for doctor's appointments, hospital stays, supervising contractors as she worked to make her parents' home more accessible. When she wasn't able to be with her parents, she relied on the kindness of their neighbours, family friends, church members, the community, and people rallied, certainly.

**1830**

She was able to be with her mother when she passed, but she couldn't be there and take the time off when her father passed because of her bills. She regrets not being able to be with her dad and knows if she had had access to a caregiver benefit, she could have spent his last weeks with him.

I have many other stories, but I don't have the time. I will tell you that a caregiver providing support for an ailing parent or a vulnerable adult or a child recovering from illness or injury could be covered by this benefit. I know that all of us appreciate the caring work that people do across the province, but more than thanks, I would encourage this PC government to support this values motion and support caregivers. Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Mr. John Fraser:** It's a pleasure to speak in support of motion 20. I want to thank the member for Niagara Falls for bringing it forward for the third time now—is that right, the third time? It is a statement of values. We all know that motions are not binding, but it's something that we all agree on.

I can't imagine what the member from Peterborough–Kawartha described. I've had experience as a caregiver. I've seen four parents and in-laws through their end-of-life journeys. I've spent a lot of time talking to people, both medical professionals and a lot of caregivers, when I had a mandate for palliative care between 2014 and 2018.

What I can say is, families are there to support families, but all families are different. Government is there to support the people that it serves, and the form that that support takes can look different. I think what we're trying to say here is, what's there is not enough. I respectfully hear there's a billion dollars more in home care. It doesn't work. I know that first-hand, and I think we all know that. So one of the things in this motion that we're not talking about, because there's this idea of financial support—that's important, but people need to know that people know that they're there. Being a caregiver can be a very lonely, isolated experience. Financial support, recognition by government that you are out there and that you matter—that your community, your city, your province is there to support you—is a really important part of what the member is putting forward.

My sisters and I took care of my mom at the end of her life, the last four years, between 2019 and 2023. It was very busy. It was busy here. We could do it. I didn't need support; I did it. I miss it. I sometimes end up driving towards my mom's house, where my son lives now, thinking my mom is there. It was really hard. It was really tough. I was exhausted—but I'd go back and do it again.

But for one of my sisters—she lost her income. She had to be there during the day. I could only be there when I came home from here, be there on the weekends. Everybody was trying to fill in. She gave up four years of income.

My mom didn't end up in a long-term-care home. She didn't get a lot of home care. She got some; we were able to organize it. My sister Missy spent a lot of time making sure everything worked. It's a lot of work, and it's work that, arguably, if we're going to be funding care for people, the government should really be doing, and we're asking people like my sister Missy to do it. I asked her to do that, because I couldn't be there.

So I don't know what form it takes. I know what we're doing right now isn't enough. It isn't enough in home care. It isn't enough to unburden the financial hardship. It isn't enough to recognize people who really feel like they haven't been seen. People don't see what they're doing.

Often they do it out of love. It's not just duty. It's not just responsibility. There is some of that, right? I agree with the member from Peterborough–Kawartha: Family needs to support family. That's the way it works. But not everybody is equal. Not every family is equal.

We had four siblings. One of them had to make a huge sacrifice. We all sacrificed, but one of them made a really big sacrifice. She didn't do it for money, and she didn't ask for anything, but sometimes you shouldn't have to wait for people to ask.

I think there's a way for us to figure this out. The motion is a statement of values. It's a statement of what we all agree on. We all agree family should take care of family. We all agree that it's important that caregivers provide the care that families need because there's not enough in the system, and the system doesn't work. I'm not saying it's awful or terrible; I'm just saying it doesn't work, so we rely on people. We rely on people like my sister Missy to be a care coordinator, to make sure the trains are running on time, that people are coming in, that there are no gaps.

I have a constituent, Andrew Kavchak, who has got a son who's 25 years old. His son is autistic, has behaviours. He loves his son. I ran into him at the grocery store—Food Basics? I can't remember which store it was. He was just telling me about what his week was like. Then we started talking about a canoe. He bought a canoe. He saw one in the store that I worked at 50 years ago, and he finally bought one. I said, "Do you ever get out in the canoe?" He says, "No, I think we've gone out twice. One time we went out, and I had a hard time with my son. But I look at the canoe, and I'm proud that I have the canoe." But he's not getting to use it. That's the life of a lifelong caregiver.

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** It's an honour to rise today to speak to this motion, and I want to thank the member from Niagara Falls for bringing it forward. I also want to thank the member for having such a collaborative and cross-party approach to this particular issue—to support caregivers, which really is a non-partisan issue—and including myself and some members from other parties in the news conference earlier today.

Some 4.2 million Ontarians provide care to their family members. Speaker, I have experienced what it's like to be one of those caregivers, and it's not easy. My mom was diagnosed with cancer three years ago, and she lives a long way from Ontario. It was hard to take a year where every single constituency week I flew back to be with her to help care for her, when I had weekends, to go back and care for her. And I think of how privileged I am to have been able to do that financially—having my staff cover me off on constituency weeks.

But not everyone has that privilege. Not everyone has a job that enables them to take the time to care for their loved ones and help their loved ones heal. I can't tell you how many people come into my office struggling to figure out how they're going to make it all work: "Can I really keep my job and care for my loved one?" "I have an adult child with a developmental disability that requires tremendous amounts of my time and financial resources. Where do I get the support, or even just respite here and there to take care of myself a little bit because I have given so much to my loved one?"

I think all of us in Ontario owe those folks a debt of gratitude because not only are they taking care of their loved ones, but by doing that they're freeing up long-term-care beds. They're freeing up spaces in our hospitals. They are making our emergency departments less crowded. They're making our communities better places, and I think the least we can do is come up with a plan. All this motion calls for is, it's just asking the government to come up with a plan for a caregiver benefit. I think that's the least we can do to say thank you—thank you for being the kind of person who's going to take the time and make the sacrifices to ensure that your loved ones are cared for and therefore the rest of us are cared for.

**1840**

I will be voting for this motion. I hope all of us vote for this motion, because I think it's just the right thing to do.

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** Let me begin by recognizing the extraordinary contribution that family caregivers make every day in Ontario. Whether it's a spouse that is helping a loved one living with dementia, an adult caring for an aging parent or a family member supporting someone recovering from an illness, these caregivers provide compassion, comfort and support that cannot be measured in dollars alone.

We know that caregiving can be physically demanding, it can be emotionally exhausting and it can be financially challenging. That's why our government is focused on providing meaningful supports that help families care for loved ones while ensuring they have access to professional services when they need them.

Since taking office, our government nearly doubled investments in home and community care. Today, Ontario invests more than $5 billion annually in home care, helping more people receive care where they want it most, at home, and these investments are producing real results.

Between 2022-23 and 2025-26, home care visit wait-lists have fallen dramatically. The number of patients waiting for personal support services has declined by 96%. At the same time, the number of patients waiting for nursing services has declined by 79%. These are large improvements, and these are transformational results that mean thousands more Ontario families are receiving supports sooner and experiencing less stress while caring for loved ones, and that is what meaningful support looks like. It means expanding access to personal support workers, nurses, rehabilitation professionals, respite services, adult day programs, transportation services, meal programs and caregiver supports. Most importantly, it means recognizing that caregivers also need support.

One of the services that is provided is respite care. Caregivers tell us that they need support, relief and peace of mind. They need time themselves to attend appointments, continue working, spending time with family and simply taking a break from the very demanding responsibilities that come with caregiving. Respite care assists caregivers in avoiding burnout. That is why our government continues to invest in programs that allow caregivers to step away, knowing that their loved one is receiving safe, professional, high-quality care. By providing respite services and community supports, we help caregivers sustain their ability to care for loved ones over the long term.

We also recognize that families face real expenses when caring for someone at home. That's why Ontario provides the Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit to help eligible families offset costs associated with supporting aging loved ones in their homes. Importantly, that provincial support can be combined with federal caregiver tax credits, providing families with meaningful financial assistance while allowing them the flexibility to determine what services and supports best meet their needs.

This is a far more practical and sustainable approach than the one proposed in this bill. Our government is focused on delivering the services caregivers actually tell us they need: faster access to home care, respite supports that prevent burnout, community programs that help loved ones remain independent and tax relief that helps offset the cost of care.

Speaker, family caregivers deserve our gratitude and our support. That is exactly what the government is delivering. We are investing billions of dollars in home and community care. We have nearly doubled the home care investments since taking office. We have reduced personal support service wait-lists, and we have reduced nursing service wait-lists. We are expanding respite care.

We are expanding community supports that prevent caregiver burnout. And we are helping families manage costs through both provincial and federal tax credit relief.

Family caregivers deserve our gratitude, respect and support. The best way to support them is by ensuring that they have access to professional care, respite services, community supports and financial assistance that help them care for their loved ones while maintaining their own well-being. That is the approach our government has taken.

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**M^me^ France Gélinas:** There are people here in the gallery that would not agree with what the member just said. They are caregivers themselves. They represent entire associations of caregivers. They know what their needs are. They know what it is to be a caregiver better than any one of us. They do it on a daily basis.

They have come here, at Queen's Park, because they want caregiver benefits. They know what exists in respite and in home care and all of this. They could teach you, teach all of us, about the services that are supposed to be there but fail them more often than they help, but that's for another conversation.

But all they're asking is, listen to them. They are on the front line. They are the people who care for their loved ones, who care for people who need support.

I'd like to read a few quotes. From the Alzheimer Society: "Care partners of people living with dementia often provide intensive support for years, frequently at the expense of their own financial security, health, and well-being. A caregiver benefit would recognize the invaluable role they play and help ease some of the burdens they carry." This is the Alzheimer Society. They know what they're talking about. They deal with people with dementia every single day. Every single one of their patients, clients, has a caregiver or more. They're telling you—all of us—that a caregiver benefit would help.

Another quote: "As a charity supporting the needs of parents and caregivers of children diagnosed with cancer in Ontario, Ontario Parents Advocating for Children with Cancer ... understands first-hand the financial hardships that caregivers of sick children experience through loss of income and out-of-pocket expenses such as hospital parking, gas and transportation costs, food, medicines and medical equipment not covered by OHIP...." That is the association Ontario Parents Advocating for Children with Cancer. They know what it is to be a caregiver; they live it every single day. They've come to Queen's Park to ask us to put our heads together to see what would a caregiver benefit—how would it make sense, in Ontario, to help the parents of children living with cancer, needing intensive cancer care.

Another quote: "Providing meaningful direct financial support for caregivers is tangible, practical, and financially feasible when you consider the value of the work they do for their loved ones living with disabilities, frailty, or an illness. Helping them with the day-to-day costs of caregiving and the impacts on their savings and their careers will go a long way to protect our health care and social systems in Ontario." That comes from the Ontario Caregiver Coalition.

"Caregivers are essential partners in cancer care, but too often they take on significant out-of-pocket costs and lost income while supporting someone they love. The Canadian Cancer Society supports the creation of an accessible Ontario caregiver support benefit...."

**1850**

Those are all people who speak from a place of power. They help caregivers care for people who are sick, who are disabled, who are frail. Nova Scotia was able to put together a caregiver benefit of $400 per month to eligible caregivers. Prince Edward Island gives a caregiver benefit ranging from $250 to $1,500 per month. Newfoundland and Labrador gives a financial grant of $400 per month. None of those provinces are rich compared to Ontario, but they've listened to the people on the front line when they came and saw their MPP and said, "We need help. We need support. Here's a way to help us."

Please do this. All you have to do is agree to pass the motion and then work on the details of what it will look like in Ontario.

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** This time we return to the member for two minutes to reply.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** There are 4.2 million caregivers in the province of Ontario. Take a look at the group up there. All of you, take a look. They're the ones who are there every single day. You know, they could be anywhere right now. They don't have to be in Toronto at 20 to 7, quarter to 7. They've already spent a long day working. But they're here because they care. They know that we need a caregiver benefit. They know that Nova Scotia—a small, small province—can do it. PEI—an even smaller province—and Newfoundland can do it.

And France is right: We're not asking. Let's have the debate. Let's move it on to committee. Let's talk about how we can help our seniors, how we can help our families, our moms, our dads, our aunts and uncles. And I want to say to the other leaders and to my leader, Marit Stiles, who is here, and to John Fraser, Mike and the independent—

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I will remind the member not to use the names of the members.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Oh, I'm sorry. All right, I take all that back.

But I want to say, they're here tonight. They could be anywhere. They're busy, but they know how important this is for everybody in the province of Ontario, those 4.2 million. But they also told a story about themselves, how they've been affected.

I told you my daughter had a heart attack, a SCAD heart attack—very rare. Overnight, my daughter couldn't pay her rent. My daughter couldn't put food on the table. It had to be a caregiver who helped, maybe somebody in the family. Actually, some of the teachers would come by the house and help out. It can happen to any of us; like that, your life can change.

All I'm saying to the Conservatives is—because we know the NDP supports it. We know the Liberals support it—I can say that. We know the Greens support it. We know the independents support it. We need your party to support it. Move it to committee—

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Thank you. The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Mr. Gates has moved private member's notice of motion number 20.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

*Vote deferred.*

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, it is now time for the late show.

Pursuant to standing order 36, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

## ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

### STUDENT ASSISTANCE

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** The member for Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

I recognize the member from Ottawa South.

**Mr. John Fraser**: I am going to start out by thanking everybody here for being here this evening, and the member from Whitby for being here—my partner on the late show, the duo.

Maybe the source of the problem is that the minister of training, universities, colleges, research excellence and security—maybe we could take a few of his jobs away so he could focus on the problem at hand.

We found out this week that the thing that the minister was touting on Monday in question period, the Learn and Stay grant—how it was adding paramedics and nurses and medical lab staff in the north, and how crucial and critical it was, and that it was safe. He was responding to the OSAP questions about the hundreds of millions of dollars that went out the door—and more importantly, of all the hard-working, honest people who went back to get upskilled, to get a job, took a risk. The government said, "Yes, we can give you a loan," and then said, "No. Sorry. We can't"—only it was after about two months of being in school. The minister said, "No, no. Everything is good. We have this Learn and Stay grant. It's great. It works." And then we find out the same thing happened to those folks up in Sault Ste. Marie at the CTS campus.

I talked about Aaron this morning. Aaron lost his job at Algoma Steel. He has a family. He decided, "Do you know what? I want to try something else. I want to get a new career. I'm not going to be working in that plant anymore. I'm going to be a paramedic." So he applied for the Learn and Stay grant. He got approved. He got into the program. Remember, he has kids, a family, a mortgage and property taxes. The government said, "It's not happening. Sorry. It's paused, and your life is paused too. You'll have to wait." Well, here's what Aaron had to say: "It kind of ripped away all the goals and aspirations that I had for me and my family, and I was gutted at the time." He's behind on his property tax, his electricity payments. He's going to the food bank. My point today was, what would we do if that was our family?

The problem here is, the government ignored the Auditor General in 2022, who said this was exactly what was going to happen. It's like she had a crystal ball—word for word. And then, the government continued—all sorts of red flags: $385 million to seven colleges, $219 million to three campuses of Academy of Learning, 8,500 applications for OSAP from one single Internet address. What else did they need? It's incredible that they would not have taken action. And now what they've said is, "We're going to get an audit by KPMG." The minister said in the hallway today, "No one is going to see that. We want to protect privacy. We want to cover ourselves." And then, later on, because they were scrambling, because that's not the right thing, they said, "Well, we might show you parts of it." Come on, guys. We're talking about hundreds of millions of dollars, if not a billion dollars, that you just let flow out, and now you're trying to say, "No, you don't need to see that."

All the government needs to do is ask the Auditor General—and the House leader knows about this, because I'm sure that I remember him asking us to ask the Auditor General a number of times. Why do we have to go to KPMG? The reason they don't want to go to the Auditor General is, first of all, she warned them, so she knows what's going on here. She told them what was going to happen. She'll know where to look. And then when she's done, what she'll say is, "I told you, and look what you did."

It's a mess. It is an awful, terrible mess that is hurting hard-working, honest people in Ontario who don't deserve it.

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from Whitby.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant and the concerns raised about its availability at private career colleges.

I want to begin by recognizing the good students who have been caught in the middle of this situation because of the actions of wrongdoers seeking to exploit our student financial assistance program. These are individuals who are working hard to pursue meaningful careers, and we recognize how important financial assistance is in supporting their education.

Speaker, the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant was created to support students pursuing in-demand health care careers in communities that need them most. Through this program, eligible students receive funding to cover tuition, books and other educational costs while agreeing to work in high-need communities in Ontario after graduation.

To date, our government has invested more than $182 million through the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant, supporting over 13,300 future nurses, paramedics and medical laboratory technologists. And we've recently expanded the program into family medicine, with a further $220-million investment to support the education of more than 2,000 future family doctors. These are real students training to become the health care professionals our communities need. And these investments reflect our government's continued efforts to strengthen health care across Ontario.

But we also have a responsibility to ensure that every dollar set aside for students is used for its intended purpose. Unfortunately, what we uncovered through months of investigations into the private post-secondary sector revealed serious concerns about the misuse of OSAP. It is the actions of bad actors seeking to exploit OSAP that have brought us to this point. What we uncovered through our investigations left our government with no choice but to pause all funding to private institutions to protect taxpayer dollars and hold bad actors accountable.

Speaker, I want to make an important distinction when it comes to the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant: There is only one private institution that is eligible for the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant. As the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant has a separate, rigorous accountability process in place, including in-person instruction and return-of-service commitments, work is under way to reassess OLSG eligibility at this institution.

The Ontario Learn and Stay Grant continues to support thousands of students studying in health care programs at public institutions across this great province. We recognize that good-acting students have been caught in the middle of this situation through no wrongdoing of their own. And we understand the difficult position this has placed many students in.

That is why our government is actively exploring low-interest, third-party loan options through financial institutions to provide additional financial assistance to affected students.

Let me be clear, Speaker. We will not rest until fraud is rooted out of our student financial assistance program and those responsible are held accountable. Student financial assistance exists to support legitimate students pursuing legitimate educational opportunities, not to be exploited by bad actors seeking to take advantage of taxpayer dollars.

We will continue taking the necessary steps to protect students, restore integrity and ensure that these programs serve the people they were designed for. That is what students deserve, what taxpayers expect and what our government will continue working to deliver.

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** There being no further matters to debate, pursuant to standing order 36(c), I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House now stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

*The House adjourned at 1904.*

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| Stiles, Marit (NDP) | Davenport | Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle<br>Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario |
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| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|---|---|---|
| **Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon. Vijay (PC)** | Scarborough—Rouge Park | Associate Minister of Artificial Intelligence Adoption / Ministre associé de l'Adoption de l'intelligence artificielle |
| **Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)** | Huron—Bruce | Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales |
| **Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)** | Vaughan—Woodbridge | Associate Attorney General / Procureur général associé |
| Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC) | Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington | |
| Tsao, Jonathan (LIB) | Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord | |
| Vanthof, John (NDP) | Timiskaming—Cochrane | Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle |
| Vaugeois, Lise (NDP) | Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord | |
| Vickers, Paul (PC) | Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound | |
| Wai, Daisy (PC) | Richmond Hill | |
| Watt, Tyler (LIB) | Nepean | |
| West, Jamie (NDP) | Sudbury | |
| **Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)** | Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre | Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes |
| Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP) | Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre | |