Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

No. 96B

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Nº 96B

1st Session
44th Parliament

Thursday
26 November 2026

1re session
44e législature

Jeudi
26 novembre 2026

Speaker: Honourable Donna Skelly
Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly
Greffier : Trevor Day

Hansard on the Internet

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

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

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

https://www.ola.org/

Index inquiries

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

Renseignements sur l'index

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

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

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

ISSN 1180-2987

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Thursday 26 November 2026 / Jeudi 26 novembre 2026

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS / AFFAIRES D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC ÉMANANT DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Benji's Law (Ensuring Anaphylaxis, Asthma and Epilepsy Friendly Overnight Camps), 2026, Bill 147, Ms. Smith; MPP Vickers / Loi Benji de 2026 pour assurer la création de camps avec nuitée attentifs à l'anaphylaxie, à l'asthme et à l'épilepsie, projet de loi 147, Mme Smith; MPP Vickers

MPP Paul Vickers 5975
Ms. Laura Smith 5976
MPP Robin Lennox 5977
Ms. Lee Fairclough 5978
MPP Susan Lahey 5979
Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos 5980
Mr. Jeff Beattie 5981
MPP Paul Vickers 5981
Second reading agreed to 5982

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 26 November 2026

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 26 novembre 2026

Report continued from volume A.

1800

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

BENJI'S LAW (ENSURING ANAPHYLAXIS, ASTHMA AND EPILEPSY FRIENDLY OVERNIGHT CAMPS), 2026

LOI BENJI DE 2026 POUR ASSURER LA CRÉATION DE CAMPS AVEC NUITÉE ATTENTIFS À L'ANAPHYLAXIE, À L'ASTHME ET À L'ÉPILEPSIE

MPP Vickers moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 147, An Act to enact Benji's Law (Ensuring Anaphylaxis, Asthma and Epilepsy Friendly Overnight Camps), 2026 / Projet de loi 147, Loi édictant la Loi Benji de 2026 pour assurer la création de camps avec nuitée attentifs à l'anaphylaxie, à l'asthme et à l'épilepsie.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for their presentation.

MPP Paul Vickers: I'd like to note that I will be sharing my time with my co-sponsor, the member for Thornhill.

Speaker, I am proud to rise today to speak to Bill 147, Benji's Law. This legislation provides an important opportunity to open a conversation around the regulations that are governing overnight camps in Ontario and consider how we can strengthen the protections in place for children with anaphylaxis and other life-threatening allergic reactions.

For many children across this province, attending summer camp is one of the highlights of their year. It's an opportunity to make friends, develop independence, experience the outdoors and create memories that last for a lifetime.

For parents, sending their children away to camp also means placing a large amount of trust in the people responsible for their care. They need to know that their children's medical needs are understood, that appropriate precautions are being taken and that staff are prepared to respond should an emergency arise. Benji's Law recognizes that responsibility and can establish a process to take a closer look at the protections currently in place.

Speaker, our province has strong regulations governing recreational camps under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, and we know that camps are already taking important steps to protect the children in their care.

It is also important to clarify the scope of this legislation. Benji's Law defines a recreational camp as a camp where "sleeping and eating facilities are provided for temporary occupancy, with or without charge, for five or more" people under the age of 18 or individuals with special needs. This means the legislation is directed at overnight camps.

Following potential review, where appropriate, the minister may take steps to recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council any potential amendments to strengthen protections for campers.

This bill identifies several areas that may be addressed through a review. It identifies training and educational requirements for camp staff and volunteers along with accessibility and the use of epinephrine auto-injectors.

These are important considerations. Staff and volunteers are entrusted with the supervision and care of children, often in settings where medical assistance may not be immediately accessible, which can be the case in my riding and many ridings in the north. It is important that they understand the risks, recognize when an emergency is occurring and know what steps to take.

An area that we want to focus on is the importance of individual medical emergency plans for campers. Every child has different needs, and having a clear plan that outlines the appropriate responses and ensures staff understand their responsibilities can make a real difference.

This bill will also ask the minister to review the existing guidance documents to support allergy awareness at our camps and ensure that they are aligned with current medical and public health information. Guidance documents help operators and their staff understand how to put these expectations into practice.

Through this work, it will also be important to take into consideration the experience of stakeholders, which we have been doing throughout the process, including with Food Allergy Canada, the Ontario Camps Association and other organizations. I believe this is an important part of the process. Food Allergy Canada brings valuable knowledge and experience in allergy awareness and management while the Ontario Camps Association understands the practical realities of operating camps across this province. We need to hear from medical and public health experts, families and the people who work at and know these facilities. Their perspectives will help ensure that

any recommendations are informed by current medical knowledge.

Speaker, this legislation has a very real connection to the community I represent, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. Our riding is fortunate to be home to a number of wonderful overnight camps that provide children with opportunities to experience the outdoors, build friendships and develop skills that will serve them throughout their lives.

I've had the opportunity to visit Camp Presqu'ile and several other camps throughout our riding and to see first-hand the work that goes into providing these experiences for young people. These camps are important parts of our community. They rely on dedicated staff, volunteers and organizers who put considerable time and effort into creating safe, welcoming environments for the children in their care. We want these camps to continue to thrive, and we want parents to feel confident that their children will be properly cared for while they are away from home. Taking the time to review our regulations and consult with the people who understand these environments is an important part of supporting that goal.

Speaker, Benji's Law is ultimately about making sure that we are doing everything responsible, reasonable and within our powers to ensure protections for children attending overnight camps. Tragedies like Benji's remind us why this work matters. We have a responsibility to learn from the past and consider where improvements can be made. We owe that to Benji, to his family and to every family across Ontario.

I am pleased to support Bill 147, and I hope all members of this House will join me in supporting Benji's Law. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Thornhill.

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for his partnership in this bill. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 147, Benji's Law.

I want to begin by thanking the Covant family, who are here, for their steadfast advocacy and their friendship. There's no more difficult or tragic time than when a parent loses a child, but the Covants' bravery and determination in keeping Benji's legacy alive and relevant—the work that has been accomplished is quite simply outstanding.

As parents, we want the best for our children. We want them to thrive. We want them to grow in a safe environment that allows them to reach their full potential. We want this despite any limitations they may face, and we want the best for our children even when caring for their legacy. The Covants have done an exceptional job in caring for Benji, even if he's no longer here.

Benji was a 17-year-old young man who loved life. His closest friend, Hudson, said he was the person who always had your back. He was the type of kid who didn't just spend time with a cohort, because he was everybody's friend.

Benji played the position of right wing for Vaughan Rangers hockey. I believe they were undefeated to win the Can/Am Montreal Challenge Cup, and that happened in 2024.

He went to Westmount high school—great high school, great kids, great teachers. He was the type of kid who would help seniors with their bags. He was the big brother to Brayden and Brooke. I've interviewed countless individuals for this bill, and everyone that I've spoken with has had the same impression of Benji: He was a special friend to all.

Benji, however, did have challenges. Poor Benji was allergic to dairy, eggs and nuts, all while suffering from asthma.

He never let his allergies be a limitation to who he was. He lived life. He was a positive tour de force, always smiling, always happy.

But sadly, on August 6, 2024, Benji died at sleepover camp after a delayed anaphylactic attack. The waves of Benji's passing literally rolled over our community like a thick, dark fog, and I don't think that fog ever goes away. But perhaps some days are slightly different because—especially the Covants can perhaps feel Benji's light escaping through the darkness to help lift them through some of that hardship. I know that Benji's spirit is still there when I feel that time and that spirit.

From that place, the Covants began their advocacy for those facing risk of anaphylaxis, through education, prevention resources and strategies through their organization, the Benji Impact. I should also mention Naomi Parness, a part of that organization, is here with us today.

Then came our bill, Benji's Law, with a goal to increase awareness and opportunities for a conversation with the Ministry of Health to improve guidance and support allergy awareness at overnight camp.

Camps in Ontario provide great opportunities, fun-filled adventures that are sometimes the first opportunities our children have away from home. They're wonderful camps that function under regulations that work to keep our campers safe. This bill will include a review with possible steps to strengthen those protections for campers and allergy awareness.

Earlier, I talked about the impact of Benji, which is actually known as the Benji Impact, an organization with a mission to support people who face anaphylaxis, through education, prevention resources and critical action plans. One of their partners, Food Allergy Canada, which is also here today, delivers critical information for those impacted by food allergy, with educational programs on latest developments and supports for those who face allergies.

1810

The families, the Covants and the community have been unrelenting in pursuit of spreading the awareness in Benji's honour. They do that not just for Benji but for everyone who faces the same limitations, including Benji's own siblings, who also have such tremendous food allergies.

Before I close, I want to share with you a personal story that I've actually never told to too many people. Many years ago, my own son was at camp. He suffered an experience, a very scary experience that changed things

for my family. I recall receiving a call from the director of the camp. My son was at camp at woodworking class. He had suffered from what appeared to be a breathing issue. He was being sent to the hospital. At that time, my son had never shown any health issues, including respiratory. It was simply never an issue.

Luckily, a smart senior camp director identified what he needed and got him the treatment he needed. They got him to the hospital, and after assessments we found out he suffered from asthma. My son, who had been in cleats all his life, on the field, on the pitch, had asthma. We adjusted. I got accustomed to carrying a blue puffer everywhere we went. It was in every knapsack, every sports kit. And the trip to the hospital and the diagnosis happened because of a smart, trained, experienced supervisor. I think about her a lot, that supervisor, and I'm always so grateful. My son's paperwork at school changed. Under Sabrina's Law, everything got a little simpler. We focused on his health.

This bill focuses on that education, because camp should be a place where campers feel safe, families have assurance of a fun and safe experience. I want you to support this bill, and I hope everyone will.

The Covant family and the Benji Impact for their steadfast work—I'm so grateful for everything that you've done. Benji's legacy lives on, not in what he left behind but the way he still continues to live and impact us right now.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

MPP Robin Lennox: It's an honour to rise on behalf of the people of Hamilton Centre, and I'm very grateful to speak to this bill. I would also like to join my colleagues in recognizing Benji's family here and Food Allergy Canada here and everyone who has worked to bring this forward. It's a devastating thing at any point to lose a young person, and I always think it is so brave and courageous for families to ensure that they are protecting the next generation and the next child, so I just want to honour that and thank you for bringing this forward.

There are many things in this bill which I do believe will improve the camp experience for children who do have allergies and other medical conditions. In particular, looking at this, we know that for children with severe allergies and anaphylactic allergies particularly, leaving home—going to any different environment—can feel uncomfortable or uncertain. So as many protections as we can put in place to ensure that they can feel safe and that they can have a joyful experience with their peers is very commendable.

When I look at this, certainly, the establishment of policies and procedures relating to the prevention and management of anaphylaxis—absolutely, this should be in place anywhere we have children being served who could potentially have life-threatening allergies. There are also provisions for emergency response protocols and ensuring that epinephrine can be administered in a timely manner; we know how important and life-saving that intervention is.

I'm pleased to see that there will be engagement in training and educating camp staff and volunteers to ensure that they can all know what signs and symptoms to look for and how to properly identify the need for epinephrine and administer epinephrine via auto-injector if necessary.

I also think that the development of individual medical emergency plans for campers is very important, of course, because we recognize that no two children's health needs may be the same and that we need to individualize our approach to ensure that we are going to meet each child's needs and that each family will have a peace of mind knowing that there is a specific plan in place to ensure the safety of their child.

I also agree that there always should be documentation and review of incidents. We know that the management of any medical emergency—though we may wish it to always go perfectly, sometimes it doesn't. And so, having processes in place to review that, to do quality improvement, to ensure that we are continuously working to enhance safety is so essential.

I also absolutely support training and consideration in food preparation, specifically at camp, when we know that there may be children with multiple different food allergens that need to be accommodated for, and to ensure that we are avoiding any form of cross-contamination or any exposures that may be inadvertent.

I would love to have a discussion with the members who have brought this bill forward. I was really pleased to see in the title the inclusion of anaphylaxis, asthma and epilepsy, and I would love to learn more about the provisions specifically for epilepsy. I did not see a specific component in the bill about epilepsy, specifically. I did see, in section 4, that there are open consultations with other stakeholders. I might suggest, in addition to some of the stakeholders that have been mentioned, which are very important—Food Allergy Canada and the Ontario Camps Association—perhaps some consideration as well to involve Epilepsy Ontario, which also does operate a specific camp for children living with epilepsy and may have some experience from operating that camp as to their protocols that support children in participating with epilepsy at their campsite, which is also, as I understand it, an overnight camp.

Of course, we know that there are so many medical conditions that kids may be impacted by, and I think we're increasingly becoming aware of them and developing protocols to fill the gaps. Another one where I can absolutely see benefits with this legislation setting a path towards providing provisions for children with other medical needs—I think about all the children in my riding with type 1 diabetes and the families who have reached out who very similarly worry about their children going to camp and not being near their regular caregivers, and the administration of insulin and, if needed, emergency medications like glucagon.

So I'm really heartened with this advancement in how we're going to manage the camp experience for children with anaphylaxis, and I hope that we can learn from that and apply it as well to children living with epilepsy and

children living with diabetes. Hopefully, we can move to a place where we have the resources to deliver individualized medical plans for children with any medical condition so that there are no barriers for children enjoying summer camp and engaging with their peers.

In addition, a couple of offerings for consideration, in terms of stakeholders who may make themselves available for consultation—I've always found the Ontario Medical Association's allergy and immunology section very knowledgeable and very helpful, specifically when thinking about how to individualize a care plan for a child whose needs may vary from traditional needs. So I may offer that suggestion.

I don't have much more to offer other than that I would be really interested to see how we can enhance the supports around epilepsy in this bill, and then see how we can move it into action, hopefully as quickly as possible. I think we would all love to see that by the time children go to camp this summer, there can be supports available that weren't available last year. I know that there would be so many families across Ontario, including in Hamilton, who would feel really comforted knowing that this work is happening and that their summer is going to be made easier.

This bill did remind me, and I wonder how we can work together on advancing this piece as well, which was—I had a constituent reach out to me just a couple of weeks ago, and her four-year-old also has an anaphylactic allergy to eggs and carries an epinephrine auto-injector. While we do have really important legislation now—as you mentioned, Sabrina's Law—governing how we provide protections for children with allergies in schools, one thing that constituent unfortunately learned through experience was that we don't have similar legislation governing school buses and what happens and who is responsible for epinephrine and responses on our school buses.

1820

Unfortunately, this came to light because her four-year-old son had his epinephrine auto-injector in his backpack and, unfortunately, another child got hold of it and stabbed the four-year-old with the auto-injector. This, of course, became an emergency on the bus and has since brought to light that we don't have processes in place for young children, particularly those four years old and younger, who might be on the bus and who probably aren't at the level of maturity to self-manage their auto-injectors.

Who is the person responsible on the bus? How do we safely manage those situations so that our children can go from home to school, maybe one day from home to summer camp on the bus, and we have ways of ensuring that their travel to that camp or that school is also safe, and that if a medical emergency occurred on the bus, there are also protocols in place and adequate training for staff and adequate storage and access to epinephrine auto-injectors?

Mr. Chris Glover: What happened to the child?

MPP Robin Lennox: Sorry; I should have said the child is fine, but certainly, the parent was quite shaken and so is doing what great parents do and working to make system change, which we are also seeing with this bill. I really applaud all parents who take that step, who take their child's experience and endeavour to make all children's experiences better.

Again, thank you to the Covant family. Thank you for bringing this forward, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I'm very pleased to be here to support Benji's Law, tabled by the MPP for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and also supported by the MPP for Thornhill.

This bill is named for Benji—and I know that his family is here today—who tragically passed away at age 17 from a delayed anaphylactic attack to ingesting food containing dairy ingredients while at a sleepover camp.

I do want to offer my sincere condolences to you for your loss, and I also commend the effort that you have made to make sure that something like this does not happen for other children and their families in the future. Thank you very much for that effort.

This bill puts into law the requirement to review and put in place regulations for clause 96(3)(k) to strengthen protections at camps, specifically overnight camps, for children who experience anaphylaxis and other severe allergic reactions. It considers updating the guidance document for recreational camps to increase the awareness of anaphylaxis and other severe allergic reactions. It includes preventive measures, best practices and references to many other additional materials. And as mentioned by my colleague, it ensures that it will be informed through consultations with stakeholders like Food Allergy Canada and the Ontario Camps Association. I thought some of the other suggestions that have been mentioned in this session were also very appropriate.

As I read the law and its expectations, many of the suggested elements are similar to and generally in the same spirit of requirements of schools through Sabrina's Law. As the mother of two teenage boys, I've seen how we have changed in the schools over time since they started as young boys to make sure that we're creating safe spaces for children that suffer from severe allergies. I must confess that when I first read this bill, I thought, "Isn't this already in place?" And it doesn't look like the requirements were. Again, I just congratulate the MPP for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for making sure that this was brought forward and that these recommendations will be acted on.

I will also say I did attend one of the camps that you mentioned in your intro, Camp Presqu'ile, when I grew up as a young kid up that way.

I also will say, as somebody who worked in health care for so many years, we should always be working to make environments for all children to be safe and to be able to participate fully, and to ensure that staff and volunteers employed in those environments are also receiving all the basic training. And for camps, especially overnight camps, they should have strong knowledge for the risks associated with allergies, be able to recognize them, recognize the symptoms and be able to respond appropriately.

We all know that summer camps are special places for children, aren't they? I remember taking my own sons to their first summer camp with a mix of emotions, knowing that I knew it was going to be good for them, but as a mom wanting to be sure that they were going to be able to come home safely. I think every parent feels that way, but I often think about the parents of children with severe allergies and the added level of worry that they must carry in that moment.

I do think that these steps are just so critical to make sure that that's possible. We know that there are 600,000 Canadian children under 18 that have food allergies. In Canada, 6.7% of children ages zero to 17 have a probable food allergy, and food triggers up to 80% of anaphylactic reactions in children. The statistics even share with us just why this is so important.

What I like about this bill is it does ensure that those environments will be available for all kids, that children and their families won't need to second-guess going.

I also know that overnight camps generally are great experiences, and as I prepared for this, I was actually thinking about the impact of that camp experience for kids more generally, and for kids that might be missing out because they're worried about their safety around allergies as well.

There's an important study that was done by Dr. Troy Glover and the research team at the University of Waterloo. They conducted a five-year study called the Canadian Summer Camp Research Project, and it concluded that participation in camps does promote so many positive changes. They actually measured the children when they arrived at the camp for the first 48 hours, and then they relooked at this in their last 48 hours. For most campers, there was a very positive change, close to 70%.

Those positive experiences included:

Social integration and citizenship, where they learn new social skills, make friends for life and develop a sense of belonging.

Environmental awareness: Campers learn to respect and appreciate the environment around them. They encourage immersion in the natural world.

Attitudes towards physical activity: the increased physical activity and daily routines that included exercise. I did note that this one was slightly lower-ranked than some of the others, so not every kid is ready to get more and more physically active, but many did.

The emotional intelligence that they learned from sharing spaces with others, the conflict resolution and how to identify their own strengths and preferences.

And the self-confidence and personal development: They acquired new skills and cope independently to be away from home.

So, I think about those positive impacts, and we want to make sure that every child is going to have an opportunity to participate and to participate safely. And again, to me, the mindset needs to be the same way as we approach the safety in our schools. We do need to have strong regulations in place to protect all kids to be able to participate in camps.

I also will just say, as this moves to implementation, there are probably a few details that will factor in as we consider the regulation.

Some of the smaller camps—I'm sure that there could be additional costs keeping medications current, making sure that things aren't expiring and that you've good processes in place to ensure all the right medications will be available. Some camps may need to consider that, and you wouldn't want any kind of deterrent to doing the right thing—just thinking through what the possibilities are that way.

1830

Most camps will have some kind of clinician on-site or at least associated with the camp. Often though, especially for summer camps, children are enjoying a whole wide range of activities. I know my nephews, every year, they go on very long canoe trips at these camps as well. So thinking through every person that is going to need some additional orientation to—looking for the signs and symptoms of an anaphylactic reaction and being able to act on those effectively in whatever environment they may be in, whether it is at the camp or whether it is actually staying overnight out in Algonquin Park somewhere or up near Tobermory somewhere, depending on where you are. I think that ability to be able to act fast needs to be a critical component of any response that is offered here, through these regulations—and just looking pragmatically at what it would take to implement some of the best practice expectations that will be put forward.

However, I think, overall, there is so much merit in this bill that is being proposed. I think the timing is important. I loved the suggestion by my colleague across the aisle here that it would be nice to think about having something in place this summer when kids are heading off to camp again. Wouldn't it be a wonderful legacy that Benji and his family will have brought here to this chamber but to all of those kids out there as well?

I think it's important that we give all children the opportunity to attend these camps. All kids deserve to be safe, especially in places where their parents have entrusted them to be taken care of. We need to require better training. The development of plans and procedures and accessibility of life-saving epinephrine auto-injectors is a common-sense plan to keep kids safe and healthy, and having these provisions in place will ensure that the camp is accessible to kids with severe allergies.

I know that our caucus plans to support this bill. Once again, I want to say thank you to Benji's family for their advocacy work and awareness raising of this issue. It's important that all children have the opportunity to thrive, including the very positive experiences of overnight camp, and I hope this bill will help that to occur. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

MPP Susan Lahey: Please note that I am sharing my time with the member from Oakville North–Burlington and the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

It is personally meaningful to me, as someone that has lived experience with an anaphylactic allergy to all types of nuts, to speak in support of the private member's Bill 147 put forward by my colleagues the member from Thornhill and the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound named in honour of Benji, who passed away from an anaphylactic allergic reaction at summer camp.

Back in the day, in the 1970s when I was growing up, there was little to no awareness of the potentially tragic outcomes for individuals with allergies of any type and the vulnerability especially of children. EpiPens were not yet available, and the advice I received as a child was simply avoidance. However, avoidance is often not realistic, especially outside of the home and especially for children. Practically speaking, in day-to-day life, ingredients can be omitted on labels, or allergy sufferers can unknowingly have their safety compromised by others.

Many times as a child, when visiting a friend's house, I would be offered a cookie and politely decline. On one occasion, while eating a bowl of plain rice at a restaurant, a tiny sliver of a peanut had accidentally found its way into the bowl in the kitchen. On yet another occasion, while travelling, a flight attendant offered me a muffin with nuts and offered it three times. Each time, I declined, but obviously there was some impediment there in terms of understanding the implications of consuming such a muffin.

I'm grateful that we live in a time now when both children and adults are speaking up about allergies and our shared responsibility that we must do our best to ensure the safety of others.

Over several decades, there has been a dramatic increase in advancing the general awareness amongst members of the public about the seriousness of food allergens.

The proposed legislation calls on the Ministry of Health to review the current regulations for overnight camps and consider whether any changes are appropriate to strengthen protections for campers with anaphylaxis and other life-threatening allergies.

This is a widespread issue affecting hundreds of thousands in Ontario—as my fellow members in this House have said—but for children and their parents, friends and loved ones, managing an allergy, or possibly not even knowing about a particular allergy until the first negative reaction, poses extra challenges and can be extremely stressful. This isn't about a preference or a choice; this can mean the difference between life and death.

Although public awareness has increased today, there continues to be the opportunity to help support children, including at summer camps. It's important that children have the chance to experience being away from home at camp. Children benefit from the sense of independence, the leadership skills, the outdoor sports and friendships that are made in an environment that is safer and supportive.

Benji's Law, according to Jennifer Gerdts, executive director of Food Allergy Canada, "creates an important opportunity to strengthen food allergy management in recreational camps, including food service practices, allergen management, staff training, and emergency preparedness."

What is the key to strengthening safety and awareness? Communication and education through bills such as Benji's, so that children can participate in overnight camp experiences with greater confidence. Meaningful conversations and education are needed amongst our broader community to ensure the allergies of children are understood and appropriately managed. This applies not only to food allergy anaphylaxis but also for children wanting to attend camp with asthma and epilepsy. Education and awareness are essential for informed decision-making, positive changes and effective action.

I'd like to recognize Benji's parents for exemplifying advocacy in action with the work they have done since the passing of their son to raise awareness and provide educational opportunities. Their tireless advocacy work aims to ensure that communities, including the overnight summer camp community, empower individuals and educate about management strategies, including mitigating the impacts of allergies at camps for kids, potentially saving other children's lives. Their bravery in the face of loss is inspiring, which is the ultimate tribute to their beloved son Benji.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I am also pleased to rise in support of Bill 147, Benji's Law, introduced by my colleagues the member for Thornhill and the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I commend them for bringing forward legislation that addresses an important issue of child safety and awareness.

For thousands of children across Ontario, attending summer camp is a highlight of the year. It's an opportunity to make friends, develop independence and create lasting memories. Parents should be able to send their children to camp with confidence, knowing their health and safety are being taken seriously.

As the member for Oakville North–Burlington, I think about the many families in our community who rely on summer camps and overnight recreational programs. Parents deserve reassurance that appropriate safety measures are in place and that camp staff are prepared to respond to a medical emergency. Children with life-threatening allergies should be able to enjoy these experiences as safely and confidently as possible.

This legislation is named in honour of Benji Covant, who tragically passed away at just 17 years of age following a delayed anaphylactic reaction while attending an overnight camp. His story is heartbreaking. While we cannot change what happened to Benji, we certainly can learn from his experience and take meaningful steps to help prevent similar tragedies.

Speaker, anaphylaxis is a serious, potentially life-threatening allergic reaction requiring immediate intervention. Awareness, preparation and timely access to epinephrine can make a critical difference.

Ontario has already taken important steps through Sabrina's Law, which established anaphylaxis policies and individual plans in publicly funded schools, but we must also consider the environments where children spend time outside the classroom, including overnight recreational camps.

Currently, Ontario requires camps to develop annual safety plans addressing various health and safety considerations.

1840

Bill 147 would build on this framework by requiring the Minister of Health to review existing regulations and recommend amendments where appropriate to strengthen anaphylaxis protections. That review could consider emergency response protocols, staff training, access to epinephrine auto-injectors, individual medical emergency plans and allergen-management practices. It would also consider updating guidance documents to reflect current medical and public health information. Importantly, this work can benefit from the expertise of organizations such as Food Allergy Canada and the Ontario Camps Association.

Speaker, at its heart, this legislation is about awareness, preparedness and giving camp operators the guidance they need to better protect the children entrusted to their care. It's also about giving parents greater peace of mind and ensuring that children living with life-threatening allergies can participate in the experiences and opportunities that make childhood so special.

I want to thank Benji's family for helping turn an unimaginable loss into an opportunity to make a difference for other families. I commend my colleagues for introducing this legislation, and I am proud to support Bill 147.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Beattie: It's my pleasure to rise today and speak in support of this important bill from the members from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and Thornhill.

In our family, we have a wealth of experience on this subject matter. My son has a severe peanut allergy, and all four of my children have had the privilege of attending overnight camps over the years, so I very intimately understand the dynamic at play.

On one hand, as parents, we want to give our kids as many experiences and opportunities as possible. Overnight camps provide that, whether it's a competitive team challenge in an outdoor wilderness setting, leadership training, challenging canoe trips or opportunities to explore and develop faith and friendship.

Overnight camps today are as important as ever, particularly in a world where our young people spend more time looking at a screen than looking out the window at, for example, a gorgeous Georgian Bay sunset, or more time ordering Uber Eats than exploring on a nature trail, as another example. That's why my wife and I, like so many parents across Ontario, have spent a lot of time and some considerable money, from time to time, carefully preparing, researching, asking questions and doing the legwork in order to provide our children with experiences that will help to shape them into the people they will eventually become.

But what happens, Speaker, if these experiences somehow can be a threat to a child's safety? For tens of thousands of parents across our province, the very things that seek to enrich our children's lives can also, in some cases, threaten those same lives. That's why Bill 147 is so important.

As the parent of a child with a severe food allergy, Speaker, I can't stress enough the worry and anxiety that every parent in this situation feels trying to find that balance between giving your child a normal experience like every other child gets, such as an overnight camp, while still ensuring that those same experiences don't inadvertently cause harm. There's a burden—a heavy burden—that parents carry every time they drop off their child at a camp bus or wave goodbye to them at a cabin door. There's a constant mental checklist. On any given day, a parent may wonder: What will they eat? Will they get enough sleep? Will they make friends?

But on top of that, there's additional questions for parents with children with severe allergies that threaten their very lives: Do they have an action plan? Has everyone been properly trained? Where is the EpiPen? Is it still within date code? In the end it comes down to a judgment call, a gut check; you have to pretend or hope that everything will be okay.

Well, this seeks to strengthen that position, and I urge everyone here today to vote in support, to give parents the confidence to be able to send their children to have those normal experiences.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? Further debate? Further debate?

I return to the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who has two minutes for his reply.

MPP Paul Vickers: I want to take some time to thank the Covant family. We're just meeting for the first time here tonight, but I certainly do feel your pain. I can't imagine sending your child away and then for something like this, as tragic as this, to happen. But I want you to take comfort in the advocacy and the strength in making Benji's story impactful and so meaningful.

I want to thank Food Allergy Canada and Ontario Camps Association for their presence here today.

I want to thank all members who have taken the time to speak on both sides. You all did a great job. There were some excellent comments and suggestions, and I think we can work together to make this bill even stronger and more impactful.

I want to do a special thanks to my co-sponsor from Thornhill, MPP Smith, who did most of the heavy lifting on this bill. I was just fortunate enough to tag along and to be part of something like this. It is a great honour on my part.

Speaker, we want to ensure the awareness of Benji's story can start conversations around these important protections. We cannot eliminate every risk, but we have the opportunity to review the safeguards and procedures in

place to reduce these risks whenever possible. We owe it to Benji, his family and the families across Ontario to take that responsibility seriously.

This is why I'm so proud to support this bill, and I hope that all my colleagues will join me in that support. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

MPP Vickers has moved second reading of Bill 147, An Act to enact Benji's Law (Ensuring Anaphylaxis, Asthma and Epilepsy Friendly Overnight Camps), 2026.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Pursuant to standing order 108, the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole House unless referred to a standing committee by the House. Does the member wish to recommend a standing committee?

MPP Paul Vickers: I would like to see this go to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Is the majority in favour of this bill being referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy? Agreed. The bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, this House stands adjourned until Monday, November 30, 2026, at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1848.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Edith Dumont, OOnt
Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative: Hon. / L'hon. Donna Skelly
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day
Deputy Clerk / Sous-Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Julia Douglas, Meghan Stenson, Christopher Tyrell, Wai Lam (William) Wong
Temporary Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes par intérim: Jeffrey Haskins

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Allsopp, Tyler (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Beattie, Jeff (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Bowman, Stephanie (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du troisième parti
Brady, Bobbi Ann (IND)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Bresee, Ric (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Président Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Cerjanec, Rob (LIB)	Ajax	
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	
Ciriello, Monica (PC)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Clancy, Aislinn (GRN)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire du troisième parti
Cooper, Hon. / L'hon. Michelle (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associée délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances
Crawford, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	Oakville	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises et de l'Approvisionnement
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Darouze, George (PC)	Carleton	
Denault, Billy (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response / Ministre de la Protection civile et de l'Intervention en cas d'urgence
Fairclough, Lee (LIB)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	
Firin, Mohamed (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston	
Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Premier / Premier ministre Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Leader, Third Party / Chef du troisième parti
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gilmour, Alexa (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Gualtieri, Silvia (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Hamid, Hon. / L'hon. Zee (PC)	Milton	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et des Jeux
Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Hazell, Andrea (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Holland, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products / Ministre associé des Forêts et des Produits forestiers
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Trevor (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	
Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
Kusendova-Bashta, Hon. / L'hon. Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Lahey, Susan (PC)	York—Simcoe	
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Energy and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie et des Mines
Lennox, Robin (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)	Durham	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
McGregor, Hon. / L'hon. Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
McKenney, Catherine (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
Oosterhoff, Hon. / L'hon. Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et de l'Agroentreprise
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	Deputy House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pinsonneault, Steve (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement et de la croissance économique du Nord
Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security / Ministre des Collèges et Universités, de l'Excellence en recherche et de la Sécurité
Racinsky, Joseph (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	
Rae, Hon. / L'hon. Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries / Ministre associé des Industries à forte consommation d'énergie
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation / Ministre des Affaires autochtones et de la Réconciliation économique avec les Premières Nations Minister Responsible for Ring of Fire Economic and Community Partnerships / Ministre responsable des Partenariats économiques et communautaires pour le développement du Cercle de feu
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Hon. / L'hon. Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	Minister of Sport / Ministre du Sport
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (IND)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shaban, Fatima (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Hon. / L'hon. Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre associé des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smyth, Stephanie (LIB)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises

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	