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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Friday 8 March 2002

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Vendredi 8 mars 2002

**Standing committee on
finance and economic affairs**

Pre-budget consultations

**Comité permanent des finances
et des affaires économiques**

Consultations prébudgétaires

Chair: Marcel Beaubien
Clerk: Susan Sourial

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Friday 8 March 2002

Vendredi 8 mars 2002

The committee met at 0959 in the Holiday Inn, Barrie.

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The Chair (Mr Marcel Beaubien): Good morning, everyone. If I can get everybody's attention, I'd like to bring the standing committee on finance and economic affairs to order.

JOHN SAYER

The Chair: Our first presentation this morning is from the Barrie Central school council. I see that the presenter is sitting comfortably. If you could state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Mr John Sayer: My name is John Sayer. I am actually with the Barrie Central school council, but I am really here as a parent first and then as a council member with the knowledge that I've picked up in that capacity. I'd like to thank you all, ladies and gentlemen, for allowing me the privilege of talking to you. It's not very often we get the chance to talk to so many distinguished people.

I'm here today, as I said, as a parent of two girls in the Simcoe County District School Board—one in grade 7 and one in grade 11—so obviously my issue is going to be education. I have been a member of school councils of both elementary and secondary since their inception six years ago. I am currently the chair of the Barrie Central school council. During the time I have been on councils, I have seen a steady decline with the inadequacies of the existing funding model.

Funding must be based on the needs of the student. This is obviously not the case with today's funding model. The system is not equal and equitable in growth areas, especially with the Simcoe County District School Board, where Barrie is the fastest-growing area in Canada, with nearly 50% of the student population attending schools in this area. Yet with the last figure I saw, we were \$520 per student below the provincial funding average. With a school population of 51,843 full-time students and more than 3,000 other and part-time students, we have had explosive growth. Common sense would suggest that we should be above the provincial spending average. According to my calculations, just to bring us to the provincial average we need at least \$27

million, and we should probably have more money than that.

Special education: the minister has developed a system or process that is not easy to understand and does not address the needs of the students. The present system is designed to hinder the process, causing delays and hundreds of hours of time wasted in the Simcoe board and in the schools. This time cannot be spared due to the drastic cuts in secretarial staff caused by funding cutbacks from the ministry. This impacts directly on the students. If funding is not available to develop the programs desperately needed by them, the students will lose.

Many administrators are working 60, and a lot of them 70, hours a week and are suffering from burnout. Sixty percent of these people will be able to retire in four years, and they will probably do that. One hundred percent will be able to retire in six years and, at the end of that time, we'll be left with principals who will have six years' experience or less. Mentoring to other principals and teachers will suffer, basically.

These days, I'm told administrators spend 15% of their time on student learning and the other 85% on other agendas caused by a lack of secretarial staff and other problems caused, once again, by the lack of funds we have in this area. This is already happening at the board level, where only one superintendent was employed in that capacity prior to 1998. The mass exodus of senior staff has left us with a system of board administrators with less experience than would warrant if other choices had been available.

EQAO testing: the tracking of grade 3 students to grade 6 is too localized. In one school where I sit on council in Barrie, there were only three students left by the time they reached grade 6. This is too small a sample and, once again, a waste of resources and manpower in a system already overstretched. Who suffers here? The students.

Grade 10 literacy tests: with 11 sheets of paper to track every student, it's labour intensive. There is not the staff available to support this. Sixty million dollars are spent to test students but there are no resources or money to help those in need. How does this benefit students? We suggest testing a sampling of students and redirecting existing dollars to fixing the problem areas.

TV advertising: I would like to see the money spent in this area put into the education budget, where it can better serve the needs of the student. Putting students first

should always be our first priority. Since 1995, the Ontario government has spent \$245 million on advertising. How is this benefiting students?

Cutbacks to custodial staff are wreaking havoc with computer and AV equipment. The dust is at a level where it can start to become a health issue. At Barrie Central, we have been cut back 1,200 hours since the start of the 2001-02 school year—just 5 months—and that's without sick leave, where staff are no longer replaced when sick. Who loses here? The students. This is also a security issue. With less custodial staff in the building, our schools are not safe, especially after school hours.

Library resources have been reduced by one third since 1995. Who loses here? Textbooks are insufficient. Despite ministry funding, there are too few books, especially in the new curriculum. Without the ability to look at a book, learning for some students will be lost. There are 22% more nerves going to the eyes as opposed to the ears. In 2002, funding for textbooks and learning materials is based on 1997 levels. This issue is further compounded when funding for learning materials and textbooks for the new curriculum is reduced by 50% or \$15 million in 2001-02.

Computers: once again, an area of great concern. We are back to where we were five years ago. With the opening of two new high schools last year, existing equipment was removed to the new schools, leaving the older schools with less equipment. There are no new initiatives to upgrade computers because there is no funding available. For a province that considers itself on the leading edge of technology to improve student learning, the provincial funding for technology does not reflect mandated school board information management systems, nor the increased provincial electronic reporting requirements for which all boards are accountable. In order to bring equipment up to date and provide adequate services, we need an extra \$25 million province-wide. Once again, the student loses.

Professional development is a major concern, particularly with the changes brought about by the ministry. This is considered a non-classroom expense by the ministry. I have to ask why something as important as training teachers is not within the classroom funding, particularly with the ministry putting such emphasis on teacher recertification. With inadequate training, the student is shortchanged.

There is a shortage of teachers, and the situation is getting worse. A starting salary of \$34,000 is not attracting them, after an expensive university education. You can get a job at McDonald's as an assistant manager and make the same kind of money, without the degree. The provincial funding model has reflected only a 1.95% increase in wages, compared to a compounded inflation rate of 8.4% over the same period. Failure to attract the right people will impact on the quality of teaching and the learning abilities of students.

Transportation: in 1997, the board decided to start the majority of high school students at 8 am, even though they had been made aware of the impact this would have

on students through a presentation made to them by the high school teachers' federation. They chose to ignore the students in the interests of cutting costs. In other words, they put the interests of the budget ahead of the welfare of the students, and continue to do so today, even though I and others have made them aware of the dangers and hardship this is causing the greater number of high school students.

The ministry froze its transportation grants in 1997. Unfortunately, because of its efficiency, Simcoe county is now penalized and has to continue to provide services to a growing number of students at 1997 funding dollars. The ministry needs to address the issue of underfunding now. You can't provide 2002 services with 1997 dollars. A deficit of \$57.3 million is the predicted provincial shortfall for this year.

The 8 am start time for high school students must be stopped. A recent sleep study completed by Sleep/Wake Disorders Canada shows that up to 60% of students are at their sleepest between 8 and 10 am. The average teenager should be getting nine hours and 15 minutes of sleep a night. Many are getting far less because they have to get up too early. Their circadian clock—their internal clock—operates on a different timeframe than pre-adolescents or adults. Many studies, most from the United States, show consistently that most teens are chronically sleep deprived. Sleep deprivation can impair memory and inhibit creativity, making it difficult for sleep-deprived students to learn. Teens struggle to learn to deal with stress and to control emotions, and sleep deprivation makes it even more difficult. Irritability, lack of self-confidence and mood swings are often common in teens, but sleep deprivation makes them worse. Depression can result from chronic sleep deprivation. Not enough sleep can endanger the immune system and make them more susceptible to serious illnesses, including type 2 diabetes.

The ministry has to accept responsibility for this disastrous, irresponsible decision made by the school boards, provide proper funding to the boards for transportation, protect those funds in a designated envelope, as with other programs, or eliminate busing altogether within areas where public transportation is available, and ban schools from starting high school before 9 am. Elementary students should start around 8:30 am. As most primary educators I have discussed this with have told me, the primary students do better earlier. We give them the more challenging tasks in the morning.

Changing the start time for high school students to a later time would be one of the single most productive measures the ministry could take. Students would learn better because their brains would be in a more receptive state and their emotions would be more under control. We would see better test scores, less uncontrolled behaviour and healthier students.

Private schools: \$2.3 billion will be taken from public education with the implementation of private school tax credits. What impact will this have on public school students? Public schools are subjected to strict curri-

culum guidelines and mandatory monitoring to ensure that the ministry-approved curriculum is being taught. Private religious and independent schools are not subject to the same standards of accountability for curriculum implementation. There is no requirement for all teachers in private schools to hold Ontario teachers' qualifications. This would appear to be a two-tiered education system supported by tax dollars, with two-tiered accountability: strict accountability for public schools, and no accountability for private schools. It would appear that the private system is being given preferential treatment. Why? What is the advantage to students? Either the government should improve and strengthen existing public schools, or the government should provide tax credits for parents who send their kids to private schools? Some 79% preferred the first option of improving the public school system. Why does the question even arise, unless the government has an agenda to promote private education at the expense of public education?

1010

Parents now have to pay up to \$150 per student for classroom materials in secondary schools. According to a recent tracking report released by People for Education, 65% of schools do not have enough textbooks for the new secondary school curriculum; 23% report they were unable to pay for needed repairs to their buildings; 26% report that access to a board psychologist had decreased in the last year; 32% of schools report a decline in the number of guidance counsellors since 1999-2000; \$63 million was cut from the transportation grant, creating hardship to many students and causing one board to announce they could only afford to bus their students to school four days a week.

Funding a strong public education system is the most important investment we can make as a society. We can either pay now for a properly funded system or pay later to house the students we have failed in overcrowded jails. The future of our children and their education is at stake. The school boards in Ontario are bankrupt or very close to being bankrupt. The only source of funding is the provincial government. It is their responsibility to ensure that sufficient funding is provided to all school boards in a fair and equal manner. In this task they have obviously failed, with an expected shortfall in 2002 of approximately \$1.1 billion, and another \$1 billion needed to refurbish aging buildings. The government will obviously get a failing grade in managing the most valuable resource this country has, our children.

Respectfully submitted, John Sayer.

The Chair: We have approximately three minutes per caucus. I'll start with Mr Phillips.

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): Thank you, Mr Sayer, for being on the school council. We appreciate the time that's required by people like yourself. You're performing a very valuable service.

I would like to start with your secondary hat on. We've heard a lot of concerns about the literacy testing, that in order to graduate you'll have to pass the literacy test, and for some students that's going to be a very

difficult challenge. With one standard that a certain number will have difficult meeting, we're going to have quite a large number of students who just won't pass secondary school, who may have been able to qualify in the past to go on to our college system. Has that been a subject of any discussion with your council?

Mr Sayer: There are so many things. It's like there's a list, and it's a long way down the list. My daughter is in grade 11, which is really the guinea pig year for high school students. It's like those kids have been missed because all the programs put into place were after or when she started. It's obviously coming along and, in the end, I'm sure it's going to be great. But, to answer your question, it hasn't been the greatest concern that we've received.

Mr Phillips: Is the greater concern simply a lack of available funds to fund the basics?

Mr Sayer: The reason I started this whole crusade, if you could call it that, is because of the 8 o'clock start time. It is the most damaging thing that the board has done. They refuse to look at any alternatives, I think simply because they're so underfunded that they're scared to do anything that will change the existing system that we have. To me, obviously, we're in need of more funds. But I feel that the school councils are given responsibilities that don't really mean too much. When it comes to trying to deal with process, we're not listened to at the board level.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Thank you very much for your presentation. I was particularly interested in the 8 o'clock start. Incidentally, my daughter is in grade 12, so she's the other half of the double cohort with your daughter.

My question on that very simply is, does the hour make any difference? It seems, with my daughter, the time she has to start in the morning has nothing to do with how much sleep she gets. It has to do with when she started the sleep as opposed to when she stopped sleeping.

Mr Sayer: It's such a big issue that it's difficult to get into in a minute or two. But I've read somewhere that the difference between achievers and non-achievers is 35 minutes' sleep per night.

Mr Hardeman: I hate to suggest that the figures are wrong. Obviously, in the last number of months we've heard a considerable debate about the private school tax credit. We did public consultation on it through our budget process. For the first time I think in Ontario history we actually did public consultation on the budget. Where does one get the number \$2.3 billion? In fact, if you take the 102,000 students in the independent system—and the credit is not based on an open-ended percentage of tuition; it's capped at \$7,000 of tuition. So the maximum that any student could derive from that tax credit would be \$3,500. Doing the math, one would have to have an awful lot of the students leave one system to go to another system to get the tax credit, recognizing that everyone who does that still pays for the public system and they have to pay a minimum of \$3,500 a year

to send their child to an independent system. Where would one get that kind of figure, \$2.3 billion?

Mr Sayer: This is the figure I've got, obviously. The only figure that I made up was the \$27 million, estimating in terms of Simcoe county's shortfall. This is something I picked up from another document.

Mr Hardeman: I just wanted to point it out.

In the same section, I would point out, and it's likely a typographical one—

Mr Sayer: I put this together myself.

Mr Hardeman: "Either the government should improve and strengthen the existing public schools or the government should provide tax credits for parents who send their kids to private schools?"

Mr Sayer: That was a question, "either/or," and it didn't come out right. It was a question that said basically 79% of the parents would think it was better to strengthen the existing system. Sorry about that.

The Chair: With that, Mr Hardeman, we've used all the time.

On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

Mr Sayer: Thank you for allowing me to present to you gentlemen.

LEARNING CENTRE FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

The Chair: Our next presentation will be from the Learning Centre for Children with Autism. I would ask the presenters to come forward; if you could state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Mr Howard Kohn: Thank you, Mr Chair. My name is Howard Kohn. I'm accompanying the executive director of the learning centre, Erla Juravsky, who will be addressing you today, for the most part.

Ms Erla Juravsky: I'm very nervous today talking to you. I was going to bring some prepared notes with me but, for me, in many respects, this is a presentation of a lifetime.

The Learning Centre for Children with Autism is an organization that's just two and a half years old. I am privileged to be its full-time executive director. I serve in the position as a former chartered accountant and investment banker who gave up my profession when my child became diagnosed with autism. Now I am at the heart of the business management of the organization.

We started this two and a half years ago because there was a profound lack of services for children with autism, and equally frustrating was that there is known treatment methodology, often referred to as ABA or IBI. I know that this committee has probably heard much on the topic of autism and IBI as a treatment that has proven effective for autism so I won't reiterate what I'm sure you have already heard much about.

We founded this organization with the firm belief that parents and families are at the heart of their child's future

success, and that any initiative to further develop children with autism to their maximum potential must partner with families to reach that ultimate goal.

A group of families, professionals and volunteers put together the Learning Centre for Children with Autism over two and a half years by fundraising hundreds of thousands of dollars, investing thousands of hours of time, tears and efforts that couldn't be imagined to get this centre off the ground because we were of the firm belief that if we built it, we could demonstrate the tremendous benefits that can be had with effective treatment strategies for children with autism.

There are parents who may come to our government to say, "Help me with this problem; help me solve the problem for my child with autism." We have tremendous empathy for other parents that are working in—I am so nervous talking to you today, I must say. I am so nervous.

The Chair: Don't be nervous. Relax.

1020

Ms Juravsky: What I'm bringing to you is an idea from an organization that's actually on the front line of autism. Every person in our organization, be it a child, a grandchild, a neighbour, a friend, is touched by autism. We have worked together to find an outstanding solution to address their pressing needs. We have built a learning centre, knowing that if we build it, we can demonstrate it. It's so difficult to talk about something on paper—"What are we going to do for the children? They need this"—and speak in the abstract. What I invite each one of you to do is actually come and see us, because we did build it, and we built it out of our hearts and out of love for the children and out of a connection with some outstanding professionals and researchers, such as the Hospital for Sick Children. Centres similar to ours in the US have been operating for 20 to 30 years; we have flown down there to model ourselves after that because we know that there is an effective approach for children with autism. What we actually have to do is try to build it.

I suppose I could have come to you and said, "I think I have the idea," but what I hope makes us a little bit different is, I know I do and I can show you. I think that organizations and projects like ours are so worthy of partnering with our provincial government because we have the fuel and the engine of professionals and parents that are willing to work hand in hand to get the job done.

I know that there are enormous financial pressures on every government right now. Everybody needs more. What we would like to do is partner with and say, "We know that everybody needs more." Autism is now at a prevalence of one in 500; 25 years ago—you just said it was three per 10,000. There is no doubt it is an enormous bubble that is pressuring the system—the health system, the education system, the Canadian social service system. Everybody is feeling this enormous pressure. We actually want to work to provide a model, to provide a piece of the public policy contribution, to say, "Let's look at it this way. Let's look at this project as a way that can address a crisis," in very much a partnership arrange-

ment. I know that my child will most likely have autism for his entire life. He is four and a half now and I know that the pressures that I deal with at four and a half are going to become different at 14, are going to be different at 24 and are going to be different at 40.

Supporting organizations and providing a partnership with organizations right now empowers parents to work collectively together to prepare for the future, as opposed to presenting their child as something that needs to be solved for them. I think the best investment, and I speak as an investment professional, is in something that's got a catalyst burning already; to build on ideas that have been contributed by people of passion and people of recognized excellence in their field, which is what our organization is. I probably haven't articulated this nearly as well as I had hoped to.

I have a presentation here asking you to support our organization for an amount of \$1.2 million per year for five years, because what I am good with is numbers. With an investment in our organization, we can produce for you something that actually is already there. I field a call a day from families newly diagnosed with autism. We have no public funding at all, we are fuelled entirely by donations, but what you'll find is that parents intuitively help parents of children with autism. I have people showing up at my house because they know that, "Erla actually runs a really good autism program and she won't turn you away." Other parents in our organization have parents showing up at their house. I think if you—

Mr Kohn: Perhaps I can be of assistance here. I've already introduced myself and I want to thank you all for hearing us. I am a lawyer in the city of Toronto. I have a three-and-a-half-year-old who is autistic. I didn't know what autism was until about a year and a half ago, when my son was diagnosed. We were desperate for solutions when we learned of our son's affliction. We were fortunate enough early on to meet someone who provided the same type of service that Erla is providing through the learning centre.

That treatment started to unlock our son. Before he had any of that treatment, he was remote. He wouldn't look his mother or me in the eye. He wouldn't talk. He had no words, no sounds. He engaged in ritual behaviour and entered another world, one where we couldn't connect with him.

Since he started receiving this type of treatment, things have improved considerably. He said "daddy" three weeks ago for the first time. He now plays with us—to a limited extent, but things are moving. We're seeing improvement; we're seeing hope for the future. One of the reasons I am here is because my family is the latest family to join Erla's organization. We're amazed, quite frankly, at what she's done in the last two years. She's built a beautiful school with wonderful therapists who are using the only scientifically proven method of treating autistic children, and they're reaping benefits through it.

The unfortunate part of all this is the money aspect. My family is currently getting some funding from TPAS.

Unfortunately, it's only about \$22,000. At the discounted rate that Erla's able to provide service for my son, the cost is \$55,000 a year for each child. The actual cost is quite a bit higher, about \$70,000, but because of corporate donations and other efforts, the learning centre has been able to provide space for families. Money is the issue, though, gentlemen and ladies.

Ms Juravsky: Howard has bailed me out here, because I am not typically an emotional person. This centre would not have got off the ground if it was not built on a very straightforward, solid business plan. I really want to make up for how I may have presented here. We have an outstanding program that is recognized by the Hospital for Sick Children. I have had calls from across the country, every province out to Vancouver, looking to learn from us and wanting to model and replicate our site. We are a leader in Canada and we are recognized as being a leader in Canada.

When children are diagnosed at leading hospitals—Toronto Western, Hospital for Sick Children—they do not offer treatment for autism, but what they do is press my business card into their hands and say, "Call the learning centre, because it was started by a group of families, and they can help you"; and we do.

We do it without any level of government funding. Should you decide not to fund it—it's bad business to say this—I will keep doing it. That's not an invitation to turn down this suggestion, but I am telling you that this is a credible organization with a track record and with the passion to partner with—the whole is bigger than the sum of its parts. Partner with us, and we can take it from a grassroots organization to an organization that is a leader and that can shape public policy, because we have a voice to be heard.

A good government takes a broad survey for solutions. I don't think you're going to get a single solution to autism. I wish you could. Believe me, I wish you could find a single cure for autism. You need us to pioneer the way, because we do it on the littlest bit of fuel you could possibly ask for.

This is not the way I thought this was going to go today. I'm going to invite you to ask me questions, because I'm sure you've got them.

Mr Kohn: Just to finish my thought, which is still brewing in my head, we recently joined the learning centre and our son loves it. He's learning. He loves going there. He's responding more to us and to the people around him. We're hoping for a miracle and we're hoping for miracles for others too, because Erla's right: parents of autistic children reach out to each other. There's a kinship that can't be described.

1030

I feel that when I was given a son with autism I was given a gift as well, a purpose, something to really dedicate my life to and something that's greater than the day-to-day work I do in my law firm downtown. That seems petty and meaningless to me now compared to the awesome responsibility that I feel I've been given and that Erla has helped us with so greatly.

I just want to let the committee know what wonderful work she's doing and how grateful our family is to be part of the learning centre and what a wonderful investment it would be for the province, because left untreated, autistic children down the road will only become a greater burden financially, morally and spiritually. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have two minutes per caucus and I'll start with Mr Christopherson.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): Thank you very much for your presentation, both of you. It's enlightening that at this moment tax cuts seem so unimportant. I note that in your presentation you say that it's best if it's started early. Obviously that points to the issue of early diagnosis. We've had other presenters with autistic children who've talked about this—and by the way, Erla, yours isn't the first set of tears, so don't be embarrassed. There's a lot of things happening in this province that people reflect when they get to the table, and your emotions are an example of that.

What we've discovered throughout these hearings is that there's up to a two-year waiting list for some children to be diagnosed. I just wanted you to reflect on that and maybe give us some help in adding how important it is that we get funding for the diagnosis and the treatment, up to and including the funding of your centre.

Ms Juravsky: The diagnosis is without a doubt an important part of it, because without a diagnosis you cannot access the funds. My child, before he received a diagnosis, began treatment, because one of the things I firmly believe is educating the parents so they know that there is something definitely wrong with their child. Autism displays in symptoms. It's not a metabolic blood test; it's diagnosed by observation. Many parents suspect something is wrong long before they are able to achieve a diagnosis. People have actually come to my centre, knowing that they are on a wait list for a diagnosis. They think their child has autism and I encourage them to begin learning about IBI and ABA, just as I did. I actually got my diagnosis as confirmation.

I acknowledge that there's problems in achieving a diagnosis, but our centre does not address the diagnostic problems. We look to the other professionals in the health care hospitals to address that. What we do, regardless of diagnosis, is provide parents with the education and the tools to help their child as soon as they become suspicious. We provide them with advice and guidance where to pursue a diagnosis. So we are more than a treatment centre: we really deal on a parent basis.

I agree, of course it's an issue. It's one of many, but it's not at my core.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Again, I appreciate you coming out this morning. I didn't know about the organization until I looked at the agenda yesterday. Actually, I have a constituent of mine with me today, Tammy Prohett, who was in to see me for a couple of hours yesterday. I'm sure Tammy would like to talk to you after the meeting. I asked her to come down with me.

I understand your organization is looking for money to proceed over the next five years. I was coming with the intent this morning of listening to concerns on adding to the \$39 million that the province is putting in right now and wondering what kind of needs are actually there. We've got \$39 million now. Should it be \$100 million, should it be \$200 million or should we start with something like your organization and develop that accordingly?

Ms Juravsky: I don't want to scare you with numbers. The state of New Jersey two years ago put out a press release that I clipped in my file when we began this learning centre project. The state of New Jersey, which population-wise is very comparable to Ontario, increased their spending for ABA services and IBI services by US\$300 million, because ABA is actually provided in the state of New Jersey until the age of 18 and is publicly available. It is a phenomenal cost. I am not asking for that level.

Does it take more? I without a doubt do not think that \$39 million is going to serve the children on all the waiting lists. The waiting list in Toronto exceeds 600. I know because I've had calls from number 580 on the list, a parent saying, "I am number 580 and I don't anticipate getting to the front of the list for two years. I still would like to take a spot on an unfunded basis." I have parents prepared to pay the tuition fee, mortgaging their homes, to attend the centre.

So is there enough money? Is \$39 million going to do it? I don't think so. But I think when the province is looking at where to invest this money, it is wisest to invest it in an organization where the wheels are turning, that levers off the commitment and volunteerism as a parent. We actually have a parent commitment that when we take on a child, you must commit to volunteerism, at a minimum of 20 hours a month, to our organization. That's good value because the parents need to work with us to make this happen. We are not looking for a blanket solution here; we are looking for a partnership. That's not just because it's cheaper; it's because this child is going to need your help as a family for a lifetime, and you must be equipped. So it's not just an economic issue; it's a philosophical issue: how do you get your child to be the best they can be?

The Chair: Thank you very much. Mr Kwinter.

Mr Kwinter: I'm delighted that you got a chance to be here. I was called about a month ago to come and see that facility. If you take a look at the picture on the front of their presentation, it's the old Dempsey's hardware store which was at the corner of Sheppard and Yonge. It's a heritage building and it was moved around the corner by the city of Toronto. It has been totally restored and they've leased it to the learning centre for 20 years at a cost of \$1 a year. This is in recognition of the work that's being done there. They have to maintain it—it isn't as if they get it for nothing—and they have to pay all the expenses, but they don't have to pay any rent.

I had an opportunity of spending some time, and it was interesting for me, because maybe five years ago

another member of the learning centre had a child and asked if I would come to her house to see the process of what was going on. That child, who is now seven, is in this centre. So I've seen him develop from the age of about three to the age of seven. If you saw him you'd think he had many, many problems, but the advancement in that three- to four-year period is unbelievable. When you see these children who are nonverbal but are communicating with computers and who have various devices to allow them to measure their progress, it really is something. I can tell you, notwithstanding that Erla is crying, you'll cry as well when you go and you see these children.

It's a horribly expensive process, and also the funding stops at age six. You might want to comment on what happens after that.

Ms Juravsky: We don't cut the children off at age six. It's not part of our philosophy. We believe that a child's best outcome is if you start with them from diagnosis and take them through to the point where they are ready to re-enter the school system. For some children that may be six, for some children it may be four, for some children it may be eight or 10. Regardless of where that child is on the age category, we take them through to where they need to be. That is why we are a registered charity, non-profit, and that's why we as a collective group work very hard to make sure we can provide the service. We believe it's cheaper to do it that way. When a child has to transition from an early intervention program to the education system, the education system does not provide ABA. The child transitions through teachers and process. You lose time. Seamless delivery, if you talk in business terms, covering all the channels of delivery, from point of entry to the point of exit, is just a far more economical way to go. So that's how we've built our model. We believe that the child succeeds the best out of this model. It's cheaper to deliver. It's just the right thing to do.

Our problem is that we cross ministries, and that's why you're going to see that this is a tri-ministry proposal, crossing the boundaries of ministries. Instead of the children following the system and following the money, we create the most effective delivery model and, hopefully, seek to find support of the three ministries so we can make it happen. We're blind to the boundaries and we think that makes it a better model.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning. Good luck.

1040

GREATER BARRIE
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Greater Barrie Chamber of Commerce. I would ask the presenter to come forward, and if you could state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Mr Pierre Jacques: My name is Pierre Jacques. I'm president of the Greater Barrie Chamber of Commerce. You'll be pleased to know that I may not take up 20 minutes. I asked my membership what issues were most pressing to them and I didn't get a whole lot of response; either they're very happy or they're indifferent. But I do have some things I'd like to speak to you about today.

I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to be here. As president of the Greater Barrie Chamber of Commerce, I represent 1,800 small businesses. The province has been revitalized in a lot of aspects and I think that things like tax cuts need to continue; balanced budgets need to continue. We have to have a balanced budget. That's one of the most important things to our membership. Another thing we're really concerned about is provincial debt reduction.

There are several other issues. A lot of them are on a provincial scale, not on a local scale, but I'm here today to speak to you about local issues specifically. One of the local issues I want to touch on is education. The part I want to touch on is post-secondary, especially Georgian College, which is a college here in the community.

An issue of great importance to our members is the skills shortages that hurt our ability to compete and be as successful as we can locally, provincially, nationally and, increasingly, internationally. Our success as employers depends on having employees with the right skills, the right attitude and motivation. Many members already have great difficulty in recruiting such skilled individuals. This problem will only get greater with each passing year, as Canadians retire in unprecedented numbers, as well as not getting skilled people. What we're seeing is a brain drain to the United States.

For many employers there's a great reliance on Ontario's post-secondary education system to educate and train the supply of skilled new employees, especially through Ontario's public college system. We are fortunate in Barrie to have one of Canada's leading colleges, Georgian College. In the past two years, Georgian has had the highest graduate employment rate in the province. It has been tied with Durham College, with 94% employment within six months of graduation. It was recently selected as one of Canada's top 100 employers for the second year in a row. But we are extremely concerned with reports that are beginning to emerge from the college system that they may not be able to address the skills shortages as fully as necessary due to inadequate funding. I understand Ontario colleges receive by far the lowest operating revenues—government funding plus tuition—in Canada. They have grown tremendously over the past decade despite a decrease in funding and modest tuition increases as compared to universities.

Chronic underfunding by the provincial government and a huge influx of new students due to the double cohort and the echo baby boom jeopardize this critical resource. I have tables here that indicate that over the past years, enrolment has gone up dramatically in colleges, while funding has gone down. I can give these to the panel after. From what I gather, it's quite possible

that within two or three years the college system will be broke. That doesn't speak well for the future of training skilled labour.

To me, it is imperative that employers can count on a financially viable college system that is able to provide access to students who wish to work in a wide range of fields, and that that access not be denied at a time when employers desperately need such skilled human resources. Skilled employees will help employers be successful, generating corporate and sales tax and helping to keep unemployment low, reducing social costs and generating higher income and sales tax.

That is my presentation on behalf of the college. Other than the colleges, I'd like to talk a bit about the transportation issues that concern our members.

You know it doesn't take long for the GTR to expand. Twenty years from now the GTR will probably encompass Barrie or south Simcoe county. We need improvements to Highway 400 just to make sure the goods that are produced here have access to markets in the GTR and elsewhere. We need to improve the north-south corridor. But before we do that, I think it's very important, if you look at the GTR, that you also improve the east-west corridor. If you can't move people east-west, there's not much point in moving people north-south. We have to look at the future, to maybe speed trains or even the GO train coming up here. If you look at the growth rate here in Barrie and Simcoe county, there are not enough highways to carry the population back and forth. Those are the traditional trucking routes to northern Ontario, and there's just a big crunch on there. Transportation is a big concern to our members, and something like extra funding or improving the highway system should be looked at to improve the economy.

I'm going to talk about my own personal pet peeve. I think northern Ontario is suffering. I've travelled across Highway 7, which they call the TransCanada Highway. To me it's nothing but a carriage trail; that's not a TransCanada Highway. If we hope to get businesses growing and carrying goods across the country, Highway 7 is probably a big priority to work on. Besides that, every time I travel to Ottawa, I've got to stop for about a dozen lights on the TransCanada Highway. It is a pet peeve.

Another issue we're concerned about as a chamber is the health issues. There's no doubt that the provision of health care will continue to cost more to business and individuals and a partnership with the private sector may need to be greatly expanded. As you know, health costs are skyrocketing. From what I gather, the provincial budget now for health is 44% of the total budget, and if it keeps going that way, there won't be a budget for anything else. We've got to look at the aging population, the boom, bust and echo effect. That's a big concern because when you build infrastructures, 10 years down the road they're too small or 10 years down the road they're too big because of the dynamics of the population. There are a lot of things you have to look at.

Again, partnerships with the private sector need to be expanded. Personally, I don't see anything wrong with

private clinics for MRIs and CT scans if they want to be funded at the same rate as the hospitals. People who are in a big rush to get those things done can get them done and pay extra. If you look at millionaire hockey players and other people, they have access to those things immediately, whereas the majority of the population doesn't have access to those. There should be broader access to some of those things.

Speaking on behalf of the Royal Victoria Hospital, I know we've been promised a cancer centre. That's one issue that we think needs to be addressed very quickly. Unfortunately, when you talk about that boom, bust and echo thing, the RVH was underbuilt for the number of people we have here. So another issue that needs to be looked at is the population growth in certain areas and the health care available to people.

Other than that, on a provincial scale—I had something to give you but it seems to have disappeared. I think I forgot it at home. That was the handout I was going to give you.

1050

The Chair: Things happen. You can always send it to the committee.

Mr Jacques: I was in a bit of a rush. You know, these things happen.

The Chair: You can send it to the clerk of the committee and I'll make sure that the members get it.

Mr Jacques: It's the presentation that was made by the OCC. It talked about taxes and issues like that. You know, 20 minutes—I didn't have a whole lot of time to prepare all that stuff and give it to you. I had the handout ready to give to you.

The Chair: We'll go forward with questions. We have a couple of minutes per caucus.

Mr Dunlop: Thank you very much, Mr Jacques. Good to see you here this morning. Barrie is a rapidly growing city here in the province of Ontario. I'm curious. What's the chamber doing, along with co-operation from the city and the region, to try to leave more of the jobs here in Barrie as opposed to 30,000 or 40,000 people driving down that highway every day? It appears that's part of the problem, that people have to commute to the GTA for a job. Have you got any comments on that? Has the chamber done anything on that?

Mr Jacques: We're working closely with the economic development committee of the city trying to get new business here. But I don't think the city has got a lot of room to grow. There's a lot of talk about smart growth so that the city can expand its boundaries and have more room to grow and attract more business. But as you know, when you talk about smart growth and municipal councils, it's not a Love Boat affair. They're fighting constantly about losing area.

Mr Dunlop: I understand that there has been a study done that 80% of the people who commute to the GTA, if they could find a salary near their current wages in the GTA, would rather be here than in the GTA. I'm just wondering, is that something where the municipal councils should be working more closely together or is it

just a lot of infighting that's stopping probably some good common sense?

Mr Jacques: I think there's a lot of competition trying to get the businesses, major companies, moving to Barrie. What's happening with Barrie—like I say, I represent a lot of small businesses—is that basically it's a service industry which is looking after grocery stores, restaurants and things like that. They're low-paying jobs; they're not high-paying jobs. We're trying to attract other industries like Honda or bigger industries here but they just don't seem to be coming. I don't know if it's got to do with the ability to move goods up and down the 400. I know that on the 400 at the best of times you can't move.

Mr Phillips: Thank you very much for being here and presenting. You've actually outlined quite a few concerns of your members on the need for some improved services in the area. One of our huge challenges is finding the revenue to support those things. The government has decided that they want corporate taxes in Ontario 25% lower than our major competitors in the neighbouring states. According to what the government gave this committee a week ago, the corporate taxes in the US, in places like Michigan, New York, Ohio, are roughly 40%, and the government of Ontario wants Ontario's corporate taxes to be 30%. They've also gone on in telling us that the Ontario government has repeatedly called on the federal government to cut corporate taxes deeper and to get them to 23% in Ontario; in other words, 40% in the US, 23% in Ontario. That's an enormous revenue loss to a jurisdiction. We have corporate taxes right now on the current plan 25% lower; they're urging the federal government to cut its taxes so they get them roughly 45% lower.

Recognizing the challenges we have, as you say, in health care, in our colleges and in transportation to fund the services, do your members feel that it is imperative that we have corporate taxes dramatically lower than our US counterparts, which are our major competitors now, as I think we all can appreciate, or could they live with something that isn't 25% to 45% lower than the US to help fund colleges, health care and transportation?

Mr Jacques: That's a good question. I don't even think I'm qualified to speak on that. Percentages I wouldn't know. Sorry. All I'm qualified to say is that our members feel that tax cuts for small businesses are imperative. That way it makes them more dynamic and more competitive. When you become more dynamic and more competitive, you hire more people. That way it improves the economy. But as far as percentages and what the rates should be, I'm really not qualified to speak on that.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you for your presentation. You mentioned the importance of tax cuts especially for small business and the need for those to continue, continued provincial debt reduction and balanced budgets as the three key economic issues from the chamber. You also commented on the importance to the local business of ensuring that Georgian College is financially viable—that was the phrase you used—and how skill shortages in

particular hurt the ability of small business and larger business to compete; therefore, the importance of Georgian College. Then you talked about the chronic underfunding of Georgian College, so it has been a long-term concern you've had. You talked about transportation needs, improving corridors—your own pet peeve with the TransCanada is noted—and the need to ensure health care, particularly in the local area with a new cancer centre.

If you listen to the finance minister—and who knows for sure what the numbers are—he is suggesting he's going to be short somewhere between \$3 billion and \$5 billion as his starting point in building the next budget. Given all the things you've asked for on the tax relief side, which cost money—lost revenue is the same as spending, so a dollar that you don't collect in taxes is no different from a dollar that you spend out of the budget—and given the needs you've mentioned—and you heard the last part of Erla's presentation which talked about the needs for children with autism—what should wait? Should the tax cuts, the balanced budget or the debt reduction wait, or should children with autism and their needs, Georgian College, transportation and health care wait? What should wait if you accept the finance minister's numbers that not everything can be done?

Mr Jacques: From what I gather, tax cuts have helped the economy greatly. If it helps the economy it brings more revenue in. Obviously, if you generate more revenue then it can help to pay for those other things.

Mr Christopherson: Here's the difficulty with that. I understand that argument. I've heard it for years and years, especially during the boom times. It was hard to respond. When you had a US economy overheated the way it was, pulling our economy along, the money was rolling in. Those days may come back but they're not here right now. So that argument is just not going to work, because all the things that you've mentioned got left behind during the good times; to leave them behind in the bad times leaves them behind all the time. Yet the tax cuts got taken care of, massive tax reductions. Again, in that context, the argument, "Give us the tax cuts and we'll have the money to do these other things," didn't work during the good times, it's not going to work in the tough times, and if it did, it's going to take a few years at least. Meanwhile, these kids go without. Do you really still think that paying off the debt is more important than taking care of kids who have autism?

Mr Jacques: I believe paying down the debt is very important.

Mr Christopherson: I didn't say it wasn't. But do you think it's more important?

Mr Jacques: I can't comment on what's more important or what's less important.

The Chair: With that, Mr Christopherson, we've run out of time.

Mr Christopherson: To be fair, that's why you're here: you're making the argument of what's important.

Mr Jacques: I'm arguing on behalf of my constituents.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

1100

TORONTO DEVELOPMENTAL
SERVICES COALITION

The Acting Chair (Ernie Hardeman): The next presentation is from the Toronto Developmental Services Coalition. There are people here to make that presentation. We ask them to come forward. Thank you very much for joining us here this morning. When you get seated, please introduce yourself for Hansard. We have set aside 20 minutes for your presentation. You can use all of that for your presentation, but any time that is left over after your presentation will be divided equally among the three caucuses for any questions they may have as they relate to your presentation. Thank you very much for being here, and we'll turn the floor over to you.

Mr Michael Doto: Thank you very much for having us. We're thrilled to be here. My name is Michael Doto. I represent the Toronto Developmental Services Coalition.

Mr Stanley Smith: I'm Stan Smith. I represent an agency called New Leaf: Living and Learning Together Inc, also part of the Toronto Developmental Services Coalition.

Mr Doto: We thought what we'd do is that Mr Smith would read somewhat of a prepared statement and then we would be happy to answer some questions.

Mr Smith: Those who know me know I'm not noted for brevity, but I'll do my best. I'm sure your bell will ring when our time is up.

The title of our paper is Helping People with Developmental Disabilities Live Meaningful Lives in their Community. This brief was put together by the Toronto Developmental Services Coalition, which helps people with developmental disabilities live meaningful lives in their communities. The question is, is it a dream or a reality?

This document describes the issues faced by people with developmental disabilities and their families living in Toronto, and the agencies trying to help them.

The Toronto Developmental Services Coalition is an organization of 14 agencies serving more than 6,000 people with developmental disabilities and their families in the Toronto area. We are committed to serving our clients with the best possible programs and services. Yet services are compromised and individuals and their families fear the worst because of funding stresses in staff recruitment and retention, infrastructure and unmet client and family needs.

The good news: the Ontario government announced a five-year funding package of \$197 million in new funding for developmental services in May 2001. Across Ontario, agencies serving people with developmental disabilities and their families received \$55 million in the first year, \$30 million of which went to easing the staffing crisis. I don't have to stress that it didn't do a lot.

There are a lot of people to be served with that money. It sounds like a lot, but it didn't go too far.

The rest went to expanding community services such as SSAH, special services at home, which is parent respite; day programs, which is places for adults to go when they are no longer in school; out-of-home respite care; and new places to live created for people with developmental disabilities. This has resulted in good news for some families, and I have a good-news story from one parent that I'd like to read.

The parent says, "We have realized our dream. Our son spent five years in a residential setting with four individuals who were at least 40 years older than our son. Our son had little to do during the day. Our family worked for 15 months on a 155-page proposal asking for funding for an appropriate placement close to family with a meaningful day program. We went cap in hand to 37 government officials before we got the funding we needed. Our son now has a new place to live with people his own age, a few friends and something enjoyable to do during the day. Now we can sleep at night, knowing our son has a new life."

What can government do? We are asking for more funding in the second year of this revitalization package to provide quality staff and services to Ontario's most vulnerable citizens. We need a new funding formula for the Toronto area that recognizes the higher costs of doing business in Ontario's capital. Our agencies have done what government has asked us to do. We found efficiencies and served more families with fewer resources, but at a cost. As parents and their children grow older in our system, we cannot meet some of their most basic needs. Families are asking us what will happen to their sons and daughters when they are no longer able to care for them at home.

I would like to mention at this point that we know—I personally and, I'm sure, Mike and other agencies—of parents in their 80s who are still caring for their developmentally handicapped children who are also senior citizens at this time. That's going on as we speak.

What will the children do during the day when they are no longer in school? How do they make sure the children have quality of life? We are willing to work collaboratively with government to ensure that our clients and their families are receiving the funding and services they require for a meaningful life, for their whole life.

The people we serve are children and adults with developmental disabilities. Many of our clients also have physical disabilities. Our clients need services that range from family counselling and respite support, day programs, physical therapy and literacy classes to full-time residential placements with constant supervision.

What issues are our clients facing? Our clients and their families are facing major issues including long-term residential waiting lists, a lack of day programs for out-of-school adults, school-to-adult life transition crises, aging parents and lack of funding for respite care and services such as vocational training and special services at home.

Waiting lists: residential placement waiting lists run up to and over 20 years. Most of our clients must be in crisis situations—that is, both parents deceased—before they are considered for placement. This not only distresses families, but also prevents them from planning for their futures; that is for the parents' futures as well as their children's.

The comfort allowance for all people on a developmental service pension is \$112 a month. I don't need to tell you that it doesn't go very far. A tube of toothpaste costs \$4. It barely covers their needs, not to mention transportation. It's used up pretty well. As you know, in Toronto a Metropass is \$90 a month or something of that nature.

The people we serve should be able to enjoy normal life experiences such as a movie, a dinner out or new seasonal clothing when necessary. Agencies have to absorb most of these costs as well as costs for transportation and recreational activities.

I have an anecdotal story of a family that talks about their daughter: Daughter AA has lived with her single mother and three siblings her whole life. While AA was in school, Mrs A was able to run errands, housekeep and attend to her other children. When AA turned 21 and left school, she was unable to attend any of the available day programs or residential settings because her autism made her difficult to manage without one-on-one support. As AA became more isolated, she became more aggressive. Mrs A and her other children felt they were in danger and could not provide the complexity of care AA needed. Mrs A eventually admitted AA to the psychiatric ward of a local hospital. Appropriate accommodation and supports in the community are still not available to AA. She continues to deteriorate and lives in a setting that costs almost five times that of a place to live with similar supports in her community. Hospitals are expensive places to live in, as you can well imagine.

Lack of day programs for out-of-school adults: because of the current restructuring of day programs, the Toronto area does not have enough placements to serve every client who needs a day program. Parents must then spend valuable support-at-home funds on private day programs, or their son or daughter does not attend the day programs, resulting in stagnation or reversal of developmental achievements.

School-to-adult transition: the transition from school to adult life has become a major issue facing our clients and their families. We are trying to find creative ways to meet the unmet need. We need specially trained staff to help our clients and their families plan for the future. The restructuring of day programs makes transitions a hurdle for our clients and their families.

Aging parents: many of our clients have parents who are increasingly frail senior citizens and who find it difficult to manage their developmentally disabled children at home. This issue places additional stress on the residential services waiting lists and on SSAH funding.

Another anecdotal story: DS is a 41-year-old man who lived with his 74-year-old father. He needed direct sup-

port in all areas of self-care: bathing, shaving, dressing and toileting. He had nothing to do during the day. His father was unable to get help for him. Mind you, the father is 74 years old. With help through the options program and professional assistance, DS's family put together a care plan. Alternative living arrangements and a day program were found. This significantly improved DS's and his father's quality of life.

Funding for family-parent respite: while some families have experienced increases to their SSAH funding, others are experiencing stagnation in their funding level. With all the other stresses, SSAH funding needs to be increased to provide relief to families who are waiting for residential and day programs. This funding allows families to pay only \$10 per hour for respite, but finding qualified staff at \$10 an hour is next to impossible, as you can imagine.

1110

Another story: "Special services at home helps me more than any other program because I can decide how and when to use it based on my son's needs. It gives me a real break. I am a single parent of G, a 20-year-old young man who lives at home. His father died of cancer three years ago. I have gone through at least 10 workers over the past two years because I can't pay them enough to continue working with my son. They eventually find jobs elsewhere that pay more. If I was willing to settle for a high school student perhaps there would be some consistency, but my son's safety comes first. He has a seizure disorder and I want to know that I am leaving him with someone who is qualified to assist him under any circumstances."

What issues are our agencies facing? Salary differentials cause staff recruitment and retention problems. Our agencies are also dealing with administrative and infrastructure funding issues and an underfunded Toronto area.

Staffing crises: our biggest concerns are staffing crises. Salary differentials range between 25% and 50% from other private sector agencies. We have many staff who leave to pursue other, better-paying opportunities. It is a vicious cycle: we recruit staff with difficulty as we are not competitive in terms of salaries; we pay for training and employment benefits; staff leave the agencies for better-paying positions. Because of the cycle, our staff turnover rate ranges from 11% to 50% annually, resulting in declining staff-to-client ratios.

The staff we have need administrative and managerial support. No increases in funding have been earmarked for this purpose. Quality assurance and delivery of services cannot be executed without these positions. While we are trying to be creative in how to deal with this issue, including consolidating part-time positions, the long-term requirement is increased funding to meet the needs of our clients.

Toronto is an underfunded area of the province. Staff need higher salaries to live and work in Toronto. The cost of doing business in Toronto is higher because rents are higher and costs are higher than in many other parts of

the province. TDSC members report dramatic increases in energy costs, WSIB, transportation, aging equipment, CPP, EI, EHT—health costs—employer contributions and supervision. For example, long-term disability premiums have risen 19%, extended health care by 35%, natural gas by 60%, transportation by 108%, rent and maintenance costs 181%, WSIB by 343%. These are costs that reduce funds that could be used to support individuals and their families.

I might point out that the nature of our business is to provide care to needy individuals who can't provide the care for themselves. We don't make toasters or widgets. We can't add a quarter or a dollar to the price of our product and thereby increase our revenues in order to continue to provide better care. The best that we can do is reduce the quality of staff and the number of staff in order to keep as much quality care going as possible. We have no other way of raising funds except through our government.

As to who the members of the Toronto Developmental Services Coalition are, collectively members represent 70% of all monies spent by the Ministry of Community and Social Services for developmental services in Toronto. We serve over 6,000 individuals living with disabilities, and their families. We help individuals with developmental and related disabilities to live in the community through day programs, residential services, vocational training, respite, supported independent living and community outreach.

The members of the coalition are, and I'll just run them off quickly for you here: the Meta Centre; the Salvation Army of Broadview Village; CLAS, which is Community Living Alternative Services; the Bob Rumball Centre for the Deaf; the Toronto Association for Community Living; Reena; New Visions; Kerry's Place Autism Services; Surex; Vita; Montage; Muki Baum; the Mary Centre and New Leaf.

That's our presentation.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much. We have just a minute for each caucus. I think the first one is the Liberal caucus.

Mr Kwinter: Thank you very much for your presentation. We've heard the issue you raise about the fact that the funding is usually one-size-fits-all. It doesn't matter whether you're in Toronto or whether you're up in Moosonee, you get the same kind of funding, yet the costs are dramatically different. Have you made representations to the ministry about that, and has there been any response?

Mr Doto: Yes and no, depending on who you mean. Agencies certainly have. We bring the issue forward on a regular basis. Last week at the pre-budget meetings, I suppose they're called, we made the point. I think it's an ongoing battle, if I can use the term, to get the point across.

We're not saying that it's more difficult to serve people in one area or the other; we're just saying you need to recognize in Toronto how expensive it is to do this kind of work and there has to be recognition of that.

What we're saying is it's becoming a crisis in terms of retaining staff. It's an infrastructure issue and these people need to be looked after. So yes, this particular coalition has only been together a short time and that's the real focus of this: to make that point.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you for your presentation. I think we've heard from at least one group at every stop so it's clearly a huge societal issue that covers the entire province.

I note that you raise the issue of the comfort allowance. I can't tell you how many hundreds of petitions I've introduced in the House talking about that. You don't mention it here but, to the best of my mind, I think it's been almost 12 years since that comfort allowance has been raised. By the time you factor in inflation, it really does next to nothing in terms of what it was originally set out to do. So you make a really good argument there.

Trying to find staff at \$10 an hour: again, we've been told about the frustration of being told, "You can pick whoever you want," but you don't get enough money to really hire anybody, so you don't really get whoever you want and I suspect at the end of the day where you do find someone, \$10 an hour isn't going to buy you a lot in terms of professional services.

Staff turnover: I can appreciate how difficult that is.

The issue of aging parents is one that is getting louder and louder with every presentation. Where are we going to be in five or 10 years if we don't adequately deal with this issue?

Mr Doto: In big trouble. One study recently by one organization indicates that about 43% of the people being looked after at home are being looked after by what you would call senior citizens. You don't need to think too hard about what will happen in five or 10 years. I think that's the whole point here: this is an investment; this is going to cost the government a lot of money.

As we indicated in that document, a crisis is much more expensive than planning for someone. When you suddenly have to look after someone that moment, you're stuck, and that is a very expensive proposition. Never mind the toll it takes on families to deal with that, an individual who gets yanked out of their home because there's no one to look after them and has to be put somewhere where they're not—

Mr Christopherson: Yes. Thank you.

Mrs Tina R. Molinari (Thornhill): Thank you very much for your presentation today. I represent the riding of Thornhill and I'm very familiar with some of the organizations you've listed here that are part of your group. One specifically is the Reena Foundation, which happens to be right in my riding. I've had several conversations with the director of Reena, and through my role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services I've also heard from several stakeholder groups on some of the issues.

Certainly the issues you raise here today are very consistent with what we've been hearing all along. The issue over salaries and the need to keep staff and the

turnover—we've heard that for the longest time and responded with the \$31.7 million, which you've also indicated in your presentation went to meet some of that.

As you can appreciate, the challenges are great and as a government and as a ministry, we make attempts to respond to a lot of the issues that come forward. We are moving in the direction of addressing some of those issues. So thank you for recognizing that within your presentation and also highlighting some of the challenges that we have to face.

Just a quick question.

1120

The Acting Chair: Let it be very quick.

Mrs Molinari: One of the things that comes to me constantly is that some of the parents and families that have children who need services are asking the government to provide them with the funds that they would ordinarily provide to an agency or whatever to provide services so that they can choose how their child is serviced. Have you heard any of that? What are your thoughts around that?

Mr Doto: I'll try to be brief. First of all, absolutely, but part of what we want to do here is to secure the ongoing funding. We recognize that the government has recognized the issue, and we'd like to see the multi-year planning continue and the infrastructure dollars continue.

We see that as an option, an array of service that needs to be available. There are organizations and people who work very hard to understand how that would work. We could certainly provide advice to the government or anyone who is interested in how that could be part of the system. I think if you look at that as the only option, you might have some problems, but if you look at it as one of the many tools or one of the many options available to families and organizations in meeting the needs—we do look at what's best for families and what's most cost-effective, so we do hear that, absolutely. Families also really struggle if you leave it up to them entirely. I don't have enough time to get into it, but I'd be happy to discuss it with you at length.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation. We're sorry to cut you off short.

Mr Doto: It's quite all right. Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: A minute for questions doesn't leave a whole lot of time. We apologize for the time constraints.

DAVID CHAMBERS

The Acting Chair: The next presentation is David Chambers. Welcome, Mr Chambers. If you would have your seat there, and if you would introduce yourself for Hansard. You have 15 minutes for your presentation that we've set aside. At the end of your presentation, if it's not all used up, we will divide that equally among the three caucuses. Hopefully it's longer than a minute, and that way we can try to keep it within those minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr David Chambers: Mr Chairman, thank you for this opportunity. My name is Dave Chambers. I am a

retiree from the teaching profession. The last 25 years of my career were spent in administration in the counties of Peel and Simcoe. At present I am in my second term as trustee for the north end of Simcoe county, an area that includes Midland, Penetanguishene, Tiny township and Wasaga Beach. I am here on behalf of the ratepayers and parents of that area, and indeed those of all north Simcoe, to express concerns regarding the educational funding formula and its potential effects upon small rural schools and their communities.

North Simcoe is a large rural area comprised of towns, villages and farmlands. The schools in north Simcoe are not new. A number were built during the population boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Many are much older, but all are fixtures of their communities. To visit most of these schools is to visit the history of this county. You will see names and pictures of parents, grandparents and great-grandparents who attended the same school. In most cases, these schools are much like the churches of these same communities: they are community institutions. In some ways, because the schools are used by and are viewed as belonging to everyone in those communities, they are even more meaningful to their community.

The present educational funding formula puts these schools at risk. Without changes to the formula, some of these schools will be closed.

The educational funding formula calls for 364 full-time elementary students to generate one full-time principal, 769 students to generate a full-time librarian, 272 students to generate one full-time secretary. This means that to have equity in resources and staff, an elementary school needs to be approximately 450 students. The average size of elementary schools in north Simcoe is 332 students. Over 90% of north Simcoe elementary schools and 63% of Simcoe county elementary schools do not meet this break-even point of 450 students.

Boards of education are funded with the expectation they will distribute staff and resources equitably among all schools. This premise is based upon the assumption that in every board there is a balance between the number of large schools and the number of small schools. My preceding comments clearly indicate that in Simcoe county, the premise upon which this part of the educational funding formula is based is flawed. The imbalance of large and small schools in Simcoe county is exaggerated by the combination of student population decline in the north, while in the south of the county there is student population growth, all of which is complicated by the geographical distance between the north and the south of this county.

The existing formula, intended to provide equity, in actual fact discriminates against the small schools of north Simcoe. It amazes me that the demand for school space south of Barrie can affect the status of a school 50 miles to the north within the same board. However, that is the reality of our formula.

Since the Simcoe County District School Board has more small schools than large ones, it is faced with decisions, as are other boards, that are negative both to

education in general and to small communities in particular. I am using the example of elementary school librarian funding to demonstrate the problem.

The Simcoe county board could, as I believe some Ontario boards have done, apply the formula as it reads and simply lock up libraries for whatever portion of the day the formula does not provide librarians in our smaller schools, thus making sure no student in a small school has the opportunity during library downtime to explore the world of books, hardly an appropriate decision to be made by a board which values reading. The other consideration is to close our small schools in the north and bus students to a centralized super-sized school, which because of size would qualify for a full-time librarian.

I am opposed to both choices. I believe you should be as well. Nor is it appropriate for a province which claims to value equity of learning opportunity to place boards in a position where they must consider between two bad decisions, both of which discriminate.

The closing of a school has a traumatic effect upon a community. When the school being closed is the only school in a community, it is devastating. Most of the reasons for this are obvious, and I intend to only touch on one aspect of this. It is short and it is simple. The greatest resource to a school is its parents. When we close a community school, we potentially deprive the school, and thus the children, of that resource.

Each of you has a local school, be it rural or urban. I ask you to consider your community without that school. I will provide a specific example. Mind you, I expected Garfield to be here; Garfield Dunlop is my local MLA.

The Chair: He was here.

Mr Chambers: Yes. He is a man that I respect. He comes from the village of Coldwater in north Simcoe. Coldwater elementary school does not have enough students to meet the break-even point. So I ask you, if the Simcoe County District School Board had to close that school and put the children of Coldwater on buses to another community, would the parents of Coldwater agree with our funding formula?

Unfortunately, there is reality to such a scenario. In 1999, 73 schools were closed in Ontario; 86% of these schools had fewer than 350 students. In 2000, 59 schools were closed; 97% were under 350. In 2001, 111 schools were closed; 81% were under 350 students. I remind you that north Simcoe has 332 per school.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe this part of the funding formula needs to be revisited and fixed to accommodate rural Ontario. I offer to you my opinion as a retired professional that super-large schools are not always better, that in rural Ontario they bring with them dislocation of students and their families and have the potential for diminishing returns to students.

Research from the United States is quite clear. Some excerpts from that research are: smaller schools raise student achievement; smaller schools reduce incidents of violence and disruptive behaviour; smaller schools combat anonymity and isolation; smaller schools increase

attendance rates; smaller schools increase parent and community involvement.

I think you must ask yourselves, if a rural school is closed, what length of time is it appropriate for young children to be on buses? In north Simcoe we already have some secondary students being bused for an hour twice a day. A formula that forces school closings is saying that two hours of travel a day is acceptable for five- and six-year-olds. I think not.

1130

My comments have concentrated on elementary schools, but the issue is the same for secondary schools. I suggest that if it is distressing that a community loses its school, it's also sad if a community is unable, due to the formula, to have a school. Wasaga Beach is a community of 15,000-plus people. It's a community that desperately wants to have its own secondary school. They do not want to continue to bus their teenaged youth out of their community to secondary schools in smaller neighbourhood communities. They do not want to be the source of one of these schools closing. They feel, and have suggested to me, that there is only one way they can retain their youth, and that is for the separate and public boards to cooperate in the building of an integrated building. They are willing to make financial contributions to such a building. They are not willing to do so with one that has duplication of classrooms and barriers. Until there are provincial guidelines for such a venture, I suggest the citizens of Wasaga and other rural communities will be subjected to watching turf wars between boards, instead of realizing their community school. The reason for mentioning this is to focus on the fact that a provincial Legislature needs to think differently and to enact legislation that recognizes the needs of rural Ontario.

Ladies and gentlemen, the purpose of this presentation was to convince you that small rural community schools should not be closed and that, as a society, we need to support our rural communities by funding local schools. You are about to start your budgetary deliberations. I beg you to review this part of the educational funding formula, on behalf of north Simcoe and rural Ontario. Thank you for this opportunity, sir.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We'll have time for one question. We have about two minutes. Mr Christopherson, you're the one.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you very much for your presentation. Just on your last point first, that you're concerned about watching turf wars between boards instead of realizing a community school, I would just caution you with experience that you spark not only the potential of a turf war but a religious war. I know of what I speak. In Hamilton, when I was an alderman in the 1980s in the east end, Winston Churchill was blazed across the national news. It was ugly.

Mr Chambers: I remember it well, sir. But I think to serve communities, we have a need to look at the box differently.

Mr Christopherson: I appreciate that. I'm just saying that it's not as easy to look at these things as just strictly

financial matters or pragmatic matters. Once you bring religion into it, you've got a whole different issue. That's all I'm raising. Just watch where you go when you raise those kinds of issues, because they're not just about bricks and mortar.

Mr Chambers: Absolutely. My comment is for people. I happen to represent Penetanguishene as well. It already has two secondary schools, and there's a probability of a third being built. It has a population of 8,000 people. Wasaga Beach has a population of close to twice that, with no secondary school. I think my point's made.

Mr Christopherson: Agreed. Your point's well made. I'm just talking about the one potential solution—a caution.

I understand how you feel about the small schools. We went through this. Yours is an interesting perspective, because you've sort of been on both sides—two sides out of the three, if you add administration as a third side of it. I want to know how you feel about the fact—if it's happening in your community—whether you're the one, you and your board, taking the heat for the potential school closures because you're front line. One of our concerns all along is that the government brags about their balanced budget, but they get there by passing off their deficits down to municipalities, school boards, hospital boards and other community agencies that are suffering. We hear them come here to the table. Then they go around, prance about and say, "We're wonderful. We balanced our books." In the meantime, other people are doing their dirty work and taking their heat. Are you finding that? Are you taking heat for these school closures, or is there recognition by your constituents that it's the funding formula and, therefore, the government?

Mr Chambers: We will take heat for it. We'll take heat if a child cannot read, and that child gets an attitude. There's a gap in that child's knowledge. That child is then a potential dropout from school. That child is then a burden to our society as a whole. With that child, then, we start a cycle of early pregnancy, welfare, unemployment. The children from that early pregnancy start the cycle again. We need to break that, and we may be able to break that by short-term funding that has a long-term objective for the future by funding small schools.

Mr Christopherson: Agreed.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

CITY OF BARRIE

The Chair: Our next presentation will be from the city of Barrie. I would ask the presenters to come forward, and if you could state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Mr Jim Perri: Thank you, Mr Chairman. My name is Jim Perri. I'm mayor of the city of Barrie. To my left is our city treasurer, Mrs Sharyn Ross, and to my right is the commissioner of corporate services and the city clerk, Mr John Craig. I believe you all have in front of you our presentation.

First of all, as mayor, I would like to welcome you to the city of Barrie. You've picked a good spot to be in and you also brought some good weather today. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on our opportunities, plans and strategies for prospering in the 21st century. We did have a slide presentation we were going to show you, but we don't have that, so you have it in front of you. The slides are there.

The city of Barrie is a regional service centre and it serves as the heart of central Ontario. In the past few years, the city of Barrie has experienced dramatic growth. We are no longer the small town we once were. The city has grown to an approximate population of 120,000, and each year 6,000 people make Barrie their home. We are the regional centre and, as such, we are the employment centre for the Simcoe county area. We are proud to have the Royal Victoria Hospital, Georgian College, a state-of-the-art water pollution control centre and a strong and vibrant service sector. Our economic retail sector goes all the way from Sudbury and basically to North York, and it's very strong. We probably have more retail commercial square footage than anything north of the city of Toronto. People are amazed at how big our commercial retail centre is for a population of 100,000. But remember, ours is a large, large catchment basin.

Barrie's prospects: we've given you a chart there just to show you that in 2001, the city of Barrie was ranked as the 23rd largest city in terms of GDP. By 2021, it will be in the 17th ranking, so it's a very fast-growing city. But constraining our boundaries will limit our future economic development opportunities and will result in urban sprawl in our surrounding townships and cities, which will in turn have serious effects on the environment. And with a limited supply of land for growth, affordable housing will be lost. That's one of our major concerns, by the way: if the city is not allowed to expand, the housing crisis in this municipality will skyrocket.

As you can see in this chart, Barrie is no longer the small town it once was. Barrie has grown dramatically in both population and GDP, and it is projected that this growth will continue. As you can see, the city of Barrie is now competing with the likes of Windsor and St Catharines.

The next chart gives you an idea of growth for the next 20 years. This is a provincial study that was done. Local, provincial and national forecasts continue to indicate that the greater Barrie area is among the most rapidly growing communities in Canada. The city of Barrie recently commissioned a local government restructuring study to look at the issue of how to manage growth in this area and how to reflect the current realities of our growing community. This issue is not only a regional issue, but a provincial issue. Allowing for the expansion of the city of Barrie would be beneficial to the province, as the city of Barrie could take continued growth pressures off the greater Toronto area.

The chart in front of you comes from a study called the greater Golden Horseshoe report. In that, it indicates

that from 2001 to 2021, the metro area will be growing at a rate of 90,000 people a year, the Ottawa-Carleton area will be about 13,000 people per year, and then Barrie will be third in the provincial growth forecast at roughly 7,900 people a year. Then way below that you'll get places like London and Kitchener, at around 4,000. You're talking about a very massive growth rate in this area, so the city does require expansions in its boundaries.

1140

There are risks of doing nothing. If we are not able to expand our boundaries, growth in the boom period will be reduced in the Barrie area. Development in Barrie has reduced some pressures on the GTA to further develop. This will not continue. Development will continue on the fringe, but these communities do not have the capacity to service this sprawl as it grows in their area. Provincially mandated requirements to maintain a 20-year supply of land for growth will be breached. Smart Growth principles—that is, strong economy, strong community and neighbourhoods and a clean, healthy environment—will not be met.

All this of course comes to what we call fiscal challenges. The city of Barrie and municipalities in general need provincial assistance to address the transfer of responsibilities in order to be economic engines for provincial prosperity. The province should develop a province-wide economic development strategy and provide assistance to the local level in attracting and retaining key industries to our communities.

As a result of the local service realignment, municipalities are experiencing increased costs for social housing, police services and social services—including child care—land ambulance and hospital expansion. The Royal Victoria Hospital is in need of expansion, and the hospital is hoping to build a cancer care centre to serve this area. In an attempt to address some of these issues in particular, the city would like to suggest the government reintroduce the hospital component in the DCA charge for hospital expansion.

Just to give you an example, we were looking at our budget preparations for this year, and 42% of the city's operating budget in 2002 is controlled by appointed commissions or boards. We will not have as a municipality, as elected officials, the ability to impact on 42% of our operating budget. We're talking about child care services, social services. People are going to submit a bill to the municipality to the total of 42%, and whatever increase they want, we've got to pay. In a democracy that's wrong, folks, because the elected people should be the ones who decide, but in this case, through provincial legislation, appointed commissions and boards are now going to dictate 42% of the budget in our city. Some of these groups, some of these authorities, are coming up with increases of over 42% in their budgets from us, and we have no option but to pay them. These are the kinds of financial challenges with which we're being faced.

Transit and transportation issues have come to the forefront as a direct result of our population growth.

Consistent with the provincial government's Smart Growth policy, the city of Barrie has been actively pursuing the return of commuter rail service to Barrie. With approximately 30% of our labour force commuting to work outside of Barrie each day, it is critical that alternative forms of transportation be available for our citizens. Providing commuter rail service would help to reduce smog, improve our environment, reduce gridlock on the highway system and improve the quality of life of our residents who commute long distances to work each day. For example, the city of Barrie has purchased the old CN line from Bradford to Barrie to protect it, hoping that in the future—of course now since the province has taken over the GO system—the province will assist us in the return of GO to the Barrie area.

We don't object to the province looking at the study for the 400, because that's a proper road to project and to plan for the future. We do have reservations, though, about concentrating their plans on the roads. We believe that they should look at a combined transportation network of highway, rail, all kinds, and not simply concentrate on the expansion of highways. I must thank the province, because they did help the city to purchase the old rail. We're hoping that they will continue. Our local MPP, Mr Joe Tascona, is working very hard to try to bring GO to Barrie, so we would like to make that public and support all his work in terms of that avenue.

In addition, in our area there are other transportation issues that need to be addressed in order to reduce congestion and gridlock in our highway system. Numerous transit studies are currently underway. They're examining options for Highway 400 expansion through the Barrie area, expansion of the park-and-ride lots and improvements to various interchanges throughout the city. The road network through Barrie has additional demands, to the point of gridlock, on weekends throughout the year for cottage traffic and traffic to the ski hill. This standstill on Highway 400 each and every weekend desperately needs to be addressed.

In addition to the funding announced last September for transit in Ontario, it is suggested that you consider sharing the gasoline tax for the purpose of transit and highway expansion. It would certainly help municipalities.

We did not make this a long presentation because we felt that it's important that you look at some key areas. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to discuss these issues with you. As always, we look forward to continuing to work with our government to ensure a prosperous future. Certainly I and my colleagues are here to answer any of your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have three minutes per caucus.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for your presentation. The first item I'd just like to ask about, to make sure I understand it, is the 42% that's spent by agencies, boards and commissions in relation to the joint services with the county around you.

Mr Perri: In our area, the province gave the county the social service component. As you know, we don't

have representation in the county. We're not part of the county. We are an independent, separated city and we have no say-so in how things are developed. The police services board submits their budgeting, and yes, we could challenge it, but I've been on the police services board for many, many years and I don't know of any municipality that's ever successfully challenged the police.

Mr Hardeman: Being on the board, then, you would never advise council to challenge the budget anyway, would you?

Mr Perri: Oh, yes, I have.

Mr Hardeman: I guess the question really is that that may be a situation that's somewhat unique to Barrie and south Simcoe because of the single tier for Barrie.

Mr Perri: Certainly in the social services, but you have, for example, conservation authorities whose budgets have been reduced in terms of provincial grants and so on but they still have the same mandate. In fact, in today's environmentally conscious society, they're becoming more and more important. Their role is increasing. They still need the same amount of money, if not more, money, but since their provincial grants are basically gone, we're the ones who have to pick up the bill. So one authority is proposing something like a 44% increase. Again, we don't have an option.

Mr Hardeman: The other question relates to the growth pressures. Your presentation is quite impressive on the speed of growth, the rate of growth in Barrie and the surrounding area and the need for further investment in infrastructure to support that growth. But somewhere in this equation isn't there supposed to be revenue from the growth to pay for the growth? I was a municipal politician for 14 years. The argument was always that you shouldn't have growth for the sake of growth. If you can't make it work for your community, then you shouldn't be encouraging it. Are we doing that?

Mr Perri: The city of Barrie does not encourage growth. The fact is that the growth is occurring. It's part of the greater Toronto area, whether we like it or not. People are coming. Our municipality pays a hefty price for growth; they do pay their own way. But it's coming and we can't stop it. And I don't think we should be. I think we have a responsibility to the population that's growing in our province. We as a nation accept 400,000-some-odd immigrants. Most of them, 60%, come to the Toronto area. We get our fair share of that, as well as we get our fair share of the people who move out of the greater Toronto area. Whether we like it or not, it's happening.

Mr Hardeman: Could I ask one—

The Chair: With that, Mr Hardeman, I have to go to Mr Phillips.

Mr Phillips: Thank you, Mr Mayor. It's a challenge. It is a rapidly growing community. One quick question: is there any talk of toll roads coming up this way at all?

Mr Perri: I hope not. I have heard that the province is looking at toll roads on the 400-series highways. We would have great reservations on that, because our economic lifeblood is the 400. We would be negatively

impacted. Industry would not be looking favourably to tolls on the 400.

Mr Phillips: Just a comment: the government put out last week, I think, their SuperBuild brochure, which you may or may not have seen. It talks about users of the 407 being so enthusiastic in their acceptance of the toll road that it may set the pattern for the development of other high-speed, high-traffic toll roads in the province.

1150

Just to alert you, the Ontario Trucking Association yesterday sent a fairly stiffly worded letter to the government saying that the trucking industry "is extremely displeased with the exorbitant tolls rates and poor customer service" of 407. "I suggest that it is inappropriate for the government to be trying to make the case that 'commercial users are becoming enthusiasts'" of the 407.

"It is our strong opinion that the Highway 407 model should not be repeated." For many truckers, "exorbitant rates ... will make it uneconomic for truckers to use toll routes."

They quoted a woman who was using the road as an enthusiastic supporter. The numbers, though, say that she pays \$720 a year on tolls to drive 12 kilometres to work each day. I just warn the council to take a good look. If the 427 extension is dependent on that, you may want to look at it.

My question is on your local services realignment. When that was done, it was called downloading by many. We in the opposition call it downloading. It was supposed to be at least revenue-neutral, if not helpful, to the municipalities. I think with the dropping numbers of people on social assistance it perhaps has been beneficial. Are you now seeing a reversal of that in any way? Are you starting to see any of the costs that have been put down on you turning around at all?

Mr Perri: From our point of view, our concern is more in terms of our inability to control it. We don't necessarily feel that there's an imbalance in the downloading on that issue at all. Our concern is that we don't control it. It's another government that controls it and we have no say-so. That's our problem and our concern.

Maybe in other areas the downloading has not been revenue-neutral. On this issue we don't have a problem with the figure. We have the problem with how it's arrived at and we don't control it. They can ask us for a 17% increase and we have to pay for it. That's our problem.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you, Mayor, for your presentation. By the way, I'm very impressed with your promotional material, particularly your business card. It's nicely done, and I think the fact that you got it done in Braille says a lot. I wanted to mention it.

Mr Perri: Thank you, sir.

Mr Christopherson: Help me out here. The downloading was devastating on a community like mine, Hamilton, because we didn't have the same growth. Sometimes I listened to the other mayors nearby—Markham, Oakville, Mississauga. A lot of the damage

that was done through the changing of the alignment of services and funding is offset in those communities by the phenomenal growth rate, just incredible increases in their revenue, which helped paper over some of those. Has your growth afforded you that same opportunity?

Mr Perri: Yes, it has. We're fortunate. The city is growing. The city has established a lot of and is expanding on its commercial retail areas. We've done well.

The realignment has impacted on us quite a bit because it means that we're providing more and more services and we're paying for them. It has impacted on us in that we can no longer try to retain a 0% tax increase. We have to have increases.

It would be nice if the province would get back into helping municipalities with more grants. I'm on the police services board. We get more and more requirements and standards imposed on us. That means that the police services budget, for example, is almost 26% of our operating budget. However, we've been lucky. We can meet it. We're a good municipality along those lines and we've been able to cope with the growth. The growth helps to pay for it. A municipality that isn't facing growth probably would have great difficulty.

Mr Christopherson: We are.

Mr Perri: We're not.

Mr Christopherson: That's good. That's fortunate for you.

If I have time, I note that in your economic projections, based on GDP ranking, you're 23rd in Canada right now and you're going to jump to 17th. That's a huge increase, based on GDP. Is that to suggest that the kind of business and the kinds of residents you'll have will be higher-income, as per Burlington, Oakville, Mississauga, or is that just a reflection of the massive size of the actual growth in the local economy?

Mr Perri: It's quantity.

Mr Christopherson: What about things like intensification? It's mostly a Toronto issue, but is it something you're looking at?

Mr Perri: In terms of residential development, the intensification is higher than in the average city in Ontario. We have a lot of townhouse development, a lot of multiple residences, in our subdivision.

Mr Christopherson: Sorry, brownfields or greenfields, Mayor?

Mr Perri: Greenfields. In terms of brownfields, we do have others in our shorelines. We have old sites that used to be factories that are now condominiums. We're trying to meet the Smart Growth principles of intensification and so on. We are there. We don't have subdivisions, for example, of all single-family homes that are on 50-, 60-, 70-foot lots. We have subdivisions where the biggest lots are about 50 feet and the rest are 30 feet.

This city has adopted Smart Growth because we truly believe in it, regardless of what political party is advocating it. We think it's good for the environment and it's good for the province, so we endorse it. It used to be called "sustainable development."

Mr Christopherson: Very impressive, Mayor, both you and your presentation. Thank you.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

Mr Perri: Thank you, sir. We appreciate your holding the meeting here in Barrie and giving us the publicity. Please come back during the summer. You'll enjoy the municipality.

SIMCOE MUSKOKA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair: Our next presentation will be from the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward, and if you could state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Kevin Kobus: Thank you, Mr Chair. I'm Kevin Kobus, director of the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board. With me today I have Catherine MacDonald, who is chairman of our board, and Trustee Maura Bolger is also in attendance.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity. We're a school system of about 22,000 students, 50 schools and a budget of about \$139 million. I've chosen to focus on six areas. Recognizing that you have been consulting around the province for many days now, I will try not to belabour some of those points that you may have heard elsewhere. I'm speaking largely to the white handout in the package that you have. The six points in my brief will deal with special education, textbooks, compensation, multi-year agreements, professional development for teachers, and the controversial class size issue. I've also included in the package a copy of our board's five-year strategic plan, just to provide some background for my comments.

In the area of special education, I expect that you've heard this point across the province. I simply wish to reinforce some of what you've heard with a little bit of specificity, so under the area of special education, just a few general comments. The process that boards must go through to get funding is too cumbersome, too criteria-driven and too labour-intensive. We believe there is already an indication from this government and a commitment that they will look at a new model and revisions to the process. We do look forward to those changes.

There are five particular points that I would draw very briefly to your attention. The process itself actually robs the classroom of valuable resources and this contradicts the basic philosophy of special education. By that I mean that we have to pull people away from student contact in order to do all the bureaucratic submissions we must do to justify our grants.

The second specific point has to do with the criteria for submitting a claim. Again, they are very restrictive and quite inflexible. There are situations that do fall in the cracks, where an ISA claim is turned down simply because of the rigidity of the process.

A third particular point, still under special education, I have entitled "Administrative Complexity." This is very much of a chicken-and-egg type of situation: in order to get an ISA claim, we must document that there is a support that's in place. However, we don't have the funding to put the support in place in order to document it, so there are students whose needs simply are not being met.

It's ironic that I'm following the mayor of Barrie and this whole concept of growth. In our particular case, since 1998, which coincidentally is when I started as director in this area, we've opened 10 new schools and have put on five major additions. Obviously, within the group of new students there are many students with very high special needs. However, we are still funded at 1998 levels. Overall in the area of special education, we are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to provide service for students and we are not receiving any funding for those new students.

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The last aspect, still with special education, is the concept of portability. If a student arrives at the door in November, namely after the October 31 count date, then we must provide a service right away. Normally that would involve putting an educational assistant in place, but we do not receive any ISA funding for that until September 1 of the following year. If you use \$30,000 roughly as the cost of an educational assistant for eight months, that's a \$24,000 shortfall we're automatically building into our budget.

Those were just general comments on deficiencies of the current approach to special education. Administratively, we've been dealing with ministry staff to try to reinforce some of the more technical aspects of that area.

I'll move on quickly to textbooks as the second of six issues. The particular emphasis I've chosen for example here is grade 11. In 2001-02, ministry funding for grade 11 textbooks only provided sufficient funds for the cost of mathematics, science and English textbooks. Obviously students are taking a range of courses, so school boards were forced to look elsewhere for sources of funds for textbooks in those other areas. It's particularly significant to deal with grade 11 this year as they are that first group of the new cohort. Many feel that they are being disadvantaged in some ways by being in that first cohort. We feel the provision of textbooks for all grades, especially for this grade, needs attention.

In the somewhat controversial area of compensation, I would like to draw to your attention a few points from our perspective, and that's the perspective of a school board that spends approximately 75% of its revenue on salaries. That should come as no surprise, as education in itself is a very labour-intensive process. We are an employer of about 3,600 staff within Simcoe county and the district of Muskoka. We continue to strive to reach fair collective agreements within the restrictions of the funding model. Unfortunately, as time goes on, the gap in terms of what we can put on the table for our employee groups and the level of funding is widening significantly.

Inflation in Ontario since 1999 has been running at the rate of about 9.2%, based on information provided by the Ontario Financing Authority, and the projected increase is about 3.1% over the next two years. The funding model we must operate under for the same time period has provided for a wage increase of about 1.95% in 2000-01. Again, this is part of the reason for the gap.

I'll highlight the area of benefits. It is an area that we as an employer are trying to contain. In some particular benefit areas the costs are going up as much as 80%. The 12% provision that's in the funding model is simply inadequate.

The next area I'd like to at least comment on briefly is the whole concept of multi-year collective agreements. As school boards, we are bound to comply with the Stability and Excellence in Education Act, or Bill 80. In our particular case, if I can use our teachers as an example, we have two units that I have elected to deal with and their agreements will expire in August of this year. In order to comply with the act, we must sign a two-year agreement now and then in 2004 we must sign a three-year agreement. Obviously, in terms of trying to put something on the table, we anticipate over the next few months getting the funding announcements so that we know what to do in the first year. However, it's a massive question mark in terms of what we can put on the table in year 2, so very much we're speculating on that level of grant in year 2. That situation will be exacerbated when we have to project out three years.

The suggestion I've incorporated into this presentation to assist us with our long-range planning and effective budget management would be to require some parallel grant announcements on a two- or three-year basis. There should be a minimum guarantee increasing grants equal to the projected inflation rate for the same time period. If this is not feasible, then I would suggest to the government that this particular provision of the act should be removed. It makes absolutely no sense right now to force boards to sign three-year agreements with no guarantee, or no indication, at least, of what's coming in year 2 and year 3.

The concept of professional development for teachers: we've introduced a new provincial curriculum in all grades over the last four or five years and this has placed tremendous demands on teachers' development. The controversial issue again about the number of professional development days is that they were simultaneously reduced from nine to four during a period in which the professional development needs were probably higher than ever. With our growth in Simcoe Muskoka, we face the challenge of hiring many new teachers into the profession who would benefit from development opportunities. Currently, most of the four days are allotted to reporting to parents on student progress, and because of conflicting needs, boards are either not offering professional development or doing so during a regular school day.

Under the model we are currently using, just to throw some numbers at least to the panel, we have 1,176

teachers. If each of those 1,176 teachers was to receive one day of professional development on a regular school day, our supply teacher costs would be \$235,000. If we had those three additional days to work with in which to provide PD, we would not be incurring those supply teacher costs. I do recognize the political sensitivity around that, but the practical reality is that we have so many young teachers entering the profession these days, the curriculum is new and there are changes in society, and we really feel that there would be tremendous benefit in having three additional PD days.

Lastly, before I give a conclusion, the whole class size issue is now very restrictive. The average elementary class size cannot exceed 24.5 students while the average secondary can be as high as 22. We also recognize that parents of our students want smaller classes, but there's obviously a huge cost associated with this goal. Parents also want textbooks in schools. They also want motivated teachers, and I believe they place a very high value on labour peace within education.

This past September 2001 saw the smoothest school opening in recent memory, when the province introduced flexibility, allowing secondary class size to increase from 21 to 22. A change of one student in elementary and secondary collective agreements would translate into approximately \$2.7 million in savings just for my board, which is one of 72 boards in the province. If new money is not going to be available for special education, textbooks or compensation, then I'm suggesting the legislation be changed to allow greater flexibility for boards to establish class size. However, this is not a heartfelt endorsement for larger classes. If it comes down to a matter of choice, our preference is for new and additional dollars for these areas without increasing the size of classes.

In conclusion, we are deeply committed to excellence in Catholic education for students in the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board. Our vision, which is part of that other document I've shared with you, is, "We are a faith-filled Catholic learning community dedicated to excellence." We pride ourselves on the priority we give to improving student learning in the classroom. We recognize that a long-term commitment to adequate funding for education is fundamental to ensuring continuity of excellence in learning. We're becoming increasingly concerned that the current inadequacy of funding may erode our ability to achieve our vision and our shared goals of providing high-quality education to our students.

We are encouraged by this opportunity to provide input, and are hopeful that our voice will be heard. On behalf of the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board, I thank you for your attention and for your consideration of this input.

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The Chair: Thank you very much. We have time for one question. Mr Phillips, we have about two and a half minutes.

Mr Phillips: It was a very thoughtful presentation by the director. I want to ask you a question that isn't even

on your presentation. You indicated that you've opened 10 new schools and additions and several others since 1998. Where did you get the funding for the capital for that?

Mr Kobus: The funding is obviously provided by the province. Some of the schools mentioned there would be under the old model and some are under the new model. We've been fortunate to be able to put up schools basically within budget. But over the last two years, as we're looking ahead—because we have a long-term growth pattern—there is creepage into our costs per square foot of putting these schools up. Our sense is that, on a go-forward basis, we will not be able to put them up, based on the current funding model. But we tend to put up efficient schools. We tend to use repeat designs where possible.

Mr Phillips: Do you borrow the money, though—that's my point—or do you receive the money from the province?

Mr Kobus: This is, I guess, one of the huge success stories that we have. We obtain our capital through a consortium called the Catholic School Board Services Association. Our board is actually one of the lead players in that. So when we go to the capital markets for money, we pool our needs with boards such as York, Dufferin-Peel, Toronto, etc. We normally get our capital money at about 35 basis points below what the market would normally provide. That has allowed us to put them up and still live within the money provided.

Mr Phillips: Do you know how much debt there is in that financing authority now?

Mr Kobus: I don't believe there is any. I know they have obtained over \$1 billion in funding through the CSBSA. There's also an affiliate group, the OSBFC. Again, if we hadn't obtained funds through that means, we probably would have put up one less school during that time frame.

The Chair: With that, on behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

COALITION FOR LEGAL AID TARIFF REFORM

The Chair: Our next presentation will be from the Coalition For Legal Aid Tariff Reform. I would ask the presenter to please come forward, and if you could state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Ms Karen Jokinen: Thank you. My name is Karen Jokinen. I am a certified specialist in criminal law with the Law Society of Upper Canada, so if you came to hear some stuff about family law, I can't give you any, although I have conferred with colleagues with respect to family law, so I hope to at least give you some information.

I know you've already been to a couple of presentations. I'm assuming that you've already been given the legal aid tariff reform business case, so I don't propose to go through it. What I propose to do is highlight a couple

of things from my review and from speaking with colleagues that are, of course, of some concern.

As you are aware, the coalition supporting tariff review is an association of legal organizations formed to try and increase the legal aid tariff. What we're looking for is an increase from the current rate, which is \$67 to \$84, to \$100 to \$125. There hasn't been an increase in legal aid since 1987.

What is interesting to me is the fact that the Legal Aid Services Act, which was enacted by the Ontario government in 1998, shows how this province has renewed and strengthened its commitment to ensuring access to justice and legal services for low-income Ontarians. In other words, we're not just looking at justice for the rich, but also for the poor. The Legal Aid Services Act obliges Legal Aid Ontario to recognize the private bar as the foundation of legal services in the areas of criminal and family law. The family law parts covered are in the case management profile that you have, but examples are single mothers seeking child support from delinquent ex-partners, victims of domestic violence asking for restraining orders, etc.

Mr Christopherson: Excuse me. You made a reference to something we may have. We don't have anything.

Ms Jokinen: I thought from the presentation in Sault—

The Chair: From a previous presentation.

Mr Christopherson: Oh, a previous presentation. OK.

Ms Jokinen: Yes. I didn't think I should kill a couple of more trees and photocopy the business case.

Now, as you're aware, the legal aid tariff for a tier 1 lawyer is \$67 an hour; that's one to four years of experience. Five to nine years is \$75.38 an hour; and 10 years and over is \$83.75. There has been no increase since 1987, and if we would just take the fact that inflation happens year to year, just taking into account inflation from 1987, it would have reached approximately anywhere from \$92 to \$115. By my calculations, if you use the \$115 number and bring it to today, a lawyer who is at a 10-year-and-over level is making, and was making in 1987, \$83.75. Now in 2002, if you subtract that from the \$115 number you come up with the hourly rate of \$53 an hour; and for a tier 1 lawyer who was in 1987 making \$67 an hour, and is today, you come up with the rate of \$42 an hour. And of course, if the rate of inflation was factored in from 1987, \$135 an hour would be your number.

If you actually have a chance to take a look at the legal aid tariff, one thing that you should note is that when professionals are asked to give evidence at a trial they are paid more, basically, at an hourly rate than the lawyers who are conducting the case. For example, a psychiatrist is paid \$103 an hour; a psychologist is paid \$90 an hour; a document examiner is paid \$85 an hour; a pathologist, \$100 an hour; a pharmacologist or toxicologist, \$90 an hour; and a social worker, \$75 an hour. So in effect, the way I look at the situation is, what is this telling members

of the public? That the person who is fighting for custody of their children or who is fighting to ensure that somebody is not wrongfully convicted is making less than the person that you need to use at your trial as an expert witness.

What you also have to look at from 1987 to today's date is that, of course, overhead has increased. Secretarial staff want the cost-of-living increase; technology has increased and in cost; the fees to the Law Society of Upper Canada and the errors and omissions we have to pay have increased. Now they're coming in with mandatory legal education, which in my view it should be in at any event. One course, for example, for continuing legal education is \$187.50 for a half-day. Rent has increased over the past 15 years. Paper, pens—you name it, it's increased.

What you've also seen is that the crowns get paid more. In the last couple of years they've had a 30% increase. In terms of the family side of things, the children's aid lawyer gets paid more than what a legal aid lawyer gets paid. Judges have had increases at both levels. Police officers have as well, and there are more of them. There has been an increase in legislative changes which makes litigation a lot more complicated. There has been an increase in charter challenges. Ironically, April 17 is the 20th anniversary of the charter. And there has been an increase in the number of forms that are required to be used in court. Family law—extremely form-intensive; about three times the amount in 1987. And even in criminal law, because of the rules of the court, we have to increase our paper as well. To make things even worse, there are caps on the number of hours that we can be paid or we can bill for a case.

So all of that makes it an inequitable justice system because what you have basically is an inherent appearance of injustice. You have the professionals, as I've already indicated, being paid more per hour. Our adversaries in family law—it may be the lawyer from children's aid; in criminal law it's the crown—are being paid more than we are. We have caps on the amount that we can bill to prepare a case. With that, in conjunction with the low rates, we simply can't afford a lot of the resources that we need, like continuing education, books etc.

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What you also have, and what will happen and what has happened, is this in turn leads to unrepresented persons in court. So in the long run you have what could be a two-hour trial in criminal court taking six hours. You have an increase of appeals because it seems there is always an appeal if there's an unrepresented person. The judge has to spend an extraordinary amount of time trying to explain to this unrepresented person all of their rights etc. I must tell you that our firm has the contract with the federal government to do the federal prosecutions, primarily drugs, so as a federal prosecutor I see the unrepresented accused running his or her own trial—and it is awful. We are there for a day on something that would have taken two hours and that evidently, if a

lawyer gets involved, will go to an appeal court. So what's happening is that in the long run you're increasing the amount of money that the government is going to be spending. As well, because of all of the factors that I've outlined, it seems to me that the Legal Aid Services Act is not being complied with because, in a sense, what you're doing is denying services to low-income persons by not being able to keep up with, in essence, even the cost-of-living increase.

An example that one of my family cohorts gave me is in a child protection hearing. The children's aid lawyer on staff, as I've indicated, makes more than what the legal aid rates are. Legal aid pays a maximum of 16 hours to do this type of case at these low rates. Few lawyers in Simcoe county will even touch it. They have a very difficult time getting lawyers to do it. This is the children's aid society wanting to take a child or children away from a family. As well, what happens is that there are time aspects that have to be met in that particular case. For example, the parents have to file and answer within 30 days or else the children's aid society apprehend, and then it gets more and more difficult the more time the child or children spend away from the home.

Something I'm more comfortable talking about is a criminal charge. As you're probably aware, there is zero tolerance for domestic assaults. Simcoe county is a little bit of a different type of place because we have a lot of up-and-running satellite courts. So here you are in the city of Barrie, which is central. We have our Superior Court here and we have our bail court here. We have all of the Barrie matters that have been—criminal law, for example, lay charges in Barrie. But we also have satellite courts—we have the Orillia court, we have the Collingwood court, we have the Midland court and we have the Bradford court—four up-and-running satellite courts, most of which also cater to family law needs but equally to criminal law needs. All of the bail hearings come into Barrie court, all of the Superior Court matters come into Barrie court, but the satellite courts operate such that if there are charges in Bradford they continue on in Bradford. So it's quite a big area in terms of trying to meet the needs of people who are charged with criminal offences.

So if somebody is charged with a domestic assault, zero tolerance. If it's a push—and I am serious, a push; I've seen these cases—they go to bail court because of the zero tolerance. They have a right to a bail hearing. Legal aid provides two hours to conduct a bail hearing. Well, we've got basically five courts in one bail court to do bail hearings. That's a lot of time. You have to try and telephone sureties. You've got to prepare your client to testify, if they will. You can't do it in two hours. And how much do you get paid for somebody's right to be released from custody? A maximum of \$170. And then, assuming you either get them out or you don't, before you set a trial date our court rules indicate it's mandatory to have a judicial pretrial. Legal aid allots two hours for that. If the person is in custody, they're now housed at the Penetang superjail, which of course is a distance from

Barrie. Legal aid authorizes us to travel there only twice—so if it's a more serious case, twice before the preliminary hearing.

In the case of a domestic trial, and let's say it takes one day, you are given 10.5 hours for all that—bail hearing, pretrial, going to interview your client and conducting the trial—close to impossible, and at the rates that are indicated in the case study you're already aware of.

With the satellite courts, as I've mentioned, it's even a little more difficult, because legal aid does not pay for a person practising in Barrie to travel to the Bradford court or the Orillia court; it's only if a one-way trip is more than 50 kilometres outside the jurisdiction. So people who have a legal aid certificate and who may be charged with a very serious offence—lawyers are not taking their certificates. They're not going to travel to these courts for nothing. Trust me: we do enough pro bono work.

What you also have, because the number of police officers has increased, is that investigations have increased and more charges are being laid. In my opinion, as a result, people who have called various lawyers in our jurisdiction have been refused legal representation because we simply cannot afford to do it on the legal aid certificate. The number of hours allotted is, in my opinion, pathetic. As a result, they are unrepresented, and once again you get into increased costs, because they are in the court system for a long time.

What you also have to know is that in our county, in terms of family lawyers, few, if any, senior family lawyers take legal aid certificates; they simply won't. With respect to the junior lawyers, they will, but again, not a lot of them will.

In terms of criminal, it's kind of the opposite. The senior lawyers, at least two or three I'm aware of in Barrie, will take the certificates—not all, some—and the junior lawyers tend not to. Eventually what is going to happen is that the senior lawyers will retire, the junior lawyers won't be taking legal aid certificates and nobody will be representing these people.

In 1996 in our jurisdiction—I wasn't here at the time, because I practised in London for 10 years—the Barrie criminal bar refused to take any legal aid certificates. It was effective, except for the fact that lawyers in Newmarket and Toronto came and took the legal aid certificates.

What you have to know is that April 17, as you're aware, is the day we're all getting together throughout Ontario, all the defence lawyers and hopefully the family lawyers, and we're going to talk about legal aid. My hope is that we are not going to agree to take legal aid certificates, because we simply can't be effective counsel on the amount of money that is being paid to us. Basically the effect of the legal aid rate as it stands now is that the Legal Aid Services Act is not being complied with.

The other point I would like to show you: I intentionally didn't pass this out at the beginning, but what I also found interesting is that on January 1, 2002, the

regulations under the Superior Court came into effect, and basically this is what is recommended, or a practice direction. This is what should be paid to the civil bar, I guess; I assume it covers family lawyers as well. The partial indemnity scale is what used to be known as party and party costs, and the substantial indemnity scale is solicitor and client costs. That's what is now recommended that a person can ask for in terms of costs at the end of their case. Now, in criminal law it's not unusual, but not usual, that we would ask for costs. But in civil law, it happens all the time. This is the rate that has been established. You know what the legal aid rate is. Basically, law clerks can ask for more money than most legal aid lawyers would be making.

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A couple of other things I'd like to point out: young offenders are affected by this. If you have a person who is charged under the Young Offenders Act and their family can't afford a lawyer or refuse to go in to be interviewed and they're left on their own, then they have to resort to legal aid. If lawyers are not taking legal aid, then they'll be representing themselves, which is going to take an inordinate amount of time for an unrepresented, youthful person.

As well, we used to have, pre-1996, block fees. With block fees you could, if you were able to schedule things properly, at least not be in a loss situation—let me put it that way. But now it's a straight hourly rate with caps. As a result, there are very few certificates in Simcoe county that have been issued for appeals. To me that seems to be saying that it's not that everybody is making the right decision in our county; it's that people are not taking legal aid certificates for appeals. So there may be some very good issues, but nobody can afford to do them. I think that shows the inequity as well.

Subject to questions, that's the presentation I have for you.

The Chair: We have about a minute and a half. I'll allow one question. Mr Christopherson, it's your turn.

Mr Christopherson: I believe it's actually the Tories' turn. I had one.

The Chair: Oh, I'm sorry. Mr Hardeman.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for your presentation. We've had a number of presentations on this tariff issue through our consultations. There are two issues that come up. One is, what is happening to the individuals who cannot get a solicitor to accept the case because it's not paying enough, and, secondly, how can the government be guaranteed that if they put more money into legal aid or raise the rates, that would solve the problem of getting more solicitors to take the cases? You talk in your presentation about such a disparity. Is there no concern that even if you raised it to a certain level, the majority of the people who do not take certificates today will still not take certificates? So we've done a bit of a job of paying a little better for those who are doing it, but we've not solved the problem at all within the system to make sure the accused have sufficient representation. As you passed out this last

notice, even what you're asking for will come nowhere near any of these rates. If these people can make that kind of money somewhere else, why am I supposed to believe they will come back and take a legal aid certificate, even at the rate you are requesting?

Ms Jokinen: One thing you have to realize about criminal lawyers is that we love what we do. We don't necessarily do it just for the money. But when it comes to a time when we're almost in the red as a result, then, no, we can't do it. If the rates were to increase and we are able to pay our staff and pay the overhead, then, yes. Any criminal lawyer will tell you that.

The Chair: With that, we are out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much.

SIMCOE COUNTY ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' FEDERATION

The Chair: Our next presentation will be from the Simcoe County Elementary Teachers' Federation. I would ask the presenter to come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Ms Ann Hoggarth: My name is Ann Hoggarth. I'm president of the Simcoe County Elementary Teachers' Federation. I welcome the opportunity to provide feedback to this committee for the 2,200 members I represent.

When discussing the budget of this fine province, you cannot do so without prefacing the discussion with what the citizens of Ontario believe are the reasons they love to live here. Very clearly, their priorities are equal access to health care; a high-quality, publicly funded education; clean air; safe communities; and a thriving economy.

Although my members recognize the need to stimulate the economy and in particular to address the needs of small business, the current fiscal policies of the Conservative government have jeopardized the priorities of the vast majority of the public. This government believes it is important to stay the course and continue with tax cuts, which very obviously reward the most wealthy while cutting the social infrastructure to shreds.

The impact of these policies on our communities has been extremely negative, and, for the most part, these hardships have come in good times. If the economy were really to take a slide, how many more cuts would occur to social services to maintain this government's policy of rewarding the wealthy?

It's time for those governing Ontario to strike a balance when composing the budget, whereby the areas of both business and social programs can exist and be viable. The vast majority of citizens of Ontario are tired of living the results of your tax cuts for a bribe of \$200. Tax cuts should not jeopardize the health and well-being of anyone, as they did, for example, in Walkerton.

Teachers are concerned that the cuts to social programs that have been made in previous budgets have disadvantaged the children of this province, the children we teach, more profoundly than anyone else in this province. Because of cuts to social and education programs,

students live in substandard housing, come to school hungry and unable to learn, have few supports in the schools other than their classroom teacher, and must rely on their school communities more and more to fundraise to pay for even the most basic school supplies such as pencils and textbooks. Now more than ever my members are dipping into their own pockets to subsidize what should be a fully funded public education system. Research shows this amount to be about \$1,000 per teacher per year.

My members are particularly troubled about the massive cuts to education. Your propaganda campaign, which was designed to vilify teachers and the work they do, has been able to throw a smokescreen over the real damage you have wrought on the education system. But the citizens are beginning to realize that the motives for your cuts to publicly funded education have nothing to do with what's best for the future of students in this province.

Our children and our grandchildren deserve to have peace and stability in those few years they are in elementary school. In order to be successful, the new curriculum, which we support, needs to be supported by financial resources that make it work. The current funding policy is flawed, and the constant downloading of more programs to school boards that are already cash-strapped is crippling.

Although your government champions the fact that you're now spending more on education than ever before, you neglect to inform the public that there are few allowances in your model for growth or inflation. For example, locally the teacher compensation package has consistently gone down since 1997, from over \$18 million to approximately \$13 million. That spells the loss for this board of about 83 teachers' salaries or \$5 million. The real facts are that the number of teachers employed by the Simcoe County District School Board has gone up by hundreds since this government came to power. Tell me how this government expects us to attract the brightest and best-trained teaching professionals to teach in our schools if there is not money to compensate them fairly? While you as MPPs have voted yourselves raises of 36.6%, you expect teachers to be satisfied with 1.9%. Does this seem equitable? What will we do when there is a great shortage of teachers in the whole of North America?

In conclusion, let me say that the members of the Simcoe County Elementary Teachers' Federation believe that unless there is a significant policy change when this budget is presented, the Ontario we know and love may not be recoverable. Please don't continue to award tax cuts at the expense of the quality of life in Ontario.

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The Chair: Thank you very much. We have five minutes per caucus. I'll start with the government side.

Mrs Molinari: Thank you for your presentation today. I must say that it's thoroughly consistent with everything we've been hearing from teacher groups, so I'm not surprised at the comments you made here today.

First, I just want to clarify your comments for the record, and I'll quote: "While you as MPPs have voted yourselves raises of 36.6%, you expect teachers to be satisfied with 1.9%. Does this seem equitable?" No. It's also not true.

Ms Hoggarth: What part is not true?

Mrs Molinari: The 36% raise is not true. We have not voted ourselves a 36% raise. So I would ask you where you got that information.

Ms Hoggarth: I actually got it from my vice-president.

Mr Dunlop: The vice-president is wrong.

Ms Hoggarth: What is the percentage then, please? Could you give it to me?

Mrs Molinari: It's 3%.

Ms Hoggarth: What happens when the new MPPs are elected?

Mrs Molinari: First, let me clarify.

Ms Hoggarth: No. I would like to know the percentage. When the new MPPs are elected, what is going to be the increase in their salary—what percentage?

Mrs Molinari: I'm not sure this is a question-and-answer period. The process here is that I would ask questions. I would be happy to respond to yours, if you'll allow me to continue.

The process that took place for the MPPs' salaries was given to an independent body—

Mr Dunlop: The Integrity Commissioner.

Mrs Molinari: The Integrity Commissioner. I believe all parties agreed to that, with some discussion and some negotiations through that process. The Integrity Commissioner is the one who made the decision what the salaries would be. It wasn't the MPPs who made that decision. I don't know whether that percentage is accurate, as of the next election, but that doesn't mean that those who are here are going to be getting that kind of a raise. So to respond to your question about what that percentage is, I don't know. It's information that I'm sure you could get without a problem. It's all public information.

Focusing on some of the other points that you've made—you talked about stability and having peace. That's something that I think all of us agree on: that we need some peace and stability within the school system. Part of having stability and peace is having kids in the classroom, and having teachers teaching kids in the classroom. One of the ways we're looking at addressing that is by providing multi-year budgeting, so the boards would know what kind of money they're getting and be able to focus on negotiating contracts that are multi-year, rather than a shorter period of time. Because every time there's a negotiation of a contract, it opens the door for some disruptions in the classrooms.

Certainly, there has been a lot of discussion around education. Not everyone would agree with the comments that you've made here today. There are a number of people who feel that the changes we've made in education with respect to curriculum were needed and far beyond the time that—

Ms Hoggarth: I think you misunderstood. I said we support the new curriculum.

Mrs Molinari: I guess we agree on something, then.

The Chair: Question, please.

Mrs Molinari: I don't have any specific questions, Mr Chair. I just wanted to clarify some comments. So if my time is up, I'll see if my other colleagues have anything to add to that.

The Chair: I'll have to go to Mr Kwinter.

Mr Kwinter: Thank you very much for your presentation. You should know that this is our last day of travelling. I think by far most of the presentations that we've had, had to deal with education. Yesterday, I think every single one in the afternoon was on education. So we've certainly received the message.

I happen to agree with you. I think that this funding formula is basically flawed. It's a one-size-fits-all. There is no room for adjustment based on local circumstances. We've heard about it through difficulties with transportation and difficulties with small schools and small boards where, because of the formula, they have to shut down the school and bus their kids for an hour or two hours—all of those problems. So I'm very, very sympathetic to your concerns.

Have some of the problems I've just described impacted on your board, and can you give me an example of some of them?

Ms Hoggarth: Yes. We have had, as I told you, the teacher compensation package in particular, the small schools. I think you just had a presentation from our chair about rural schools. As Mr Kobus from the Catholic board also said, it's hard to stick by the staffing averages when there are small schools. The fact that you're funded on the amount of square feet becomes another problem. In the funding formula it pays enough for a school with some 370 students in it. Anything below that and you're going to have difficulty funding that school. Those are all difficulties. I know our board is working very hard on transportation. They've started a consortium to deal with that, but it costs money to do those kinds of things.

If this had been done a little more gently and easily—let me make it very clear that our members have no difficulty with the curriculum changes, but they do have difficulty with how they are implemented, with lack of resources, lack of time, lack of professional development and the money to pay for it. We implemented a new curriculum and we went from nine professional development days down to four. The board wants to use those professional development days for lots of different things. There are many more things that need to be done in professional development days. Teachers don't have the time or the energy these days to be able to go to a lot of things that are offered outside the school day.

Mr Kwinter: How do you find the testing procedures? Has that presented a problem for you?

Ms Hoggarth: The testing of teachers or the testing of students?

Mr Kwinter: The testing of students.

Ms Hoggarth: My personal belief, and the belief of most of the members I've talked to, is that testing is one way of assessing a student's progress. Many teachers in their own rooms have used some form of testing over the years. It's always been used. The fact that so much money and time is being allocated to this part of the education system I feel we will find out in the future was a mistake.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you very much for your presentation. Let me start with your last sentence, "Please don't continue to award tax cuts at the expense of the quality of life in Ontario." I'm sure you won't be shocked to learn that we've had some business groups come in that continue to make the case that the government should continue with tax cuts, no matter what, that that's the absolute top priority. I don't think we've had anybody from a community that represents a part of our society that relies on government to exist and provide services to citizens who feels that way. Interestingly, there were a couple of chambers that came in and talked about broader issues at least, but the message has got to continue to be driven home to this government. The only way it's going to happen is when their internal polling starts to tell them that there are more Ontarians who don't want the tax cut but would rather have services promoted than receive the tax cuts. That's when they'll change. Until then, as long as they do their polling within the universe of votes they can get—they're not going to get your vote, so you wouldn't be in that. At least that's my sense—

Ms Hoggarth: You never know. I like Garfield.

Mr Hardeman: You're being presumptuous.

Mr Christopherson: Fair enough. But there are those who will not vote for you, just like there are those who will not vote for us. I'm saying within your universe, your polling, as long as it shows that the people who are likely to vote for you want tax cuts, you're going to continue with that. The second that number starts to change, then they're going to get off this mantra and move on to something else. That's really how the political process works at the end of the day.

You mentioned that you've got students who come to school hungry. Is that something that just happens once in a while or is that happening with frequency?

Ms Hoggarth: That happens on a regular basis in many schools. Our board is in the process now of juggling the way we provide special education support in certain schools and they are using a number of indicators. A lot of them have to do with the socio-economic conditions of the students. I would say that 30% of our schools have breakfast programs that are run by a combination of volunteers and teachers. In many cases those schools have noticed that their test results, which everyone around this table is thrilled to promote, have gone up. That has to do with the fact that if children eat, they learn better. The fact that food banks are being used more and more is actually a shame for our society. We have one of the highest standards of living in the world and it's despicable that we have to do that kind of thing in our schools.

Mr Christopherson: You also raised the issue of fundraising. Again, representing the western part of Hamilton that includes the downtown, where we have families with some real challenges and there are some inner-city schools with incredible challenges, you can hold a fundraiser every night of the week around the clock and you're not going to raise enough money to offset any of the real deficiencies because they just don't have the disposable income. If you're lucky enough to hold a fundraiser at a school in Thornhill or Mississauga—I'm serious—or Oakville or Markham, you can maybe do that, you can cover these things off, but why should that be? Why should some student in Hamilton not have a textbook but the same student in the same situation in Thornhill does have a textbook because one's lucky enough to live in an upper-middle-class neighbourhood and they can raise the money? The other one lives in a poor neighbourhood and they don't have it. To me, there seems to be an inherent unfairness to this issue of having to voluntarily fundraise. What's your experience?

Ms Hoggarth: There are definitely "have" and "have-not" schools, and it's kept quiet, although it's public knowledge. The schools that are "have" schools are able to raise money and are in communities where the socio-economic structure is much better. They go about their fundraising. They have individual parents who donate thousands of dollars to the schools to pay for sets of textbooks, to pay for computers, to pay for supplies. Then we have other schools where it just isn't going to happen. Those kids, as much as their parents would love to volunteer and try to raise funds—the community itself doesn't have the funds available. They don't have the extra funds.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

Before we adjourn, lunch for the members will be served in the dining room to the right. We're adjourned until 2:30 this afternoon.

The committee recessed from 1254 to 1429.

REENA

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. If I can get your attention, we'll bring the standing committee on finance and economic affairs back to order.

Our first presentation this afternoon is from Reena. I would ask the presenters to please come forward. If you could state your names for the record, please, and on behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Dr George Cantlie: My name is George Cantlie. I'm a parent of a client of Reena's and a board member. To my left is Sandy Keshen, our executive director.

Reena is quite an organization. I came from another part of Canada here 10 or 12 years ago and got to know it, with my son, soon after arrival. There can be very few organizations in Canada that have the reputation of this one in terms of looking after people with developmental handicaps.

We're just short of 30 years of existence. It started in North York in 1973. The clientele are people with developmental disabilities of all ages, principally adults—in particular, older adults—but some children now; I'll mention more about that. Reena is quite a distinct organization, because we actually built, a couple of years ago, an ElderHome for 16 individuals who are coming into old age.

You may not realize it, but people with developmental handicaps age earlier than the rest of us. For instance, most patients with Down syndrome will develop Alzheimer's disease about the age of 55 or so. This is a problem that our particular organization has addressed.

In addition to that, we have a central facility, the Toby and Henry Battle Developmental Centre, which involves helping people on a daily basis, daycare support, and that has been in operation now for almost five years.

We're involved currently in building a children's home for younger individuals with developmental handicaps. A second ElderHome is in the planning stages.

The operating budget of this organization is about \$13 million a year, of course with most support from the government. We're very thankful and we make this point to our representative, Tina Molinari, in particular. The Ontario government has already done a lot for people in our situation, with a five-year funding package of almost \$200 million last year. So we're very thankful for what's been done up to this point.

I mentioned the distinct nature of Reena in terms of having the ElderHome. The other thing that distinguishes us, I think, as an organization in comparison to our colleagues that I should mention is that we're probably the second largest organization in the Toronto area dealing with developmental handicap after the Toronto Association for Community Living.

The numbers, you might be interested, in supported independent living—people such as my son Paul, who's 35 years of age and mildly handicapped. He's in a supported independent living apartment. We have 130 people like him.

We have 100-odd participants in our day programs and about 250 people we're keeping an eye out for in their current home situation. I'll be mentioning more about that.

But the other point I want to make about the distinctness of Reena is that we have been involved in training workers for developmentally handicapped people. We have a big training program that, in fact, in the last year provided almost 2,000 training spaces, 400 of which were used by staff from outside agencies. You might ask, why would we be in the business of training staff people? The answer is, there's a developing shortage of good young people who want to take up this career and there's also a shortage of places for them to be trained. The community colleges are cutting back on their training programs. That's under the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. So this makes us, we feel, a very important and unique organization.

Although we do have outreach to people in the homes before they need to get involved with organizational care,

we do want to make the point that that's an area we want to develop further. We look at it in essence as a kind of crisis prevention and life planning situation. If we can pinpoint well ahead of time people with developmental handicaps who are living at home with their parents, when things are going reasonably well, and knowing what we do about how these people and their families can be affected as life goes by, we want to emphasize that outreach. It's a less costly way of doing things. It's a more organized way. In essence, if you identify people that are going to need more involved facilities later down the road then you can plan for that, plan for your waiting lists and so on. That's going to take a little more support because our ability to fund that sort of program at the moment is a little shaky.

Additionally, one point we'd like to mention is that budgeting is sometimes a bit hard for us because, particularly when you get into this long-term planning and proactive attitude toward helping people, you want to be sure of your funding a little bit further down the road than certainly one year. So multi-year budgeting would be a great principle if it ever came on stream.

I think I'll leave a little time for questions. I've spent about 10 minutes. I'll at least break for questions.

The Chair: OK, then. We have approximately—you're right—three minutes per caucus, and I'll start with Mr Kwinter.

Mr Kwinter: Thank you very much and I'm delighted to see you. Certainly Sandy knows that at one time Reena was in my riding. It's now moved a little farther north but a lot of your constituent clients are still in my riding and I have an interaction with them a lot. They're very helpful. They come into my constituency office, they're really eager to do things, and I just want you to know I think you do a great job.

I was very pleased to hear about this elder program. We had a presentation earlier today by—I want to get their exact name right—the Toronto Developmental Services Coalition. What they sort of identified—and I've had it identified in my constituency office because I represent one of the largest populations of seniors in Ontario. I've had seniors coming into my office telling me that they have developmentally handicapped children who are adults. They are looking after them and they are really frightened as to what is going to happen to them when they're gone.

1440

Dr Cantlie: That's right. The demography is really that often many of the Down syndrome children are from older parents, so if you look at the demography you've got a parent getting into their 80s, late 70s, and they've got a 35- or 40-year-old child. That person is likely getting Alzheimer's because almost every person with Down syndrome gets Alzheimer's, and gets it about 10 years earlier than the rest of us do or are at risk of getting it.

Ms Sandy Keshen: Let me try from another perspective. We have families who have sustained their adult children at home, and given the crunch in the

system at this point in time—and we've been involved as an agency in developing a forum that involves both long-term care and developmental services to look at ways of working together—we have seen families go directly with their adult person into a nursing home or a long-term-care facility, which isn't the place for them. But in terms of partnership, we need to help families stay in their home longer with this person. That's one model, because the same kind of supports needs could be there for both. When they need to enter nursing homes we, as an organization, are now working at building the second ElderHome and freeing up spaces for younger people with the existing housing.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you for your presentation. Certainly we've been hearing a great deal about this issue as we move across the province.

I want to pick up where Mr Kwinter left off and talk a little more about the ElderHome also. The presentation said it's for 16 seniors right now. Is that specifically for the very situation we've just talked about or is this for alternate placement outside the home where an individual, for whatever reason, can't stay in the home?

Ms Keshen: It's a combination. The individuals who have been with us for the past 30 years are aging; they're living longer. The oldest resident is 84. He came from a facility, and certainly we want to continue to work with the individual; he has no family. At the same time, because we were able to stretch resources, we were able to accept people who were 65. His siblings—two other people—were, at that point, taking care of him. So we expanded our ability to resource this population.

The second ElderHome will also have a combination of those who are aging in supportive independent living apartments where those units no longer support them, plus families who now say it's time to have people leave home.

Mr Christopherson: Is it fair for me to assume that doesn't meet all the need?

Ms Keshen: Absolutely. It does not meet all the needs. I don't have the statistics on me, but the form has identified that 50% of our population—people we're currently serving—are going to be over 55 and needing additional support. And that's not taking in the 3,000 people in Toronto who are in need of residential support.

Mr Christopherson: That's existing, that's without the stress and pressure of the demographics, as you mentioned, that are marching along exacerbating this. It seems to me that we're in serious trouble now, but if it continues it's not going to take long before we're in a crisis situation with individual family crises happening all over the place. Is that your sense?

Ms Keshen: Absolutely, and I think the proactiveness George talked about—when George says “patients” I want to nudge him because in our system it's “individuals,” “residents.” But George is a doctor, so I have to forgive him for that; otherwise he'd get a nudge.

It is a crisis. It continues to be a crisis for families in the system. George's comment about early intervention and planning with families—we can sustain families

longer if we move in earlier and do not use all our costly resources for residential. Families are important, part of our planning. Reena has always had a belief that we have a partnership with families to sustain. We want to not move in and take over.

The two ElderHomes, as Tina knows—one is in her riding—were built by private dollars, not government dollars, and our developmental centre was built with private dollars. Our second ElderHome will also be built with private dollars. We're trying very hard to understand the financial crunch for all of us and looking at ways of meeting that.

Mrs Molinari: Thank you very much for coming to present today. I noticed on the agenda that you were here and it's just coincidental that I'm here as well, but it's a pleasure to be here and listen to your presentation. Certainly, Sandy, you and I have had several conversations and have worked well together.

I don't have any specific questions, but I do want to highlight at this opportunity the work that Reena, Sandy Keshen and the board of directors have done to assist the community and the province. Sandy, you talked about the homes that were built with private dollars. The work you do within the community in generating support—not only financial support but also support from the families you serve and support from the communities that have these homes in their communities. I know some of the struggles we endured when it was in the proposing stages, where the residents and some of those issues—I have to say you've done a phenomenal job in bringing all of those people together and getting everyone to understand. Because a lot of it has been lack of understanding and the fear, "What's coming into my community? Who are these people?" You've certainly done an excellent job.

Your training program is certainly one that is to be admired and is an example for all of the province of Ontario. I know Minister Baird was very impressed when he came to visit Reena and talks very, very highly of all of the work you do. When I visited Reena, the other point made by one of your staff was about how the Ontario Works program was doing a great job within Reena, having people who were in Ontario Works coming in and volunteering and, eventually, leading up to positions within the foundation, which was really positive to hear.

So you're covering a large perspective of community social services needs, not only those that you specifically are responsible for or that you're mandated for. I have to say that you're an example for a lot of the other community social services across the province.

Ms Keshen: I get embarrassed by those kinds of comments—I'm blushing—but thank you. I appreciate that.

Mrs Molinari: They're well deserved, and please pass them along to your board of directors as well.

Ms Keshen: I certainly will. I think for us right now the issue is that we are seeing much more involvement with children, and especially children with autism, in partnership with the ministry. Again, we always strive.

We are building a home for children with autism that will have three spaces that are permanent and three spaces that are respite, so we will have 18 families using that house. It was in partnership. We had one donor who gave us some money and the rest will come from the province.

Autism has really increased a great deal, so when we talk about working with families and working with them within the family home, I'm really speaking about autistic children. They are certainly an incredibly emotional and physical drain on families. We can provide them with respite out of home and respite in the home and evening programs. Our battle centre has become a hub of activity. If you ever come, come at 3:30 until about 7:30 Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the place is just full of kids with autism having a wonderful time. But it gives a family a break, and still they're part of the family system as opposed to yanking them out of the home. So I'm promoting what George talked about.

Sorry, I'm going on too long.

The Chair: No, you're doing very well. And I didn't think you were blushing; I thought it was just the reflection from the tablecloth.

On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

SHARON BATE

The Chair: Our next presentation will be from the Simcoe County District School Board. I would ask the presenter or presenters to please come forward. On behalf of the committee, welcome. If you could also state your name for the record. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this afternoon.

Ms Sharon Bate: Thank you. I am Sharon Bate and I am the director of education for the Simcoe County District School Board. I did ask to speak as an individual because my passion today is not only as the director of education and the chief executive or education officer of the board, but as an educator. I know as an educator, folks, that it's a dangerous place to be right now, in front of you. It's a Friday afternoon, you have had many presentations or lectures, and it is the Friday before March break. I know as a teacher that is not a favourable place to be, but my message is one that needs to be told and I am really pleased to have the opportunity to tell it.

1450

You will have heard as you've crossed the province—I think it's been eight or 10 days—about the issues facing all educators as they relate to the provincial funding formula. I am pleased that my colleague, who shared six specific concerns in this particular area, is here. Those six areas are ones we share. I have chosen not to necessarily repeat them so we can broaden the issues we bring to your attention.

I work as part of a 6,000-member team of individuals who are committed and dedicated, regardless of what may or may not be in today's letter to the editor, to quality education in our schools. We have 106 schools, for which I work with this team, in a geography that's

larger than Prince Edward Island. That's part of my point today, because I want to present for your consideration that a funding formula based on averages does not meet our needs. You will hear me say that we are too urban to benefit from the rural aspects of the formula and we're too rural to benefit from the urban factors. That has placed us and our coterminous boards among the lowest per-pupil-funded boards in the province, with a gap that is no longer acceptable or sustainable if we're going to keep the quality of education in our classrooms.

Our kids don't come in packages. It doesn't matter how finite or detailed your model becomes, they don't know it, they don't know think they have any reason to come to school in those categories, and they don't. We get the best kids the parents have to send us. They do not look like the provincial average in your formula. We need a formula that recognizes their needs regardless.

You've also heard across the province about the failure of the 1997 costing benchmarks. It has become impossible for us to continue on that basis. Time does not, cannot and will not stand still for anyone. We have found out over the past that it doesn't matter when the benchmarks were set, people expect us to pay the bills in 2002 dollars.

The Simcoe County District School Board has a wonderful reputation. Our trustees in the past have made tough decisions, they've made challenging decisions, and they are cost-efficient and cost-effective. We have been working at the funding formula level, though with greater flexibility, for a number of years. Our trustees in previous organizations maintained among the lowest municipal tax rates this province has experienced. Sometimes, though, the decisions they made were not able to provide the level of service our other neighbours have had.

Today, 25,242 students rode buses. I did check. That is the actual number, including the ones who perhaps left for March break yesterday. That's 50% of our population. In order to minimize our costs in this area and to keep that mill rate low, prior to 1997 the board reduced the number of bus stops, administered longer walking zones and implemented the controversial early start that I know one of our school council chairs talked to you about this morning. An early start, folks, puts kids at bus stops at about 10 minutes to 7 o'clock in the morning. The bus comes and picks them up and takes them to the secondary school. It then leaves that secondary school, having dropped off those kids, and collects, in a shorter geographic distance, a group for an elementary school, and often does that three times. We refer to them as A, B and C runs. We did that so we could save money: fewer buses, fewer drivers and reduced costs. We did this prior to 1997, and now you have penalized us for that.

We're trapped in a funding model that has based transportation grants on what those expenditures were in 1997. Not only are we paying for it in the loss of flexibility, but our school bus operators are paying for it too. We have less revenue to pay them at the rate of some of their competitors. One-time grant enhancements do not allow us to give long-standing commitments to these

members of our community who provide an invaluable service in driving these buses for us.

We're being penalized today because we made tough decisions previously. The boards that hadn't made those decisions are benefiting from the current model, because they're being funded at levels before those economies were taken. There have been slight adjustments for population. But in one case, on one side of the Severn River, that community receives about \$250 more per pupil for busing, and the Bluewater side receives about \$220 more than we receive for busing. We can no longer find economies in other areas of our budget to offset that difference.

I'd like to give you another example, and that's around accommodation. We're not average in accommodation either, because we're one of very few boards that is growing—and Mayor Perri shared that with you this morning. We have an enrolment growth in the south end of our jurisdiction that is among the largest in Canada, while we have schools in other areas that are declining. We receive \$117 per square foot to build new schools and additions. We've had to build 12 new schools and 20 additions to accommodate the growth in the last five years. Once again, 1997 benchmarks don't do it. The cost of construction alone has increased. Our costs for our most recent tendered prices—it is a competitive bid—ranged to \$149 per square foot.

You've heard from many of us, including the presenters just before us, about the multi-year collective agreement. I have a lot of skills in this role. Giving a commitment for three years to my employees without knowing where the funding comes from is not reasonable, nor is it, in my mind, good management. Our secretaries, teachers, principals, custodians—all of our groups—are watching what you're doing right now as a government with our OPSEU counterparts and with your middle managers. We read and hear from them: 2%, 2% and 2% over three years cumulatively. We must have at least what you have found yourself offering these other groups. Without that, you are putting us on a collision course. Our kids deserve better than to be put on that particular road.

The funding formula has us in a Catch-22. I will emphasize that, while parts of it are based on per-pupil, areas of the special grants have set us apart where our needs are not met. An example would be technology. Many boards just have to worry about getting the wiring to the road because the infrastructure exists. This year, our board had to invest over \$300,000 just to start getting the wide-area network pieces to our school doors. Otherwise, we have students trying to participate in e-learning, and it's taking a kid in Collingwood 22 minutes to upload your ministry Web site, because it's a dial-in 56 MGB modem. We had to put up our dollars for that. There were some ministry dollars, but \$300,000 worth of our kids' dollars had to go for that purpose.

We also have the issue of small schools. Some 55 of our 90 elementary schools are below the benchmark that People for Education and the ministry formula say you

need to sustain. Our choices in this matter are not tenable. We either have to close schools or put kids on buses for even longer than our 55-minute limit now. We either have to close or make decisions that will impact our principals, vice-principals and school secretaries to a point where we can't attract them.

1500

I'd like to close by putting on my teacher's hat again, and giving you some math questions for homework. Calculators are allowed, but mental math gets more marks. My question: in 1997, the per-pupil operating grants in Simcoe—

Mr Dunlop: You have the answers, though.

Ms Bate: If you're reading my notes, I gave them to you. There's always a teacher notebook, but we have to pay separately and your formula didn't give us money for that.

Simcoe County District School Board: per pupil operating grant, \$5,785; our operating grant this year, \$6,006. It went up but, if you do the math, only 3.82%.

The cost of living or the Ontario consumer price index—a difference from 139.3% to 152.7%. A percentage of that—you don't subtract—is 96%.

Our teachers' salaries, a 7.5% increase. Compare that to a 1.95% increase in the grants. And \$117 a square foot for the schools we need to build versus the \$149 we are paying our contractors.

My class is over. I know it's even more dangerous to take you past recess. But, folks, we are in a crisis situation. We have managed within the funding formula for years. We have managed efficiently and effectively, but it needs to change. The reality in funding dilemmas we face in our schools needs to be addressed now or we will not be able to continue at the quality level we have in the past.

I'd be pleased to answer any questions, and I'd like to thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have two minutes per caucus and I'll start with Mr Christopherson.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you very much for your presentation. Am I correct in assuming that in order to meet the needs regardless of the funding formula, if it comes up short, you're taking it from some other program? You're basically robbing Peter to pay Paul?

Ms Bate: Our problem is that there's no Peter left, because we have had a healthy reserve in the past and that is almost depleted. It will not sustain us another year.

Mr Christopherson: Transportation is a huge issue. I know it is in Hamilton. It's one of the big issues and we don't even have a huge rural base to that. We have one, but it's not as big as you've got. What kind of money do you need on the transportation side? What changes do you need in the formula? What kinds of things do you need reflected and considered that aren't now?

Ms Bate: Our parents will argue that the early start needs to be adjusted. If we had done it on current salaries for our bus operators, it would take us about \$2.79 million just to reverse the early start or minimize it. Our contractors have had less than a 3% raise in the last six

years. It now costs us about \$42,000 for a 72-passenger bus. We add about 16 per year for growth. If you do the math, we would need, at a minimum, in the neighbourhood of \$4 million if we were to deliver the service at the current levels and give our bus operators what their counterparts in other parts of the province are earning in their contracts.

Mr Dunlop: It's been a great lesson, Ms Bate.

Ms Bate: Thank you. You're a good student. Sit up straight, Mr Dunlop.

Mr Hardeman: You don't get the results of the test back till next year.

Mr Dunlop: I wish you wouldn't have said that about the buses because I see Alan Smale at the back there.

Ms Bate: I read his magazines very carefully.

Mr Dunlop: Can you make a few more comments on a three-year plan for funding? If you had a three-year plan right now, what kind of requirements would it be in terms of percentages? If you don't feel comfortable answering, it doesn't matter.

Ms Bate: The percentages over the three years I believe have to be a baseline or a range, but the baseline that reflects—our federations would tell us—cost of living is minimal. We need to be able to position our teachers at a competitive level, and our secretaries and engineers. Also, in a county like this we do not have the ability to do much with our pay equity, and it is estimated to be in the neighbourhood of 2% to 4%. We are not at the consumer price index and I would go there as a minimal starting point.

Mr Kwinter: Thank you very much for your presentation. I'm going to quote from an article that appeared in the National Post this morning that said, "Ontario's 72 directors of education have banded together to issue the provincial government an unprecedented warning that they are so starved of money they can't provide a good education to children without running deficits—and breaking the law." You've said that Paul and Peter are no longer there and your reserves are diminishing. What do you do once those are gone if you don't get additional funding? How do you cope?

Ms Bate: In areas of accommodation and principal, vice-principal, secretary compensation, we are going to have to move to closing schools. We are going to have to transport students longer, and that will have a negative impact on them. We are going to have to reduce services away from some of the social services we provide. In a county like this we're often the only agency with psychologists and speech language pathologists who can work with students. We're going to have to start drawing the line for what is a safe environment for students. For students who come to us with medical needs, we are no longer going to be able to give assurance that we can maintain their environment in a safe way for their needs. We are going to have to eliminate some of the high-cost programs, such as technology, broad-based technology as well as the e-learning materials we do.

We're already far below the provincial average in terms of staff ratios and central admin, so I'm not sure

there's a great deal more we can do there. Those are just some of the strategies we're dealing with. Textbook sharing, increasing the amount of support we would depend upon from our communities for consumables, would just be the tip of the iceberg.

Mr Kwinter: I also understand from the representations that were made by the directors that that money is required just to keep the status quo, which is not acceptable, so it really is compounding that problem.

Ms Bate: I agree. In a county like this one where we have youngsters moving in, the needs of the youngsters who move in at JK and in our primary grades are far greater than the youngsters who have those comparable needs moving out at the grade 12 and OAC level. Status quo is going to put us into program cuts and staff reductions.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon. And class is not dismissed here yet.

Mr Christopherson: It is for the teacher.

The Chair: For the teacher but not this class.

Ms Bate: That would be planning time.

Mr Hardeman: Yes, that would be planning time because we don't get March break.

TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair: Our next presentation will be from the Toronto District School Board. I would ask the presenters to come forward. On behalf of the committee, welcome. If you could state your name for the record, please, you have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Ms Shelley Laskin: Thank you for allowing the Toronto District School Board to speak with you this afternoon. I am Shelley Laskin, chair of the budget committee. With me are Donna Cansfield, chair of the board; Pauline Ling, vice-chair of the board; and Don Higgins, executive officer, business services.

We have distributed a copies of *The Real Costs of Public Education—The Crisis in Provincial Funding for Toronto's Public School Students*. Also included in the package of information that you have is the Ontario Public School Boards' Association presentation that they made at an earlier session of the provincial standing committee on pre-budget consultation to demonstrate that we are part of the bigger picture of the decline of educational funding. We just witnessed the end of the presentation of Director Sharon Bate and you will hear echoed sentiments from a very different board but a board that is in a very similar situation, as are all boards across the province.

The Toronto District School Board is entrusted to educate all Toronto students, no matter who they are, where they come from or what they can do. We welcome this duty and are proud of our ability to provide excellent programs to more than 270,000 day school students in the most diverse city in Canada.

Changes to the funding of education have had a dramatic impact on the ability of the Toronto District

School Board and many Ontario school boards to implement the changes to Ontario's education system during the past several years and, at the same time, sustain the quality of education we provide for our students. The underfunding of Toronto's public schools is undermining our ability to continue to deliver high-quality education, to meet the diverse needs of our students and parents and, first and foremost, allow all our students to succeed.

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While there have been some increases in provincial grants to the board, they do not come close to meeting the Toronto District School Board's real and actual cost increases created by higher enrolment, lower class sizes and sharp increases in utility, inflation and labour costs.

Even though the Toronto District School Board has made significant cuts in expenditures of \$268 million between 1998 and 2001, the funding formula will force further cuts of \$150 million by September 1, 2003, to the most basic of our educational services: teaching, learning, classroom supports and the upkeep of our schools. This will add up to \$418 million in cuts since the funding formula was introduced.

This funding crisis is not unique to the Toronto District School Board, as I mentioned earlier. The Ontario Public School Boards' Association presented compelling evidence that the education funding model is bankrupting the school systems of Ontario. OPSBA's study, based on school boards' actual expenditure, the same amounts of dollars they have to report to the ministry, shows that the gap between school board revenues and expenditures exceeds \$1.1 billion annually. The study also predicts that half the school boards in Ontario could incur operating deficits this current year.

The funding model is in need of an immediate major overhaul. The most serious weaknesses contributing to the growing financial crisis, both for the Toronto District School Board and a majority of other boards, are the use of averages and the various benchmarks used to generate funding. The following provides a brief summary of these weaknesses and their impact on the TDSB.

The first of these weaknesses is the use of averages in calculating funding to schools. The one-size-fits-all approach may have been the easiest way to allocate funding but it severely penalized the Toronto District School Board due to a number of reasons: the cost of living in Toronto is significantly higher than in other parts of Ontario, resulting in salary and benefit costs that are above average compared to other school boards; unique inner-city needs of the TDSB that are only partially funded under the learning opportunities grant; and higher-than-average school operating costs because of factors such as the age and condition of our buildings.

This weakness contributes to the following funding model shortfall: underfunding of average salaries of support staff is \$27.5 million; support services for inner-city needs is \$30 million. In total, that's \$57.5 million right there. In addition, the underfunding of the board's teacher salary and benefits of 7%, or \$4,500 per teacher,

results in a thousand fewer teachers to support programs such as library, guidance, English as a second language and programs for students with special needs. This is equivalent to denying each and every school two teachers it needs to deliver the curriculum.

The second major weakness is the benchmarks used in the funding model to determine the per pupil formula that boards receive. They have not been adjusted since 1997. The year is now 2002. The funding benchmarks must be adjusted to reflect today's costs of doing business and providing services.

The following are some of the benchmarks that contribute to the board's funding shortfall: \$31.6 million in school operations alone. The most significant component that contributes to this shortfall relates to the sharp increases in the cost of utilities since 1997 of over \$27 million. This erosion in funding is caused by conditions and decisions that are not controlled by school boards. The deregulation of natural gas has caused dramatic fluctuations in prices. The same is expected to occur for hydro rates after May 2002.

Our schools are deteriorating because of the drastic elimination of maintenance to compensate for the lack of funding of utilities. Further, the ability of the board to carry out roof replacements and other major renewal of its schools is restricted by underfunding of renewal requirements by an estimated \$60 million on an annual basis.

Information technology is short \$14 million. The funding of technology is based on 1997 costs and the technology standards that existed in the mid-1990s. The ministry recognizes that the funding is out of date but has failed to bring this critical element of education into the 21st century. OPSBA stated in its report that in order to keep equipment up to date and provide adequate service, an additional \$200 million is required across Ontario school boards.

We're short \$6.1 million in textbooks and learning. Funding based on 1997 costs simply does not provide the funds boards require to supply new textbooks needed to implement the new curriculum in today's dollars. This is becoming a chronic problem across Ontario and is forcing local communities to raise money for core classroom materials.

The \$21 million in benefit costs: the benchmarks for funding the benefit costs in the funding model included government benefits of CPP that are simply out of date. Health care costs have been rising at 10% to 15% per year since the late 1990s and are expected to continue at that pace. Canada pension plan contributions have increased 80%, or \$700, per employee since 1997. For example, the benefit cost for school secretaries is 24% of salary, compared to the ministry benchmark of 18%. The funding shortfall for school secretaries alone is \$3 million.

School office costs are \$12 million. The funding model benchmark provides \$5 per pupil. That's not even enough to pay the cost of telephones, let alone other basic costs of running an office, such as photocopiers and general supplies.

The double-cohort issue of \$7 million: the secondary school reform will result in a significant decline in secondary enrolment for the 2003-04 school year. There are major fixed costs in the school system that do not decline immediately as a result of declining enrolment. The grants relating to areas such as school administration—principals, vice-principals and school secretaries—and school operations must be frozen for at least one or two years to enable school boards to adjust for the enrolment decline. The ministry is examining this issue, but boards must know as part of the 2002-03 general legislative grant release what will happen to its grants so boards can carry out effective planning to reduce change.

The total of these issues represents over \$147 million of the board's projected funding gap of \$150 million. The board can no longer gut its education programs and services to this extent and continue to provide quality education to its students.

During last year's budget process, extensive consultation told us what Toronto residents valued and wanted in their public schools. In response, we have just completed our Need to Succeed budget document, which shines light on the very real problems with the funding formula. It does this by outlining the actual program and service needs of all students, needs they deserve in order to reach high levels of achievement, which is this board's goal and which we know is this government's. But this comes at a price, and that price is more than the currently flawed funding formula provides. Our community wants a quality education second to none for its most valuable resource: its youth. A society which invests wisely and heavily in its youth guarantees itself a bright future in what is becoming an increasingly competitive world.

At this point a funding cut, freeze—stable funding—or a marginal increase in grants for 2002-03 will clearly jeopardize the educational programs and services to support our students' success in school. If the provincial government fails to provide a significant cash infusion for education for 2002-03, the Toronto District School Board will clearly be faced with the choice between cutting student programs or running a deficit or both. In fact, the majority of boards in Ontario will face serious reductions.

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Running a deficit is illegal, but there are few options left to cut that won't damage the quality of education. Toronto students, and in fact the majority of Ontario students, will be in significantly underfunded schools with minimal program options and insufficient staff support. Their opportunity to achieve to their full potential will be at risk. Funding education at 1997 costs is impossible; 1997 dollars simply won't buy 2002 goods, services or student programs.

The Ministry of Education's business plan states that its vision is to offer Ontario students the best education in Canada and that Ontario students will have access to top-quality education. We cannot be clear enough: unless significant investment is made in Ontario's public school system, the ministry's vision will not be met.

We once again offer to work with the government to modify the funding formula so that all of us charged with delivering education can reach our goals.

I thank you very much for your time, and we look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately two minutes per caucus, and I'll start with Ms Molinari.

Mrs Molinari: Thank you very much for your presentation. You've covered a lot of areas. It's difficult in this short period of time to touch on all of the things that you've covered, so I'm going to pick just a couple of them.

First, I've heard constantly about the current flawed funding formula. That term disturbs me somewhat, because the funding formula we had for education prior to the new formula was definitely flawed, where it did not provide proper funding for all students in the province of Ontario; it was based on assessment. The Toronto board did not receive any grants from the government before because you were so rich in assessment base, so all the other boards across the province relied on grants from the provincial government, whereas those that had enough residential tax base didn't.

So I agree that the formula needs to be revised and there are some things that need to be done to make it more workable for all the schools in the province of Ontario. That's why I'm pleased to hear that you are willing to work with us in finding those solutions for that. I think the provincial associations are a very good resource to the ministry in providing for that because, as you can appreciate, different boards in different parts of the province have different needs, and when you're trying to come up with a funding formula that is equitable to all of them, it takes time, it's difficult, it's not something that can be done quickly. So I appreciate your willingness to work with us.

The number of issues you've raised with buildings, the buildings that need to be renewed and some other things, the school operations and some of the money that needs to be spent on that—coming from my background as chair of the York Catholic board, which is just north of Toronto, some of the difficulties that we had as well with renewal of buildings, the things that you've listed here—

The Chair: Question, please.

Mrs Molinari: —and that you've talked about are large. These were not created in the last few years with the new funding formula; some of these things have been there for a longer period of time.

I guess my question would be, what of this amount is something that is recent and what is it that could have been done prior to, when the money was there?

Ms Laskin: I'll answer it first and then Executive Officer Higgins can add more information.

First, the context to your question: you're absolutely right, Toronto did have its own tax base and was able to provide the quality of education its citizens demanded of it. When the province took over, it was to create equity, but we didn't expect that equity made it inadequate for Toronto as a benchmark for everyone else.

We used to spend, as a Metro board, close to \$80 million on an annual basis on renewal of our buildings. The government provides us \$38 million. That is why the number of dollars seems so large, because they simply don't meet the upkeep on an annual basis that we are able to provide for our buildings. So they're exaggerated because of our size, but they are reasonable, because that's the amount it takes to upkeep the buildings. That's the amount of money the former boards used to spend.

I'm not saying this argument, nor are we making this presentation, for Toronto only. We have consistently tried to create and use examples that hit all school boards across the province, because we care very deeply about the education across the province. But we can't deny the fact that we are the largest school board. We are one of the most affected, because we had an amalgamation of six into one. We had the ability to provide a level of education that we want to continue to deliver, because our students deserve nothing less.

The Chair: Thank you very much, but I have to go to Mr Kwinter, because we've used all the time.

Mr Kwinter: I'd just like to follow up on that, so maybe you can get a chance to respond as well.

One of the things I remember is that Toronto, when it had its own school board and its own assessment base, would go out and raise the amount of money that the citizens wanted to spend on their education system. I don't think you should apologize for Toronto. Because of its critical mass, because of the diversity of its population base—and not only that, but because of the concentration of support services—people came from all over the province to Toronto, because that's where they could get it. It just wasn't available. So that cost was there.

Mrs Molinari talks about how it wasn't fair. I think it was far fairer than this funding formula, because what it did was it recognized the need. It wasn't a matter of saying, "Let's get down to the lowest common denominator. Let's make sure that everybody is mediocre by spreading the money throughout the province." It doesn't matter whether it's Toronto or it's some other community; if there's a need, that should be recognized. There should be funding to address that need, and not say, "Sorry, but that is not the average." How many people in this room would consider themselves average? Everyone likes to think that they're above average. So it just doesn't work.

The funding formula is basically flawed, because it doesn't take into consideration that we're not all average and all situations aren't exactly the same. There has to be a realization of that. You might want to comment on that.

Mr Donald Higgins: I don't take issue with the previous regime, other than to say that Toronto had its issues, as the MPP just said—and I won't belabour that. But I think on the other side, from the cries that we were hearing prior to the new funding model coming in, other boards were not adequately funded. They rested that on the assessment base and the disproportionate weight of commercial-industrial which Toronto had at its use. Even in those days—and I'll come back to commenting on one

specific item that picks up on the MPP's comment earlier—the funding was flawed before. Because they used to say that the negative grants which the province never collected from the Toronto board—if they had just collected the negative grant from the Toronto board, it would have repaired a lot of the issues of the underfunding of other boards. In the past, the funding model approach was difficult to use to address the issues because of the assessment differential in adjusting grants. The grants could have been adjusted upwards to resolve issues.

The reverse is happening now. Now we've got a funding model that, in the beginning and in its construct, is good. I think most finance officials would say the essence of it is fine; except you can't leave a funding model static after it's created—referring to the benchmarks. They were established based on 1996-97 data, and haven't been touched since. When we look at school operations, just as a case in point, natural gas—depending on whether you lucked into a three- or four-year contract four years ago on cheap gas; if you didn't, you're paying 100% to 150% more just for natural gas, the prime heating fuel of school boards, which contributes to our \$27-million gap.

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The funding model is not elastic, so it stays static and these costs expand. The only retort to that is we purged in our board: we removed \$18 million of our maintenance expenditures for the current fiscal year to compensate for the change in the cost of utilities. Many other boards in the province who didn't lock in three or four years ago to the cheap gas were faced with the same alternatives. They have to gut maintenance, and therefore the spin starts on the deterioration of facilities. And as we moved into the funding model maintaining a reasonable position of facility renewal, now it's deteriorated.

Even the minister herself, based on ministry studies, is extremely concerned about the deterioration of schools. Her information shows that the system needs a \$1-billion infusion to catch up to the renewal problem. If that keeps being delayed, it's like the old Penn Central Railroad. You used to see the freight train going down the grasslands, which was actually the main line. It just fell into disrepair. That's exactly what's happening to our schools and to many other schools. If that's not checked, the roof repair that would have been \$5,000 is now a roof replacement at \$100,000. Although we're only on one element of the benchmarks, it carries over into each line.

That's why, in the conclusion of the remarks, we say a major infusion is needed to catch up. The previous director of Simcoe referred to wage settlements. We've got a major catch-up to avoid gutting our programs with the 150 gap we have. In addition to that, there's a need to provide some reasonable compensation to employees as a salary increase.

The Chair: I'll have to bring it to an end on that particular comment. Mr Christopherson.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you for your presentation. The similarity of the problems and the level of the

crisis are amazing, whether we're talking about the biggest city in the country or whether we're in the most rural area. We had boards from outside Sault Ste Marie talking to us, and the problems are the same. It's just so clear that the government is going to have an impossible time—I hope, quite frankly—dodging this issue.

One of the difficulties in engaging in the discussion you have with them is that you are doing it based on their good faith. I'm in a position where I can say to you that I don't think they went into this with good faith. They deliberately planned to underfund it, because they had to make sure they had enough money to pay for their tax cuts. We know from Snobelen's approach way back when that they're not afraid of cracking a few eggs and other things too.

What's frustrating is that when you were allowed to do your own, it wasn't perfect, but it was a lot better. In Hamilton, when this government first got elected and cut the funding, changed the legislation so that JK was optional and didn't give the money for it, our trustees voted for a modest increase in the education portion of the property tax. Every one of them who ran got re-elected, for the simple reason that it reflected what the community wanted. Your shortfall, our shortfall in Hamilton—none of it is what anybody wants. Whether they're going to come to grips with it this time might have a lot to do with whether or not we have an election before we have a budget. We'll see.

I wanted to ask you one quick question, though, on something I hadn't seen brought to us in this fashion, and that is the whole notion of the double cohort. Most of it we've been dealing with is on the post-secondary side, but you're raising an interesting aspect, if I understand correctly, that you're going to build in all this infrastructure and you can't just turn a switch and abandon it all at once and make it go away. Can you address that?

Mr Higgins: The issue of the double cohort is difficult, both for the ministry, quite frankly, to give them credit, and for the school boards, because we're all trying to guess at what the reduction in secondary enrolment will be. When we do our enrolment forecasts now, we do three: high, medium and low. If we go on the median, which is what our forecasts are based on, it shows about a 5% decline in secondary enrolment. Other boards are all over.

Now, the ministry does have committees established. But the problem we have, as articulated here, is that all the grants are generated on a per pupil basis—all the grants. So your classroom teachers are generated, and your school operations are generated. As enrolment declines, and because we're really not going to know for sure, believe it or not, until September 2003, when we get the enrolments, or until June, when we see how many kids are successful getting into university and getting out the system, whether it's 2% or 5% or 7%—we'll start seeing signs during the coming year, next year.

So the issue, and what we've been representing to the ministry, is that you've got to freeze the fixed elements of the grant model and not allow them to fall. The

elements that fund classroom teachers can fall, although some school boards would say not to do that either. We can adjust the number of teachers to offset the student decline. But in school administration, school operations, psychologists, social workers, about 40% of the grant is locked in. Boards cannot reduce that at a snap. It can take anywhere from two to five years to re-adjust the system, because the students come out of different schools. So you may have a school with an enrolment of 1,000, and 100 of them go out under the double cohort. But all the fixed plant stays in place; it doesn't change. In some rural areas, the double cohort is a disaster, because they're underfunded already.

That's the real crux of the issue. We're saying you've got to lock down for a year—I would suggest two years—at least that 40% of the per pupil grant to allow the easing out of the problem.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

Ms Donna Cansfield: I'd to thank you and the committee. We were late in applying, and you indicated that you would be prepared to accept our written submission and then very graciously allowed us to come and present to you. I think that speaks well on behalf of this committee. Also, I'd like to reiterate, on behalf of the Toronto District School Board, that we very clearly would like to work with you and with the other boards to resolve this before it gets out of hand.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr Christopherson: You like one thing they did, and they couldn't do it without our agreement.

Ms Cansfield: Thank you.

SIMCOE COUNTY SCHOOL BUS OPERATORS ASSOCIATION

The Chair: Our next presentation will be from the Sinton Bus Line. I would ask the presenter to please come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Alan Smale: My name is Alan Smale. I'm general manager of Laidlaw Transit Ltd. I'm a good friend of Stan Sinton, too good a friend, I guess; he asked me to come here in his place. I'm not sure he knew what was going on today, but he didn't give me much warning.

I do appreciate the opportunity to be here. I'm a past president of the Simcoe Country School Bus Operators Association. I'm also a past director of the Ontario School Bus Association. In my 28 years in the school bus industry, I've witnessed many changes in student transportation. There have been huge improvements in school vehicles, with numerous safety features added, such as stop arms and cushioned high-back seats. Driver screening, training and ongoing education have been vastly improved. Nowhere, however, has there been a greater change than in student transportation funding.

Since the formation of county school boards, operators have negotiated with local trustees and school board

representatives. Local issues were identified and dealt with as fairly and equitably as possible. Funding was provided by the province, with support from the local taxpayer.

Currently, school boards still negotiate with bus operators, but they are unable to obtain additional funds beyond provincial grants. The current provincial formula only recognizes costs of operation prior to 1996. This means we are operating a student transportation system in 2002 and being paid in 1996 dollars. Additionally, there has been no recognition for inflation, approximately 11% since 1996.

In the early 1990s, school boards were challenged to find savings in their operations. Typically they looked to transportation to reduce expenses. Staggered bell times were used to allow for doubling of routes. Half-day kindergarten was eliminated, and walking distances were increased.

Boards that had found and taken advantage of all possible efficiencies then found themselves in an impossible situation when the province introduced the block grants in 1996. Provincial funding was reduced, and no more efficiencies were available. At the same time, operating days were increased from 185 to 190. To compound the problem, there are an additional 10,000 students being transported daily compared to 1995.

In some cases, funds from plant operations were used to supplement transportation grants. We've heard the problems that has caused with buildings. Payments to bus operators were frozen or reduced. Many school board contracts have not had rate increases since 1992-93.

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While operators' income was reduced, expenses continued to increase well beyond the rate of inflation. Improvements in buses, new D250 standards and the American dollar exchange rate combined to increase the purchase price of a 72-passenger vehicle by over \$20,000 from 1995 to 2001. Transportation rate formulas have not changed to recognize increased expenses.

Staggered bell times and multiple routes resulted in a fundamental change in the role of the school bus driver. In the past, drivers carried a maximum of 72 children on a route that would normally last two hours a day. They dealt with one school and were very familiar with their passengers. Drivers must now deal with over 120 children on routes that may serve three or more schools and spend five to six hours on the bus. Retirees and stay-at-home mothers, a traditional source of driving staff, are no longer interested in this type of work. High turnover, driver shortages and demands for higher pay are the result. Again, transportation rate formulas have not changed to recognize these increased expenses.

At the same time, fuel prices and insurance premiums increased exponentially. Operators found themselves in a position where they could not replace buses, which extended the average age of school buses in Ontario. Cost pressures have forced operators to do more with less. They have created stress for our staff as we ask them to do more to meet higher service demands of

school boards and parents. When I started in the business my hair was as dark as Mr Dunlop's over there. Sorry about the shot.

Mr Dunlop: Look closely.

Mr Christopherson: It sort of gets darker over the months, though.

Mr Smale: For over four years the Ministry of Education has been working in partnership with school board transportation officials and school bus operators to develop a new equitable funding formula. Bus operators have appreciated the opportunity to participate in this process. They have been patient as time has passed without a new formula being devised.

In the meantime, the province has recognized the crisis in funding. A tax credit in the May 1999 budget assisted in the purchase of new buses that complied with the new D250 standards. The Ontario School Bus Association has recommended that the tax credit be extended until December 31, 2005, basically to bring in more of the new buses with the new safety features. In the 2000-01 school year, interim funding of \$23 million was allocated to student transportation. This was intended to compensate for higher fuel prices, increased capital costs and other increased costs faced by operators. Unfortunately, this interim funding was not continued for the 2001-02 school year. Boards did receive flex funding of \$100 per student, but none of this additional funding found its way into transportation. Bus operators made the government aware of the problem and \$29.3 million in interim funding was announced in December 2001 for this school year.

While this interim funding has been greatly appreciated and has allowed operators to continue to provide service, it does not resolve the issue of stable funding. If bus operators are to provide safe, secure and on-time transportation of our greatest resource, children, then funding issues must be resolved. Until a new funding formula is in place, school boards must receive sufficient funding to allow them to adequately compensate bus operators. This funding needs to be fair and at an equitable level. It must be enveloped for transportation in order that school boards in fact allocate the funding as the province intends.

Once the new funding formula is approved, we understand it will be phased in across the province. Until the new formula is in place, boards must receive the money required to meet their needs. Total transportation funding for this school year, including the interim \$29.3 million, stands at \$610.3 million. This should be considered the base minimum for the 2002-03 school year.

Thank you for considering our recommendations for the provincial budget.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have a couple of minutes per caucus.

Mr Kwinter: The interim additional funding that you got for 2000-01 was \$23 million.

Mr Smale: It was \$23 million for the 2000-01 year, yes.

Mr Kwinter: Then on December 1 you got an additional \$29 million for 2002-03.

Mr Smale: That's correct.

Mr Kwinter: Does that in any way come close to matching what your increased costs were from 1996-97?

Mr Smale: Not really, no. The \$29.3 million included \$6.3 million for school boards to handle declining enrolments, so basically what transportation received was the same \$23 million that we had the previous year. It's basically kept us at status quo and hasn't allowed us to really recoup any of our investment in a new fleet. It's important for operators to continue to purchase new vehicles and upgrade their fleet, particularly with the improvements that were made with the new D250 standards with the escape hatches and the reflective stripes on the buses, that sort of thing. It's important for us to continue that process. So I guess we're hoping the new funding formula will recognize what our costs are and compensate the boards adequately for that.

Mr Kwinter: You are private operators?

Mr Smale: Yes, we are.

Mr Kwinter: Do any of the school boards own their own buses?

Mr Smale: There are a few in the province that do. None in this area that I deal with.

Mr Kwinter: Is there any difference in the way they're funded?

Mr Smale: I'm not aware of how they're funded.

Mr Dunlop: There's quite a difference in the levels.

Mr Kwinter: What I'm really trying to determine is, if you're a private sector contractor supplying this transportation and it ever gets to the point where you feel it just isn't worth it, what would the school board do?

Mr Smale: That would be a problem. I think it would be difficult for them to get into the bus business, to develop the expertise that we have in it. You do see a trend in the province of small operators that are getting out of the business because they can't survive. Larger operators, I guess, have the resources to try and wait out the current situation and hope we can have better days ahead.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you very much, Mr Smale, for your presentation. I want to talk a bit about the D250 standards. When did they come in?

Mr Smale: In 1999.

Mr Christopherson: And they obviously apply to all new purchases.

Mr Smale: That's right.

Mr Christopherson: You mentioned a few things. I heard you say there was this cushioned high back, I guess because they don't wear seat belts. Do children still not wear seat belts on school buses?

Mr Smale: No. The original D250 standards back in 1974—around that era—came out with the padded backseats. I don't know if you remember that back in the old days there was a bare metal back to a school bus seat, which the orthodontists appreciated, I think, but parents didn't. But the new standards allow what they call compartmentalization and that really allows the student the protection of the back of the seat in front of them. Seatbelts have been shown to cause more injuries.

Mr Christopherson: Yes, I knew there was good reason for it. You mentioned there were other things too. There's an escape hatch, there's reflective tape. What other features are on there? I'm interested.

Mr Smale: There are better braking systems.

Mr Christopherson: That arm that comes out?

Mr Smale: The arm that comes out is an optional feature that some operators use. I'm sorry, I lost my train of thought.

Mr Christopherson: It's OK. But the point is that there are a lot of safety features built into that.

You have two situations right now, as I understand it. One is that the tax credit is no longer available, and you've urged that it be extended to allow you to purchase more. At the same time, the cost of your purchasing the vehicles has gone up you said by \$20,000. What I'm getting to is that you've got a lot of disincentives and you need the government to play a role in providing incentives if we as a population are going to see the safety standards for our kids go up when they're travelling on our highways.

Mr Smale: I believe the tax incentives are still in place this year but they expire in December 2002.

Mr Christopherson: If you got that extension, would you continue to purchase new buses?

Mr Smale: Yes, we would.

Mr Dunlop: It's good to see you here. You mentioned one thing there, that the \$29.3 million was for 2002-03?

Mr Smale: Sorry; 2001-02.

Mr Dunlop: It's for this year.

Mr Smale: Yes.

Mr Dunlop: OK. It was \$23 million last year—we call it one-time funding—and it's \$29.3 million this year. I just wanted to make sure it was correctly—

Mr Christopherson: Is that the tax credit we're talking about?

Mr Dunlop: No. The extra funding the boards needed.

Mr Kwinter: He said that the \$29.3 million grant in December for—

Mr Dunlop: For the year we're in, 2001-02. So the \$29.3 million was to help the bus operators for this current fiscal year, not for next year. Unless we correct the funding formula, what you'll be doing immediately, starting on April 1, is lobbying for \$29.3 million to be used in the 2002-03 year.

Mr Smale: Exactly.

Mr Dunlop: My comments to you, Alan, are very simply that these operators do an extremely good job here in Simcoe county. I just want to say that working

with Rick Donaldson over the last year has been a pleasure. I know that you do a great job in transporting—what is it?—840,000 children every day in the province with almost no problem. I appreciate the recommendations and we'll see if we can work toward the funding formula being corrected.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr Smale: Thank you for the opportunity to be here.

The Chair: Before we adjourn, there are a couple of items I would like to put on the table. First of all, the report will be ready on April 2. I think we have slated April 4 as the meeting date. When would people like to start in the morning: 10 o'clock? So if we slate it for 10 o'clock, in whichever room we can find, we will notify each member.

Mr Christopherson: Room 151, if we can get it.

The Chair: Yes. The only other item I would like to bring to the floor is that I would like to thank all the staff for their support, punctuality and dedication, and also the members. I really appreciate receiving your co-operation. I know it's a grind to go on the road for two weeks and start early in the morning and end late at night, so I certainly appreciate your co-operation.

Mr Christopherson: If I can, Chair, I think possibly for the second time in a row I want to compliment you on your chairing role. Some of these guys are hard to manage. As somebody who has been on the receiving end of some of that "Get in line" stuff, you've been very fair. I've been very impressed with your ability to stay on track without offending anybody, so my compliments to you. You've done an excellent job in the chair.

Mr Kwinter: I want to echo those remarks. I've said it to several people: I think you do an outstanding job as the Chairman and I want to commend you for it.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and with no further ado—

Mr Hardeman: Mr Chair, I can't let the opportunity slip by. Since I have been so agreeable for the full two weeks in doing all these hearings, I just want to say that I'm going to disagree with them on the compliments to the Chair. I believe that you have cut me off more times than I thought I should be cut off.

The Chair: But I try to be fair.

Mr Hardeman: You tried to be fair. But I do want to echo their comments.

The Chair: With this, class will be dismissed or adjourned until April 4 at 10 o'clock.

The committee adjourned at 1554.

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