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Wednesday 2 November 2005

Mercredi 2 novembre 2005

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 2 November 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 2 novembre 2005

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES
STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES SERVICES
À L'ENFANCE ET À LA FAMILLE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 1, 2005, on the motion for second reading of Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 210, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Hamilton East has the floor.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's my pleasure to continue raising some of the issues I think are important about the Bill 210 amendments to the Child and Family Services Act.

When I finished my debate yesterday, I said there were a few things I wanted to look at a little bit more closely in the remainder of my time, so I'll give you a bit of an overview of what those are. They include several issues: First Nations issues, some of the things that were missed in the process of the last review, some issues around aging out, and then funding of CASs overall. I'm going to hopefully divide my time into those four segments and then we'll see where we are at the end of that.

Since I closed my remarks last night, I thought I would start them tonight on the First Nations issues, and I thought a good way to bring that into the discussion was to share with you a piece I received that comes from a person who is executive director of the Weechee-it-te-win Family Services, which is a community-oriented and community-based native-staffed child and family services agency in the north. What George Simard, the WFS executive director, shares is *The Story of the Elder*. I think it provides an excellent framework for a discussion about the necessity, in fact the absolute requirement, of having the appropriate dialogue and the appropriate deference to the First Nations in regard to their children:

"A grandfather is asleep and is dreaming. In the dream, his granddaughter comes into the bedroom; he

senses her presence and he wakes up. His granddaughter's eyes are staring into his own eyes and each time he moves his body, her eyes remain focused on his. Finally, he asks her, 'Granddaughter, what is it you want?'

"She looks at him intently and asks this question: 'Granddad, during your lifetime what did you do to make it a better world for me when I grow up?'

"Upon hearing the question, the grandfather immediately awoke, his heart was palpating, he was sweating, he was afraid because the thought came to his mind, what if all he could tell her was that all he ever did was maintain the status quo?

"The insight from this experience is why it is so important to be doing something for the other generations to come and is the motivation that moves WFS and me in particular."

I thought George's words were extremely moving and extremely pertinent to the discussion that we're having today on Bill 210.

I mentioned in my remarks the other day that there are particular issues that the First Nations have, not only with the bill but with the process by which the bill will move forward herein. I wanted to flag, first of all, that section 44 of the bill is the one that allows changes to the First Nations customary care agreements by regulation. What the First Nations are concerned about specifically is that these changes by regulation are at risk of occurring behind closed doors and without the proper airing and consultation with First Nations. Because these changes occur in regulations, they're also concerned that the scrutiny of this House will not be brought to bear on any changes that may come forward.

There is a real worry, I think a real legitimate point they have to make around the section that changes a particular arrangement they have with regard to care for their children who are in protected services. I raise that because I think it goes without saying that there are certain processes that need to take place and we should all be aware of what they are. They exist in the act under part X, and they're quite explicit with regard to the way that the ministry and all the agents of the government are supposed to be working with First Nations to ensure that the proper process is undertaken in engagement and dialogue with them.

1850

Part X indicates that, "The Lieutenant Governor in council may make regulations for the purposes of part X." There are very specific requirements in that section

that speak to “the apprehension of children and the placement of children in residential care ... the placement of homemakers and the provision of other family members in support services ... the preparation of plans for the care of children,” etc. It’s incumbent upon us, knowing these sections exist in the act, to make every effort to ensure that we’re adhering to those sections and engaging First Nations in an appropriate way in the discussion.

The other issue that has been raised with me is the extent to which the First Nations communities have been engaged thus far. My understanding is, and I’ve received many pieces of information from different communities that indicate that, yes, there has been some engagement with agency representatives in regard to this particular bill, but what there hasn’t been is an engagement with the political leadership of First Nations. I would urge the government to ensure that the political leadership is engaged thoroughly in this process, because it’s, frankly, incumbent upon us to make sure their voices are strongly heard and are taken into consideration in every aspect of the way we go through this bill.

It seems to me my friend Peter Kormos needs a little bit of rest in the front row. He’s having sleep apnea problems. He told me he only gets 45 minutes at a go when he has to sleep. He says he has back problems, and therefore can’t get more than 45 minutes at a stretch. So Mr. Kormos, if I’m putting you to sleep, you’re welcome to use the couches in the back. Perhaps I’m good for your back.

Interjection.

Ms. Horwath: Oh, is that right? Well, I don’t want to talk about your urinary tract issues, Mr. Kormos. However, I do appreciate that you’re here tonight for this very important debate on Bill 210 because it really indicates that there are people here who are concerned about the welfare of our children, and that is what Bill 210 is all about.

Notwithstanding that minor distraction from my friend Peter Kormos, the member for Niagara Centre, I needed to make sure that I was starting my discussion tonight particularly about the issues being raised by the First Nations community. I want to read from a letter I received from some of the representatives of First Nations, just to indicate to you not only the fact that they need to have some serious dialogue with government around Bill 210, but that there are other issues with which they are concerned.

There is a letter that was sent to the minister back in August of this year, and it was sent by Betty Kennedy, executive director of the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario. One of the things she put on the record with the minister is the fact that— I’ll quote right from her letter:

“At this time, I would like to identify one of these issues that relate to the designation process of our pre-mandated agencies. We would like this process to be clearly identified and would welcome receipt of all criteria for each stage in the designation process as well as the specified timelines in order to assist our member agencies more effectively. A number of them have iden-

tified significant delays in moving through this process and have requested our assistance in determining why these delays are occurring. If we could begin to develop our working relationship by clarifying these matters....” etc.

The First Nations peoples are on record with the minister in many different ways. I raise this letter because it points out a desire for a dialogue to occur on an issue that is not contemplated in Bill 210. It’s another issue that was raised by First Nations peoples around the designation process for their community agencies and some frustration around identifying what the roadblocks are to allowing those designations to take place, but it’s not actually within the scope of Bill 210. I raise it because there are many issues to do with child welfare that did not receive scrutiny and are not contemplated in Bill 210 in terms of changing the system.

This bill will go to committee. I know it will, and there are lots of positive—

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Will this bill go to committee?

Ms. Horwath: The member for Niagara Centre is asking me, “Is this bill going to committee?” I can tell you that last time we debated this bill, which was just yesterday, the Conservatives and the New Democrats were both calling for this bill to travel. We’re encouraging the minister and we hope the government will hear our pleas to ensure that this bill not only goes to committee, but that that committee actually travels to the communities that are being affected by the changes it’s contemplating. I’m hoping that we soon have a list of all of the communities that are requesting those hearings, but we certainly have put the marker into the government that that needs to be done.

I wanted to spend just a few minutes on some of the issues that are missing from the bill. They are missing from the bill because they really weren’t part of the review. That speaks to something that we perhaps would like to see changed, and that is the scope of the mandatory five-year review. It is very clear that the review that took place elicited a number of responses outside of the actual scope that was determined by the minister. Of course, the act requires the five-year review to take place. I don’t know what section it is; the very last section, I think. Yes, part XII, the miscellaneous part of the act requires the review of the act but it also allows, through the discretion of the minister, the scope of that review. In this very first review of the act, it became very clear in the responses that were received that there are many issues that people want to have reviewed and scrutinized by the government, with a view to maintaining and continuing along the pathways of improvement in the child welfare system.

There’s much literature that would support the review to be expanded and to have a broader context. It’s some of those issues that are incumbent upon us as a government, as a group of legislators, to look at, if we’re really interested in changing the well-being of children in our province.

I wanted to set the ground for that by quoting from a research document that reviews child protection legislation in Ontario—past, present, and future. There's one small piece in here that speaks to that broader context. It says, "Recent social policy reviews in Canada have identified systemic risks to child safety such as family violence and poverty. A broader context to evaluating the impact of child welfare policy that includes the major predictors of risk to vulnerable children is necessary to address" ongoing change. I say that this is something we would like to see happening, something we would support, that broader overview, because we firmly believe—and I certainly firmly believe—that there are things this government can be doing that could change the welfare of children at this very moment. I don't want to simply repeat the things we often repeat in this House with regard to more affordable housing and ending the child benefit clawback and ensuring there is a decent level of social assistance available to families. Yes, those things are all important, but it's not just us on this side of the House who are raising these issues.

1900

I turn to a report that was provided, undertaken by a group of academics at the University of Western Ontario in London, the Association of Poverty with Child Welfare Service and Child and Family Clinical Outcomes, who flag many of these very issues themselves. So, again, it's not simply the opposition saying that there needs to be a serious look at and recognition of these factors. This is what's coming out in all of the literature that speaks to the issue of child welfare.

I thought this one particular section is important. It indicates, in looking at poverty and child outcomes: "Studies include factors such as nutrition and brain development, suggesting poverty and, specifically, poor nutrition, place children at risk for later learning, behavioural and developmental challenges...."

"A second theme suggests that the instability of living arrangements," a.k.a. housing, "and homelessness due to poverty place children at increased risk.... This may reflect the inability of children to receive consistent educational opportunities and parent(s) to develop a social network of support to buffer parental stress."

All of this is very logical stuff. It seems to me that this logical piece here is something that's missing from the bill and from the review that was undertaken, because unfortunately that review was scoped very narrowly to deal only with the adoption of crown wards.

Another "encompassing framework within which to view the effects of poverty on children is provided by Avison et al. (1994). These authors suggest that the 'pernicious' effects of poverty"—did you like that word, Peter Kormos? Pernicious.

Mr. Kormos: Spell it. Don't; no.

Ms. Horwath: It's not a spelling bee, Mr. Kormos.

However, "the 'pernicious' effects of poverty are such that the financial strain results in the combined effects of caregiver strain, lack of social support, lowered self-esteem and maternal distress resulting in childhood vul-

nerabilities reflected in both internal and external problems."

This report goes on to cite a number of factors that the opposition, that the New Democrats, are constantly raising with this government. If this government were serious about the welfare and well-being of children, they would start addressing some of these fundamental, root causes of the crises we're seeing in children's well-being, or lack thereof, in Ontario.

"Child maltreatment in Canada is particularly related to," one study says, "the major environmental conditions of which low socioeconomic status and housing conditions play a significant role." Again, the ability of parents to provide for their children has a significant effect on the well-being of those children, something that is not a surprise to anyone but needs to be addressed in a most fundamental way by the government.

"This 'economic-deprivation' hypothesis reflects the inability of parents to meet basic needs such as housing, creating instability that can lead to increasing stress on adults," which then could result in parental violence.

I could go on and quote many more pieces of this particular study, but what parts of it do is to situate child abuse within a broader social context, suggesting that it's not an isolated family problem but a community problem, most often related to the social and economic situation of the locale. Also, they note that it "reflects increases in social isolation and compromised ability to meet basic childcare needs." I would put to you that after several years of reductions, and then the flat-lining of things like social assistance, policies like the clawback of the national child benefit very much affect the socioeconomic situation of families in today's Ontario.

There are also indications of cases where children are exposed to family violence, and issues around battered women. Considering the fact that we started the spousal abuse prevention and awareness month, or violence against women month, whatever we want to call it in today's nomenclature, I think that an important factor we need to recognize is that very few victims of family violence have the resources to actually begin a new life for themselves and their children. This, as well, affects the welfare of the children of Ontario.

In talking about what was missing in the bill brought forward, I thought I should just rely on the report that the government tabled in March 2005: the report on the 2005 review of the Child and Family Services Act. Just to wrap up my comments on that piece, there are a number of issues that were flagged. A number of the respondents to this review indicated the very thing that I indicated, that there is a concern that the review was too narrow, that the five-year review needs to be broadened out and expanded, that the minister's ability to scope the review very narrowly needs to be rethought. If we're to get through proper and more broadly based reforms in a timely fashion, as the child welfare system continues to change and the needs of children continue to change and the world in which we live continues to change, then perhaps what we need to do is ensure that the review is broadened out every five years.

Again, not unlike some of the comments I just made, people indicated to the minister and the ministry that services do not function in isolation, and it's detrimental not to change one system without consideration of other systems such as children's and adult mental health, youth justice, social assistance and education.

Issues were raised around a number of different points: the justice system, children's rights and youth justice. There are a number of pieces that people raised and wanted to ensure were recognized around adoption records and privacy. All of these kinds of issues were raised and were noted in the report itself that was produced in March 2005. It's important to note that the minister had a choice on how to scope it, and the ministry's own executive summary indicates that they focused on "key provisions of the legislation relating to permanency options for children in care, including adoption." I think that's one of the pieces we would like to see changed. We would certainly like to be looking at, in the process of the hearings, if there's an opportunity to perhaps broaden out the scope of the five-year review. This having been the first one, it's now our chance to say, "Did it work? Did it meet our needs? Are there things we can do to change it, to make it better, to make it more responsive?" It's not for any of our benefits, it's not for us to be able to gain anything by that, but for the children of Ontario, particularly children affected by this legislation, to be able to have positive outcomes. That's the goal we've all stated and will continue to state, I'm sure, through this entire process.

There was one issue raised in the document, and that was the issue of aging out. I wanted to spend a little bit of time on that because I thought it was an interesting fit with some of the things we're seeing in terms of children on the streets, the violence that's occurring and some of the choices—in fact, I wouldn't even call them choices—some of the circumstances children find themselves in these days. In particular, I wanted to talk about the way we deal with the aging-out issue. In this particular situation, perhaps it needs to be relooked at.

1910

In the Ministry of Children and Youth Services' strategic plan for a flexible, sustainable and outcome-oriented service delivery model of July 2005, there is an acknowledgement of the issue of aging out. I should actually stop and say what aging out is. It is the time which a child has been under care of the children's aid society, has been a ward of the crown, for certain points in their life. But of course, "aging out" means they've gotten to the point of their life where they are an adult, or are considered to be an adult, and are no longer eligible for the care of the state.

I wanted to indicate here that, yes, this has been flagged, and I appreciate that the ministry is aware of this concern. There are extended care maintenance agreements that can be undertaken with these young people up to the age of 21 to help them transition into the adult world with the ability to take care of themselves. But many jurisdictions are finding that that age of 21 no

longer reflects today's realities. I mentioned it just yesterday in this debate as well. In fact, I had a couple of chuckles from some of the members behind me here yesterday when I raised it. Young people are not leaving home at the age of 21 so much any more. Young people are staying home into their mid- to late 20s to make sure they are able to put together a future for themselves that is going to be successful and determine—

Mr. Kormos: How old is Julian now?

Ms. Horwath: My son is only 13. In fact, I bought a dog for my son recently, and I said to him, "Honey, this dog is going to live about 13 years, the same age as you are now. That dog is going to be around for a long time. It's your dog, so when you move out of the house, you'll be taking the dog with you," and he said, "Mummy, I'm never moving out of the house." That just reflects, though, that there is an opportunity for us to relook at and rethink the age at which we start to withdraw our supports for these young people.

I actually put together a very few pieces that I thought were important around that aging-out issue. I mentioned it briefly yesterday, but Carol Goar wrote an excellent article outlining this issue that was published in the Toronto Star on Friday, October 28. She goes through the description of what happens to young people when they age out, when the system that has become their parent or their caregiver, for lack of a better word, withdraws and the difficulty and the transitioning that needs to happen for them to be successful.

In researching this issue a little bit more closely, I was surprised to find how blatant and how stunning the statistics are for children as they age out of that system. I wanted to share some of it with you tonight because I think it's extremely important. It's a piece that we really do have an opportunity to affect, perhaps in this very bill, and perhaps not, but it's worth putting on the record only to remind ourselves that if we are committed to doing it, we can get it done this time around. It's an issue that really needs to be addressed by legislators.

This is a document called Youth Leaving Care—How Do They Fare? There's a little bit of a rhyme going on there. It's a briefing paper that was prepared in September 2005 for the Modernizing Income Security for Working Age Adults Project. It was specifically put together to put some recommendations in place that respect the challenges facing youth leaving care. It states:

"The findings show that, compared to their peers, youth aging out of care are more likely to:

—leave school before completing their secondary education;

—become a parent at a young age;

—be dependent on social assistance;

—be unemployed or under-employed;

—be incarcerated/involved with the criminal justice system;

—experience homelessness;

—have mental health problems; and

—be at higher risk for substance abuse problems."

It seems to me that if these are the outcomes that we know are occurring for youth who are aging out in the current system, then it speaks volumes to the fact that we need to change that system so that those outcomes can be changed to be more positive for those youth.

In fact, Canadian youth aging out of care have cited the following requirements as being crucial to better transition to adulthood and to perhaps positively affect these outcomes. They indicate that there is a need for ongoing, supportive relationships, peer support and independent living training, increased access to financial support, and support in gaining access to education, employment and training programs.

In other words, it's not good enough to say, "We'll keep financially supporting you for a little while, but here's your hat. What's your hurry? You're on your own." That simply has not proven to work, and I would say that if we can invest in some of these transition programs now, in the transition process, then we'll be not only economically saving a lot of money at the end of the day in some of these other systems, but holy smokes, we'll be giving youth, young people, a fighting chance at making a go of adult life after having been in custody and care and aging out of that system.

International research indicates that there are better outcomes for youth aging out when they complete their high school, when they have access to post-secondary opportunities and role models, when they refrain from alcohol and drug use, when they obtain life skills and independent living training, and when they experience stable placements while in care. I think the stable placements part is, in fact, in some ways, addressed by Bill 210. In fact, I think Bill 210 in many ways looks at that very issue of stable placements, but I think there is much, much more that can be done.

In fact, there are recommendations on page 4 of this report, specifically to the Ontario government, and I'm going to read them out, because I think they need to be on the record in this discussion. They're suggesting that we extend the maximum age at which youth can continue to receive the extended care and maintenance allowance from the current age of 21 to the age of 24 to enable them to achieve higher educational attainments and working skills; ensure that the ECM, the extended care and maintenance, allowance reinstatement provision is consistently applied across all children's aid societies in Ontario; increase the maximum ECM allowance to reflect current living costs; and incorporate an annual indexation provision.

It continues on with about a dozen—maybe not quite—short-term or immediate recommendations, and then goes on to talk about some of the research and academic work that needs to be done in the future to continue to track and be sure that we are keeping tabs on our successes, hopefully, for children who are aging out of the system.

So I just wanted to indicate that aging out, I think, is an important and relevant issue, that we need to get a grip on that, that we need to provide young people with that

extra boost to be able to become successful as they age out of the child welfare system. It's something that many other jurisdictions have done, and research shows that where the changes are made in terms of the age for extended maintenance and care funding—in other jurisdictions, when young people are reaching the age of entering post-secondary education, their tuition is covered by government, and so they don't have to worry about ensuring that they can afford post-secondary education, because it is part of the supports that the government is putting in place to make sure that they are able to achieve some success later in life.

There's one issue that I raised the other day, and it's the issue of resources to the children's aid societies. I know there's an initiative underway at this moment in time to look at the funding of children's aid societies to determine what the new model might look like, what the new requirements are going to be and how those requirements relate to the funding. So I understand that that's currently something that's being reviewed. I can't say enough how important it is to make sure that we resource the children's aid societies to a level that is reflective of the extremely important job we've been giving them to do. I think of the pressure that's on children's aid societies right now, the difficulty, the struggle they have, year in and year out, trying to meet the needs of children and families, trying to make sure that children who are in need of care are getting that protection, trying to make sure they're doing that in a way that meets the requirements of the law.

1920

I know my own executive director of the children's aid society in the community I come from has indicated to me that those legal costs—and again, they are important. We have to make sure we're doing everything within the parameters of the law, but those very costs are driving the budgets of children's aid societies out of whack. It's incumbent on all of us to recognize that that funding situation has been very difficult for quite some time now, for several years. It's actually in some ways a miracle that some of these children's aid societies have been able to continue to provide the good service they have in the communities where they're doing that good work.

In that context, I got an e-mail from a woman in my riding and it reflects the level of frustration that people have. This wasn't particularly about a child protection issue, but it was an issue where this woman was trying to get some service from the children's aid society. I'm going to read a little section of it, and I've already told her I'd be doing this. I'm not going to use her name, because there's a privacy issue, but I did want to read it because I think it speaks to the frustration people have. I think people just don't realize the level of strain that CASs have been under. This woman sent me this e-mail in the middle of September and she said, "The reason I'm e-mailing you is concerning the adoption legislation and my ability to seek out information regarding my file and adoption records." Initially, I thought this was about the

adoption bill that we just passed the other day, but in fact she goes on to say, "It has become apparent to me that the funding provided for the children's aid society, specifically for persons to search out one's file, is completely inadequate. I am currently 28 years old, I applied for my records earlier this year, and was just informed that due to a huge backlog and lack of funding for such services, my application for information will be at least five or more years in waiting, as they are currently only working on applications submitted in 2001."

We went through the process of debating and passing the adoption bill, and to a great extent that bill was a result of many years of hard work by the NDP member from Toronto–Danforth, Marilyn Churley. She was in tears the other day with all of the people who were so pleased that that bill has finally made it through the Legislature. But for people who were crown wards, whose files exist within the filing cabinets of the children's aid societies, there is perhaps another barrier to obtaining those records.

Having said that, she did contact me today to say that there is hope, that in fact instead of it being five years, it may be two years, it may be a year and a half, and I guess that's better than nothing. But it is certainly the case that the funding formula and the resources required for the children's aid societies to do a decent job is sorely in need of repair.

I wanted to finish my comments by reiterating how much I look forward to hearing some of the detailed presentations that will come about when this bill goes through the appropriate process of committee hearings, because I think as we hear from people, and now that they see the legislation in writing, we'll be able to get some really positive insights into how to move forward in the child welfare system and how to move forward with this particular legislation.

I really think that taking some time out to make sure we get it right is so important. It's so important for children and their families, and it's so important for people who have been trying to adopt children in Ontario and haven't been able to do so because the barriers have prevented them from being able to achieve those positive outcomes for the children and for those people looking to adopt. It's just so important to get it right that I look forward to those public hearings, and I sincerely hope that the government takes that step and ensures that public hearings take place.

I'm adamant in my belief that those public hearings can't just be here in Toronto, that children's aid societies and providers of these kinds of services across the province want to have something to say. I reflect back again to the voices we need to hear from First Nations. Maybe it's not convenient to travel these bills out to these kinds of communities, but it's incumbent upon us, it's required of us, it is our obligation to make sure that we take the time to engage in a dialogue with First Nations about their children and about their needs in terms of child protection. If we don't do that, if we were not committed to making that effort, it would be a dark

day in this Legislature, because it is so extremely important that I cannot overstate how important it is that we get that done.

I wanted to make sure, as we go through that process of the hearings, that there is also some of the work that's been done around the extent to which during the process—I can recall going through the briefing with the minister and her staff. There's this chart here that is extremely complicated, but they took us through it piece by piece to describe the various stages that will occur in the process of a child being taken into care. One thing I want to flag that I'm hoping to hear about during the hearings is the extent to which children have choices, or that choices are available through all of the stages of this process. I know there are choices around kinship care and around openness of adoption, but I think we have to be extremely careful to make sure that, as we go through every stage, we're flagging where choices can be made by children who are going through the stages of being taken into care.

I wanted to say also that when it comes to putting amendments, I know the minister has some amendments already prepared. I know she has looked at pieces of the legislation around accountability and a process for complaints, and I'm pleased about that. As I mentioned yesterday, New Democrats had also flagged that there were some concerns there. We also wanted to again put on the record some concerns about, or at least we're keeping an eye on, the alternative dispute resolution piece. We want to make sure that works. We want to make sure that it's a process that is respectful of the rights of all parties, so we're very careful to keep an eye on that and are looking forward to hearing if there are comments about that piece in the public hearings process.

I wanted to end by saying that it has been a very positive experience for me, as my first leadoff speech on a bill in this House, to be able to speak to this particular bill, because I think it's an important piece of legislation. I think if we work on it and if we keep an open mind and a broad dialogue, we'll get to a place where the welfare of children is always our top priority. Thank you very much, and I look forward to public hearings on the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Shafiq Qadri (Etobicoke North): First of all, I would like to commend the member from Hamilton East for her remarks, a number of them, of course, in support of Bill 210. Before beginning, I'd also like to commend the Minister of Children and Youth Services, the Honourable Mary Anne Chambers, for bringing not only her considerable wisdom but I would also say her humanity to this particular file.

As Senator Hillary Clinton said, when asked, "What does it take to raise a child?" in the now famous phrase, "It takes a village." The McGuinty government is creating that village, whether it's our programs regarding health care or education, but in this particular file, the idea of being able to offer to children in need, youth at risk, stable opportunities for growth, for long-lasting families and for a continued bonding, which of course all

of us know is extremely important in terms of development, whether it's physical or mental, and for things like self-esteem.

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That's why I'd like to commend the minister on the various components of this particular bill, whether it's making adoption more flexible or removing some of the legal constraints, some of the red tape that is involved in that long procedure that was referred to by the member from Hamilton East; for example, from the first intervention of children's aid, when there's an assessment, when there's a placement and when, unfortunately, there's a replacement, meaning an ongoing shuffle of the particular foster family. We all know how disruptive that can be to all individuals concerned and we all know how certain legal frameworks that are still in place interfere with the long-term placement, which is ultimately not in the best interest of the children themselves whom we are here to serve.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke):

I want to congratulate the member for Hamilton East for her first leadoff speech here on Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts.

I know it is customary and obligatory to speak to a bill when you're doing a response in this House, but I'm asking for a little bit of latitude to talk about my page, because the pages will be leaving us tomorrow. Tomorrow will be their last day. I want to commend and congratulate the wonderful group of pages that we've had in the Legislature this term. We were privileged to have this great group of young people with us. But I want to specifically talk about Loreena Dobson, a page from my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, coming from—what her grandfather will absolutely tell you is the truth—Cobden, the centre of the universe.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Cobden?

Mr. Yakabuski: Cobden, yes. You know her grandfather, Hal Dobson. If any of you know the story about the repatriation of Champlain's astrolabe and bringing it home to Cobden, Mr. Dobson played an integral role in that exercise.

Mr. Kormos: What's the story?

Mr. Yakabuski: Well, we don't have enough time to go through the story, I say to the member from Niagara Centre, but I do want to say what a pleasure it has been to have Loreena here to serve as a page in this Legislature and what an honour it's been as her member. I also had the honour of having her sister, Emma Dobson, last year. So for two fall sessions in a row, I've had girls from the Dobson family. Their parents, Grant and Dorothy, are justifiably proud of those two wonderful girls. I'm very proud to serve as their member here for the riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, and I want to commend and congratulate the program and all those who have served.

Mr. Kormos: I want Mr. Yakabuski, the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, to know that all of us in this chamber share his high regard for the young page

from his riding, and a year ago her sister, who served this Legislature well.

Ms. Horwath, our critic in these matters, has laid the groundwork quite well and quite thoroughly. Her analysis is clear. Make no mistake about it, there was nothing in what she said that committed New Democrats to joyous applause with respect to this legislation. There are more than a few pieces of it about which we have some very serious concerns, and Ms. Horwath made that very clear during her comments. She has every intention of pressing rigorously and without pause to ensure that aboriginal communities, native communities, are heard around the issues they have with this legislation and with what very much appears to be a clear failure to have consulted, or at least consulted effectively, with those communities.

The next speaker on behalf of New Democrats is going to be Shelley Martel, our member from Nickel Belt. I urge people who indeed are watching the legislative channel at 25 minutes to 8 to stay tuned, because if indeed Ms. Horwath displayed passion and commitment to the issue, Ms. Martel will bring even heightened levels of enthusiasm about the welfare of children and this government's responsibility to craft appropriate amendments to make sure that those children are adequately protected.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I'd like to express my appreciation for the thoughtful comments I've heard from all members in the House yesterday and today. It's clear that this is a very important piece of work, a very important piece of legislation, and it's good to know, but certainly not surprising, that others share our government's commitment to protecting our most vulnerable citizens.

I want to specifically refer to two areas that have come up a couple of times, one on First Nations involvement, and I want you to know that section 44 is indeed intended to provide us with the flexibility required to accommodate the needs of the First Nations people and their specific requirements for their kids and their specific challenges. We will not take those lightly. We will take them very, very seriously and we intend that they will have tremendous influence on how we arrange for their kids to be protected under this legislation. I don't for one minute have any problem making that commitment.

The other reference I'd like to make is to the whole matter of the definition of community, which came up a couple of times. Community, as we have presented it, is intended to be more inclusive. It's not meant to restrict but in fact to define in broader terms examples of how a child can find circumstances with which they would be comfortable.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Hamilton East, you have two minutes to reply.

Ms. Horwath: I want to thank the members for Etobicoke North, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Niagara Centre and the Minister of Children and Youth Services for their discussion on my leadoff speech. I have to say

that I look forward to the next phase of this bill. I look forward to the process by which we will hear the voices, particularly of the First Nations. I look forward to the way that engagement will occur. I look forward to other voices coming to the table to share their issues, their concerns and perhaps their accolades in the various pieces of this bill.

I also look forward to, hopefully, some opportunities for amendments, particularly around things maybe like aging out, particularly around the scope of the review that takes place. But I'm waiting to hear from the people who come to speak to committee on this bill, assuming of course that we're going to have a public hearings process. I hope that's the case.

I wanted to reiterate that we want to see children have choices every step along the way, and that the options we see in the first step of the process are then reflected again and again so that children have as many options as possible, so that they can achieve the things that any child raised anywhere in Ontario would hope to be able to achieve for their future—a future that is bright, productive and one that they can be proud of themselves in.

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Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It is my pleasure to introduce a visitor in the gallery from the beautiful city of Brampton, a former member from Brampton, Bob Callahan, a city councillor in the beautiful city of Brampton. Welcome, Bob.

The Deputy Speaker: That, of course, is not a point of order, but we certainly welcome our former colleague. Further debate.

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward–Hastings): I'm delighted to speak to this bill, and I will be sharing my time with the member for Peterborough.

There's a great deal to this bill, and I'm going to focus on a part that I think really profoundly provides opportunities for improving the quality of life for our children. Quite frankly, that is what this bill—and what I like to think our society—is about. What I'd like to do is talk about how the system presently works and how it will work if this bill is passed.

Children come into CAS care a number of ways. Some are voluntarily given into care by parents who say, "I'm simply not able to provide the care they need. I recognize that I need help on this," and I applaud them. Others come into care because someone has alerted the children's aid society to what they believe may be abuse and a child in need of protection.

I need to say to those of you who are watching this evening and are thinking, "Well, really, it's none of my business what happens in that house, and I shouldn't get involved," that it is your business. We have a responsibility as a society to ensure that our children are protected, and every child in your community and in this province is our child. You don't need to give your name, but you do need to call your CAS if you fear that a child is at risk.

The CAS investigates. There is a sense in society that the CAS comes and takes away children. The CAS

doesn't come and take away children. The CAS becomes involved when they believe a child is in need of protection, but ultimately a judge makes a decision as to what's in the best interests of that child. It's as simple as that. A child who is deemed to be in need of protection may go to school in the morning and the CAS may meet them there and bring them into care. This is a child who, in many cases, goes to school and never, ever returns home, or the child may be at home and the CAS comes and removes them from that home for their own safety.

In the years the family and I have fostered, I have never been able to fully appreciate the trauma of leaving your parents in the morning and never returning. With every child we have ever had the privilege of fostering, I think we can say that they loved their parents and their parents loved them. There may have been inappropriate actions, but there was love in that house. It is an absolute trauma, and I think the vast majority of us, thank goodness, never have any sense of how difficult it is for that child.

At the present time, that child may be placed in what's called an "emergency receiving home" or they may be placed directly into a foster home. From the child's viewpoint, they have been taken and placed with strangers. I want to say that we have great foster homes in this province. We are blessed with hundreds of foster homes that truly care. But from the child's viewpoint, they're strangers.

This bill will enable a society to make arrangements with extended family or friends or those who have been involved in that child's life and are meaningful—

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): Grandparents.

Mr. Parsons: Grandparents.

Mr. Levac: Very important.

Mr. Parsons: Now, this doesn't make the work of the CASs easier; it makes it harder, because they have to ensure that when they're placing that child with an extended family or friends, that child is still in a place of safety and that those who are alleged to have committed the abuse won't show up there and intimidate the child or take the child. But for the child, think of the difference between being placed with strangers at 11 o'clock at night or being placed with grandparents. This will not always be the case, but this is an option that's being added in this bill to ensure that the children will have some degree of comfort.

The next thing that happens after that is that there's an appearance in court, probably without the child present. But eventually there is a court case. We can't, again, imagine the stress on a child, knowing that they're in this foster home, and they may have put down some roots, but they know that somewhere there's a judge and there's a court case being heard, so maybe they'll leave that night and maybe they won't. Maybe somebody will come back and say, "Well, it's been remanded." So they will live in a constant state of, "Am I going to stay here or am I going to move?" We're talking about kids who are four, five and six years old. If the court drags on for a year, for a 4-year-old, that's a quarter of their life that they've

been in animated suspension waiting to know what happens. For foster parents, it is equally difficult because, folks, it is impossible to foster a child without forming a bond with them, and the only bad part about being a foster parent is the day that the child moves on. It may be to a wonderful adoptive home, and it may be great for the child, but it's a difficult day for the foster parents, I can assure you.

This new bill says that we don't necessarily need to go to court. Maybe there is mediation that can take place between the agency and the birth parents or the family to see if there can be a result found to allow that child to move on to a place of safety and permanency fairly quickly. This bill says there are opportunities that don't necessarily require one or two years of court hearings to make it happen. Again, that child will have the benefit of some permanency fairly quickly.

Many, many of the court orders given now for children who come into care—they become what are called “crown wards,” meaning that the birth parents have forfeited their rights and the crown is now responsible for that child. The majority of them are crown wards with access, which means, although that child will never return home, there is opportunity for visitation. Because of that interaction between the child and their natural family, no adoption takes place, so that child will spend their life in a foster home. I've got to repeat, I'm very proud of the foster homes.

This bill says: If all the parties are open, why can't that child go into an open adoption, where the birth parents may be informed regularly as to the progress of their child and photographs and letters exchanged? This will provide an opportunity for far more children to move on to permanency. This bill will also recognize that adoption by individuals who are not a part of the extended family is certainly an option that happens all the time. But often there are extended families who say, “We would like to provide permanency for the child, but we can't financially afford it.” A lot of kids don't come into care on their own; they come with their siblings. We recognize the cost that is entailed in providing necessities for a family of three or four. The ministry is pursuing a route that says, “Rather than paying for these four children to be in foster care until they turn 18, we can provide some financial support to enable the extended family to look after these children.”

There are also children who are in foster care who have perhaps been in a foster home for five, six, seven or eight years and, folks, that's now their family and that's their home. This bill will allow a judge to grant an order that says that these children remain in that home; it's kind of foster guardianship. You'll be able to say to the children, “This is your home. There's not a chance that the phone will ring and you're going to be moved to another foster home.”

Many foster parents want to foster for a period of time, but not, perhaps, for 15 years, because fostering does have an impact on your natural family, and all of the kids that come into care have needs not of their making.

If you've been sexually abused since you were two years old, or you've been physically beaten or you've been starved, that has shaped that child's fabric for the rest of their life. I'm increasingly stunned and amazed at foster children we have worked with who recall that something happened to them when they were eight months or nine months. I used to think that no one would remember that, but they remember that something traumatic happened. They're very high-needs, and thank goodness we have the foster homes that will work with them. But some foster homes need relief from time to time. Many will take foster children, saying, “We will be delighted to provide care until an adoptive home is found.” But there reaches a point in time where that becomes a home. Sometimes, with the backlog in court cases, we're familiar with children who have waited for the court process for three or four years, and they've put down roots. This bill, again, allows some permanency to be established with the foster parents, which will again speed up the process for that child.

When we first started fostering, kids came to us with all of their possessions in green garbage bags. Try to picture that everything you own is in a green garbage bag. That's your suitcase. Well, that doesn't happen any more, but they still may have to live for years almost out of a suitcase, knowing they'll be moved, they'll go on.

This bill, if it does nothing else, will speed up the process for children going through a traumatic time; it will give them some stability, some long-term life commitments. This bill is a superb bill that I could not endorse more. It will make life better for hundreds of children in this province. It is overdue, and I applaud the minister for this bill.

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Mr. Leal: It's a pleasure for me to spend a few minutes this evening talking about Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts.

First of all, I want to start off this evening by saying that today is my daughter Shanae's birthday. She's six years old today, and she's probably just completed her hockey game. Her brother Braden was there, and my wife, Karan. They're all at the Evinrude Centre tonight to watch her play hockey. I know from experience that she's pretty good in the corner.

Mr. Kormos: Where's her father?

Mr. Leal: The member from Niagara Centre wanted to know where her father is, but I want to say that my colleague for Brampton Centre allowed me to take off on Monday evening so I could be with my kids for Halloween, and we had a great evening.

No one brings more passion to this issue than my colleague the member for Prince Edward—Hastings. The member for Prince Edward—Hastings has long experience in the Belleville area. He was chair of the school board down there, and I also believe he was chair of the children's aid society for that area for many years. He has that depth of experience, and when he speaks on a bill such as Bill 210, he comes from experience and passion

and knows what we have to do to address some of our difficulties with children in our communities.

I also want to compliment the Minister of Children and Youth Services. The minister, of course, in 2003, left the corporate world. She was then the vice-president of Scotiabank and left that world because she wanted to make a contribution to the province of Ontario. I can think of no better portfolio than the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to make that contribution, because she's always had a great passion for children, and during her corporate career at Scotiabank, she was involved in corporate programs reaching out to children in our communities right across Canada. She deserves some credit for that.

I'm particularly happy with the provisions for aboriginal people. I want to speak about two communities in my riding of Peterborough. Chief Keith Knott is the chief of the First Nations community at Curve Lake in the riding of Peterborough, and Chief Greg Cowie is the chief for Hiawatha.

During my last term on Peterborough city council from 2000 to 2003, I had the opportunity to be the council's representative on the Kawartha-Haliburton Children's Aid Society. At that time, it was under the directorship of one Bob Penny. Bob retired and was succeeded by Hugh Nicholson. One of the things that I discovered during my time on the children's aid society board, and reviewing a number of cases there, was the very high proportion of First Nations children who find themselves in the children's aid society system. Often, those First Nations children are removed from their communities and are put into families that certainly don't appreciate the heritage of those First Nations communities.

Section 44, I believe, goes a long way toward starting to bridge that gap and to address that concern for the First Nations communities. I believe we have an obligation as a government to reach out to those individuals of the First Nations community, and I think that bill starts that process in a very positive and enlightened way.

Some of the other key points that are raised here in this bill: First, it will make adoption more flexible by allowing more children to be adopted while still maintaining ties to the birth family and community; second, it will make it easier for relatives, including grandparents, to provide permanent homes for those children and youth who are in need; third, it will create more legal options beyond traditional adoption, so children and youth in care can be placed in a permanent home; and fourth, it will help resolve more cases outside the courtroom through mediation, a more collaborative, speedy and less costly approach.

I think that's a very important aspect of this bill: that we're going to go toward mediation. Often, when you get into the courtroom setting, it's very adversarial, indeed, and very expensive. Any time we have the opportunity to go to mediation, to bring parties together and have a more meaningful, more positive dialogue outside of the tense confines that we often find within the courtroom, I think it's a very positive process indeed.

The other key thing is that we're going to change the way children's aid societies do business in Ontario. We'll make them more stable and sustainable. When you look at children's aid societies, perpetually they've been running deficits in Ontario. I think this bill, through some of the provisions, will go a long way toward making them much more stable and sustainable. For those children's aid societies, that's a very important approach, not only for the hard-working staff who are employed by children's aid societies in Ontario, but certainly for the stability for the children whom they serve.

Interjection.

Mr. Leal: My good friend from Perth–Middlesex says focusing in on kids is very important because they're the great resource of the future and the leaders for tomorrow.

Another point with regards to children's aid societies: We're going to provide a new funding framework and put greater emphasis, as I said, on adoption and other family-based care options. We're proposing new options so societies can better match their level of response to each child's needs, and what can be better than that? As I previously chatted about, we're talking about bringing in mediation to get out of the situation of court-based settlements.

We're bringing in a series of new rules. It's an opportunity to overhaul how we deal with children in the province of Ontario. It's a hallmark of this government, which is very progressive in nature, looking at previous things that need to be overhauled. I think this bill is a good example of that.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): And we have our new ministry.

Mr. Leal: We have our new ministry, just two years ago, and I want to compliment the minister. She happened to be in Peterborough some months ago and took the opportunity to meet with a number of stakeholder groups in my riding. It was an opportunity to talk with those individuals who have such crucial roles in raising children and providing for children in our community.

We've been working very closely with the Adoption Council of Ontario to strengthen the adoption matching base here in Ontario, to help workers and children's aid societies to match available children with prospective parents. I think that's a very positive step forward.

There's nothing more important in our communities across Ontario than finding permanent homes for children. I think this bill goes a long way, and that's what's best. It's best for our children to have those permanent homes, and Bill 210 goes a long way to bring about permanency and sustainability for families. Instead of having children that fit the rules, we're going to have rules that fit the children. I think that's a very important philosophical underpinning of this bill, and something that we want to pursue.

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It appears that my colleagues in the opposition—it looks like there's going to be unanimity on this bill. It's one of those bills I think you can't have a lot of disagreement with. You may want to do a bit of fine-tuning,

a bit of tweaking, but I don't see any substantive arguments against the general thrust and the philosophical base of this bill. I assume it will be going to committee. We look forward to an opportunity to take it across the province and hear how people are going to endorse the many provisions of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Kormos: I want to remind folks once again that in approximately 28 minutes' time, Shelley Martel, the member for Nickel Belt, is going to rise and speak on behalf of New Democrats with respect to Bill 210. I know that folks know Shelley for her many years of experience here in the provincial Legislature. She's got 18 years and is still running strong. She's one of the most effective members of this Legislature that Queen's Park has ever witnessed. The people in Nickel Belt, who insist on returning her election after election, know that one is hard-pressed to find a harder-working MPP anywhere in the province.

She's also a mother, and that's an incredibly difficult job as well, but Shelley Martel, with some occasional assistance from her husband, when he's home, does an incredible job. She has two great kids, Sarah and Jonathan, who are no strangers to Queen's Park. I just don't know where Shelley finds the energy to work with two delightful but energetic kids and to perform incredibly demanding duties as an MPP as well.

I'm looking forward to Ms. Martel. She has been working on children's issues for a long time. She has served well her leadership in the campaign to ensure that children with autism are treated justly and fairly by this government. That the discrimination by the McGuinty Liberals against children with autism is taken on and challenged has been one of Ms. Martel's biggest struggles, and whether it was working with their parents or taking on this government, she's something to look forward to in the next 28 minutes.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): It's my pleasure to speak for approximately two minutes on Bill 210. As I mentioned yesterday when I spoke to this bill, the problem this bill attempts to address is the potential for adopting some 18,000 children who are in the care of foster parents, usually through children's aid. Of those, there are about 9,000 children who are in fact under permanent crown wardship of the province of Ontario. Of those 9,000 children, 75% have access terms so that their parents can visit with them under certain terms as laid down by a judge's order and, up to now, they have been totally ineligible for adoption. This is something this bill attempts to address, and since the children in question really have no right to speak for themselves, it is up to us lawgivers to protect the rights of these children. But I think we all stand under the same belief and intention of attempting to have these children end up in a safe and caring environment.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): In response to the two statements that were made, I just want to focus for a bit on the alternative dispute resolution mechanism, because it is true that the current Child and Family

Services Act does not address ADR as an option. There are no mechanisms to allow for disputes to be settled through that mechanism, so you end up in a court proceeding to resolve the matter. In the minister's own background paper that was produced as a briefing for my colleague, it says, "This can lead to costly and protracted litigation and may delay achieving a permanent plan for the child."

The first question I have is, why is it that the court system is so backlogged that this becomes a problem? We might take some of these cases, then, out of court system. I doubt that's going to resolve some of the really serious issues in the court system that we should be addressing.

My second concern is that the ADR mechanisms that are going to be employed, we assume as a result of this bill, don't become very litigious as well. It's very clear in the briefing material that the office of the child's lawyer may act as the child's legal representative. I'm not opposed to that. That's probably very necessary. The dilemma that I see occurring, however, is the potential for the alternative dispute resolution mechanism to become as litigious, expensive, complicated and potentially as confrontational as any court proceeding that may have occurred already to try and deal with matters under the Child and Family Services Act.

I say to the government, if you're going to move to ADR as a way to resolve some of these disputes, then you want to be awfully careful and awfully certain that you're not setting up a parallel process that could be essentially as expensive, because the CAS could have their lawyer there, the children's lawyer could be there, and you may have a biological parent who is trying to intervene in the proceedings and have a lawyer there as well. So you've got all these legal expenses that you would have had in court already, and it may be just as confrontational. So some really serious care and careful consideration is going to have to be employed to determine how that process is actually going to work, if it's going to work better than a court process.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I think, quite simply stated, this is a good bill. There's no question about it. This is about the children. This is about making sure that children aren't penalized because of their family situations.

Having raised five children of my own, I know one thing about kids: I may not have raised them all right, I may have had some bumps in the road, but I love my children and I made sure they had permanence, that they had a connection with their family, not just with their own brothers and sisters but with their extended families. With this bill, we allow grandparents and extended family to raise these children.

Every family has a heritage and a culture all its own. Earlier this week we debated the adoption disclosure bill, and we talked about how important it was for children to have their roots, to be connected, to have somewhere they can call home, to know where they belong. It should be the same here. These children have a right to know

and they have a right to be a part of their extended family. Sometimes things happen in individual families and it shouldn't reflect on the entire, extended, larger family group. Those children should be able to have that experience, to be part of it. Children need permanence. It's very important. They may not like the rules, they may wonder why they're being asked to do certain things, but they understand that it's because they are loved, and that comes very often from family.

I know myself, if I knew that I had a family member, not necessarily one of my own children but someone else, a family member who was taken out of the family situation because of something that had happened, I'd want to take care of that child. I'd want to have the right to do that, to be able to keep them within their larger family unit so they could grow up and enjoy and know who they really are.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Peterborough, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Leal: I want to thank the members from Nickel Belt, Niagara Centre, Cambridge and Lambton-Kent-Middlesex for providing comments on Bill 210. I think, when you listened very carefully to the comments, you could see some unanimity that's starting to form on this bill.

This bill, I believe, complements some of the other things that this government is doing; for example, the Best Start program. When you talk about permanency for a child in a situation and then you move that child into the Best Start program and then into elementary school, where we cap classes from JK to grade 3, it's about giving that child the best possible start, the best possible beginning in the province of Ontario, and that's exactly what we're doing here.

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As I said, this bill will go to committee. There will be some tweaking, some fine-tuning. But listen to the speakers tonight. There is a unanimity I can see forming—

Interjection: A growing consensus.

Mr. Leal: —a growing consensus. They see the philosophical thrust behind this bill. You can see us, as we should from time to time, as legislators, all coming together for the children in this province, and I am pleased. I'll listen to others this evening, but it's all for the kids. We're coming together in the best interests of kids in the province of Ontario.

Interjection.

Mr. Leal: Someone said that there is a rural part of my riding. I say to the member from Niagara Centre that about 40% of it is, and I have a very good relationship with that part of the riding.

Interjection.

Mr. Leal: There's some heckling here, Mr. Speaker, but I'll continue on.

I think this is a very good bill. The minister deserves a great deal of credit for bringing it forward. I look forward to its speedy passage.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I am very pleased to have this opportunity tonight, at about 10 after

8, to be speaking to second reading of Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts.

I am very pleased that the Minister of Children and Youth Services is showing her respect and regard for this place by being present throughout the debate, and she deserves credit and acknowledgment for that. I think it's appreciated by all members that she's showing interest in this debate by personally being here, and I would hope that all ministers of the crown would take note of her interest in her bill. This bill, of course, was introduced by her predecessor, the member for Hamilton Mountain, who served as Minister of Children and Youth Services for approximately the first two years of the current government. The bill was introduced in this House on June 6 before the summer recess, and it was designated for carry-over after the House was prorogued so that the government could continue to move this issue forward.

I had a chance to review some of the comments that were made by the minister of children's services of the day when she introduced this bill in this House, again, back in June. She talked about the need for legislation of this type. She referred to it as an historic step forward "on behalf of the thousands of children and youth in Ontario who are in the permanent care of a children's aid society."

She suggested that the current system of adoption and children's aid society rules is "too rigid." She said that "we need to help more children find a permanent, caring home by making adoption more flexible for individual children and friendlier"—and easier—"for parents." She talked about the legislation as being an effort to "modernize the rules around adoption" so that they would work more effectively for children and families, and she indicated that the proposed changes in Bill 210 would have the effect of removing what she called "the rigid restriction that a child must completely sever all ties to his or her birth family before being eligible for adoption."

She indicated to the House at that time that approximately "70% of children in permanent care" currently "can't be adopted because their birth family has a court-ordered right to contact them. When judges make an order that a child become a ward of the state, they may be hesitant to seal off all contact with the family, except in those cases where it's necessary for the child's safety." She said that the proposed changes in this legislation, Bill 210, "would mean that a child could keep those important ties to their family, community and culture and still be adopted or placed in a permanent home."

She also made reference to the fact that an adoption "will help a number of these children find a secure, stable family," but she said that adoption was not always right for every single child: "Right now, if a child can't be adopted, they often have no choice but foster or group care." Instead of making the child fit the rules, she indicated that the government was making an effort to change the rules to fit the child.

She talked about the fact that these proposed changes would give children's aid societies more flexibility to

meet the needs of each individual child. For some children, she indicated that “it would mean being placed with a member of their extended family, someone they already know and trust. It may be a grandparent...” In some cases, they would be “placed with another adult, possibly a member of their community,” or perhaps even a long-time foster parent.

She indicated, “The young person could have the legal and emotional certainty of a permanent home and family, at least until they turn 18,” under these proposed rules, and that “The proposed changes are part of our government’s plan to help more children and youth in care of children’s aid societies thrive in a safe, stable, supportive home.”

She also talked about the fact that in many cases today, parents who have tried to adopt a child from a children’s aid society have expressed to the government, I guess, that the process is “cumbersome” and “inconsistent.” So the government is making, apparently, an effort to standardize these adoption rules across the province so that they are the same no matter whether you live in Timmins or Toronto or perhaps in Fergus. Apparently, it would ensure that there would be the same process for private adoptions as someone going through a children’s aid society.

The minister also alluded to the fact that the government is making an effort to work with the Adoption Council of Ontario and children’s aid societies across the province to develop a province-wide Web site that would help children’s aid societies match children who are available for adoption with would-be parents, people who want to adopt a child, and that for those families that need it, there would be some post-adoption support so that families who adopt a child from a children’s aid society aren’t suddenly left on their own.

She also made reference to the fact that there are three significant changes to the way children’s aid societies do business that are inherent in this bill.

First of all, she’s talking about establishing a new funding framework that puts a greater emphasis on the specific results that the government wants to see for children, like adoption. I gather that means financial incentives to children’s aid societies so that more children are adopted and that that desired outcome is in fact realized.

She talked about the fact that children’s aid societies, if this bill is passed in its current form, would have more options available to them when they respond to new cases and about ensuring that the adoption process always starts with a rigorous safety assessment, and after that, the societies being able to match their level of response to the needs of the individual child.

She indicated, lastly, that the legislation proposes more extensive use of mediation instead of courts in child protection matters. She said she felt that mediation is, generally speaking, a less adversarial process than using the courts and, in that sense, in the interests of the child and the family.

All of these ideas that the minister expressed to the House on June 6 I think would enjoy some degree of

support from the members of the House, at least in terms of broad principles. They seem to be reasonable ideas that are being brought forward by the government to work to address a problem that I think the member for Cambridge has quite rightly identified, essentially the fact that currently in the province of Ontario there are between 18,000 and 19,000 kids in care—foster care, I guess, in most cases; that of these 18,000 to 19,000 children, approximately 9,000 are considered to be permanent crown wards of the province; and that 75% of this group of 9,000 kids have access orders of some sort in which natural parents have some access rights to visit or interact with their children but of course don’t have custody of their children over the medium term, as the kids are in foster care. Currently, these children are not eligible for adoption. This is, I guess, the fundamental issue that the government is hoping to address with this particular piece of legislation.

The Liberal government of Ontario today likes to talk about the fact that they are the first government to appoint a Minister of Children and Youth Services and that that’s something they have done to demonstrate their interest in our young people. Again going back to first principles, I think every member of this House would agree that protecting children must be a very high priority, an important priority, of any provincial government of any political stripe.

But I would remind the members of the government side, in some cases members who were perhaps first elected in 2003, that our colleague the former member from Mississauga South, Margaret Marland, who served in this House from 1985 to 2003 and served with a great deal of distinction, was actually, in my opinion, the first minister responsible for children who was appointed by any government. She served from October 1997, if I’m not mistaken, until the spring of 2001. So she served for almost four years as a minister responsible for children, and I think she did a magnificent job in that particular responsibility. I think it underlined and demonstrated the support that our government had for ensuring that children’s needs were going to be met. She became a very effective advocate for children. So I’ll just put that forward to remind the members on the government side that in fact it was an idea that the former government was obviously prepared to embrace, and that is something that I think they would probably want to at some point acknowledge during the course of this debate.

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It’s been encouraging to hear from the government members in particular, and I think the minister has indicated that she feels this bill should go to committee and that there will be considerable debate at committee, and public hearings as well, amongst knowledgeable people who are experts in this field. Any one of us who reads this bill through, as I think most of us will want to do—and even if you read the explanatory notes, which are long and complex—certainly wants to make sure we get this right. One of the former speakers tonight talked about giving this bill swift passage. I’m not sure that

would be something I would support. I think there's a need for considerable debate and discussion at probably the standing committee on social policy so we make sure that we get this right.

This is the kind of bill, in fact, that perhaps should have been referred to committee after first reading. This is one of those bills that comes forward and is embraced by all sides of the House, at least in principle, but at the same time is so important and so vital, and really isn't political in the sense of some of the issues that divide us, government and opposition. I think we all support the broad goals. In the past, we've had good success with these kind of bills in referring them to standing committees of this Legislature after first reading. So before the government has taken a hard and fast position on some of the issues, before the minister commits her personal credibility to the bill, the bill being referred to a committee after first reading allows for, I think, a more open-ended debate on the issues without the government having to perhaps face the embarrassment of having to make a significant change in the bill. Again, this is a bill that might have been better sent to committee after first reading. That obviously was not done, but now we have the opportunity to go to committee after second reading.

I would suggest and hope that there would be extensive hearings, not just in Toronto but across the province, because there are differences. Obviously, various areas of the province have different needs and different circumstances and different kinds of challenges, and if we just have a couple of afternoons of hearings here in Toronto while the House is sitting from 3:30 to 6 o'clock and we just allow perhaps the provincial associations to come in because there isn't time for others, I think that would be a mistake and we would be remiss in doing that.

I would hope that this bill can go through a process where there are extensive hearings. I would love to see the standing committee on social policy travel the province and come to the cities of Kitchener–Waterloo and Guelph, our area, because I think we have a great deal of expertise in our area which could be very helpful to the government in terms how we move forward with this bill.

Over the 15 years that I've been privileged to serve in this House, I've had a chance to work with Family and Children's Services of Guelph and Wellington County. I see the member for Guelph–Wellington nodding her head, and I think she would agree with me that they do an excellent job. Moe Brubacher, who is the executive director of Family and Children's Services of Guelph and Wellington County, is someone with a great deal of experience. He's been managing that agency for longer than I've been here in this House, if I'm not mistaken. He's come to see me over the years, whether I was sitting in opposition or government, usually on an annual basis, sometimes more often than that, to talk primarily about the challenges that the agency's facing related to government policy, but also about funding issues. I've always tried to be an advocate for that important group in our area, which does such good work. It's not just the

staff who work for the children's aid societies; in many cases it's the foster parents and volunteers who put a great deal of work into improving the lives of these children.

Since I've been privileged to serve part of Waterloo region in my riding of Waterloo–Wellington for the last six years, I've had the opportunity to interact with Waterloo Family and Children's Services and to work closely with the executive director of that particular agency, Peter Ringrose. I know my colleague the member for Cambridge has already talked about the excellent working relationship that we have with Peter Ringrose and his staff.

I think we have a great deal of expertise to offer on this issue and would hope that can be accessed.

The other point I would want to make, in conclusion, is that I know that the children's aid societies in the province have a deficit, collectively, of about \$70 million. This point has been brought up on a number occasions. I believe the children's aid societies are effectively managed in a financial sense. I also know there are extraordinary challenges being put on the caseworkers to ensure that they adhere to new provincial guidelines, and that has caused an enormous amount of stress on those agencies. I think the government, over the medium and long term, needs to deal with the financial challenge that our children's aid societies are facing. Obviously, we wouldn't want to allow this to continue, where children's aid societies have an overwhelming deficit of about \$70 million. We wouldn't want to turn a blind eye to that, because it would mean that over the long run, care for children who are in need of it would be diminished.

This is a funding issue that I would hope the government will address in the coming budget. We heard the government's fall economic statement yesterday. I have it in my office. I had a busy day today and I haven't had a chance, as I had wanted to, to go through the documents, but I don't think there was a commitment for expanded funding to children's aid societies, if I'm not mistaken. I'm sure if I am, one of the government members will correct me very quickly. That was an opportunity for the government to express support for children's aid societies in terms of their financial challenge—a \$70-million deficit. It was a chance, an opportunity that was missed. Of course, there is another opportunity and there will be another provincial budget in the spring, and I would anticipate and expect that all of us in the Legislature will have a chance to hear from our children's aid societies in the next little while, if there's an effort made to bring these issues to our attention. Hopefully, collectively, we can advocate on behalf of those children's aid societies that represent our communities so well, with a view toward ensuring that the Minister of Finance makes a commitment in the upcoming budget next spring to deal with this issue in a meaningful way such that care is not diminished for children in our communities.

Thank you very much for listening to me. I look forward to the continued debate on this particular issue. I think it's an important one. I hope the ideas that I've

expressed to the House this evening have been helpful. Again, I would reiterate the need for further discussion and debate on this issue because of the importance of it and the concern I have that we need to do all we can to protect children. We need to get this right. We need to ensure that the government has a plan to deal with these matters in the coming years so that our children are protected.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Martel: With respect to the comments that were made by the member for Waterloo–Wellington, I want to focus on his comments with respect to the need for the public hearings to be outside of this place when they actually do take place. I am reminded that another member in previous debates said he looked forward to speedy passage, but I can tell you, I don't think that's going to happen. We wouldn't want to see it happen that way and, frankly, I think the community out there, which has a very important interest in how this legislation unfolds, would not want that to happen without some opportunity for children's aid societies, for grandparent groups, for those who are involved in the system and for native organizations in particular to have some kind of say.

We say to the government that it's regrettable—because the bill was introduced on June 6—that some provision was not made at that time for the bill to go out, even after first reading. It is too bad that the bill didn't go out, even after first reading, for public hearings, during the course of the summer, because then those extensive consultations outside of here and around the province could have occurred at that time. I say to the government that didn't happen, but it does have to happen now. We are starting to hear from aboriginal organizations in particular who really want to make sure this works. There has always been a conflict as to how some of these issues are arrived at in terms of child protection, where kids end up, how they end up very far from their home in very inappropriate placements, and aboriginal communities in particular deserve to be involved in this process, particularly around issues of placement of children with extended families, how that will occur, and how access will continue to be provided where it is decided that extended family, for whatever reason, are not going to be appropriate adoptive parents. I encourage the government to indicate very early on that there will be hearings and that those will take place both in Toronto and outside of Toronto to ensure that people can have their say.

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Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I too wanted to make a few comments with respect to this bill and to say, first of all, that I think this kind of bill is long overdue. I think the comments that were made earlier, not only by the member who just spoke, in the last 20-minute segment, but also the members who spoke before, like the member from Peterborough and particularly the member from Hastings–Prince Edward, who has been involved with the children's aid society and with fostering children for over 25 years and can certainly relate from personal experi-

ence a number of the experiences that he had as a result of looking after children and adopting some children as well, and the tremendous, traumatic effects that it can have on children who are fostered with a number of different families over a long period of time.

It also gives me an opportunity just to very briefly say something about children's aid societies—I know that's what the member from Guelph–Wellington mentioned as well—and that is the hard work that's being done by children's aid society workers on a day-to-day basis. I think what people outside understand is that this is a mandated service. Quite often, the children's aid society has to go into situations in order to protect children. That's what they're mainly involved in. But quite frequently they do so without, necessarily, the consent of the parents, other guardians or indeed a lot of people who may be involved with the particular child. Whereas a lot of children's mental health services are sought out by the individuals or by their parents, the services of the children's aid society are mandated services, and that makes it even harder on the people who are trying to do this work on behalf of all of us to protect children on a day-to-day basis.

I applaud them for all of the hard work they've done over the years, and, undoubtedly, once this law comes into effect, they will continue to do so.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): I just want to congratulate my colleague from Waterloo–Wellington for doing a very conscientious job during his 20 minutes, trying to explain this bill and also indicating—and I also share his belief—that this needs to go to committee. I'm not sure what the bill is doing exactly. In fact, I commend anyone who can speak for 20 minutes on this bill.

As I understand it, there are 9,000 children in the permanent care of the children's aid society who, because they have court orders of access for their birth parents, are unable under current law to be adopted. Well, if you change that law, are you really going to increase the percentage of these children who can get adopted in a significant way? You're adopting a child, but then the birth parents—who may not be the best parents in the world or the child probably wouldn't be in care in the first place, by definition—are going to be able to pop in; the drunk mum or the drug-addicted father is going to be able to pop in anytime and have automatic access, and you go to all the bother and care and love of adopting these children?

I would love this to go to committee and have people who have experience in this field, from other jurisdictions perhaps, come forward and tell us how this is all going to work. It seems to me it would be better to tighten up on the access, permanently remove these children from the terrible lives they've had, and give them the best care and the best parents possible, without those parents having to look over their shoulders all the time for the addicted mother or the drunk father showing up at the doorstep and demanding—and having a law protecting—that access. Call me crazy, but—

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: OK.

Mr. Wilson: The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing over there laughs because he probably knows I am crazy from time to time. But the fact of the matter is, this bill is a real tongue-twister and I would agree that it needs to go to committee. Again, I commend my colleagues and anyone who can speak for 20 minutes on it.

Mr. Kormos: It is always a pleasure to hear the participation of Ted Arnott, the member for Waterloo–Wellington. I listened carefully to his comments on Bill 210.

I would caution government members to please suppress some of their sometimes—I was going to say “mindless”; I won’t—less-than-thoughtful enthusiasm for this type of legislation. There are some serious and legitimate caveats being raised.

The issue of committee hearings—look, at the end of the day, it’s going to be the government that determines how long and how wide and far this bill goes to committee, but restrict those at your own risk.

The two aspects of the bill that I want to speak to are the aspect of alternative dispute resolution—because I think there are some serious pitfalls in dealing with matters by way of dispute resolution when, in fact, if we’re really interested in the best interests of the child prevailing, decisions about that child’s future, about that child’s well-being, in my view should not be the result of necessarily a mediated process, but should be the result of court oversight. If there’s a shortage of courtrooms and judges, address that.

The other issue is the open adoption. Look, Tim Hudak and I are well aware of the origins of these proposals. Sheila Volchert, for whom I have the highest regard and about whom I am going to speak when my opportunity comes, was meeting with Brenda Elliott, the Conservative Minister of Community and Social Services, advocating on behalf of grandparents raising children, open adoptions, adoptions within the family structure, because the concern about a natural parent continuing to have access to a child who’s adopted by adoptive parents could well deter adoptions by non-family members, and that should be of interest to government members.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Waterloo–Wellington, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Arnott: Just to reply briefly, I want to thank the member for Nickel Belt for her contribution in response to my speech, and I know that she’ll make a very important speech next on behalf of the New Democrats. She has served as the critic for children and youth services, I know, for a number of years and has done an effective job in bringing these issues forward. Certainly the issue of services for autistic children is something that she has highlighted repeatedly in this House. It is indicative, unfortunately, of a broken Liberal promise to ensure that services for children with autism, the IBI therapies—intensive behavioural intervention—would be available to those children after the age of six, something that Dalton McGuinty promised to do in the election campaign but unfortunately, to date, so far has not done.

I want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs for his comments. I would hope, Mr. Speaker, that you would not have ruled him out of order if he had stood up and indicated that he was going to expand the funding for the communities of Mapleton and Centre Wellington in response to our tornado disaster. Had he done that, I certainly would have applauded him for responding in that way. I’m looking forward to continuing to work with him on that particular issue.

I want to thank the member for Simcoe–Grey, who spoke very briefly and complimented, I think, all members of the House who have participated in this debate so far, because it is a complex issue. Quite frankly, I found out I was going to be speaking to this bill this afternoon. I’ve had an opportunity to review some of the information, but I would have wished to have more time to consult with my constituents before I had the opportunity to speak to second reading on this issue. Again, that underlines to me the need for extensive hearings on this issue.

I want to thank the member for Niagara Centre, who has responded in an interesting way to the comments that have been made this evening. I think he’s going to be speaking to this bill later on, but perhaps not tonight. So we look forward to that too.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Martel: It’s a pleasure for me to participate in the debate tonight. I want to begin by saying that I found an opportunity to get some information from our own children’s aid society, which I think I have a very good relationship with, after a long period of time. I talked this afternoon very briefly to the assistant executive director, Norah Dougan, who also gave me some information from the director of finance and the adoption supervisor with respect to the bill. I want to raise some of the cautions, the flags, the concerns that come from our own children’s aid society with respect to the legislation that is before us.

The first has to do with the opportunity in the bill to place children with extended family or community. The change that the government is proposing is as follows: Right now, there is no legislative requirement for children’s aid societies to consider extended family or community members as a potential alternate placement for a child early in a case when a child cannot be returned to his or her family, and the hearing must be adjourned. In many cases, the child remains in the temporary care of CAS. The legislation, if passed, is going to broaden the definition of “place of safety” to allow CAS to place the child with his or her relative or a member of the community following apprehension, subject to an assessment that will show whether or not this is a safe environment. Secondly, the court will be required to consider if it’s in the child’s best interests to be placed in the care of a relative or a member of the child’s extended family or community before actually placing the child in the temporary care of CAS.

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The concern that our CAS wants to raise, and I want to raise it here, is that we’d better be awful sure of the

criteria that we develop about a safe place and the criteria that are going to be met for children to go into the care of another extended family member and not into the care of the CAS, because you don't want to get into the terrible situation that we saw expressed in the media here in the last couple of weeks. There is an inquest going on right now with horrible circumstances involving extended family. So yes, yes, yes, in many circumstances that is the most appropriate placement, and we hope the mechanisms would be in place for that to happen, but it is not always the most appropriate placement. So the criteria that are developed around an assessment, which would normally go on now before anyone becomes a foster parent anyway, but the further need to make sure that the criteria around placement are well-developed, are effective, and that we are not putting that child at further risk in terms of the end result of the placement.

One of the concerns that has been raised, because our children's aid society works quite extensively with a number of First Nations on Manitoulin Island, is that there really has to be serious consideration given to placement of First Nations children. Under the guise of customary care, far too many of our First Nations children off the island, and frankly out of other aboriginal communities, are placed in group homes far away from their aboriginal community, in placements that are entirely inappropriate from a social point of view, from an emotional point of view and from a cultural point of view, completely inappropriate placements, all under the guise of what we call customary care.

The societies themselves, with great consultation from First Nations communities, are going to have to be very clear about what are the definitions of "customary care" and how that is going to be implemented to ensure that there is accountability when that care arrangement goes into effect and, frankly, to ensure that there's no abuse in the process. Our children's aid society would say, and they would say it, I think, with the support of a number of First Nations, that there has been abuse in that process, that we've seen far too many First Nations children who are not only taken from their biological parent or parents in an aboriginal community, but are taken out of that community altogether and placed in a group home far from home, and that is the end of their relationship with their First Nation community. It may very well sever a lot of the attempts that they have as aboriginal children to adhere to their own traditions, to their own cultures and values. Those changes that we make really do require very significant work with aboriginal communities. A lot of the problem is that those issues have not been sorted out.

I know my own children's aid society has talked to me about this issue before. It's talked to me about this issue for a number of years, that there is no clarification, that there is no direction, that there is very little assistance from the ministry in dealing with these specific issues, this relationship between aboriginal First Nations communities and children's aid societies that are not aboriginal children's aid societies. We really need a heck of a

lot more clarification and work to be done to ensure that those arrangements are appropriate, proper, and culturally appropriate as well.

Secondly, with respect to support services: If I read the bill, it makes it clear that the CAS, if the legislation is passed, is going to be able to provide financial assistance where a crown ward order is terminated and that child is placed in a person's custody, if the child meets the eligibility criteria. Right now, extended care and maintenance under the guise of financial assistance is not available to youth when the crown wardship order is terminated prior to reaching age 18. I take from that that the government is going to continue to provide financial assistance around care and maintenance—a clothing allowance, support around accommodation, food etc.—which would be particularly important. We get instances of a number of grandparents who want to adopt, but they're on a fixed income. They come to our office and say, "We just can't afford to do this. We think this is the best placement, but this child is going to have ongoing financial needs that we are not going to be able to meet." There is really no place for them to go at this point in time to get the kind of financial assistance that would allow them to retain their grandson or granddaughter.

It is a serious shame in this province that we have grandparents who have had to see their grandchildren go back into the care of the CAS because they couldn't afford to care for them themselves and there was no mechanism to pay for that care. If they were a foster parent, they would get that money, but because they are not—they are the grandparent and they perhaps wanted to adopt—there was no way for them to get the financial assistance to do so.

I'm assuming what it means is that in those scenarios, grandparents actually adopting, there is going to be financial assistance. What I don't think it means, and this is what the society raised with me today, is financial support from any of those services that any number of children require as a result of the very difficult childhood they might have had before they end up in a foster home and before, under this legislation, they end up in an adoptive home. I'm referring to children's mental health services, developmental health services, respite services, limited residential services etc. Frankly, the ability of this approach of more open adoption to actually work hinges very clearly on the ability of many of these adoptive parents to still be able to access these types of services for their newly adopted children.

As I understand it, if you're in foster care now, many of those services are both arranged for by the children's aid society and paid for by the children's aid society out of their global budget, out of their children's budget. If and when you have an adoption occur and that money doesn't flow for that service—(a) if there's no coordination of that service through the CAS any more, but (b) far more importantly, if there is no financial assistance from somebody to pay for those important services—that is really going to come into play when parents are making a decision about adoption. Some of

these services are really expensive. Many of these children are going to be in for quite a number of years needing to access these services because of things that happened to them in their biological home before they were taken into care. I don't see anything in this legislation, and I didn't hear the minister say anything, about what the government's commitment is, what the government is in for in terms of ensuring that the government is going to continue to pay for these necessary services, be they children's mental health, respite services, short-term residential placements etc.

It's one thing, and I agree it's important, to be providing maintenance—i.e., support around clothing allowance, food, shelter etc.—but it's a whole other matter when the child you want to adopt is undergoing and will undergo for some long time treatment through a broad range of services in the community. Someone's got to pay for that, and if adoptive parents are the ones who are going to be left in that position, I think you're going to see a rather significant decline in people's optimism or desire or willingness, I guess is the key word, to actually get into this, if they feel they're not going to be able to make the financial commitment that's going to be required.

Over and above that is the issue about whether or not some of those services are actually in the community to access right now. We've seen this through questions that we raised in the spring, where many parents of special-needs children were forced to give up the care of their children to the CAS in order to access the appropriate care that they needed; in most cases, residential care. CAS essentially was at the top of the list and was in a position to access these services for children who were coming into their care. That's fine and dandy, but if children are going out of CAS care because they are no longer crown wards, where are those children who need and perhaps were receiving services going to rank in those waiting lists?

That's a difficult issue that the government has got to address. In far too many communities the services are not in place. They are not in place despite everything the government had to say about how they were going to return all of these special-needs children back to their parents, and how all of these temporary care arrangements that parents were forced into in order to get residential care were going to be extinguished, because these kids were going to get care. But we know through the estimates process, because there were parents who came to the estimates process of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, that many of those arrangements have not been put in place. Many of those kids are still sitting in residential care because there aren't the services in the community.

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So if you've got these children where there are parents who want to adopt them, where are they going to rank in terms of actually getting some of those services? There's a huge problem now, and in many communities this issue is going to have to be sorted out or, again, there will be

parents who might want to adopt who will say, "(a) We've got no guarantee that we can pay for the service, and (b) we've got no guarantee we're going to get the service in the first place. We'd be better to continue as foster parents, because that way we might be at the top of the list for a service and we might have the payment for the services to continue to be made by the ministry."

The government has to grapple with those two very important issues about post-adoption support services, or their hope around seeing large numbers of children being adopted may very well vanish in the face of that reality that adoptive parents are going to face.

Let me deal with the proposal to use mediation. Our own children's aid society made the point, and it's a point that I have to make, that because of the court backlog right now the proceeding to ensure permanency for a child is a very difficult one. So they said the "alternative dispute resolution" mechanism "will allow the parties to resolve issues outside of the courts. As the court process is presently very slow the intent would be that alternative dispute resolution will allow the process of ensuring permanency for a child to occur more quickly. This will be a welcome change." But they also said that any mechanism has to be adequately funded and it has to be separate from a CAS budget to ensure both objectivity and neutrality in terms of resolutions that will be dealt with.

My colleague from Niagara has raised this concern, and so have I, that if the issue is a backlog in court, maybe we had better be dealing with that, because that issue about a backlog in court is affecting not only CAS but any number of other proceedings going on in court.

Secondly, my concern is that the alternative dispute resolution mechanism itself could become just as litigious, just as confrontational and perhaps just as costly and perhaps just as time-consuming as any court process. Rightly so, the minister has pointed out in her background briefing notes that the children's lawyer could be and should be there to represent a child's interests. The CAS will probably have a lawyer there dealing with their piece of the puzzle. You may have a biological parent who is there to contest whatever arrangement might be put into place, and they might have a lawyer as well. So at the end of the day, I'm not sure where the savings are and I'm not sure how we're going to ensure that this process doesn't become just as extensive, just as lengthy and perhaps just as confrontational as any process that you might have in court.

I also say with respect to that, if there are serious issues around getting that child out of care, then that should be dealt with rapidly and speedily in court. There is no excuse for having these kinds of delays around really significant, important issues about care of children and their safety and security.

So we'll wait and see what the government comes up with with respect to alternative dispute resolution, but I raise those concerns and I certainly say that that system is going to have to be appropriately and adequately funded too, so I'm not sure where the savings are going to be. It

really has to be paid for outside of a CAS budget, because they're under serious financial strain now and, secondly, you really do want to ensure, if the process is going to be an alternative dispute mechanism and not court-ordered, that there is some objectivity and neutrality to it.

Let me deal with the complaints process of children in care, because the government has put forward a proposal that I gather is going to be amended. So I want to raise a concern about this. The government has suggested in its background papers that right now complaints are filed with the local CAS and complaint resolution is dealt with through the CAS system, and that the government was going to eliminate the director's review of client complaints and clarify issues around criteria to set out the complaints procedure. Then the minister said that perhaps the government would bring forward amendments, as I understand it, that would have put the complaints process right outside the CAS. So it would be an independent third party that you would take your complaint to in order to have that adjudicated.

Let me raise this point from the perspective of our own CAS. Our own CAS was happy to see that the legislation, as currently drafted, was going to say that there could not be a director's review when an adoption had already started and was underway. In our community—I won't go through the details of the case at hand—frankly, the government put the CAS in a very difficult position with a director's review. An adoption process was underway. There was a complaint raised about other parties who wanted to do the adoption, and even though the adoption process was underway, the ministry authorized a director's review of that particular circumstance, so it of course set back the adoption process. It was very difficult for the parents who had undertaken the adoptive proceedings, whom the CAS was supporting. It was difficult for the children who were involved, because they thought they saw some permanency coming. Then there was a director's review that landed on the lap of everybody. There was much uncertainty and instability around whether the director would decide that somebody else should actually be involved in this adoption.

Our CAS was happy with the proposal that the minister brought forward to say that there will no longer be a director's review permitted when an adoption process is underway. Now the minister says we're going to have an outside complaint process—fine and dandy. I still want to know at what point there will be no review. If an adoption is underway, there has to be some clarity. Whether it's within the CAS or an independent agency looking after the complaint, there has to be some process whereby, once the adoption process has started, you can't turn that clock back, you can't stop that proceeding, you can't change that. Much work has gone into ensuring that the adoptive parents are appropriate, and you just can't arbitrarily stop that process in midstream.

So whatever complaint process the ministry comes forward with, I would encourage the ministry to come forward with some real clarity around at what point you

cannot make a complaint and it will not be investigated. I suggest that it is the point where an adoption process is already underway; a complaint should not be reviewed under that circumstance.

In the short time that's remaining, let me just raise two other points; one is financial resources. I raised this with the minister yesterday, and I want to raise it again. Under the Conservatives, there was a major change in terms of how the CAS operated. Many would argue that so much of workers' time is now spent dealing with apprehension matters and not supporting children who can be supported in the community, and certainly not on adoption.

My own executive director has told me that they virtually have no resources, no staff dealing with adoption at all in our agency, because the bulk of their staff has been involved in these protection issues and taking kids out of homes. If this process is going to work, then I need to know where the financial resources are coming from to ensure that the staff will be in place to actually deal with the adoption side of children's aid societies, because it has been under neglect in too many of the agencies so far.

The financial director of our own children's aid society tells me it has a \$1-million deficit right now, on a budget of \$28 million. If they don't get some financial resources, it's going to be very hard for them to re-allocate human resources internally to actually deal with these adoption matters. They also make it very clear that the new funding model that the government has doesn't resolve the problem at all. The new funding model makes adjustments for inflation by 3%, but the salary settlement for the CAS in these past two years has totalled 6%, so we're essentially being flatlined.

The second problem is that the new funding model doesn't give any recognition to, in big CASs where people to have travel, that it costs just that much more to run those agencies. Again, that is not covered.

So we've got a CAS that's facing a \$1-million deficit. If the government wants this proposal to work, where is the money going to come from to allow the staff resources to be in place to actually do the work on adoption, work that has not been done in our agency for a long, long time now, as the executive director has pointed out to me?

I will stop on that point and welcome comments and questions.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): It's certainly my pleasure to rise and support Bill 210. I do want to say right at the very beginning that I had the privilege of sitting on our children's aid for a number of years. One of the things that we struggled with as a children's aid was finding the proper care at the right time. I know that moving the system forward in a manner that is fitting the needs of the child—not the child fitting into the rules applied, but allowing the child to change the rules that will best meet the needs of the child—is absolutely the right direction to go.

I just look for some clarification. There were some concerns raised by the member from Nickel Belt. Our

government recognizes that for a child truly in need of protection, whether or not the child is with a grandparent or whatever that support may be, the supports must be in place, and they may be required. This may be either through financial support or access to services. We are committed to providing the supports necessary to make those permanent options available.

I just have a bit of time left, and I want to say thank you to all the foster parents who have given so much of their time to providing the care that is needed by so many children from our children's aid services. When they give of their homes, their families and their time, it's a huge commitment. Every year, I attend the volunteer awards for our children's aid services. A lot of the families have been providing foster care for 28 years, 32 years, 35 years. It's remarkable. Thank you.

2100

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I'd just like to comment in the few moments that I have on some of the key points that were raised by the member from Nickel Belt. I think all of us understand the importance of legislation that deals with this issue, that deals with children in very vulnerable situations. We recognize the fact that the minister has been very clear that this particular piece of legislation is designed to encourage adoption. But I think there are a number of potential problems in how that might work out. The member has referred to the complexities of the openness agreements, the kinds of problems that might arise and the kinds of impediments that those problems might bring in terms of encouraging people to adopt. I think, looking at that, we need to look very, very carefully at the kind of information that's provided through the public hearing process, because, frankly, this is too important an issue to be left without the benefit of expertise.

The question of alternative dispute resolution was one I raised yesterday as well as the member for Nickel Belt. Is it really going to be cost efficient? Is it really going to be something that isn't viewed as a precursor to the court system? I think there are a number of issues. The question of saving money: Obviously, the first issue is, are we doing the best for vulnerable children? I think that has to be the paramount concern. Then, from there, look at some of these other issues.

Mr. Kormos: I'm looking forward to my opportunity to speak to the bill. I suspect it won't be until tomorrow afternoon now that I'll be able to do that. I'm going to talk about Sheila Volchert and her lobbying, her advocacy with the Ministry of Community and Social Services back in the Conservative government days of Brenda Elliott. There's no two ways about it: A whole lot of this bill addresses those very concerns and issues that Sheila Volchert, speaking on behalf of grandparents raising their grandchildren, raised on their behalf with the ministry at that time. But that's why we'd better put this in context.

I'm incredibly concerned that people are misinterpreting, for instance, the rationale for open adoption. If you listen to grandparents raising grandchildren, you'll

hear more than a few of them say that the reason they want open adoption is to be able to persuade the mother, usually, of those grandchildren to acquiesce to the adoption without the fear that by acquiescing, she will never see those children again. One of the barriers that so many of these grandparents face in pursuing adoption is a natural parent—a daughter, the mother of those grandchildren—who won't consent to the adoption, who'll constantly interfere with the grandparents' custody and care and control of the children, causing havoc and constant disruption. So this isn't some sort of fuzzy, feel-good thing of saying, "Let's all be one big, happy family, and have aunts and uncles and cousins and natural parents and adoptive parents all sitting down to Christmas dinner together." It's being promoted on the part of grandparents raising grandchildren, for very pragmatic reasons.

The ADR proposal—and I'm an advocate of ADR; I understand ADR—is an incredibly frightening proposal in the context of legislation and a regime wherein the best interests of the child should prevail. I have no interest in seeing those compromised in the course of negotiations.

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): Despite the topic of the bill under discussion tonight, for the first time since my baby has been born, I've decided not to make mention of him in my speech and move right ahead to the legislation that's been put forward.

Mr. Qadri: What's his name?

Mr. Milloy: His name, if I was to raise it, is John Patrick.

When we come to pieces of legislation like this, I'm reminded of when I was first elected as an MPP and I was going off to an education meeting where we were going to be discussing a whole range of issues—administrative issues, governance issues and budget issues—and I consulted a more veteran politician. I said, "How do I make it through all these weeds at this sort of meeting? How do I deal with all this?" The advice I received from this woman was very wise. She said to me, "Think about the children. Think about the students. Think what is best for young people." When I look at this bill, I see a bill that does that. I see a bill that takes a look at the adoption system and takes a look at children's aid societies and the supports that are available, and it tries to pull it out of the weeds and say what's best for the child.

When you look at this bill, it contains two main thrusts: one, of course, dealing with adoption, which a number of the speakers have spoken about tonight, and the other, of course, with children's aid societies. It gives them the sort of tools and the flexibilities that they need to be more effective.

As we enter into November, we're coming up on the Christmas season, and I'd be remiss if I didn't talk for a second or two about my own children's aid society in my community. I see the member here from Waterloo-Wellington, who helped share that the Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region has their annual fundraising drive every Christmas. As well as being a

successful fundraising drive, what I see during that is the amount of community outpouring and support for that organization, because people recognize what an outstanding job they do and they also recognize the types of support they need. This bill will provide them with that support. This bill will provide for children in need. It's a child-focused bill, and I'm pleased to support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Nickel Belt, you have two minutes to reply.

Ms. Martel: I'd like to thank all the members who participated, and just reiterate a few things that I said. I go back to my CAS that I have a good working relationship with, and I trust their judgment on many of these issues, and I wanted to raise their concerns.

I heard one of the members say, "Yes, of course, the financial supports are going to be there for the services that these children need." I hope that's true, but I can tell you that my own children's aid society raised that as the number one issue with me today. They're concerned that in fact financial resources will not be there to pay for the community supports that are going to continue to be necessary for children who might be in care now who when, and if, adopted are still going to need access to children's mental health services, residential care, respite care for those parents from time to time and the whole gamut. I would prefer to see the minister stand up very clearly in her place and send a message to the children's aid societies across the province and say, "Yes, absolutely, those financial supports are still going to be there. The government will pay for those. There will be no interruption in service and you don't have to worry that as an adoptive parent you're going to have to pay out of your own pocket to access these very important services. They're going to be there when you need them, and the government is going to cover the costs for that."

Secondly, there's going to have to be a shift in human resources within children's aid societies to deal with this. I go back to my concern about the funding model and is there enough money in the current funding in order to allow that to happen. My own CAS says, "The new funding model does not provide enough funding because it uses 2003-04 expenditures as the basis for funding and adjusts for inflation by 3%. This 3% covers two years (2004-05 and 2005-06). Salary settlements for the CAS of these two years have totalled 6%." So essentially, they've been flatlined. Our CAS has a \$1-million deficit right now. Where are the resources going to come from that allow them to shift from child protection, which they've been doing under the previous government's mandate, to have a bit more of a focus on actual adoption?

Our CAS is not alone. I'm sure any number of others are going to be in the same boat where their resources have been so tied up in protection that they're going to need additional resources to now deal with adoption.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

2110

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I'm pleased to rise in the House today to speak about Bill 210, the Child and Family Services Statute Law Amendment Act. I will be

sharing my time with the honourable member from Brant.

According to the York Region Children's Aid Society, children come first and children need solutions that are dependable, predictable and permanent. We have a responsibility as the elected government of Ontario to put forth legislation that will provide these solutions. Bill 210 will do exactly that.

This government has shown its devotion to the children of Ontario with countless pieces of legislation, from ensuring that children are properly nourished, to reducing classroom sizes so they can get the attention they need from their teachers, to proposing legislation which will no longer force children to exclude their birth parents from their lives in order to be considered for adoption. We are strongly focused on children. Children need to be protected. They should feel safe at home.

The legislation is focused on children or youth who are crown wards and in the care of children's aid societies. There are approximately 9,000 children in the permanent care of Ontario children's aid societies. In York region alone, there are more than 200 youngsters who are crown wards, and only 15 were adopted last year. These children live in either foster homes or group homes and move on average every 22 months. The goals of this legislation are clear and commendable. By truly putting the needs of these children first, they will have the opportunity to enjoy a fulfilling and productive childhood in a permanently nurturing and stable environment. This legislation is focused on making adoption more flexible for children and less difficult for the prospective adoptive parents. We can do something to ease the difficult transition for those children to a loving, supportive and stable environment.

Furthermore, this legislation will make children's aid societies more accountable, sustainable and stable. The proposed new options include mediation and a more individual approach to each child's specific needs rather than going through the more costly and lengthy court system. By changing the way children's aid societies do business, we can ensure that they are there for children who need them for years to come.

Over the last 10 years, there has been a 185% increase in the number of investigations into child protection cases. Over the last five years, there has been a 46% increase in the number of children in the protection of a children's aid society. These increasing numbers can be partially explained by better reporting by the public and individuals who work directly with children. In fact, all citizens have a moral obligation and a legal responsibility to report any suspected cases of child abuse. Since 2000, the legislation has been clarified to include neglect and emotional harm as a basis for child protection intervention. For eight long years, the previous government slashed social services and support programs that families depend on. Without those supports, more families reached a point where child protection intervention was required.

We have increased the budget for children's aid societies substantially over the last two years. This year,

our government increased funding to children's aid societies by over \$95 million, representing almost a 10% budget increase. But because this growth is not sustainable, we need to help children's aid societies operate more effectively.

We are taking three important steps to change the way they operate. First, this year the ministry began providing funding under a new model that puts a greater emphasis on the specific results we want to see for children, like more adoptions. Second, societies will have more options available to them when they respond to new cases. Societies will be better able to match their level of response to the needs of the children. Third and finally, legislative changes, if passed, should result in more extensive use of mediation to resolve child protection matters. This is not only more effective for children and families, it is more efficient for our family courts.

Our focus is on these children now and in the future. Children thrive in consistent, nurturing environments, and this legislation increases the chances of these children growing up in these kinds of environments. Our proposed legislation would make it easier for children in need of protection to find a permanent, loving home. When in a loving and stable home, children do better in school and form strong relationships. Expanding family-based care options means more children have the opportunity for a happy childhood and long-term success. We owe it to the children of Ontario to provide these solutions as they are available.

Currently, these children are required to sever all ties with their biological parents before even being considered for adoption. Similarly, the courts have been hesitant to consider adoption in many cases because it would cut off ties the child has with his or her birth family and community. Today, when a child is first removed from the care of his or her parents because of protection concerns, they are usually placed in an emergency foster home or group home. Under the current legislation, placing the child with an extended family member is not possible, because under the legislation a family member is not deemed a "place of safety." The new legislation will make it easier for relatives, including grandparents, to provide permanent homes for those children and youth who need one.

In cases where there is no kin to care for the child, adoption is their only chance for a stable environment. There are many cases where children love their birth parents but realize that their parents are unable to adequately provide for them. It is not right that a child should have to give up on their own parents for reasons that may not be anyone's fault. For instance, yesterday my colleague Minister Chambers provided a hypothetical example of a boy whose mother was mentally ill. That is just one example of a parent who is capable of loving but not providing. I am sure I don't have to tell you that forcing a child to sever all ties with a parent is not something that we should encourage unless the child is endangered by that parent.

The current system is simply too rigid. We need to have a system that meets the needs of the child, where

the rules fit the child instead of the child fitting the rules. A flexible and conscientious system could enable a child to be adopted by a loving family while still maintaining contact with their biological parents and their community. This clearly puts the needs of the child ahead of those of the biological parent and the adoptive parent. The proposed legislation truly looks out for the best interests of the child.

We also want to make it easier for the caring families across Ontario who desperately want to adopt. We know that many families would like to adopt a child locally but have found it is too difficult. Many prospective parents have to complete an application and home study for each individual children's aid society they approach. Currently, there are two ways that people can apply to adopt in Ontario. People can approach their local children's aid society or they can apply through the private and international adoption system. Under our proposed reform, we will streamline the process so there is one application and one home study for both CAS adoptions and private adoptions.

We feel that these important changes, as part of the overall legislation, will go a long way in providing children and families with the safety and stability they need and deserve.

In the words of Martin McNamara, executive director of York Region Children's Aid Society, this bill will help take child protection and safety to the next level. That's what we are trying to do, and therefore I believe that Bill 210 must be supported.

Mr. Levac: I deeply appreciate the opportunity to talk on this particular topic. I would suggest that there is so little time and so much to say that I would be tempted to ask for unanimous consent to go to midnight, but I'm not going to do that to these fine people.

But I want to suggest something. There hasn't been a single person in this House, from when I was first elected to now, who has not spoken with passion about protecting our children, and I want the people to know that that is so today. I want to compliment each and every one of the members who has spoken to this moment, and I would not want it to be misinterpreted that I am casting aspersions on anyone. I am complimenting every single member, because we need to send the message out, no matter what political party is sitting in this place, that we value our children to the degree that we are discussing this very serious issue. I want to thank each and every one of you for doing that.

2120

I would also suggest that it has been a very enlightening discussion. We've been hearing about some CASs that have had difficulty in looking at the new way of advancing themselves, and I want to say to you that I take pride in mentioning the Brantford and Brant area CAS. They have already started to do that restructuring. They have been moving forward with understanding that the child placement is an extremely important priority, so I want to compliment them, the city membership, the county membership, the volunteers on the CAS board and the staff, for seeing ahead of time that it needs to

restructure and that it fits itself into the new funding that's approaching. So I want to compliment them for that.

I want to suggest to you that we have established protocols in our school boards, we've established protocols in my office and we've established protocols at city hall for the protection of our children. I recommend that, if those protocols are not in place in anyone else's office, we consider doing that to ensure that our children and our parents who want and love those children are taken care of.

As a school principal and an educator for 25 years, I will tell you that I've been exposed many times to the harrowing experience of having children apprehended and asking staff to make that phone call, and supporting them and understanding that our education system is first and foremost designed to protect the safety and the welfare of our children. I would ask people to understand that it is the responsibility of any individual—not just the teacher, not just a teacher's aide, a secretary or a caretaker but the person next door or anyone else who is aware of child abuse in any shape or form—it is their responsibility, it is their duty, to call the CAS. It's their responsibility. It's not one group's responsibility to do this. I would say positively that many individuals and organizations have taken that step to ensure that our children are protected.

This piece of legislation is one more evolution. It's not the answer to all of our ills. It's one more evolution. I would dare say that there isn't a party in this House that hasn't made an attempt to make those improvements as well. Again, I come back to my passionate plea that we stay focused on that purpose, that when we do offer those solutions and those constructive criticisms, they are offered in that manner, and that we receive them, as this government, in the way in which they were intended. The most important thing we could be doing in this Legislature at this time is to create legislation to protect our children. Unfortunately, at times it's from their own parents, their own relatives, from schools, from friends and from neighbours. Unfortunately, that happens. In this day and age, in this society, let me suggest to you that it has happened many times before, but now we're bringing it out of the darkness and making it a cultural change.

For a moment, I want to talk about cultural change. In my education, I was taught about different cultures. I took sociology and psychology. What we learned was that there are different ways in which some cultures approach their children. During my teaching years, I came across a case at the CAS that was fascinating. What happened in that case? There was a European culture that had a tradition of curing stomach aches. Interesting, you say. What does that have to do with children? In this particular culture, they were able to pull together an herbal concoction, with various weeds and whatever, and they would rub it on a child's stomach to cure a stomach ache, and it worked. What was the by-product of that? Unfortunately, it created bruises.

One of the teachers did their job: The child was taking phys. ed, had exposed their stomach, and the teacher saw

massive bruising on the stomach and reported it to the CAS immediately, as they should have done because they suspected the child was being beaten. The CAS immediately did an investigation. If it hadn't have been for the sensitivity of the CAS intake worker who was doing the investigation and their understanding of what the cultural norm was, that child could have been apprehended and taken away from the family because they were acting in the best interests of the child. It was a little fortunate that they had somebody at the CAS who could speak the language, because we had a parent who didn't have a command of the English language and couldn't explain what they were doing. Until it was resolved, the child was held. Thankfully, it was resolved.

I tell that story for us to recognize and appreciate the extreme nuances that take place in cases of apprehension and protection. When we get to that point, we have to be darned sure of what we're doing.

What are we doing in Bill 210? What we're trying to accomplish in Bill 210 is to make that transition as painless and as little damaging psychologically as possible to those children, and to introduce—which has been done now and wasn't as commonplace as before—the extended family into the potential of bringing a loving home to that child.

A couple of members on the other side were referring to grandparents, and I'm so glad that they are making that reference, because I too have been receiving phone calls from grandparents looking for grandparents' rights. This is one piece of that puzzle that, I believe, if passed and if this bill becomes law, will address.

There have been some concerns brought up about the ADR, the alternative dispute resolution. There have been some concerns and expressions that it may create over-litigious situations and timely and costly functions. But let me try to reassure you about some of those situations, which have been researched. In these, you would include mediation instead of court. You would include family conferencing—trained by professionals, by the way. You would include another one that I am partial to because I am exposed to this in my riding, and that would be native talking circles.

It has been shown in evaluation and research that these three options consistently outperform the timely resolution of settlement rates, and have lower costs than the court proceedings. So there is evidence that shows, and I hope would dispel some of the concerns that are being expressed about creating a new system—some. I would acknowledge and accept that there are times in which all of those processes, no matter which ones you use, are going to cause some heartache and time constraints and costly litigation; they are there.

I think we need to do even more work, which is another reason why I appreciate the fact that we are going to be sending this to committee for those experts who have some solutions for us, for the tweaking that needs to be done with some of the sections of the bill.

One of the things that I've focused on for over 24 and a half years as an educator is the children in terms of the flow, the spectrum that the children experience through-

out this whole process. I would respectfully suggest that because we are looking at this bill in the way that we are—focusing on the child and what it means for adoption, to find that stable portion for their life for that time—if we are able to find that resolution in this bill, I can tell you from my experience as a teacher, as a principal and as somebody who reads the educational research, that you will see an improvement in school performance, social performance and the ability to get along with others, the types of homes we want to create and assist and help to create in this bill. Along with the other solutions that have been offered by previous governments, we continue to evolve to where we will be able to provide our children with that stability to help them be better citizens and, more importantly, better

persons. Why can I say that? It's easy to say, because all of the research to this point has indicated clearly that with a loving, stable and continuously supportive parent—I would use “parent” not to define it as simply a birth parent, but the person who is doing the raising—we end up with a better opportunity for that child to perform in our society.

I know we're at the end of the time, and I would offer up this compliment one more time: We are doing a good thing for our children.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, members, for the quality of debate tonight. However, it is 9:30 of the clock and this House is adjourned until 10 a.m. of the clock, November 3.

The House adjourned at 2130.

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Kuldip Kular, Norm Miller, Richard Patten,
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