

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 55B

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N° 55B

1st Session
43rd Parliament
Wednesday
22 March 2023

1^{re} session
43^e législature
Mercredi
22 mars 2023

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

Hansard on the Internet

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

<https://www.ola.org/>

Index inquiries

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

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

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

Renseignements sur l'index

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

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



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

ISSN 1180-2987

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 22 March 2023 / Mercredi 22 mars 2023

**Working for Workers Act, 2023, Bill 79,
Mr. McNaughton / Loi de 2023 visant à oeuvrer
pour les travailleurs, projet de loi 79,
M. McNaughton**

Mme France Gélinas.....	3007
Mr. John Yakabuski.....	3009
Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	3009
M. Anthony Leardi	3010
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	3010
Mrs. Robin Martin	3010
Ms. Andrea Khanjin	3010
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.....	3012

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

Social assistance

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong.....	3012
Mr. Logan Kanapathi.....	3014
Ms. Bhutla Karpoche.....	3016
Mr. John Fraser.....	3016
MPP Lise Vaugeois	3017
Mr. Mike Schreiner.....	3018
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong.....	3018
Vote deferred	3018

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 22 March 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 22 mars 2023

Report continued from volume A.

1719

WORKING FOR WORKERS ACT, 2023
LOI DE 2023 VISANT À OEUVRER
POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS

Continuation of debate on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 79, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 79, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'emploi, le travail et d'autres questions.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to say a few words on the record regarding Bill 79, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters, called Working for Workers Act. I will start by drawing a little bit of interest to the translation of the title, which says “oeuvrer pour les travailleurs.” For some of you who speak French, you will realize that this bill is for men only. You don't talk about “travailleuses” in the bill at all. You talk about men. I would say not only is it in the translation that you talk about men, it is also in the content of the bill.

I was happy to hear the minister talk about needing washrooms for women on work sites. I come from a family of three generations of mine workers. My daughter is an industrial electrician; so was my husband, her dad, and so was my father-in-law. And I can tell you that working in industrial settings as a woman is still very difficult. You are a minority no matter where you find yourself. My daughter is often one female electrician to 25 guys, and finding a washroom, yes, can be difficult.

I will open a positive door, though. In Sudbury, we have a store called Covergalls. So think about “overalls,” but make that Covergalls, C-O-V-E-R-G-A-L-L-S. This is made in Sudbury; it was founded by Alicia Woods in 2013. Basically, she worked in the trades. She actually went on Dragons' Den in 2014; she did get some partnerships. She used to work in mining and was inspired to start her own company because there was no work clothing for women. She wants to encourage women to work in mining and forestry and the trades. She focuses on health and safety, diversity and inclusion, and education and advocacy, and she makes work clothes for women. Whether you're talking about overalls, tops, jackets, pants, bibs, gloves, maternity workwear and more, you can find all of those in Sudbury at Covergalls, and they fit women. They

are made by women for women in Sudbury, and I encourage everybody to go on their website and check it out. It would have been good for the minister to acknowledge that this type of work clothing exists in Ontario, but here, everybody knows now. Please feel free to go shopping. You will be happy with what you see.

Coming back to women: We all know of the scarcity of workers in our health care system. Two weeks ago, the Financial Accountability Officer told us that the plan that is in place won't meet the needs; we will be 600 beds short in our hospitals and we will be 36,000 nurses and PSWs short in this province.

So, what do you do when you put a bill forward that talks about working for workers? You look at where the greatest needs are. There are huge needs in health care. How do you work—the PSWs, the nurses, everybody in health care has been telling you what needs to happen. You need to make PSW a career. You need to make sure that they get permanent full-time jobs. You want to make sure that they are paid a living wage. You want to make sure that they have benefits, 10 sick days, a pension plan and a workload that a human being can handle. Is any of this in the bill? No, Speaker. There's nothing for PSWs in that bill, although the government is in a position to change all of this.

We have, quite to the contrary, an exodus of health care workers. AdvantAge Ontario was at Queen's Park recently. I'm sure they gave all of us their leaflet that shows that they surveyed 100 of their members. Their members are all not-for-profit long-term-care homes, retirement homes etc. They surveyed 100 of their members to show that, in all regions of the province, no matter the home type or size, almost all of them have to use a temp agency and the price gouging that goes on with the temp agency. In their sector, in long-term care, an average RN makes \$42 an hour. In my neck of the woods, when you need an RN through agency nursing, it's \$112.50 an hour—that's average. Plus, on top of this, you have to pay a 35% surcharge fee for the agency. So, the agency takes 35% on top of the \$112.50. They also ask for transportation and accommodation expenses, and the list goes on.

For RPNs, an RPN in this sector makes on average \$28 an hour. Through the agency, in my neck of the woods, it's \$90, and you add the 35% in fees for the agencies, the accommodations etc.

A PSW makes on average \$24 an hour. Through the agency, they will charge \$67 an hour on average. We are talking millions of dollars every single month that go to agencies, that do not go to the bedside, that do not go to provide quality care—because quality care in long-term

care can only take place when you know the person you're working with, when you know how they like their food and how they like to be handled and how they like to go to the bathroom and be dressed. And when it's an agency PSW coming in, there is no way she knows any of this—not because she's not a nice person, but because you just don't know until you have a relationship established, and agency staff cannot do this.

Lisa Levin, the AdvantAge Ontario CEO, said that in the not-for-profit long-term-care homes, we “weren't able to raise wages for a number of years” because the not-for-profit homes fell under Bill 124. That has “made it harder ... for them to keep staff and to attract staff, and that's also exacerbated the agency issue.” All of this should be addressed in a “working for workers” bill, but it is not in there.

Something else that has been asked for, for a long time: 75% full-time permanent jobs in every sector, whether you talk about home care, long-term care, the hospital sector. Give them permanent jobs. Enough of those jobs where you sit by your phone and wait for it to ring or to text so that you know if you have work the next day, and then you work 25 days in a row without a day off. That's not what people want. People want stability in their lives. Give them permanent full-time jobs; make them 75%.

Another thing that is very woman-oriented and not in this bill has to do with homemakers. Did you know, Speaker, that a homemaker in Ontario is not covered by the labour law? So Bayshore and all of the big home care companies hire homemakers. They can schedule them to work 14, 16 hours a day. They can schedule them to work throughout: no breaks, no eating time, no nothing. And all of that is legal. Plus, if they work more than 12 hours a day, which many of them do, they only have to pay them for 12 hours—no overtime. You've worked 14 hours and you only get paid for 12 because you're not covered by the labour law. How hard would it be to bring these women who work for home care agencies under the labour law? But that's not in the bill.

Something else that the medical laboratory assistants have been asking for, for a long time—the College of Medical Laboratory Technologists exists in Ontario and we've seen how important they were during COVID. There are also thousands of assistants who work in Ontario. They're not members of a college. They don't register with anybody. We don't know how many we have. We don't know where they work. Really? Like, the college exists. They are ready to register those people. They already offer them a way to put your name on the list so that as soon as the government gives us the okay, we will bring you into the College of Medical Laboratory Technologists. And yet, five years into this government's mandate, the medical laboratory assistants are still not registered anywhere.

We sort of know that we have quite a few because LifeLabs hires nothing but laboratory assistants. You can pull someone from the street and train them and say, “You're now able to draw blood. You're now able to do all sorts of stuff for LifeLabs.” People think that because

they have this title, “medical laboratory assistant,” they are a regulated health care professional but they are not, yet they provide patient care. If you have a complaint against them, good luck, Speaker, because the only one accountable will be their employer, who may not be that interested in dealing with complaints. The college is, though. Colleges exist for one reason: to protect the public. This college already exists. This service is being rendered right now. Bring it under the college. Do you see that in the bill? No, Speaker, you don't.

1730

We've talked a whole lot about thyroid and pancreatic cancer being added to the list of cancers that are deemed for firefighters. This is something important. This is something that I would say all of us on this side of the House have been asking for, have been working toward. The minister talks about it, but we can't see it in writing anywhere.

I have been in this place long enough; 16 years is a long time to be an MPP. I can guarantee you that I have heard lots of good ministers say good things, but till you see it in writing in a bill, nothing happens. Don't give those people false hope. We all know that firefighters die of cancer at a way higher rate than other workers. They have been fighting for this for a long time. They deserve to have presumptive coverage for pancreatic and thyroid cancer. You've talked about it. It is time that you put it in writing. It is high time that you put it in writing.

I'm sad to see that in a couple of days the paid sick days for workers will go away. We have a report from the Financial Accountability Officer that just came out, and he tells us that more workers have gone on sick days, have gone—when workers don't have sick days, they go to work sick. They make other working workers sick. We already have the highest rate of sick workers in Ontario, that we have never seen before. You won't be surprised to see that health occupations have the highest proportion of vacancies unfilled for 90 days in a row or more. We have on average 5.2%, the highest we've ever seen, of people who are sick, workers who are sick at work right now. And yet, we have our good member from London West, who has put forward legislation after legislation to say we need to legislate 10 paid sick days. Why is it not in the bill?

We just came out of a pandemic. We all know the difference it makes when a sick worker can stay home, rather than making the rest of their co-workers sick.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And it costs the economy.

M^{me} France Gélinas: And it costs the economy. Do we see that in the bill? No, it's not in the bill.

We've talked a lot about workers getting sick at work. We have talked about McIntyre Powder, where miners were forced to breathe in that powder that gave them all sorts of horrible diseases, that made them sick and made them die. It was a long journey to bring in an apology from this Legislature. I'm very glad that this happened, but there is something very similar happening in Sault Ste. Marie right now. There were 38 full-time Algoma University faculty who wrote to MPP Ross Romano—sorry, the MPP for Sault Ste. Marie—asking him to revoke the Algoma

Steel pollution regulation exemption so that we don't make people sick. If you go to part of Sault Ste. Marie, you can smell it, you can taste it; every breath you take, you know that you're breathing in pollution. And yet, we have a government that gives Algoma Steel an exemption to continue to pollute and to make people sick. How could that be? Why is that not in the bill? This was addressed directly to a member on the government side, but yet it's not in the bill.

We have the Ontario Federation of Labour, which has been on a campaign of Enough is Enough. The first thing they have in their Enough is Enough campaign is, give workers real wage increases. You cannot continue with Bill 124 at 1% when the cost of living is going up in the 6.8% and 7%—you can't do this. Give workers real wage increases. They also focus on keeping schools and health care facilities in the public not-for-profit, which is something that I fully support—and as well as looking at affordability. Do we see this in government bills? Nope.

Something that is very important to the people I represent is anti-scab legislation. We had a horrific one-year-long strike in Sudbury, from 2009 to 2010. Thousands of workers were on strike. Because they were on strike, all of the mining supply that supports our mining giants had no work. You are talking about thousands and thousands of people. This strike was allowed to drag on because of scab workers, which has had a devastating impact on many, many parts of my riding. The desperate people who took those jobs ended up being ostracized from their families, their community, for the rest of their lives. Why don't we have anti-scab legislation coming from this government so that we can recognize this is how you work for workers? But none of that is in there.

Of course, you can't talk about working for workers without saying, why are you going back to court with Bill 124? What do you expect will work for workers by going back to court to challenge the ruling that has already happened? This bill is unconstitutional. This bill disrespects workers. You want to work for workers? Start by not bringing them to court over Bill 124. I could go on and on about promises that this government has made, about statements that they have made, but as long as I don't see it in writing in this bill, then I will continue to do my work, I will continue to advocate so that the workers of Ontario get the protection they deserve—and whether that be PSWs or nurses or homemakers or firefighters or everybody else I've named, they all deserve a government who cares about them, and none of them are covered in Bill 79.

And please ask some French people on this side of the House to read the French version of the bill, because there's not only men who work in Ontario, there's also women who work in Ontario, but according to this bill, if you're on the French side, there's only men, and that's not okay in 2023.

I thank you for your time, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member for her address today. I didn't hear too much about Bill 79,

but I'm sure that the translators can fix the version of the feminine versus masculine in the bill; I'm sure they can deal with that.

What I don't understand is the NDP's fixation on what isn't in the bill. I can tell you that we have no intention of following the agenda of you people over there. If you want your agenda to be followed, do you know what you need to do? Get elected as government. And the path you're on, you're going to keep shrinking and shrinking till you're back to eight members or so, like you were when I got here, because you're becoming narrower and narrower every single day.

This is progress for workers here in the province of Ontario. We are seeing the reality of what is needed here in Ontario. We need to build homes. We need to build schools. We need to build hospitals. We need to build highways. And we need—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you for the passionate response.

The member from Nickel Belt.

1740

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm happy to see the passion in the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I will tell you that I'm just as passionate as he is to make sure that every worker goes to work in the morning and comes back to his family and his life safely at home, that every worker who goes to work also comes home to her family and loved ones after her shift. So when we see a bill called Working for Workers, we really want to bring the voices of workers.

Yesterday, in committee for Bill 60, we had union after union coming to tell us what it will mean for their workers, and the government never asked them a single question, never talked to them.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Nickel Belt for just an excellent rundown of the glaring omissions from this bill. We see a government that has tabled legislation that claims to work for workers, and yet there are so many things that they have utterly missed the mark on, whether it's PSW wages, the ridiculous and costly legal battle of appealing Bill 124. But also, to not put in anti-scab legislation—thank you for explaining what that does to people, what that does to communities and how it is egregious that there is no legislation on the books to prevent scabs.

I did want to ask, in terms of the different disciplines in health care, whether it's home care, long-term care or acute care, would you have liked to have seen some measures to address wage parity?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The short answer to this is absolutely. A nurse is a nurse is a nurse. Whether she works with a patient in the hospital or in a long-term-care home or in their own home because she does home care, putting in an IV in a hospital or in a long-term-care home or in your own home requires the same amount of knowledge and skills, requires the same licensing and should be remunerated as such.

You will remember that the Mike Harris government pretended that privatizing home care and selling it to the for-profits was going to do things better, faster, cheaper. None of that happened. The only thing that happened to home care is that they cannot recruit and retain a stable workforce because they make their money off of the backs of workers by not paying them respectful wages.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

M. Anthony Leardi: L'annexe numéro 3 du projet de loi 79 dit la suite : « La profession réglementée ne peut accepter une expérience canadienne comme condition d'inscription que si elle accepte aussi d'autres moyens de remplir cette condition que l'expérience canadienne, qui satisfont aux critères prescrits par les règlements. »

Est-ce que la députée est d'accord avec cela et est-ce qu'elle va voter pour?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Je suis contente de recevoir des questions en français; on n'en reçoit pas beaucoup, donc je remercie le député.

J'aimerais qu'il amène à son caucus le fait que, à la page 7, à l'annexe 5, du côté francophone lorsque l'on parle du—« La présente annexe entre en vigueur le jour où la Loi de 2023 visant à oeuvrer pour les travailleurs reçoit la sanction royale. » Ça n'aurait pas été très difficile de dire « visant à oeuvrer pour les travailleurs et travailleuses reçoit la sanction royale ». Quand le titre ne parle que de travailleurs, bien, c'est un titre qui fait référence seulement aux hommes.

Je vois que le membre de Prescott-Russell me regarde également. J'apprécie le fait que vous m'ayez posé une question en français.

J'aimerais ça qu'on puisse corriger le titre pour qu'on puisse inclure les femmes. Merci.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would like to thank my colleague the member for Nickel Belt for her very knowledgeable remarks and for the linkages she made between this legislation and the needs of a particular group of workers: health care workers.

I just found out today, Speaker, that in my community, London Health Sciences Centre is reporting COVID outbreaks on four different floors of University Hospital and one floor of Victoria Hospital. So that means there are patients in the hospital with COVID; there are health care workers who are caring for those patients with COVID.

Could the member comment on what the absence of paid sick days, beginning March 31, is going to mean for those patients and those health care workers?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Although as we go into April, the risk of flu and all this decreases with spring, because we spend more time outside, I can guarantee you that if you don't have paid sick days—there are people who cannot afford to take a day without pay. They will go to work while they are sick. They will make their co-workers sick. Some of those co-workers will end up in the hospital and we will continue to have outbreak after outbreak in our hospitals, in our long-term-care homes.

We all want to get rid of COVID-19. We've had it up to here with the pandemic—and maybe higher than that.

We know that one of the best ways to protect us is, when you are sick, stay home. And you can do this when you have paid sick days.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member from Nickle Belt. The member from Nickle Belt mentioned the committee hearings, the social policy committee on Bill 60 that we were at, and suggested that none of the Conservatives asked any questions of the labour leaders that were there. I myself recall asking a question of the president of the Ontario Federation of Labour—at least one, if not more. But never mind, we're here to talk about Bill 79, which unfortunately the member didn't talk about. She did say a lot of things that weren't in the bill, but one of the things we're doing—and she said she supports this and so do all the members over there—is expanding presumptive coverage for firefighters. The member from Nickle Belt chooses to not believe we're going to do that, but she knows, because she's been here for several years, that not everything goes into a bill; some things go into regulations.

So I would ask the member for Nickle Belt if she would not agree that this is a great step forward in protecting workers and something that should be done—and it is this government, by the way, that is getting it done.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I can still remember when my previous leader, Andrea Horwath, brought forward presumptive legislation for firefighters for different cancers. She worked really hard, the entire NDP caucus worked really hard, and we succeeded. We were able to get a few cancers recognized by the WSIB for firefighters. Since that day, the number of cancers that are recognized have increased. I'm going by memory; I think we are at 17. To add two more is absolutely the right thing to do.

If you look at Canada, most other provinces have already added thyroid and pancreatic cancer to the list. Am I happy that Ontario will be following suit? Yes, I am happy. But until I see it in writing—if it's not going to be in legislation but in the regs that follow, show it to us. Show us the regs. Till they're not there, it's not in writing—politicians sometimes talk more than they act—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I'm very proud to rise in this Legislature to join my colleagues in support of Bill 79, the Working for Workers Act. I spent a lot of time in my community talking to constituents about a variety of topics, including the one that we're talking about today. What comes to mind, of course, is a Legion not very far from where I live in Innisfil, Legion 547, and Denis Mainville, who is doing an excellent job being president there. Thank you, Denis, for your leadership at the Belle Ewart Legion. He actually was in this Legislature a few months ago, and we all recognized him and paid our respects for everything he has done. He served in the Gulf War.

1750

What Denis Mainville and the Innisfil Legion have organized is a Veterans and First Responders Coffee Club. The premise of this Veterans and First Responders Coffee Club is for folks to come together to share their stories.

They come from all backgrounds and many of them have stories. Many of them have stories from Afghanistan. We know of Canadians—there's about 40,000 soldiers that were deployed in Afghanistan. Nearly one in seven develop a mental disorder attributed to the mission. Denis saw this need in our particular community with his whole executive, and with Brian Bergeron, so thank you, Brian, as well for the work you're doing on this Veterans and First Responders Coffee Club. They got together and they're offering this particular opportunity for folks to come together to share their stories and of course get any services that they may need or any help they may need.

I encourage all folks around Simcoe county and Innisfil or Barrie, if you are a first responder or you're a veteran or a current member of the Canadian Armed Forces, and you just want to come in to a safe place like the Legion and share your story, to look out for Denis Mainville's Veterans and First Responders Coffee Club chats that take place very often.

This bill also touches upon that, because when we talk about mental health and the fact that we want to make sure that everyone gets the help they need, we have to think about our reservists. Something I heard about when I was at a base close here in Toronto with Seamless Canada is that they also have their own recruiting challenges. There's a lot of people, especially new Canadians, who are very excited to serve their country in the Canadian Armed Forces, but of course, we want to make it a lot easier for people to serve their country. Part of that is giving them the mental health services that they need, so that the brave men and women who do put their lives on the line are able to take that time that they need to get their services and get the little bit of the time that they may need.

That includes our first responders, Speaker. In addition to giving reservists the leave they may need and encouraging them to take that time, we also have first responders like firefighters. I recall here at Queen's Park when I got to meet with Joey and Eric from the Barrie firefighters association. They're been advocating for more cancers to be covered for their line of work for several years, and of course they were pleased to see this particular announcement.

Our president of the Barrie Professional Fire Fighters Association, Kevin White, was also very pleased to see this particular announcement including cancer coverage for our firefighters. One thing Kevin had said—I want to read a quote from him in this Legislature—was, “With one of our own Barrie professional firefighters currently battling pancreatic cancer, this is a significant legislative improvement for our member and their family at this difficult time. No doubt we will have more members here in our Barrie association that will be affected by this extremely important coverage. We would like to thank this government for making this a reality for our membership.” Again, that's Kevin White from the Barrie Professional Fire Fighters Association. I want to thank Kevin for his support and his advocacy to make this a reality, and of course we have in our hearts the particular Barrie firefighter who is battling that cancer.

That makes me think of another Barrie firefighter who unfortunately we did lose, but he will forever be commemorated because, Speaker, he is commemorated at the Queen's Park Fallen Fire Fighters Memorial. His name is John McKoen and he leaves behind his wife, Karla McKoen. He passed in the line of duty but he didn't pass from what you would think of, running into all kinds of situations that he did for three decades; he passed because he was fighting cancer—and you know, of course, being in the line of duty. And so, forever, we can pass that particular monument on the grounds of this Legislature and commemorate folks like him who did pay the ultimate sacrifice by sacrificing his health for the safety of others.

Time and time again, his wife, Karla, had this conversation with him: “Is there a time you want to step down from firefighting?” And he said no, he wanted to keep going. Nothing would stop done John and he just kept going for the three decades being a firefighter. I'm definitely grateful that every time I walk by that memorial, he is there.

But in addition to our first responders, the other particular element that really stands out in this bill came to mind when I was speaking to our Filipino community. Not that long ago, I attended the fifth anniversary of the Filipino church, so congratulations on your fifth anniversary—an incredible celebration, always great festivities, always such good attention to detail. But of course, the rights of workers always come up. We have a new organization that has started. It's still quite nascent, but Beethoven Crasco, who's very instrumental in the Filipino community, always standing up for immigrant worker rights there, he started a group called Filipino-Canadian Association of Barrie and Suburban Areas. When he heard about this particular announcement—he read the news release, Speaker—he said the following: “Withholding a worker's passport is like putting a leash on a person and taking control of his life. It sends a message that a person's right to liberty is violated. It is also like turning the worker's workplace into a prison cell.” Speaker, no longer do they have to feel like taking their passports is like being in a prison cell, because we're making it illegal, and we're fining those employers who are taking the passports of those particular migrant workers, because we're saying that we have zero tolerance for that type of behaviour in this province. I want to thank the Minister of Labour and our Premier for their leadership on that particular policy initiative.

Speaker, there are many, many great things in this particular bill. I was very excited that Barrie actually gets a specific shout-out in this bill, and that's when it comes to employment service transformation. As we all know, many of us have Employment Ontario offices, and the premise of Employment Ontario offices is of course allowing people to hit the ground running to get that job, give them a lift up in life, give them the skills that they need to continue on. Certainly, we saw a lot of people who had to pivot, change careers throughout the last two years. They've had to upskill or retrain, and Employment Ontario has been a big part of that.

But there have also been a lot of barriers. Someone I speak to quite frequently because of her current role, Kelly McKenna, is the Simcoe Muskoka Workforce Development Board and Literacy Network chair. She has been working on this new framework that we're introducing in this particular bill, which is going to be expanding new employment services to five more regions, which include London, Windsor-Sarnia, Kitchener-Waterloo-Barrie, Durham and Ottawa. Barrie is going to be included with Waterloo and Kitchener, and the folks in Barrie are very excited about this because now we have access—and those folks who drive through Waterloo know there's a lot of exciting tech talent that's happening there. What's missed is the ripple effects that particular tech talent has in other communities, like Barrie, like Innisfil.

In Barrie, for instance, we have a really groundbreaking, disruptive initiative called the Sandbox Centre right at the heart of our Barrie transit station. They do all kinds of stuff, from helping people secure venture capital to securing their IP, which is really important for exporting our entrepreneur ideas throughout the world. They've really been a hub, bringing in all kinds of speakers and all kinds of support. The Sandbox Centre has really been this anchor, but for them to now be able to work with folks in Waterloo and obviously bring in more of that talent, more of that knowledge base, it really helps them.

It also helps Innisfil. We have a DMZ, and it stands for digital media zone. It's an offshoot of former Ryerson University; now it's called Toronto Metropolitan University. But it's an offshoot of Toronto Metropolitan University's DMZ that Toronto has in downtown Barrie. We now have that in Innisfil, and it does the same thing. It helps with a lot of interesting start-up ideas. In fact, during the pandemic, we had a hackathon with the digital media zone where we encouraged more people to pursue that type of skill. They had to find ways to help the municipality, whether it's developing a chat bot or whether it's helping book a local marina dock.

There are a lot of interesting things that are happening out of these huge hubs, but now that we're going to be connected with Kitchener and Waterloo, it's going to help bring up that talent in our region and allow us to get more people to start their businesses locally, employ more people, lift up people into employment, so they're not always stuck in minimum-wage jobs. They can have a high-paying job often that comes with benefits. So employment services transformation, which is part of this bill, is going to help with that in addition to, of course, getting more people into the skilled trades.

One thing, when I was speaking with Kelly McKenna—we actually spoke on the phone earlier this morning—she kind of went into the nuts and bolts of how this is actually going to happen with improving employment services. We got talking about some statistics, and that's about—Ontario employment continues to face historic labour shortages, as all of us have seen this in our communities. There keeps being ads for jobs: “Employees wanted.” Speaker, nearly 300,000 jobs were going unfilled in December 2022. At the same time, more than 800,000 people

rely on social assistance. Some of them are looking for a second chance, and others just want to get started. When speaking to Kelly McKenna about this, she had mentioned it's because of the way many of our employment offices were designed. And of course, we're disrupting that.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): It is now time for private members' public business.

1800

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should transform the social assistance rate structure so that all adults have access to consistent and equitable levels of support, regardless of their living situation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, I rise today on behalf of my riding of London—Fanshawe to bring to attention a very important issue, and I look forward to the government supporting my motion. The aim of this motion is to transform the social assistance rate structure so that all adults have access to consistent and equitable levels of support, regardless of their living situation, such as rental, ownership, board-and-lodge, no fixed address or rent-geared-to-income housing.

Ontarians on ODSP represent some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Those whose disabilities and circumstances require or are simply improved by co-habitation in a board-and-lodge setting should not be penalized for their housing decisions. This bill is important to minimize the negative impact felt by ODSP and social assistance recipients, who face further disadvantages when their financial assistance is reduced based on housing status.

We are all aware that the current social assistance rates are inadequate and have not kept pace with inflation; the government's meagre 5% increase for ODSP does not reflect the minimum standard of living rates. ODSP rates should be doubled. However, this government has made it clear that they have no intention of doubling ODSP rates. But they can support my motion.

The living situations of social assistance recipients, particularly individuals receiving ODSP, are complex and can vary between regions. In addition to raising the rates regardless of one's living situation, the government of Ontario should assess and put in place protections to guard against matters of exploitation that may arise in these living situations.

A few years ago, Speaker, a woman came to my office. She lives in an unregistered assisted living home in my

riding. This home allows her to live in relative independence while still being able to access the services and care she requires. It by no means is a choice she has made, but rather a necessity given her circumstances. Despite not having a true choice for living arrangements, she has made the best of her situation. But when the home was unable to provide care within the ODSP board-and-lodge budgetary limits, she faced eviction.

To be clear on the budgetary limits to which I am referring here, ODSP clients who are classified under the “room and board” or “board and lodging” designation are given \$867 for boarder allowance plus \$71 for special boarder allowance, whereas a single individual receiving ODSP typically receives \$1,228 a month. The differentiation based on housing status was formally defined through a regulation in 1998: A board-and-lodging situation is one in which a recipient receives food and shelter from the same source.

In situations where the recipient’s circumstances are not clearly defined as either rent or board-and-lodging, the shelter arrangement is determined by reviewing the recipient’s food preparation practices. If the landlord purchases and prepares the food, the recipient is a boarder. If the recipient purchases and prepares food separately for themselves and their dependants, then the recipient is in a rental situation. To be considered a renter, a recipient does not necessarily need to be living in self-contained quarters but must purchase food and prepare it for themselves.

It is worth noting that board-and-lodging does not apply to everyone whose food and housing is provided by the same source. There are some notable exemptions, including:

- an intensive support residence or a supported group living residence as defined in subsection 4(2) of the Services and Supports to Promote the Social Inclusion of Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act, 2008;
- a provincial residential school for persons whose vision or hearing is impaired; and
- long-term-care homes.

Essentially, what these policies have created is a system that penalizes ODSP recipients for living accommodations that are likely outside one’s control. It is also important to note that the main difference between the exemptions I just noted and those getting board-and-lodge rates is the idea of registered homes and licensed facilities. Some homes are doing their best to provide services and care for their residents, but we also know that there are homes that can sometimes exploit the vulnerable positions of their residents.

When a resident can only afford \$867 a month to cover food and rent, you can appreciate why some homes feel so strapped, or why the home of my constituent felt their only option was eviction. But often these unregulated homes are the only option for these folks. Knowing some of these homes, my colleague Jeff Burch, MPP for Niagara Centre, has done wonderful work in trying to better regulate the industry. Last fall, he re-tabled his bill to regulate supportive living and ensure quality of care for vulnerable Ontarians with complex needs. If passed, the bill would

create a framework for inspection and complaint protocol; introduce new safeguards and protect residents; and make failure of having a licence a punishable offence, with fines up to \$1,000 per day.

I have heard from homes and providers concerned about the board-and-lodging rates as well. They are struggling to provide the necessities to their residents for less than \$867 a month. Keep in mind that people still require clothing, shoes, toiletries, phones, internet—all sorts of things every month that add up that we take for granted.

To highlight the importance of this motion, I would like to talk about the cost-of-living statistics in my community compared to the current assistance levels. Actual cost of living, according to a recent study in London, is \$1,220 plus rent. The average rent for a single bedroom in London is \$1,774, so let’s assume someone needs at least \$2,994 a month to cover the basic cost of living. A single ODSP recipient gets up to \$1,228 a month, while a room-and-board recipient—I remind you again—receives up to \$938. That’s a deficit of over \$1,700 a month and just over \$2,000 a month respectively.

We have asked the government to double the ODSP rates for this exact reason. ODSP rates do not allow people in our community to even reach the poverty line. Given the government’s dismissal of the motion to double the ODSP rates, I am surely confident that they can support this motion at least to equalize the playing field for room-and-board recipients.

We know that there are already so many ODSP policies preventing the people on ODSP from getting ahead. And I don’t even want to use the phrase “getting ahead,” because even I recognize that these small changes will not help them get further ahead. But hopefully changes like my motion are one way of helping them close the gap. A little bit of extra assistance can go a long way to ensuring these recipients can live a life with dignity, safety and security—something that all Ontarians deserve.

Like my constituent Sherri, who has struggled with ODSP policies regarding extra funding for incontinence supplies. Or my constituent Fadi: When his son wanted to get a job to help pay for college, Fadi’s ODSP assistance was cut because this was called “extra income” to the household. I have also heard from Joyce, a caretaker for Bill, a man with various developmental medical conditions that mean he requires 24/7 care. Joyce struggles to budget monthly to provide Bill with all the necessities, plus a few extras to ensure that Bill can live a full life.

My colleagues recently took it upon themselves to highlight the inadequacy of the ODSP program and went on their own ODSP diet. Through this experience, they identified the simple impossibility people face every month trying to afford the basic necessities of life on ODSP budgets. And that was based on the regular rates, not even the board-and-lodging rates.

When I tried to get specific numbers on how many ODSP recipients were classified under room-and-board, I was surprised to find that the researchers at the Legislative Library couldn’t find this type of data without a freedom-of-information request. The researchers also noted for me

that the initial implementation of the “board and lodging” designation was never debated. However, the issue has been highlighted in reforms such as the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance, which noted this issue in 2010. Their final report recommended removing the distinction between “board and lodging” and other recipients in order to simplify the administration of the program. A similar recommendation was made in 2017 by the income security working group in A Roadmap for Change.

I have also, Speaker, received a letter from the executive director of Neighbourhood Legal Services, a poverty clinic funded by legal aid to provide low-income residents of London-Middlesex with legal assistance in the areas of income maintenance, housing and employment. The letter reads:

“We fully support MPP Teresa Armstrong’s motion in the provincial Legislature seeking the elimination of the board and lodge ODSP rates.

“We support this because the board and lodge rate in the ODSP legislation is discriminatory on human rights and disability grounds, and creates the severest form of poverty for the most disabled in this province.

“People who are severely disabled and on ODSP often require assistance with their food purchasing and prep, as well as other supports (for example, assistance with taking medications, getting to medical appointments etc.).

“Many are forced to live in private care homes to receive the supports they need.

“However, they are then faced with the reduced ODSP rate, and cannot afford to live.

“Added to this, care homes struggle with inflation and the cost of food more than ever, and are increasingly unable to feed people adequate nutrition.

1810

“We have had clients who have had to leave their care homes based on lack of nutrition alone, often ending up in hospital and with nowhere to go.

“The board and lodge rate takes a situation of substantial poverty for the most disabled of those on ODSP, and elevates it to a situation of severe poverty and risk of further health demise and death.

“Would the government please consider eliminating the discriminatory board and lodge rate as soon as possible? This is an easy thing to do and it will save lives.”

That’s the end of the letter.

Speaker, Neighbourhood Legal Services identifies that these policies that force people into abject poverty are only going to cost the system in the long run, whether that be further stress on the health care system or preventable and costly support services.

This government has made a commitment to streamline government programs and reduce red tape. This bill is a great example of how a policy can streamline administrative services of the ODSP program and help recipients at the same time. It’s a win-win.

As Mark Twain said, it’s never wrong to do the right thing. I urge this government to do the right thing and support my motion today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Our commitment to those who depend on social assistance has been consistent throughout our time in office. We raised the ODSP and OW rates in our first year in government. We invested more than \$1 billion in the Social Services Relief Fund and expanded access to temporary emergency assistance for those in financial crisis during the pandemic. We have introduced programs like the LIFT and CARE tax credits that put money back in 1.7 million people’s pockets, including people on social assistance.

Our government is committed to supporting those who need it most. That’s why we have made the largest increase to ODSP rates in decades. On top of that, we have aligned ODSP rates with inflation so that vulnerable people get more support to pay for life’s essentials, especially during periods of high inflation. The first-ever adjustment will take place in July of this year.

We have increased the threshold of the earnings exemption fivefold, which will empower people with disabilities who are able to work by giving them a real opportunity to tap into their skills and talents, contribute to the local economy and support their family without the fear of losing their benefits.

Madam Speaker, I think we should acknowledge what the people who work in that space every day said about that decision. Mark Wafer, the CEO of Abilities Centre, called it a game-changer and change in a very, very significant way.

Chris Beesley, CEO of Community Living Ontario said this announcement “is a signal from the government, that they are listening. This is a definite step in the right direction. We look forward to continuing our work with the government.”

Valérie Picher, board chair for Community Living Toronto, said, “We are pleased with the announcement.... This means more money in the pockets of the people we support, as well as improving their quality of life” of people. “We thank the government of Ontario for their continued support.”

Brad Saunders, the CEO of Community Living Toronto, said, “This is great news for people receiving ODSP as the employment income threshold will have a huge ... impact for them. Thank you to the government of Ontario ... for your ongoing support.”

He’s referring to the monthly earning exemption—first time in history—for people on ODSP, from \$200 to \$1,000 per month.

From day one we have been supporting those who need it most. The social assistance system has faced challenges for decades. We are the only government to work to modernize the system to better support those who are unable to work, while getting people who can work connected to training and jobs. These investments back up our transformation of social assistance to build a more responsive, efficient and person-centred system that will get people back to work and help the province recover from COVID-19.

Our modernization has us working with our municipal partners to develop a shared vision for social assistance. The focus of this vision is on the people we serve and how we can connect them to supports that respond to their unique needs and the barriers they face. Our vision ensures front-line workers are not bogged down in paperwork and have more time to focus on connecting clients with supports like job readiness programs, housing, child care, skills training and mental health services.

Speaker, we know that it takes all levels of government working together, which is why we continue to call on and work with the federal government to deliver its promise to implement the Canadian disability benefit. We are already moving ahead with our work to improve services. Along with the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development and the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services—my minister—we are improving access to employment and training services. We are also making it easier to access support with new digital tools and modern service options that include an online application form, expansion of the MyBenefits platform and new communications channels to allow two-way digital messaging between the clients and the caseworkers.

We have made it easier for individuals to complete their usual medical review form by requesting it be sent directly to their health care professional for completion. We are also providing flexibility to clients by allowing them to request an extension of an additional three months, doubling the amount of time they have to complete the package of forms. Our government worked for months and months with municipalities to design the new vision for social assistance. It is focused on connecting people to the supports they need and helping them on a path to greater independence and employment.

Speaker, we heard loud and clear from municipalities that they were spending too much time on paperwork and that there was a wasteful amount of duplicated time with the ministry and the other organizations. A 2018 study found that caseworkers spend approximately a quarter of their day—about 400 hours a year—filing and organizing paperwork. ODSP offices alone have generated over 30,000 pieces of paper per day. That duplication takes away time staff could be spending helping clients access support, improve their lives and achieve more independence.

We know southern Ontario cities have different needs than the northern towns and First Nation communities, and we are working with them to put the right people and resources where they can do the most. Together, we are eliminating unnecessary rules and paperwork so we can give people opportunities.

Municipalities know that the current system, where 47 municipal delivery bodies in addition to the ministry are replicating the same tasks, just doesn't make sense. It only makes the system more complicated for those we serve. Our municipal partners are working with us to design a system that is easier to navigate and focused on connecting people to supports they need, like job readiness programs, housing, child care, skills training and mental health services.

Speaker, I would like to highlight the work we have been doing with the district social services administration boards. The 10 district social services administration boards, covering more than 140 municipalities, provide critical services to people in northern Ontario. To further support effective governance, our ministry started working with the district social services administration boards in 2020 to finalize the district social services administration board accountability and governance guidelines and explore other opportunities to support transparency and accountability. As district social services administration boards touch northern life in many ways, through social housing, child care, ambulances, as well as the Ontario Works program, our partnership with other ministries will be a crucial aspect in the successful delivery of these important services.

We can't lose sight of this, Madam Speaker: We are here to support people who can work get back to work and have better lives, and we are here to support people who cannot work to have decent lives. We are going to continue to put forward sustainable solutions and work with all levels of government to ensure that people have the support they need.

1820

People on ODSP may also already qualify for various health benefits, including: prescription drugs, vision care, dental care, devices approved under the Ministry of Health, special diet expenses due to their medical conditions, nutritional costs due to pregnancy and breastfeeding and medical transportation, to name just a few. The discretionary benefits are provided to both Ontario Works and ODSP recipients on a case-by-case basis, and that determination is made by the local municipality district social services administration board or First Nations Ontario Works administrator. Ontario Works administrators have the authority to set local policies on the type of services and items and the amount of coverage that may be provided based on local priorities. Speaker, over 112,000 recipients have used this program and received at least one discretionary benefit, and that's on top of the 250,000 people who received the emergency benefit.

While we have been doing the important work of making people's lives better, where has the opposition been? They have criticized our government every step of the way. They have voted against budgets and economic statements that contained the measures that have made people's lives better. The Liberals had the chance to raise the rates, and the fact is they waited until before an election they knew they would lose to propose it. The NDP had a golden opportunity with the Liberals, but they failed miserably. They both had the chance to index rates to inflation, but they didn't. While they talked, it was our government that acted. Once again, we have this motion from the NDP to support the illusion of action.

Our government doesn't pretend to act, Speaker. We take action to make Ontarians' lives better. We are the only ones who said yes to supporting individuals on social assistance. We made the investments into social assistance, and we are investing again with the largest increase

to ODSP in decades. And we are indexing the rate to inflation, something they could have done at any time in their 15 years in power, but they didn't. We are doing that—a crucial point in the development of ODSP in our province. And we are raising the ODSP earned income threshold by 400%, allowing those who can work to earn more money and keep it. These are the historical things we are doing, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoch: I want to begin by thanking my colleague the MPP for London–Fanshawe for tabling and bringing forward this important motion for debate.

Speaker, there are so many issues with the state of social assistance programs in Ontario, the most obvious one being that rates are simply too low for social assistance recipients to survive on. A single person on ODSP gets \$1,228 per month, and on Ontario Works gets \$733 a month. The maximum allowance for shelter is \$522 for people on ODSP, and the maximum shelter allowance for OW is \$390—\$522 and \$390 for shelter. Right now, the city of Toronto's 2023 average market rent for a hostel or dwelling room is \$1,024 per month. And I'm not talking about a one bedroom, not even a bachelor—this is just for a single room, the absolute minimum to have a roof over your head that's yours.

ODSP and OW rates have remained pretty much the same since the Conservative government under Mike Harris cut the rates. And what did the Liberals do when they were in power for 15 years with strong majorities? They didn't increase the rates to amounts people can survive on. Successive governments, both Liberal and Conservative, have done nothing to ensure that people on social assistance can live with dignity. And when you factor in inflation and cost-of-living increases, people on social assistance are actually receiving less now than they did previously. It's no wonder that the homelessness crisis has gotten dramatically worse. The cost of everything has gone up by a lot, but not social assistance rates; that has not budged much for almost 30 years.

Here's the big picture: Keeping social assistance rates low actually costs the province more in the long run. By giving people enough to live on, they can live healthier lives, a life with dignity. By keeping people in deep poverty, the costs are going to show up in our health care system, on addressing the homelessness crisis. So why don't we just pay a little bit more up front so we can save a lot more money down the road? It's not just morally the right thing to do; it's fiscally the right thing to do.

Aside from the actual rates, the other major issue with social assistance is to do with the rate structure. Speaker, there are so many rules—rules that are discriminatory and impact how much support someone can receive. This is what the motion we're debating today is about. The motion reads, "That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should transform the social assistance rate structure so that all adults have access to a consistent and equitable level of support regardless of their living situation."

You know what, Speaker? ODSP punishes people for falling in love, for getting into a relationship. Let me explain what I mean: The government of Canada defines "common-law" as living with someone in a conjugal relationship for at least 12 consecutive months. In Ontario, two people are considered common-law partners if they have been continuously living together in a conjugal relationship for at least three years. But ODSP defines a common-law relationship as between two people who have been living together for only three months.

This ODSP policy has serious consequences for people who are disabled. It discourages disabled people from forming relationships, because it can reduce or eliminate benefits. Even if they are in a relationship, it becomes much more difficult to leave the relationship, because ODSP rules have made the disabled person completely dependent on their partner financially, and that has serious consequences if the relationship is an abusive one. It forces disabled people to choose between living a slightly better quality of life or living with their loved one but in deep poverty. ODSP policy basically says you can live with a stranger without penalty, but if you live with the person you love, you will be financially penalized. As a result, disabled people have to hide their relationships, pretend that their loving partners are no more than roommates, and they can't get married without financial repercussions. And to make matters worse, if they're cut off from ODSP because of their living situation, they don't just lose their income; they lose their drug and dental benefits. That's such an important benefit, a life-saving benefit for disabled people.

The low rates and the discriminatory rules are reasons why so many people on ODSP say that they'd rather apply for medical assistance in dying than live like this.

All of us have heard from our constituents asking for increases to social assistance rates. One that I will never forget, Speaker, was from my constituent Laura. She shared how hard it was to live on the amount given for ODSP and explained all the ways in which rules make her life even harder. You know how she ended the letter to me? She wrote, "Please bring us up to the poverty line! Please bring us up to the poverty line!"

Imagine that. ODSP recipients are living in such deep poverty that they are asking, pleading with this government just to be on the poverty line. Think about that, and think about that when you vote on this motion.

1830

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I want to thank the member from London–Fanshawe for bringing forward a very thoughtful motion again—she brings forward very thoughtful things in this House—and it is actually very specific. I do want to say, we shouldn't be here talking just simply about ODSP rates. It's very specific, and I don't want to spend my time saying, "Yes, you raised the clawback to \$1,000, but you cut it to \$200," or "Yes, you raised the annual rate, but you cut it in half when you got in government." So let's not get into that.

We all know that ODSP doesn't provide enough support to people. In our heart of hearts, we all know that. We don't always say that in this place, but we all know that. And the specific problem that the member is talking about is, people who are in need of special assistance are being disadvantaged. It's not like it's more than a rounding error on a rounding error on a rounding error around this place. It's about fixing specific problems that happen to people who are disadvantaged because of the way that we make the rules.

If you heard my colleague from Kingston and the Islands this week, he talked about a widow in his riding who gets ODSP. She gets a CPP widow's pension from her husband; ODSP claws that in half. But do you know what? If she went out and worked and made 800 bucks, they wouldn't take any money from her. But that pension that man worked to earn—that's work, so why are they clawing that back? And I think we'd all agree on that. I think we all think that it would be fair for us to make sure she got the full amount or that the people who the member from London—Fanshawe is talking about get fair and equal access to what other people are getting under ODSP. We're not even actually debating the rates of ODSP right now. We're just actually debating how ODSP at an inadequate rate is unfair to people; it is. She's right. So that needs to be looked at. It's a great question. It's a great motion.

So I am going to make one more pitch—basic income. We had a pilot—I'm not going to go on with what the government did with the pilot. I thought it was unfair and unjust. But it was an opportunity for us to look at something that people from all parties have said: We need to take a look at basic income so we can streamline the way we provide social assistance, so that we can actually have people—I don't want to use the words "more integrated," but more part of the communities that they live in, be given opportunities to work, be given opportunities to be educated. So those are the kinds of things that we have to do.

But today we're specifically talking about unfair rules under ODSP that need to change, and I think the government should be listening, just like they should have listened to the member from Kingston and the Islands with his constituent—and I hope that they do.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Thunder Bay—Superior North.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I want to thank the member from London—Fanshawe for this thoughtful bill—and the goal of the bill is so that all adults have access to a consistent level of support regardless of their living situation.

When I listened to the member today, I was actually appalled to realize that room-and-board situations are even worse than other living situations for people on ODSP. I'm shocked. I cannot believe that there's a rationale for reducing people to that level of poverty. So the goal really is specific in this case, but it's so necessary to remove the enormous amount of red tape. There are over 800 regulations that restrict and cause harm to people with disabilities.

ODSP benefits need to attach to the individual recipient based solely on their disability. It should not be influenced, it should not be determined or clawed back based on living arrangements, regardless of whether the person is living with a spouse, a parent, a roommate or in a place with room-and-board.

I would be very interested to know if ODSP rules violate human rights or charter rights, and I suggest that they probably do.

There are things that ODSP rules against that all other able-bodied adults are permitted to do—which is, pool their resources in order to make their lives easier and more comfortable. Think about this: All other able-bodied individuals are allowed to pool their resources, but if you have a disability—and remember, we are talking about people with disabilities that make it impossible to do any sort of regularized paid work—you are then penalized for living with someone you care about. How bizarre and how cruel.

When an adult with a disability enters into a relationship with another adult, their disability doesn't suddenly disappear. To retain one's autonomy to make safe, sustainable choices for themselves, it is imperative that the disabled person be allowed to retain their financial autonomy to the fullest extent possible. When two able-bodied adults in an intimate relationship decide to live together—this is able-bodied adults—neither of their respective incomes is suddenly reduced as a result of their pooling their resources. Yet people with disabilities receiving ODSP have their meagre benefits clawed back if they choose to cohabit with someone they care about.

The Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity has spoken about the need for women to have financial independence as a means to manage their own living conditions and have the ability to escape abuse, if that should become necessary. Well, that thinking needs to apply to disabled people, as well. People with disabilities need to maintain their financial independence, otherwise they are put at serious risk of becoming trapped in abusive relationships. And clearly, with the situation in unlicensed lodgings, how could they even think of going anywhere else with such a meagre amount of money?

My colleague here spoke very well about the specific amounts. We know that they are criminally low. They cause incredible hardship, create stress in people's lives and cause—I will say, if you want to develop problems with your mental health, be on ODSP and be worrying every single day how you're going to find a place to live, how you're going to pay for food, how you're going to have a bus pass so that you can cross town and get to the food bank. It's impossible to have any dignity on the rates that exist for ODSP right now, and OW, of course, is completely off the charts. There is no way anybody can live on those amounts of money.

The deliberate hardship created by these regulations also extends to other household members, including spouses, partners and parents, who find themselves serving as non-compensated primary or secondary caregivers for the person with a disability. So family members also wind up being penalized when that money is clawed back

from the ODSP recipient. It just makes everything so difficult. You can't hire people to come in and provide help.

The bottom line is that ODSP regulations that make payments contingent on a person's living arrangements are punitive. There is an assumption behind all these rules that people with disabilities are not to be trusted. Underneath all these regulations and punitive clawbacks is also the assumption that everyone is able to work, but that is absurd. That is reality, yet this government continues to promote a fantasy world in which people in debilitating and chronic pain, people with brain injuries, people with significant developmental disabilities, people who lose their cognitive capacities because of exposures to industrial chemicals are going to be able to get a job. It's absurd, but it's equally absurd that the government describes itself as generous when it is absolutely clear that it is impossible to live on the amount of money that is available for people on ODSP—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I want to thank the member from London–Fanshawe for bringing forward this important motion. I want to say to the members opposite in the government, you oftentimes talk about the need to reduce red tape. I can tell you as a former small business owner, I understand the need to reduce red tape. But I want to point out what the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North just said: over 800 regulations confronting people on ODSP. I can't tell you how many people come into my office in tears saying that it is a full-time job just to navigate all the red tape that they have to go through on social assistance. And then imagine what they say, Speaker, when they break down in tears and say, "Now I'm being penalized for falling in love, for having a domestic relationship in my current housing situation." And imagine how hard that is when you're trying to live on \$1,200 a month.

I can tell you in Guelph now the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment is over \$2,000. It's just literally impossible for people on ODSP or Ontario Works to survive on \$1,200 a month or \$733 a month. And then to know that you could be penalized based on your living arrangement if you're with someone you love or a parent, or you're in a place that provides room and board—it's simply impossible.

So all this motion is doing—I know the member supports doubling ODSP rates, and I would like for us to do that. But at the very least, can't we agree on this motion that we're going to remove a little bit of red tape for people on ODSP, so that they can at least be in a loving relationship without being penalized for it with their benefits?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member now has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to thank the members from Markham–Thornhill, Ottawa South, Parkdale–High Park, Thunder Bay–Superior North, and Guelph.

It is true; this motion is very specific, and it will help the government reduce red tape.

Specifically, this motion came to light when someone came to my office and explained that they lived in residential assisted living that wasn't regulated and that they couldn't afford to live there—the private assisted living facility couldn't afford to maintain the room-and-board situation, and they were evicted.

So this is also a fairness piece, as has been described.

Neighbourhood Legal Services—they take on these constituents' living situation as legal issues, to challenge ODSP, to show that this legislation for board-and-lodge is indeed discriminatory on human rights and disability grounds. They've actually won in many, many cases. The question I had for them is, why not start a class action lawsuit and force the government to change that piece of regulation? But again, it takes the people who are involved in these situations to come forward. It's a lot on their mental health, physical health and emotional health.

So if the government is settling, the ODSP workers are settling when these cases come forward, it only makes sense just to cut the red tape—and don't discriminate on the way people are forced to live from no choice of their own. If you can't cook for yourself for medical reasons and you can't go shopping for mobility reasons, why is that allowed? Why are you discriminated against because you can't live independently?

Speaker, I hope this government will support my motion. I ask the member from Markham–Thornhill to be a champion with me and make this government change this regulation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Ms. Armstrong has moved private member's notice of motion number 34.

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

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

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

In my opinion, the nays have it.

A recorded vote is being required. It will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): All matters relating to private members' public business have been completed.

This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow, March 23.

The House adjourned at 1843.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott

Clerk / Greffier: Todd Decker

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffier: Trevor Day

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Valerie Quioc Lim, Wai Lam (William) Wong,

Meghan Stenson, Christopher Tyrell

Temporary Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes par intérim: Mike Civil

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Andrew, Jill (NDP)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Barnes, Patrice (PC)	Ajax	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough- Sud-Ouest	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Bowman, Stephanie (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Brady, Bobbi Ann (IND)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Bresee, Ric (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Byers, Rick (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Legislative Affairs / Ministre des Affaires législatives Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough- Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Associate Minister of Transportation / Ministre associé des Transports
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds— Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	
Flack, Rob (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Michael D. (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC)	Kanata—Carleton	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Hon. / L'hon. Parm (PC)	Milton	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Holland, Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Jones, Trevor (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Ke, Vincent (IND)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean	
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
McCarthy, Todd J. (PC)	Durham	
McGregor, Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York / Beaches—East York	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associé du Logement
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Hon. / L'hon. Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-présidente et présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	