

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 66A

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N° 66A

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Tuesday
18 April 2023

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mardi
18 avril 2023

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

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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
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Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-2987

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 18 April 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 18 avril 2023

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning. Let us pray.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BETTER SCHOOLS AND STUDENT
OUTCOMES ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION
DES ÉCOLES ET DU RENDEMENT
DES ÉLÈVES

Mr. Lecce moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 98, An Act to amend various Acts relating to education and child care / *Projet de loi 98, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'éducation et la garde d'enfants.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister care to lead off the debate?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to first off acknowledge that I will be sharing my time with the brilliant parliamentary assistant, the member from Ajax.

I'm going to commence this with a quote. "One complaint that we heard, repeatedly, was that the public education system no longer seems to be responsible to the public ... there exists widespread unease that schools have become a kingdom unto themselves, with little need to report to parents or to the world at large what they are doing with our kids, and whether they're doing it successfully." That was a quote from the Royal Commission on Learning commissioned by Premier Bob Rae in the early 1990s, led by a former federal Liberal minister and provincial New Democratic minister. That is a telling quote, and the constant in my lifetime has been the desire for our ministry, our school boards, the enterprise around our children, to step up and to do better.

So I'm very honoured to rise in this House and to speak about the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act and how it will help Ontario succeed and help our kids reach their full potential in our country. If passed, this bill would propose legislative reforms under four key statutes. The first is the Education Act, the second is the Ontario College of Teachers Act, the third is the Early Childhood Educators Act—and, finally, consequential amendments to the Ontarians with Disabilities Act. These changes

would improve and modernize our publicly funded education system to prepare them for the jobs of tomorrow, to ensure that young people have a curriculum that leads them to good-paying jobs and to succeed in whatever path they take.

Yesterday, I was proud to unveil a new investment in our publicly funded schools, a global commitment to spend more than \$690 million for the coming school year, a 2.7% increase relative to last year. We're increasing the funding per student, per pupil. We're increasing funding for transportation and mental health, in special education. We're increasing investment in reading, writing and math—the fundamental skills where we insist there is greater fluency within the classroom both from the teacher and from the students themselves.

I want to acknowledge our publicly funded school system. Overwhelmingly, I think it's fair to say, it does good work. We're proud of the record of the outcomes associated with respect to increasing graduation rates—we started at 85% just a few years ago, and today it's 89%. That's a trajectory moving in the right direction, at the highest levels it has been in recent history. That is not done in spite of, but because of, a targeted focus on lifting everyone up—destreaming, new mental health supports, and going back to the basics of reading, writing and math.

In addition to the broader \$26.6-billion investment for this school year and more investment for the next school year, over the past days, the parliamentary assistant and I worked together on unveiling a plan to refocus our system on what matters most.

It is our government that believes most strongly, as a matter of principle, that education needs to ensure that as a child goes through their learning journey they master the skills that will set them up for success.

The fact that Dyslexia Canada spoke at the announcement—about a third of children graduating with a physical graduation diploma, and yet, one third of those kids are still not at the tiered level or meeting the standards of their age. They're leaving our high school system not feeling prepared. That is not a reflection on students in Canada. It's not a reflection on kids in this province. It is exclusively a reminder that the systems around our kids need to be better, and to lift our standards and the ambitions of our young people.

Over the past days, the parliamentary assistant and I announced a new plan with new investment focused on the fundamentals of reading, writing and math, by announcing \$175 million—a new investment and the largest of its kind in the nation—specifically tailored and focused on boosting literacy rates.

We took the advice of the Ontario Human Rights Commission in the monumental Right to Read report that urged the government to reform the former Liberal government's language curriculum that was failing so many kids, particularly in the special education community. We accepted their advice to impose and introduce a standard screener of all children in senior kindergarten and grades 1 and 2 to make sure that they are at the literacy rates they should be at, particularly recognizing, Madam Speaker, as you will know, that if we don't intervene at the front end of a young person's life, it could create long-term impacts, adversity and, frankly, roadblocks to their success. Illiteracy costs the economy billions. It imposes great levels of anxiety, mental health affliction, a lack of confidence, and a lack of ability to get those good jobs.

We see the total connection point, the causal connection of having strong literacy rates and mathematical competence with success in life, success in the job market. I think those are consequential, foundational elements of our publicly funded school system. And it is our government and our Premier who are committing to boosting those levels and to refocusing the system on what matters most.

We unveiled a plan, endorsed by the Ontario Human Rights Commission in the Right to Read report, and I hope all members of the House will stand with the government to ensure every child is able to meet the standards of literacy, reading and writing, both in grades 3 and 6 and upon their graduation years down the road.

We also announced a plan to boost math. A core part of the legislation and the investment is associated on the understanding that financial literacy and broader numeracy skills are foundational in this modern workplace. Many employers, many job creators, many families, many parents, will say their kids are not at the level they should be at. Again, it's not a reflection of the child's willingness to work hard. It's a reflection of the system's inability to inspire these kids and, frankly, educate them in the competencies that are required.

We unveiled a plan—over \$70 million of investments to double the amount of math coaches in Ontario schools. We are literally ensuring every single school board in Ontario has one senior lead that is singularly charged with ensuring outcomes improve in school boards; that training with staff is better standardized; that evidence-based best practices that are high-impact, and, frankly, lift standards are introduced systematically across school boards; and accountability with the government. What we're going to be asking school boards to do is to tie student outcomes to their own board improvement plans, connecting the dots, creating real accountability for boards and opportunities for young people to believe again that if they work hard they will be able to succeed.

0910

Madam Speaker, we know that there are 15,000 students every year, almost 11% of kids, who do not graduate in Ontario. It is an example of our "why" today—that we can lift our ambitions, our standards and our expectations for our system to do better for kids. It is the crux of why we exist, of why this legislation exists. We're

trying to challenge the status quo. We are trying to send a signal throughout the system that we have to step it up to serve our kids. We know the non-graduates in this province have a 5% higher rate of unemployment, a 13% lower rate of labour market participation, lower incomes than the provincial average. We know that graduation is a key to success for so many kids.

Some school boards have consistently lagged behind on the key student performance indicators: elementary EQAO assessments; secondary EQAO assessments in grade 9; graduation rates; student attendance—all of these fundamentals.

I believe and I hope all of us believe that we can do better, and it is possible to do better if we work harder and smarter and work together in the interests of serving our children.

That's why we devised this plan. It's why we brought forth, if it's passed, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act—to directly respond to the challenges in a modern country; to ensure our systems perform better, more efficiently; and that the unifying mission of the ministry, of the school board, of a school, is the advancement of skills that matter to the success of a young person. We're bringing forth this legislation in response to an overwhelming desire by parents to see the system of education refocused on what matters most. We brought this plan, really, premised on consequential pillars: to ensure more accountability, more transparency for parents; better governance and leadership of our school board trustees and administrators; a commitment to build schools faster and to better use our real estate portfolio for the needs of our children; and an overwhelming refocus on driving better outcomes, especially in areas like reading, writing and math, graduation rates and attendance rates. This is possible through legislation—the first time in roughly 25 years, in a generation, that a government has had the commitment to overhaul and modernize legislation that clearly was not meeting the needs of children today.

The first principle of our action is to deal with accountability and transparency. We know that some school boards are not always working towards the same priorities. This bill, if passed, will establish a provincial priorities framework to ensure all school boards across the province are focused on student achievement. This is the anchor of this legislation. It is the capacity of the democratically elected government of the people of Ontario to be able to set binding student achievement priorities on school boards. The purpose of education is to build skills, to make sure children are able to go through with confidence in their education system, knowing that they have the competencies relevant and necessary in the labour market and in higher learning and wherever their path will take them in life.

I believe having the authority to set out a clear, unambiguous commitment to student achievement, to higher grad rates, to higher success rates in reading, writing and math, higher attendance rates—this is an ambitious plan to lift standards and outcomes, and it allows the minister to send a signal to school boards that "these priorities shall

be your priorities.” Student achievement has to be the crux of what we do.

The parliamentary assistant, Patrice Barnes, former trustee, often spoke to me in her former life—before getting elected as a member of provincial Parliament—as a trustee, about the necessity for student achievement to be at the centre of what government does, and too many kids were falling behind, as a consequence, when we weren’t focused on achievement.

So this plan repatriates power and focus back to the people, to parents, and to the mission of lifting up the skills necessary that we think are critical for these young people.

We require school boards, for the first time, to meet with parents in the development of a board improvement plan. This is about creating some metric where we can measure success, measure improvement and progress associated with this bill. Many parents say it’s great to set out standards, but how do we ensure that this new priority of student achievement is codified and implemented on the ground? Well, we’re now going to be imposing a requirement for school boards to meet with their parent communities and other stakeholders and voices in their education system to develop a board improvement plan that is directly responsive to the provincial priorities on student achievement. The mission of the bill is to refocus our education system on what actually matters most: on boosting reading, writing and math; on building very socially and emotionally intelligent leaders who are ready for the jobs of tomorrow. But we can’t do that unless we master the basics. And EQAO data is a compelling, relevant data point that should define a problem we all agree with: The status quo is unacceptable. We have to do better. So the board improvement plan will create a healthy level of accountability. You develop it with your community, you post it publicly, and the ministry will now be able to benchmark success according to adherence to those provincial priorities and student outcomes. Let that be the guide that moves us forward as school boards actually improve on the ground. It is a healthy reform with a healthy level of accountability, necessary to get Ontario’s kids back on track on the fundamental skills.

If we find school boards are struggling to act in this area, we have tools, of course, in place to take action, to make sure that those school boards refocus on what matters. But I do believe that the school boards will work with us to strengthen accountability and outcomes. I think they’ve heard from parents loud and clear in all regions of this province that that is what matters most.

So we’re moving forward with a plan to strengthen accountability, to require boards to be more transparent, as well, about how they spend our money.

We’ve increased investment in every single metric that matters most. In the most recent Grants for Student Needs, the funding vehicle for school boards, yesterday we expanded mental health—it’s over \$100 million to date. We started, under the former Liberals—at the peak of spending under Premier Wynne—at \$18 million per year in schools. It is today over \$100 million of investment in student mental health—a compassionate, necessary investment to support kids who are facing great adversity in

our schools and in our society. That is the type of investment we’re making, and it’s part of the accountability mission we want—to see more kids be successful and supported and positive in our school system.

Madam Speaker, we are including enhanced school board financial reporting on the funding and spending—planned and actuals. We want to make sure people know exactly where tax dollars are being expended, because we often hear of curiosity for where all this money goes. I think we can build confidence by being more transparent with the people we represent, by letting them know exactly what we’re spending and where we’re spending it. We’re also going to require and create authority to limit board participation in activities that could potentially place them at financial risk.

School boards, as you know, play a significant role, as well, in the delivery of child care. Speaker, 64% of our child care spaces are located in schools. To continue to implement the Canada federal agreement where we’ve reduced rates this year at 50%—roughly \$8,000 to \$10,000 in savings per year—we need to have a better plan to collaborate with school boards and municipalities on where they’re going to build child care, where they’re going to build schools.

Currently, there is no requirement for a school board to work with the municipality on where the next school will be built, often creating conflict. The municipality will suggest they know best. They are permitting the growth. The school board will suggest they know best. They’re looking at student enrolment forecasts.

How do we marry these silos and make them work together in the interests of building schools where the growth is at?

0920

This bill actually requires school boards to work with—in good faith, at the front end—municipalities to build communities together and to stop the siloization that frustrates all of us who think, “How is it possible in 2023 that you could have these two coexisting governing systems that never really spoke to each other, except through petitions?” We need more collaboration, and this bill will actually require that integration, which is good for development, good for planning communities where families can live and thrive.

We’re also ensuring a more seamless transition to provide to children and families from care to school. That’s part of this bill—the recognition that the education system plays a fairly critical role in child care. We’re going to continue to invest and work with them to build spaces. We’re on track to build 86,000 new spaces over the coming years to meet the needs of families, because of our reduced child care fees for the people of Ontario.

We’ve also spoken about the skilled trades in this bill, to accelerate pathways for some kids who may not graduate in Ontario. For roughly 11% of children today, notwithstanding that the graduation rate has increased from roughly 85% to 89% under our Progressive Conservative government—a historic achievement that was done because of the hard work of our staff and our schools, our

parents and government working together, investing in areas that matters most. But we still have kids who may not graduate. I believe in providing a path to a credential that leads them to a good job. It's why we are looking at accelerating apprenticeship pathways into the skilled trades directly for some students, starting in grades 11 and 12. This bill enables that transition.

When it comes to leadership and governance of our school boards, 700 elected trustees in the province of Ontario are responsible for \$32 billion of our publicly funded school system. I want to believe all of us accept the premise that we need to see more consistency in the skills and the training of school board trustees and a better provincial standard when it comes to the ethical conduct and the governance of our school board trustees and the code of conduct that really manages that.

Madam Speaker, we all know of examples where this dysfunction has manifested, impacting children. Perhaps the most compelling example was in Peel, a school board that faced years of broad-level systematic dysfunction of their trustees—often interpersonal beefs that triumphed over the interests of children. Kids—often the most marginalized, racialized, most at risk—were the ones who paid the biggest price. That is an unacceptable reality for any observer. It was why, as minister, I intervened for the first time in this province's and country's history to supervise a school board on that basis. Broad-level “dysfunction,” “racism,” “incompetence,” across the board”—these are not my words. An independent assessment was done, and then I moved and acted to intervene. But that shouldn't be our reality. I was essentially, in addition to being your Minister of Education, effectively managing or directing a school board in Peel. That is not a reflection of how a well-functioning system should run.

We recognize we need to do better when it comes to creating a dispute resolution mechanism with trustees, because what I've also found is this increasing propensity of some trustees to level vexatious complaints against others, often paralyzing the ability of school boards to get on with the business of student achievement. Again, going back to the cult of personality, ideological schisms that exist within governments that often manifest with school boards spending 90% of their time doing a lot of counter-productive work—“work” is probably the wrong word, but a lack of focus on what matters most.

That's not a comment on all trustees, not a comment on all school boards. It's a comment on problems that exist far too often and a desire to work with—we've consulted with school board trustees for well over a year on the development of a new code of conduct. We've done so with the aim to build public trust, because it has been eroded in many school boards in this province. Trustees' disputes also detract from the attention of their primary duty: student achievement.

In the bill, we propose that all trustees would have to undergo governance training. They have to understand how to be effective, professional leaders in their space, focused on achievement, and we are going to require all boards of trustees to adopt a provincial code of conduct, to

finally standardize a code of conduct that didn't exist. Some boards have—they pretty much all have them—differing codes of conduct.

Madam Speaker, perhaps you are best positioned in this House to speak about the governance of effective bodies and bodies that actually drive outcomes.

The aim of a provincial code of conduct is to create some sort of standardization of the system, to create an impartial process, led by the integrity commissioner, that would resolve trustee code of conduct issues and complaints in a fair and timely manner. I believe many of these complaints often paralyze the business of focusing on students.

Madam Speaker, this legislation will also introduce higher standards and, frankly, expectations with respect to our directors of education. To support them in their work, we're proposing to enhance the standardized training for directors and other senior board officers. The bill will create authority to make performance appraisal frameworks for all directors of education because, as you may know, right now there are 72 performance assessment appraisals in the province—no standardization, no central sort of overarching vision for an effective, accountable system.

As people get to know more about the gaps that exist in Ontario's education system, it probably is enraging them to think, “How was that not done years ago?” Why were consecutive governments, former Liberals—one referred to the Premier as the “education Premier,” a self-imposed name. But how did all that time pass and yet there wasn't an improvement to the systems around our kids? It's a fair question, and it's part of the reason why we're here today: to fill those gaps, to improve the system and, frankly, to lift our standards in education to become more mission-focused on what matters to families, and that is the achievement of their kids.

So the imposition of a code of conduct, the creation of an independent authority through the integrity commissioners, will allow for our school boards to focus, as set out, on provincial priorities dealing with achievement.

We've also made a commitment in this legislation to maximize our real estate portfolio. School boards have roughly a value of \$64 billion in real estate. We are literally one of the largest real estate holders in the country, and yet currently the ministry does not have the authority or the knowledge of the inventory available—what is being used for schools, as in what schools are being used for learning versus schools that are sitting empty, schools that are being used as administrative buildings or storage facilities or being rented to a wreck business down the street. Just as an asset manager, that is a problem in itself. We need to understand the portfolio we have and what is available to put to use for the benefit of educational purposes.

Madam Speaker, in the announcement made yesterday we committed to investing \$550 million every single year to build new schools in this province. The Auditor General recommends 2.5% of funding for renewal—maintenance funding to keep our schools up to date. This budget confirms that investment gain of \$1.3 billion. That is a

reflection of a commitment to make sure modern schools are built and schools are updated.

In fact, we have 100 schools being built as we speak and 200 in the pipeline today in small towns and big cities everywhere. We are refocusing on building schools, and the impetus for this bill is to get it done quicker. It should not take a decade of time to build a school in this province, and yet, here in Toronto—a compelling case study how not to do it—it takes literally a decade. Many members opposite represent urban centres. You all have examples of this. In rural Ontario, the same can be true. The bottom line is, no matter where the application, the problem, I think, resonates with most parents. Why does it take seven, eight, nine, 10, 12 years to build, often, a standard modulated build? It's honestly ludicrous. Time is money, because every single week I'm having to go back and reauthorize an inflationary increase to a school that cost \$15 million a year ago, but now they're asking for \$2 million or \$3 million more because of inflation, because of time. So if we could reduce the backlog and make the system more seamless, we could be more responsible with the tax dollar, but even beyond the fiscal imperative, we can get a school built in a community faster. That's the point of the bill.

0930

I find the element of our capital system to be almost of an archaic nature. The legislation will enable, for the first time, the authority of a school board to do joint-use projects. There's roughly 40 of 5,000 schools joint-used in our history. That requires an exemption from the minister—a massive level of bureaucracy. It's a headache, frankly. It's annoying for the school boards to have to go through the process of working with all these entities because the systems have been designed to make it difficult, because it's such a static, siloed nature of our bureaucracies. We don't have someone with a lens to break down those silos. This bill materially does that. It takes a global lens of how the tax dollar should be extended, and that would create greater value and better outcomes for kids.

Madam Speaker, I say this because the bill includes the capacity to streamline and reduce the timelines. In fact, the Ministry of Education, through a lean review, cut down the approvals by 15%. But even still, I would submit that's not enough. Speak to parents today in any community, small or large. They will say it isn't working as efficiently as it should be. My job, as minister, is not to defend the status quo. I would submit that members opposite should not be defending the status quo; we should serve as a challenge function to all governments and those around our kids to step up and do better and produce a more efficient result for children. So this bill does that. It allows for the acceleration of school builds. It allows us to meet our immigration targets set by the federal government. Speaker, 300,000 people are moving in next year; 300,000 are moving in the year after, so we need to build schools faster.

We're going to have to reimagine how we do business when it comes to building in this province and eliminate the roadblocks to progress.

We are going to take a few steps that I think are going to be very, very positive. The first is, we're going to focus on building modern schools faster by delivering and better utilizing school capacity and enhancing accountability around this.

We're going to establish a provincial framework of property that is deemed excess by school boards to meet current and future pupil accommodation needs, which essentially means we're going to come up with a system that understands where the growth is happening and where the corresponding capital investments need to be.

We'll work with school boards to end the territorialism that does exist in school boards—not everywhere, but we all know of examples. We may not be prepared to share them, but I know all of us are aware of examples where the public school board is looking for a school. They have faced explosive growth in Ottawa, just to illustrate an example. The Catholic school board, which has a school that is empty—or perhaps rent it to some organization in the community. They have a school down the street, but that school board, because of the nature of the competitive systems within our education system, will not sell that excess school that they haven't used in a decade to the other board. The taxpayer paid for the school. I'm not suggesting repurposing it for some other interest. There has to be some entity that forces the hands of school boards, to say, “You've got to work together. Kids are sitting in portables or being bused out of town. This is actually about the quality of life of our children, so stop creating these territorial cultures and put children first.” So in my job as minister, this legislation will enable my ability to say to a school board, “That's a problem we're not going to stand by anymore. You will sell your excess school to the board that needs it.”

There are French schools in this province, massive growth—it's a great story of enrolment increasing. They don't have land. You know, Madam Speaker, the history of how French school boards were developed. They didn't get a lot of legacy schools in the public and Catholic system. That's one of their big issues of contention. We have to keep up with the needs of our French-language commitment. We are constitutionally obliged to do so, and we will.

It resonates with me when a board comes to me, saying, “We need a school.” They have schools—often, half a dozen schools within a small community—and there isn't a commitment to sell them. That's going to end in this bill. We're going to make sure schools are sold for educational purposes.

There's a process established to be clear. The first step is, the school boards themselves have to say if there is need for the school or not. If there's not a need, the process would then force them to offer it to the coterminous board. So in this example, the public school selling the school would have to offer it to the Catholic and French school. They get the first right of refusal. If there is absolutely no need for educational purposes for any of the school boards involved—the original landholder, the other boards—then it can be provided, through the Ministry of Infrastructure,

to our provincial priorities list, which can include things like long-term care. If they don't also need it, then, of course, it would go on the market. That's the existing process, frankly, of how to dispose of a school, of an asset. So this is not really revolutionary, but it's following that process—offer it firstly for academic purposes, for student purposes, for learning; offer it to coterminous boards; offer it to other provincial priorities, like long-term care; and then, should none of them exercise their rights to put their hand up, saying, “I need that school. I want to build on that land a long-term care for a compelling reason to support an aging population,” then it could be sold in the public market. That's just common sense.

I think we should all really focus ourselves on doing better when it comes to building schools faster and allowing for more innovation in the sector. The elements of our system are so archaic, even joint-use projects—there are brilliant examples in the province of joint use between a school board partnering with a YMCA or a municipality. There are some awesome examples in Ontario of those joint projects. The problem is, statistically, they're so insignificant. Of 5,000 schools—4,800-plus schools—we have 40, since Confederation, joint-use schools. I wouldn't say that is a number that is reflective of many families' interests, which is marrying good recreational infrastructure with a local school.

Imagine in our communities a school that is partnered with a community centre or a recreational facility or a YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, whatever, that has pools and ice rinks—from an equity perspective, access to recreational infrastructure that many kids may not get in their communities or at home or certainly in their schools. This is good for kids. It may economize and save some money; that's not the driving force here. We're putting \$550 million. We have a \$14-billion capital plan that's committed in our budget. That money is there. But I just think if we could do more and provide better learning experiences and learning spaces, that's a good thing for kids. So let's enable school boards—let's send a culture through this bill that that is now permissible; in fact, it's actually encouraged.

Out-of-the-box thinking: We're going to need to think about how we build in vertical communities. I approved the first elementary school in a condo down in lower Lakeshore some two years ago. It was somewhat comical that, in 2022, the government of the day builds a school in a condo, when we know there's intensification happening. We know young families, that's probably—let me rephrase that: That's often where many young families will start. If they're able to attain homes, they will start within their condos and then perhaps move out of that. But they will have their first or second child often in an urban centre, in a condo. They deserve a school too. They shouldn't be bused 92 minutes to some other part of town. We could build schools and rethink and reimagine how we build more efficiently in the province. And we did that. We did that in an urban centre as a case study that we can build with community, developments and municipalities to deliver education close to home. That's a good outcome, and this bill will encourage more of that.

It also will reduce the planning time, and it will give me the ability, as the minister, to require boards to use certain designs and plans when constructing, renovating and making additions to schools—essentially, a catalogue of options to better modulate the building of schools and make it happen quicker.

Madam Speaker, I also have reaffirmed my commitments to protect the integrity of small towns in this province. We know there are many parents—some in this House today—who advocated strongly against the former government's systematic school closure policy. It was a legacy that was quite indefensible: 600 schools closed. And it's not the concept of closing underperforming schools that offends me; it's the concept of closing a single school in a community, the only school in a community, that it, in effect, guarantees the end of the viability of that town or village or community for economic purposes. When you remove a school or child care, you remove the heartbeat of a small town. The lack of concern for that implication, I think, is the impetus for why we've maintained a school board moratorium to date, and that will stay in place until we have resolved long-standing concerns around the economic impacts—a true evaluation of the real impact of closing a school in a small town of this province. In the meantime, this bill focuses on building them faster. We can all unite behind that, I hope.

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Another component that I think is prudent for me to share today, moving beyond the capital side, is the idea to strengthen a zero-tolerance approach in the Ontario College of Teachers. First off, we've got to process teachers quicker. In BC, if you're an international teacher from London, England and you want to come and teach in Canada, it takes you 40 to 50 days to get certified; yet our regulator, the Ontario College of Teachers, takes 110 days. We can do something better. It's just a recognition that we have to create a healthy level of pressure on all the entities in the ecosystem of education to step up. Why does it take two or three times longer to certify a teacher, when I'm hearing from school boards that they lack access to those qualified staff? Well, then get on with it. Work harder and smarter and produce a better outcome that meets the needs of the labour market and our school system today—so I'm imposing mandatory dates that it will take to certify. If they can do it in BC, we can do it in this province. And I know the school board system and many others in the education system support that.

The other element is, how do we send a signal of zero tolerance against some of the most heinous and, often, the most serious of crimes against children? It has to be said, our educators, I think, care deeply about their kids—a true affection and commitment. They go above and beyond. I celebrate their work. I thank them for their work. But like in any profession, there will be those who bring reputational harm to their profession. Thus, there needs to be a bona fide, zero-tolerance, strong regulator in place, to remove individuals who pose a potential risk to a child.

This bill, through legislative force, will require any teacher charged and convicted of a serious Criminal Code

offence dealing with, for example, sexual crimes against a child to receive a lifetime ban. They will never be able to teach in the province of Ontario again. Their names will now be publicly posted to a registry. I believe it's in the provincial interest that you know if your child's teacher was charged, convicted or associated with a serious crime. We will require those individuals to pay for the victim supports for the children and their families, including retroactive examples of this. And, obviously, we will continue, as we did last year for the first time, to mandate that every single teacher in the Ontario College of Teachers and the College of Early Childhood Educators has to go through sexual abuse prevention training. We did that this past September, which I think is going to make a big difference.

The message in this bill is zero tolerance when it comes to the safety of children, zero tolerance when it comes to those who believe they want to bring harm to a child. I cannot reaffirm the overwhelming sense of gratitude to the staff—these are good people. But among good people, there can be examples of those who are predatory and should not be near a child. The old system was not working particularly well in Ontario. This sends a signal: If you dare act upon a vulnerable child in a school in any criminal way, there will be real consequences, and professionally you'll never be able to teach in the province again. We're going to do that. We're going to speed up the processing times.

There are so many elements to the bill, but I want to get through just one or two more quick points before I turn it over to the parliamentary assistant.

Another element that is necessary is the curriculum. It took the former Liberals almost 15 years to update the math curriculum; 13 years to update the science curriculum. The global economy changed around us—AI came on board; we had massive changes in technology, in innovation—and the curriculum was static, as if the government had no regard of the day for how labour market needs must connect with what we teach our kids in the classroom. And then we wondered aloud, “How is it that kids have such a high rate of youth unemployment?” It was because they weren't learning skills they can monetize in the economy. They weren't learning anything relevant to where the puck was going when it comes to future innovations of the jobs of tomorrow.

So this bill mandates, through statutory power, that every minister, whomever he or she may be, will have to modernize curriculum on a regularized basis to make sure it meets the needs of job creators and, more importantly, it actually helps kids get a good job, own a home, and achieve in our country.

Finally, we are placing a great deal of emphasis in the Education Act on helping to ensure, when it comes to Ontarians with disabilities, that the language in the legislation is reflective and inclusive. We've heard from our stakeholders from the French community about the need to amend the language speaking to special education in the French version, so we're amending the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, because words matter too. We want

young people to feel respected and included and celebrated in our school boards, so we're going to make that amendment as well.

Overall, our aim is to lift outcomes, lift ambitions, better introduce and usher in more accountability and transparency to empower the parents' voice and to refocus our system on what fundamentally matters: the mastery of reading, writing, math and STEM disciplines to build leaders ready to take on the jobs of tomorrow, who can graduate with a competitive advantage in this country.

It is a great honour to serve as minister, and I'm grateful for all the partners involved to make this bill a reality: my staff, our stakeholders, all parliamentarians who have spoken out on a desire for better for children. Hopefully, with the support of this House, this bill will allow us to improve a system that is so desperately in need of reform.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Ajax to continue.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: It is an honour to stand before you today, as the parliamentary assistant to Ontario's education minister, to support the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act. I want to thank the minister for sharing his time with me this morning to highlight how these proposed reforms will help improve student outcomes for Ontario students and support their lifelong success.

As a former trustee, an MPP and a mom, I know how profoundly important education is.

I'm very proud of the work our team has done and continues to do to support Ontario's education system.

As Minister Lecce has already outlined, these reforms are designed to ensure Ontario's education system is focused on improving student outcomes across our province's 72 district school boards, while preparing students for the jobs of the future. At the same time, we want them to be ready to adapt as the world changes around them. We need to ensure our education partners are held accountable, their practices are transparent, and the entire sector is focused on the same provincial priorities; namely, student achievement, especially in fundamental skills like reading, writing and math, because at the heart of our public education system is a shared responsibility to ensure all students and children can succeed and reach their full potential. By proposing the changes to the Education Act, the Ontario College of Teachers Act, the Early Childhood Educators Act, and subsequent amendments to the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, we are making it clear that the success of Ontario's students and children is our number one priority.

As a former school board trustee proudly serving Ajax students and parents in the Durham District School Board for nearly a decade, I firmly support the reforms to enhance governance and leadership. I can speak from first-hand experience on how important the role of a school board trustee is. They have the important responsibility of serving as their community advocate for public education. They're required, under the Education Act, to carry out the responsibilities in a manner that assists the board in fulfilling its duties. A trustee must maintain a focus on student achievement and well-being, as well as participate

in making decisions that benefit the board community they serve. At all times, they must be focused on being the voices of the parents who elected them and represent the interests of their constituents. It is not an easy job. Oftentimes, many people don't know what a trustee does.

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Speaker, many trustees do amazing work to support and advocate for students. They champion programs and changes in their communities that lead to phenomenal student success. We often don't see these amazing stories on the news, but we know that they do the work. And oftentimes, we have others that cause disruption within our schools.

Ontario is large and diverse. As such, the job of a trustee varies widely to meet local needs. But there's significant inconsistency across the province when it comes to trustees and their training and skills. Discussions with our trustee partners and a public survey showed strong support for provincial standards when it comes to trustee codes of conduct. I'm happy to say these proposed reforms will establish this, which ultimately will set trustees up for success in supporting our students and our boards.

Speaker, I support the proposed implementation of standardized mandatory training for all trustees on a provincial level to ensure they have the knowledge and skills necessary for this very important job. And because Ontario is a vast place, we need provincial requirements for trustee codes of conduct, which sets out clear expectations in how trustees fulfill their duties. It's unfortunate that we have seen some trustees shut down respectful parents who were simply offering views which the board disagreed with. By clearly establishing this standard code of conduct, this legislation seeks to ensure all trustees clearly understand their roles and obligations to their constituents—that they understand what governance is.

And the same goes for directors of education. Directors of education are leaders in our school communities, but right now, there are very few criteria or requirements for a candidate to assume this critical role. A director is effectively a CEO. It is precisely for this reason that I support establishing government authority to set out a consistent performance appraisal framework to support boards in assessing director of education performance. This would help ensure greater consistency across the province, and that boards are supported in meeting their duties and delivering on provincial priorities.

In addressing the difference we're seeing in school board performance and renewing our focus on student achievement, we will help more students and families in Ontario to succeed, especially in our marginalized communities. The results are better outcomes for students and children across the province. That is why I believe consistency in trustee training, establishing provincial standards in trustee codes of conduct, as well as a future, standardized performance appraisal framework for directors of education will improve student success in Ontario.

And just as school boards will benefit from greater consistency, so will educators. It is important to have a

consistent, evidence-based approach to teaching and learning in math, literacy, special education, mental health, and technology courses. This will ensure students across the province will be able to gain the skills and knowledge they need to take their next steps in life. So we'll make sure our educators have the tools and knowledge they need to help our students to succeed to maintain Ontario's competitive edge in the labour market.

Additionally, our proposed amendments will also aim to increase fair and effective disciplinary processes for teachers and registered early childhood educators that support child and student safety. Specifically, we're taking action to ensure that there's zero tolerance for educators involved in a sexual offence.

We're also supporting students who have been victims of sexual abuse by expanding therapy counselling funding provided by respective regulatory colleges to any student victim of alleged sexual abuse. This is a further demonstration of our commitment to protecting our students.

Speaker, we are proud that Ontario continues to be among the top-performing education systems nationally and internationally. However, we know that there is variability in how our education system performs across the province. As Minister Lecce previously mentioned, some of our school boards have struggled with key student performance indicators including elementary EQAO assessments, secondary EQAO assessments, graduation rates, and student attendance. As a former trustee and as a parent, I know we must do better—it is my condition that we need to do not just pockets of excellence, but excellence across our boards.

Moreover, parents are telling us that they feel powerless and out of touch, with limited knowledge and ability to affect the education system for their children. It is one of the main reasons that I ran as trustee. I had a problem that I could not navigate with our system. It was cumbersome and unresponsive to the need as a parent.

We have seen many organizations that are up to support parents just to navigate the education system. That is why we are proposing to establish consistent requirements for school boards to share information with parents. As I mentioned earlier, this would be both in how they manage Ontario's historical education investment, as well as information and updates on student outcomes, and progress around student achievement in fundamental areas. This would help parents measure success right across the province. It's important, because if this legislation is passed, it will establish consistent information and approaches to student learning, so students will benefit from similar approaches to instruction and learning no matter where they live. That consistency is a big focus for the changes we are seeking to make, because where people live should never determine the impact or quality of their kids' education.

To help ensure students have the support they need, this legislation proposes an amendment to the Education Act providing authority to the minister to issue binding policies and guidelines on student mental health and well-

being. This would bring more consistency to the delivery of mental health education and services in all boards across the province.

As the minister touched on earlier, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act would grant him the authority to establish formal guidelines for a transparent and predictable review process. It would ensure the curriculum is not only reviewed regularly, but ensure students are prepared for success at every level of their lives and for jobs in the future.

It is also an exciting day for our government and the broader education sector at large, as we announce education funding for the 2023-24 school year, with a focus on getting back to basics and developing strong fundamental skills and knowledge. Our government is investing \$693 million more in public education for the next school year as part of the Grants for Student Needs and Priorities and Partnerships Fund. That's a 2.7% increase in the base GSN funding from last year, which, by the way, was already a record-setting investment. This new record-setting investment, announced today, aligns with our proposed reforms, building on the work currently under way, including our new targeted supports for mental health, math and literacy. This investment will support nearly a thousand more educators, which follows Sunday's exciting news where our government made a \$180-million investment to support the development of fundamental skills in reading and mathematics. That investment will also support nearly 1,000 educators, meaning that over the past few days our government has made an investment of nearly 2,000 more teachers.

This reform, proposed in the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, will be supported by targeted initiatives including \$140 million to help students struggling with the fundamentals of reading, writing and math. Almost \$40 million will be provided over the next three years for summer mental health supports, to support the continuity of care for students with mental health concerns, and almost \$20 million for the hiring of additional paraprofessional staff, educational assistants, and custodians to enhance student safety and maintain cleaning standards.

Under the GSN funding formula, school boards in Ontario's publicly funded education system are receiving the largest investment in education in our province's history.

In addition, the Priorities and Partnerships Fund investment of \$473.6 million will enable school boards and third parties to undertake important curricular and extracurricular initiatives that promote student success, development and leadership skills.

Our goal is to support students with help they need.

As we move forward, we need a strong education system with a unified focus to ensure all students, no matter where they are in Ontario, are ready for the demands of the future economy.

Since our government took office, we have worked to get our publicly funded education system back on track and back into the hands of those it impacts the most: our students, their parents, and educators.

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To conclude, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act is another example of our government's efforts to get our kids back on track. If passed, it would not only help to ensure students and children in Ontario are equipped with the skills they need to succeed, but it would also help make certain we continue to have one of the best education systems in the world for years to come.

The proposed amendments to the Education Act, Ontario College of Teachers Act, Early Childhood Educators Act, and the subsequent amendments to the Ontarians with Disabilities Act make it clear that our government is focused on one thing: improving student success.

We know our teachers are among the very best in the world. We know they do a great job, and we want to ensure that we continue to develop supports and resources that will help them remain leaders in their field. The Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act would support educators to be better prepared at teaching the fundamentals of math, literacy, special education, mental health, and technology to help set up our students for success now and in the future.

We realize—and we've heard from parents and from our job market—that our students are leaving school not prepared for the jobs. We have over 200,000 jobs available, and our youth unemployment is still very high, and so this is why our government wants to focus and continues to focus on student success.

I look forward to the support of all members of this House on this very important piece of legislation that continues to support and set our kids up for success.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll move to questions.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The Grants for Student Needs background documents that were released yesterday revealed that thanks to this government's persistent underfunding of education, our high schools now have, on average, four fewer teachers than they did in 2018. What the minister has announced in the past couple days is one new educator for only about 20% of our schools in Ontario, \$180 million—that's less than half the amount of money the minister failed to get out the door the past year. This math is not mathing.

How does the minister believe that our kids are going to succeed at reading and writing when every single year he's providing them with fewer supports instead of more?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I remind the speaker that it's not lost on us that the NDP would have voted against the roughly 8,000 new staff hired since 2018 when we came to power. They would have opposed the last increase of \$690 million, a 10% increase in the GSN over the last four years, 27% in the Ministry of Education relative to where we started in 2017-18 under the former Liberals.

The message we're sending in this bill, through Sunday's announcement, was the hiring of 2,000 front-line staff; specifically, 700 for literacy promotion, educators who specialize in reading; an additional 380 math educators; and then almost a thousand more for grades 7,

8, 9 and 10 destreaming courses—for grades 7 and 8, leading into the grade 9 destreaming and grade 10 to help with that transition out. That's 2,000 more front-line educators, and the members can't agree that that's an incremental step forward to improving literacy in math. It's odd that they're not dealing with the substance of the bill that deals with improvements and reform and modernization.

I hope the member will declare a clear position if she and all New Democrats will vote for better when it comes to our school system in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Will Bouma: I wanted to ask the member from Ajax a question. It seems that just a few weeks ago, we were having a conversation about how much she cares about the education system in the province of Ontario. In fact, for those of you who don't know, her concerns about education in the province of Ontario are exactly why she's here. It's such a personal thing for her.

I'm so excited, with our Minister of Education, to see the progress that we're making for the benefit of the students in Ontario.

Again, there are too many things that I'm so excited about in this piece of legislation. But I wanted to ask her, as a mom and being a parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education, what really is personal for her that's such a huge step forward in this piece of legislation?

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you very much for that question.

It's the parental part. I know myself that, as a trustee, when I had a problem trying to figure something out for my child—the lack of response from the education system about my questions, the number of doors I knocked on and the phone calls I made, that I could not get a response. As a parent, when your child is in crisis and you cannot get a response from the education system—a system that you're sending your child to for multiple hours a day—it really takes away from your sense of power as a parent, where you want to protect your child and you want to do the best for your child. That is definitely one of the reasons why I ran as a trustee and why I'm pleased to serve with the minister in this portfolio.

We need to really move back to a child-centric education system, where parents also have a voice in that education—because it shows that when parents are involved in education, students do much better.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: As a trained educator myself, I have some concerns with Bill 98, because we see Bill 98 as legislation that has been developed without consultation with educators, with trustees, and without consultation with parents or with students. It's another cart-before-horse exercise, which we're so familiar with from the Liberals before. They made drastic changes to education without consulting the community.

During the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs pre-budget consultations, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association—and this is Barb

Dobrowolski—said, “Since coming into office in 2018, the government's agenda has been gutted by ideology rather than evidence. Policy decisions have been made with little thought, foresight or genuine consultation with stakeholders and experts, the consequences of which have been to destabilize public services. Enough is enough.”

The government has reached out and said that they will hold public consultations and allow public input by mid-May. Is this a public relations exercise, or will the government pass amendments to this legislation brought forward by the official opposition?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We're going to listen to the overwhelming message of parents who expect and demand the education system to be better. If you've knocked on a door in London, you would have heard the same message. If you spoke to any parent in the publicly funded school system, they acknowledge that there are good things happening. They also demand better for their children. That's exactly why we brought forth this bill.

Is there a provision in this bill that you specifically oppose, so you—let's decouple the consultation. Could you name an element that you specifically—

Interjection.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yes, we're going to use this opportunity to define the positions of the opposition.

Do you oppose building schools faster? Do you oppose certifying teachers quicker? Do you oppose using our real estate portfolio for educational purposes? Do you oppose having involvement in the faculties of education so we can set out what a modern educator looks like? Do you oppose accountability for school boards who expend billions of our dollars? Do you oppose an integrity commissioner to standardize complaints in the province? Name the issue you oppose.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the minister and parliamentary assistant for their dedication to the students of Ontario.

Every day, parents receive information about their child's school—I personally just received one about three seconds ago, about my son's school. We know about the permission slips, the class updates and the requests to take part in events. Yet one piece of information we don't know about is how our child is performing at school.

The EQAO for 2021-22 assessment results showed weaker performance in the math scores across all grades and reading and writing in grade 3.

We know that this proposed legislation will include setting provincial educational priorities for boards.

How does requiring school boards to provide progress reports on provincial education priorities for students achieve support for student success?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'd much prefer the member from Ajax, actually, to respond, but thank you very much to the member from Thornhill for the question and her

leadership as a parent and as an advocate for children in Thornhill and beyond.

The way by which we introduce a measurement tool is by ensuring that school boards have to create, through public engagement with families and parents, a board improvement plan. The anchor of this bill is not just words and aspirational mission statements; it is accountability to measure the improvement in our school boards by re-focusing on student achievement. So every school board will produce, in consultation with parents, a board improvement plan. They will then post the plan publicly. They will then be benchmarked against the success of implementing and adhering to provincial priorities when it comes to student achievement: better reading, writing and math scores; higher graduation rates; a higher level of attendance within our schools. These are all metrics that matter, and they will help children succeed.

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So yes, we're going to produce accountability in the system, but we're also going to really move forward with a spirit of collaboration. I think if we all work together and we work smarter and harder, we can lift the standards and the ambitions of kids and give Ontario students the ability to reach their full potential, which we all desire.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): One last question.

Mr. Joel Harden: My question is for the minister.

I listened with rapt attention to 40 minutes of platitudes. But in the real world, at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, we know that there are \$10 million to \$13 million of cuts being proposed with this minister's performance. In the real world, what that will mean for students with special needs, who are at the top of the chopping block, unfortunately, are fewer autism classes—at least two in the city of Ottawa. I want to mention Steve Legault, whose son, profoundly in need of supports, is only entitled to two hours of education a day. That's what the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, sadly, has had to do because of a lack of staff supports. And this minister, despite the rhetoric, is continuing a regime of austerity that will make the Legault family's life worse.

So, Minister, I would like you to deliver a message to the Legault family. Are you going to make sure that you're going to make the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board whole and they won't have \$10 million to \$13 million of cuts, or aren't you?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We're going to commit to families in Ottawa and all regions of the province that their funding will increase through an almost \$700-million GSN funding enhancement—2.7% this school year—to meet the needs of children now and into the future.

We're also going to hire 2,000 more front-line teachers. The member opposite calls it a platitude; I call it a person, a leader in front of a child, making a difference on reading, writing and math. That's going to help.

I hope the members opposite will support us as we hire 2,000 additional front-line educators in schools across Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to further debate.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I am pleased to have the opportunity today to rise to speak to Bill 98, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act. This is another example of the government's Orwellian naming of legislation. I think a more apt title for it would have been the "micromanaging school boards as a distraction from the underfunding of schools act" or maybe the Wizard of Oz act—pay no attention to the minister behind the curtain—because what we have here is a spectacular refusal to take responsibility for the government's failures on the education file and the many ways in which this government and this minister are shortchanging our kids. Instead, the government is trying to distract parents by blaming schools, by blaming teachers and by blaming school boards for his underinvestment. And he's desperately hoping that you don't notice that, once again this year, education funding is not keeping up with inflation. Instead, he wants you to believe that if he blusters enough about basic skills, you won't even notice that there's no actual plan here to address the real reasons why our children are struggling. He's hoping you won't pay any attention to rising class sizes, to cuts to teachers and education workers, to the lack of special education supports, to the absence of mental health supports in our schools, to the rising tide of violence in our schools because of the mental health crisis, to the burnout that teachers and education workers are experiencing because of the cuts and the conditions imposed on them by this government, to the impact of e-learning on our students and our school budgets.

This bill and the timing of it, along with the minister's announcement on Sunday, is smoke and mirrors. It is sleight of hand. It's saying, "Please look over here so that you don't notice what we're doing over here," so that you disbelieve what you are seeing in our schools with your own eyes.

Are our children struggling? Yes, absolutely. Do they need and deserve better supports? Yes, absolutely. But let's talk about why they're struggling and who is actually responsible for what is happening and what the solutions are if you are not a minister who is obsessed with avoiding responsibility.

The past three years have been rough; there is no doubt about that—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I apologize to the member. I have to interrupt because it's now 10:15.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

WEARING OF PINS

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I will recognize the member for Newmarket–Aurora, who has a point of order.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to allow members to wear pins in recognition of April being the Canadian Cancer Society's daffodil campaign.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): MPP Gallagher Murphy has moved unanimous consent to allow MPPs to wear pins. Agreed? Agreed.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

YOM HA-SHOAH

Ms. Laura Smith: Today marks Yom ha-Shoah, the solemn commemoration of the brutal murder and discrimination endured by the Jewish people during the Holocaust. Almost every Jewish person out there has a story of a family member who endured the Holocaust, including myself.

There's a park that borders my riding dedicated to a well-known Holocaust survivor, Felix Opatowski. At 15, Felix risked his life and smuggled goods out of Nazi ghettos in exchange for food for his family. After being deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp in 1943, he joined the Polish underground as a runner and later helped plan an attempt to demolish the camp's crematorium.

Not long ago, I attended the premiere for the Legacy Portrait Project documentary, where Holocaust survivors spoke of their experiences with their grandchildren. These conversations filmed in the documentary capture a moment in time, a glimpse into the individual triumph of each survivor, having prevailed over adversity by building families and finding love and joy after the Holocaust.

One in three students in Canada believe the Holocaust was fabricated or exaggerated, and 42% of students have explicitly seen an anti-Semitic incident in their school.

I'm looking forward to September of this year, when the new Holocaust curriculum will be officially launched in schools all over this province. Learning and listening to these stories of the Holocaust is crucial because those who fail—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you for the 90-second members' statement.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Jeff Burch: Over 100 developmental service workers at Community Living Port Colborne-Wainfleet, members of CUPE Local 2276, have been on strike since March 31. These are some of the workers we so proudly called heroes during the pandemic, who do the often-invisible work of helping people with disabilities live full, rich lives. The main issue is a staffing crisis that has led to members being stuck on shift, sometimes for up to 36 hours. They just want to get back to the bargaining table to secure a fair deal, but this employer has indicated they are in no rush to do so.

Untrained IT and admin workers are caring for residents, including administering medication and managing complex needs. They have hired agency workers, and these unqualified scabs are being paid substantially more than the workers were.

Chris Judge, one of the CUPE members I met on the picket line last week, says he has been stuck on shift so frequently that he misses his children, and hearing his kids upset or crying on the other end of the phone when he can't come home is absolutely heartbreaking.

Judge and his co-workers aren't fighting for a raise, although they deserve one. They're fighting so their employer will respect them as complete people with families and lives. Their message: "We don't do this to get rich, we do it because it's meaningful. But our employer uses that against us. They push us to our limits. They take advantage. People are made to feel guilty for wanting to go home at the end of a shift when all we want is to do our jobs to the best of our ability and to have a life outside of work."

I urge Community Living Port Colborne-Wainfleet, its board and management to get back to the bargaining—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We're still on 90-second members' statements.

HOMELESSNESS AND ASSISTED HOUSING

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's an honour to rise today to share with the Legislature important news from my riding of Sarnia-Lambton. I am extremely pleased to inform the members of this Legislature about a recent announcement that will provide much-needed new funding from the Ontario government for the province's Homelessness Prevention Program and Indigenous Supportive Housing Program. The county of Lambton will see an increase of over \$2 million, bringing total Homelessness Prevention Program funding for this municipality to more than \$5.6 million. That represents an increase of over 57% over the previous year's funding.

I had the opportunity to speak with Valerie Colasanti, the general manager of Lambton county social services, about the importance of this critical new funding. Ms. Colasanti said the increased provincial investment would help Lambton county provide more support to keep people in their homes, and also allow the county to do more long-term planning.

The additional funding will be spent on initiatives such as helping those who live in shelters move into permanent homes. It could also help pay for mental health and harm reduction supports to keep precariously housed individuals in their homes. And it could also provide rent supplements to make rent more affordable.

All of us in Sarnia-Lambton are grateful for this important investment in our community.

1020

FIRE SAFETY IN NORTHERN AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. Good morning.

Remarks in Anishiniimowin.

This morning, I would like to share parts of an open letter from Norman Shewaybick from Webequie First Nation:

"On April 7, 2023, the home that my family has been occupying since 1999 burnt to the ground. It housed eight of us in total (and yes, we had working smoke alarms). Luckily, we were all able to self-rescue without injury

before the fire spread. The house was engulfed in flames within 20 minutes. All we had was a measly fire extinguisher. We lost everything.

“Last fall, another fire left families homeless because there are no fire services to call.

“In Webequie, there is no fire service, there are no enforceable fire codes, there is no fire truck or a fire station.

“While we live in poverty, our lands are being valued in the trillions and mining is being aggressively pushed to promote Canada and Ontario’s future prosperity.

“It is preposterous that legislation like the Ontario Mining Act is fully applicable on our lands but not the Ontario fire protection act or Ontario fire code and that governments have not already found a way to work with ... First Nations in Ontario.”

There is so much more to Norman’s letter. I do not have enough time to share it all this morning, but it’s an important letter.

Meegwetch for listening.

HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. Ross Romano: Mr. Speaker, my favourite time of the year is the spring. I love the changing of the weather. I love seeing the sun come out and all the snow melting. Obviously, in Sault Ste. Marie, we do get our fair share of snow. It’s such a wonderful time of year, such an exciting time of year. This past week, our constituency week, was an absolutely glorious spring week in so many communities across the province. And Sault Ste. Marie was just outstanding. We had the snow melting. Kids were all outside playing. I couldn’t get my boys to come back inside by the middle of the day Sunday as the weather actually started to turn. Patios were open for business again. Things were outstanding.

This past week was a really great week in Sault Ste. Marie, with our brand new Northern Community Centre, which is a new twin-pad hockey arena that just opened a month ago. Already, we’ve had a few tournaments hosted in this new hockey arena that I’m really proud our government was able to help with the construction of. It was a really special tournament we hosted this past week, where our Soo Jr. Greyhounds under 15 AAA—northern Ontario hockey league champs, actually—hosted the Ontario Hockey Federation U15 AAA Ontario championships. We had teams from across all of Ontario that travelled to the Soo for this five-day round robin tournament. We welcomed the York Simcoe Express, the Sudbury Nickel Capitals, the Thunder Bay Kings, the Vaughan Kings, the Elgin-Middlesex Canucks, and the Upper Canada Cyclones. Unfortunately, we fell short in the finals. But I’m really proud of the work our team put in, and I want to congratulate them on their success.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Speaker, 12 days ago, an ice storm knocked out power in parts of Ottawa once again,

including large parts of Ottawa West–Nepean. For the second time in less than a year, the power was out for multiple days, with some residents waiting up to four days to have power restored. And once again, residents in apartments and condo buildings were trapped in their own homes for multiple days with no access to food, water or medical care.

Lynn Ashdown, who uses a wheelchair and has now been trapped three times in her home for multiple days, was so struck by the trauma of the situation that she threw up as soon as the power went out.

Residents of apartment buildings like the Minto-owned building at 1343 Meadowlands were once again reaching out to my office to plead for help as they were trapped without water and elevators.

These residents cannot fathom why the government would not support legislation that could easily prevent situations like this from happening.

It is absolutely shameful that the government is siding with big real estate investment trusts against people with disabilities, seniors, parents of small children, and others with mobility issues who are experiencing extreme hardship and trauma every time the power goes out.

We need legislation to protect the safety and human rights of every Ontarian in an emergency.

Shame on this government for making people like Lynn and the residents of 1343 Meadowlands suffer repeatedly.

TAXATION

Mr. Graham McGregor: I rise this morning to stand up for every resident of Brampton North or Ontario who drives a car, heats their home, or shops at a grocery store. It’s on their behalf that I join my caucus colleagues in calling on the federal government to end their carbon tax.

For many families in my community—and this may come as a shock to downtown Toronto progressives—access to a car is a necessity, not a luxury. For families in my community and across Ontario, heating their home with natural gas is a necessity, not a luxury; grocery shopping to feed their family is a necessity, not a luxury. Maybe some progressives will argue that those families could stockpile blankets to stay warm in the winter or just shiver a lot. It would appear that those same progressives suggest that those families simply fork out more money for their groceries. They call it “doing our part,” or “civic duty.”

I’ll tell you what, Mr. Speaker. I’ll do my part by voting in favour of measures that cut taxes on gas, food and other necessities.

And it’s the civic duty for every member of this House to stand up for Ontario families and demand the federal government scrap this ridiculous carbon tax.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Stephen Blais: Ontarians were recently blessed with a glimpse of what summer has in store, and while it didn’t last as long as any of us would have liked, it’s a very

good reminder that warmer days are just around the corner.

Warm weather brings about a great deal of activity in our communities. Neighbours are gardening and spring cleaning. Cities are sweeping away the remnants of winter. The coming of spring and summer also means more people moving about their communities.

In Orléans last week, the roads and sidewalks were full of joggers and cyclists dusting off the cobwebs of winter and getting some much-needed exercise and vitamin D.

Soon the parks will be open to welcome our children, and more and more students will be walking or biking to school. With all of this activity, it's important that we, as motorists, pay closer attention to our surroundings and that we remind ourselves to slow down through the neighbourhood, become mindful of the ball bouncing down the driveway into the road. As much as we might try to teach them, children won't always be on their highest guard and know all of their surroundings. It's incumbent upon us to be extra-vigilant around them.

Everybody should be encouraged to enjoy the outdoors and the wonderful opportunities spring and summer provide. Let's make sure everybody can stay safe while they do it.

POLICE

Ms. Donna Skelly: A few weeks ago, I was privileged to join members of Hamilton Police Service on a ride-along. Unfortunately, many people in Hamilton are suffering from addictions issues, so I wasn't surprised that all but one of the calls we responded to that night involved a person under the influence of either drugs or alcohol. What did surprise me was the level of compassion displayed by police when they interact with these people. Here are a few examples:

Police prevented a man who was dressed completely in dark clothing, walking straight down the middle of a dimly lit street, from being hit by a car. Police convinced him to go to a shelter and actually drove him there. He could have been killed that night and an unsuspecting driver's life forever changed.

I watched as police, along with paramedics, de-escalated a family crisis involving a mother and a troubled youth. The youth was eventually calmed and taken to hospital for treatment.

I witnessed wellness checks of our homeless population and police handing out canned good to people who knew them by name.

But I also saw the dangerous side of policing. At the beginning of the shift, I had taken a selfie with a young rookie cop I knew, Marco Arif. By the end of that shift, he was off to hospital with serious facial injuries that he received during an altercation on the job.

I want to thank Constable Arif, Sergeant Scott Hamilton, and all of the women and men who work for Hamilton Police Service.

Now, more than ever, we need our police, and now, more than ever, they need our support.

1030

ROSEMER ENVERGA

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: I'm honoured to rise today to celebrate a strong community leader and a constituent in my riding of Scarborough–Rouge Park, Rosemer Enverga. Rosemer is a caring community leader and a force of nature who has inspired and touched the lives of many.

Rosemer is the wife of the late Senator Tobias Enverga Jr.

The Enverga family have been known for their leadership in the community and for promoting Filipino art and culture, while supporting the most vulnerable. In 2008, Rosemer co-founded the Philippine Canadian Charitable Foundation with her late husband to support community initiatives, including the Pinoy Fiesta and Trade Show Toronto. As temporalities leader, Rosemer's dedication extends to the Philippines, where PCCF and the Archdiocesan Filipino Catholic Mission have provided over \$600,000 in medical supplies to hospitals and helped construct houses for those in need. These initiatives are rooted in their strong belief in family, community and faith.

Rosemer is also a recipient of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal by the Governor General of Canada for her service in Canada and for the Filipino community.

I want to congratulate Rosemer for continuing the legacy of her late husband and their lifelong commitment to charity.

I am truly proud to have Rosemer and her family in the Ontario Legislature today.

HOUSE SITTINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 9(g), the Clerk has received written notice from the government House leader indicating that a temporary change in the weekly meeting schedule of the House is required, and therefore, the afternoon routine on Wednesday, April 19, 2023, shall commence at 1 p.m.

USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN THE HOUSE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I also need to take a moment to remind members that the rules of this House prohibit members from using smart phone cameras to record the proceedings in the chamber. This rule is found in standing order 22, which provides that electronic devices may not be used as cameras or recording devices. Any recording of House proceedings using a personal electronic device would be a contravention of the standing order and, therefore, out of order.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It is now my pleasure to ask our group of legislative pages to assemble for their introduction.

From York–Simcoe, Nicholas Boutsis; from Scarborough–Rouge Park, Dominic Cadotte; from Burlington, Senna Chan Carusone; from Eglinton–Lawrence, Claire Cross; from Dufferin–Caledon, Katherine Demczur; from Guelph, Frederick Funk; from Brampton West, Mridul Goel; from Oshawa, Sanskrati Goyal; from Newmarket–Aurora, Liam Gunning; from Oxford, Leonard Hobbs; from Beaches–East York, Lazaros Kasekas; from Niagara Centre, Randall Marsh; from Markham–Stouffville, Maya Morales; from Pickering–Uxbridge, Christopher Naassan; from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Cole Okrainec; from Mississauga–Streetsville, Kundanika Pingali; from Waterloo, Akshitha Puttur; from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, Mackenzie Rankin; from Cambridge, Olivia Vermet; and from Vaughan–Woodbridge, Sophie Vine.

Please join me in welcoming this group of legislative pages.

Applause.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my pleasure to welcome representatives from the UHC Hub of Opportunities that provides supports and services to people in Windsor and all of Essex county: CEO June Muir and supervisor Marianne Moore.

It's good to see you back here at Queen's Park.

Mr. Trevor Jones: It's my pleasure to welcome representatives from Farm Fresh Ontario joining us today in the galleries. I encourage everyone to stop by their reception this evening from 5 until 7 in the dining room.

Thank you for joining us.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to welcome to the House today Steve and Christine Wright and Mary Ann and Nathan Peel. Steve is chair and Mary Ann is director of Howick Mutual Insurance. Steve and Christine are from Belmore, and Mary Ann and Nathan are from Bluevale. There might be a couple of family members up there, as well.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would like to welcome Michau Van Speyk from the Ontario Autism Coalition.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I'm delighted to welcome Pamela Sertl and Lori Schisler of 360°kids from my Richmond Hill riding, as well as First Work representatives led by their executive director, Akosua Alagaratnam, sitting in the public gallery.

Speaker, 360°kids was named one of Canada's best charities by Maclean's magazine in 2020. It helps youth overcome crisis and transition to a state of safety and stability.

Welcome all to Queen's Park.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: I'd like to welcome a few people to the House today: Justin, Sarah, Adrian, Charles, Frank, Steve, Alison, Trevor, Lachlan, Martin, Stephanie, and Craig. They're here for the Good Roads conference. We had some other visitors this morning for breakfast, but they had to go for delegations.

Thanks for coming.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: I would like to welcome constituents from Scarborough–Rouge Park: the incredible community leader Rosemer Enverga and her daughter Rocel Enverga; Lions Club chapter president Virgie; and community leader Gloria.

Welcome to the Ontario Legislature.

1040

Ms. Jess Dixon: It's my absolute honour and pleasure this morning to introduce you to three incredible police officers from the Toronto Police Service. Some of you may remember my member's statement from a while back about a grassroots organization called Project Hope, started by these three officers. They have since gathered almost half a million dollars in donations for recent immigrants and refugees to Canada, as well as the survivors of the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria. On their own time, they do outreach work, making sure that new arrivals to Canada who maybe haven't experienced Canadian police get a positive experience right off the bat. The work they do can't be understated.

Murtaza Popalzai, Mustafa Popalzai, and Farzad Ghotbi, thank you so much for coming.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I'd like to wish a very, very warm welcome to June Muir and Marianne Moore from the Unemployed Help Centre of Windsor Hub of Opportunities, who are here participating in the First Work advocacy day today. I had a great opportunity to meet with them earlier today.

On behalf of MPP Jones, MPP Leardi and myself, thank you for all that you do for the betterment of our community.

Mr. Aris Babikian: It is my great pleasure to welcome Rosemer Enverga and her colleagues to this House. Rosemer is quite an active person in the Filipino community. We've worked on so many projects to enhance and improve the quality of life for Scarborough–Agincourt residents of Filipino descent.

Thank you very much, Rosemer, for your contribution.

QUESTION PERIOD

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: Our students are struggling. Underfunding of our education system is impacting our kids directly with oversized classrooms, with fewer in-school supports, and anxiety levels are at an all-time high. None of this is normal.

Would the Premier explain how a measly \$66 per student is going to address the massive problems their chronic underfunding has created?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We are proud to increase investment for the coming school year by 693 million more dollars for September. That is a 10% increase in funding for school boards in the last four years. When you look at the entire Ministry of Education budget, it is up 27% when

compared to the peak of spending under Premier Kathleen Wynne. That is an investment in our publicly funded schools.

Speaker, we just announced a commitment to hire a thousand more teachers focused on literacy and math, a thousand additional teachers focused on destreaming.

I know the members will continue to oppose measures that incrementally make a difference in schools. They have an opportunity today to vote for our budget and our new plan to improve schools, to expect better from our school boards, and to demand that our education leads to student achievement and better outcomes in reading, writing and math.

Vote for our budget. Vote for our investments. Vote for better-in-Ontario schools.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: The education funding that was announced yesterday doesn't even remotely keep pace with inflation, let alone address the three years of learning disruption that have been impacting our kids so deeply.

So if they're not investing in our students and their future, what are they doing? They're micromanaging school boards, they're labelling community schools as real estate assets, and they're introducing new fees. That's what they're doing.

Back to the Premier: If he isn't going to invest in schools, will he at least not stick them with the bill for ministry responsibilities?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: From health care to housing to education, the status quo defender here, in the Leader of the Opposition—defending the status quo, when we all know we can do better for our children and they deserve better in Ontario schools.

We introduced legislation that is premised on raising standards, increasing accountability, and enshrining the voice of parents in our education system. What about that is so offensive to the Leader of the Opposition?

What about making sure that we have better outcomes tied to student achievement so we actually see higher outcomes related to reading, writing and math?

What is offensive about ensuring that we build schools faster, that we certify new educators quicker?

What is offensive about ensuring that new teachers are better educated on math, on literacy, on mental health and special education?

It is opposition, systematically, to progress and to change.

We will stand up for kids and drive this legislation forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The final supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, when is this government going to start taking responsibility? Five years—the status quo is their terrible record. It's the same old story that we've heard from this minister and this government for years now, and that's how out of touch they are. They're micromanaging municipalities. They're ideologically dismantling public health care. And now they're grabbing power from school boards.

I don't know a parent or a teacher in this province who trusts this government to deliver quality education to our children. Just look at the state of education in this province right now.

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: They don't want to hear it. But we see it every day.

Back to the Premier: His plan is going to force the lay-offs of teachers and education workers across this province. Will he reverse course and invest in the supports that students need to thrive?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I ask the members to please take their seats.

The Minister of Education to respond.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, it is ironic, recognizing that in the last election, the New Democrats lost 300,000 votes of the people of Ontario. So when you want to talk about public confidence—we have a mandate to demand better for Ontario children. There are 83 Progressive Conservatives—a historic achievement—because the people of Ontario have confidence in our Premier and in our party to stand up for parents and to demand better from the system of education.

We are increasing the hiring by 2,000 more front-line staff. We are refocusing education on what matters most: back to the basics, back to ensuring young people have the fluency in the skills that will help set them up for long-term success.

The member opposite speaks about mental health. In this budget, we've increased it by 500%, over \$100 million—a significant increase to help children succeed.

We're going to continue to drive reform and demand better for Ontario children.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Ms. Marit Stiles: On Thursday, the Ombudsman's office released their latest report on child welfare agencies in the province. We heard about Misty, a 13-year-old Indigenous girl from northern Ontario who repeatedly went missing while living in a home operated by Johnson Children's Services, which, as many of you already know, is a private provider. They were found to be particularly remiss in their obligations to provide care to Misty. The Ombudsman made 58 recommendations as a result; 31 of them were directed towards Johnson Children's Services.

So my question is very simple: What does the Premier plan to do to act on the important recommendations of the Ombudsman?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank the honourable colleague for the question.

Mr. Speaker, let me be clear: There is absolutely no room whatsoever in our system for individuals, entities or organizations that either willfully or through neglect fail in their duty of care towards children. Every single child

in our province, whether they're in care or not, deserves the right to live in peace and safety.

I'm glad to be able to share that all three organizations that were at the centre of the Ombudsman report have accepted all 58 recommendations from the Ombudsman. It's critical that all 58 recommendations need to be implemented swiftly so that something like this never happens again across this province. And while none of these recommendations are directed towards the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, we will nonetheless use this report to inform the continuing work of redesigning child welfare across the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to go back to the Premier on this one. It's a very important question.

Misty went missing seven times while she was in the care of Johnson Children's Services. At one point, the staff waited to report Misty missing to the police for more than four hours, and that resulted in her disappearance for 19 days—19 days, Speaker. I want everyone in this House to imagine a child going missing for 19 days.

1050

What's worse, Johnson was being paid to provide her with one-on-one support. The Ombudsman found they failed to provide this level of care. He also found significant gaps in documentation, record-keeping and training practices.

Speaker, Johnson Children's Services failed Misty.

To the Premier: Why are private providers with documented negligence still allowed to operate in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Parsa: The events outlined in the Ombudsman report are absolutely unacceptable and there will be absolutely no room—zero tolerance. As I said, every single child and every single youth in our province deserves to have a safe and loving home regardless of whether they're in care.

Again, the three organizations in the case have accepted all 58 recommendations, but we are asking and we will make sure that all 58 recommendations are implemented swiftly so that this never happens to a single child or youth across the province.

Mr. Speaker, under the leadership of this Premier, Premier Ford, as I said from day one, no child or youth will ever be left behind. We'll make sure that never happens.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The final supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: The minister talks about zero tolerance. Why are they still operating in this province?

I'm going to go back to the Premier again. It's clear that private providers like Johnson Children's Services have not been meeting the complex needs of marginalized children in care.

The circumstances of Misty's life put her uniquely at risk. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls specifically addresses "the

obligation of the child welfare system to protect Indigenous children from exploitation." But it seems like this is not a priority for the Premier and his government.

How is the Premier going to ensure there are resources for northern communities to provide culturally appropriate services so children like Misty can receive the support and the protection they need, and that every child deserves?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank the member for the question.

As I mentioned earlier, the events that are outlined in the report are unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that, just last week, I was up north with the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and my colleague from Kiiwetinoong in a signing of a coordination agreement to support the exercise of the Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug jurisdiction that would give them jurisdiction over child and family services under the KIDO agreement of family law.

I will add once again that we have made sure that services that are being provided need to be safe and secure, and every single child and every single youth in this province needs to be supported.

This comes as a result of many years of neglect by the previous government which always, every single time—the NDP had the opportunity to do something about it; they didn't. It is unacceptable.

Under this government, under this Premier, we'll make sure that, once again, no one is left behind, not a single child—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The next question.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. Good morning. My question is to the Premier.

Last week, the Ombudsman released a report on the failure of three care agencies to ensure the safety of a First Nations girl who repeatedly went missing when she was supposed to be receiving supervised services. This young woman should not have been harmed while under this care.

What has this minister done to hold these child welfare agencies accountable after all the evidence that tells us they are not doing their jobs?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Once again, thank you for the question.

Very clearly, again, the events that are outlined in the Ombudsman report are absolutely unacceptable.

As I mentioned, every single child and every single youth in our province needs to be in a safe and loving

environment and a stable home, again, regardless of whether they're in care.

The Ombudsman's report is going to be helpful as we are embarking on a child welfare redesign across the province.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, let me be very, very clear: Not a single child or youth in this province is going to go through neglect. We are not going to let it happen. We will fight for them every single day and make sure that those who are responsible are always held to account.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: You should shut down Johnson, because it's children who pay full with their lives when you do not take action, when you just speak those words that you're speaking.

The provincial protection system is perpetually responding to crises instead of fixing the root issues. Their focus should be on keeping families whole and healthy and on issues that create the crises, such as housing, parenting, wellness, food security, and poverty.

Again, what does this government plan to do to act on the important recommendations of the Ombudsman?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, the three organizations involved in the case have accepted all 58 recommendations of the Ombudsman's report and will make sure that they are acted on swiftly and implemented so that this never happens again to a single child or youth.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also add, this is why the child welfare redesign is in process. We are now consulting with those, because we want to make sure that this never happens to a single child or youth in the province. That includes more oversight across the province.

Once again, this is as a result of neglect for many, many years. They didn't do anything about it.

It's not going to happen on—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Official opposition, come to order.

Hon. Michael Parsa: We'll make sure that we work every single day to protect every single child and youth in our province.

LIFE SCIENCES SECTOR

Mr. Mike Harris: My question is for the Premier.

Waterloo region is home to some of the best and brightest health care and technology researchers in the world, making this an ideal location for innovative companies that are looking to start up and expand. It should come as no surprise that there is such extensive knowledge, skills and expertise found here, as our region is also home to a number of highly respected post-secondary institutions.

Ontario's life sciences sector is essential to advancing innovative health care solutions, and it is also vital to building our competitive economy. Our government must continue to demonstrate support for this sector in order to ensure that Ontario remains a leading force in new, innovative health technologies and job creation.

Can the Premier please explain what our government is doing to foster innovation in the health technology sector?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank our all-star MPP from Kitchener–Conestoga for the important question and for hosting us, along with the other MPPs in the Waterloo region. I brought some real all-star ministers: the Minister of Colleges and Universities, and my good pal the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. We did an incredible announcement over in Kitchener, at the University of Waterloo—it was \$7.5 million to help build a state-of-the-art innovation arena at the University of Waterloo.

Mr. Speaker, you see these students—they're coming up with the brightest and greatest ideas; they're blazing a new trail when it comes to life sciences. We've seen over \$3 billion of investment in the life sciences sector right here in Ontario. We're leading the country. We're leading globally with life sciences. Companies are coming here by the droves because we have the brightest and best students anywhere in the world, right here in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to the Premier for that response. This announcement is great news that will help to create good-paying jobs, attract new investments and elevate the profile of Kitchener and, of course, Waterloo region as a leading region in tech and innovation. Under the leadership of the Premier, this investment is just one of the many ways that our government is building a strong Ontario for a resilient economy today, but also for the future.

However, it is essential that our government continues to be forward-thinking and continues to adopt Ontario-made innovations that will improve our health care sector.

1100

Can the Premier please elaborate on how this investment in Waterloo region is part of our government's broader strategy to develop innovative solutions to improve the lives of all Ontarians?

Hon. Doug Ford: Again, I want to thank the member for that question.

When we went to Kitchener-Waterloo region, one of the fastest-growing regions anywhere in Ontario, we were there to support the life sciences strategy that we've put together. The strategy is the first of its kind in over a decade, and it's serving as a road map to establish Ontario as a life sciences leader.

Mr. Speaker, I always say that government doesn't create jobs; we create the environment and the conditions and the climate for companies to invest. And as I mentioned earlier, over \$3 billion has been invested.

OmniaBio, 250 jobs, a 200,000-square-foot building in Hamilton—they're a bio-manufacturing company. You

heard about the AstraZeneca, 500 jobs—what a great announcement; Roche, another 500 jobs; Sanofi, 300 jobs. Mr. Speaker, that's just to name a few. Again, they know Ontario is a place to invest in. They know we have the best talent in the world.

We have cut red tape and regulations—over \$700 million.

We've cut \$8 billion off the backs—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you.
The member for Sudbury.

HOSPICE CARE

MPP Jamie West: My question is to the Premier.

Maison McCulloch is Sudbury's hospice. I met with executive director Julie Aubé, and I was shocked to hear the hospice must rely on donations just to stay afloat. This is not normal. Julie told me how critical their 50/50 draw is because the Conservative government's budget doesn't spell out new money for any specific palliative care operations in Ontario. She said, "It is time hospices be recognized for the vital role they play in the health care system and start being funded like an equal clinical health care institution."

My question is, will the Premier finally recognize the vital role hospices play in the health care system, and will he start funding them like an equal clinical health care institution?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The member opposite is right when he talks about the value and importance of palliative care and hospices in our province.

In fact, in our Your Health document, we laid out very specifically our commitment to expand hospice and palliative care in the province of Ontario, because we see it as a really important part of our health care continuum.

And in fact, in our 2023-24 budget, our government is expanding palliative care to services in local communities, adding 23 new hospice beds to the 500 that already exist in the province of Ontario.

There is no doubt that hospice and palliative care are an important community partner in our health care system, and we will continue to support and fund them appropriately.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

MPP Jamie West: Sudbury's hospice has to raise is \$1.6 million every year to operate. So the announcement from the minister that they're going to open more hospices means that there's more fundraising required to operate. The \$1.6 million isn't for fancy extras. This fundraising is for meal prep, for housekeepers, for cleaning supplies. Imagine worrying every single month that you won't raise enough money to keep residents fed and cared for in the final stages of life. And the fear is justified, because last month it was reported that the hospice was relying on food banks to feed their patients—food banks. This is shameful. This is not normal. And this is not acceptable.

My question: Will the Conservative government increase the funding so that hospices like Maison McCulloch don't have to rely on food banks, fundraisers, and community donations to feed and care for their patients?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Hospices are a really integral and engaged community asset that many of us had the pleasure of participating in and being part of—and by doing that, community members have historically always stepped up to support.

In my own community, Bethell Hospice was founded by one family who saw the need and ultimately funded and formed a residential hospice that, frankly, is world-leading, in the region of Peel. We do this in our community because we want to give back. We want to support these very important services.

And, yes, the province of Ontario will continue to support and fund hospice and palliative care, but we're doing it with the support and the commitment of the communities they serve.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Rob Flack: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Interjection: I do like the tie, by the way.

Mr. Rob Flack: Nice and yellow.

I want to thank the minister for visiting my riding yesterday and the city of London. It was truly wonderful to see area manufacturers announce their important expansions.

Ontario's world-class manufacturing sector employs over 660,000 workers and is the lifeline of our province's regional economies. That's why we've taken the right steps to attract investment, all the while growing the economy and creating new, good and sustainable jobs.

But to remain competitive, our manufacturers and businesses need a government that will work with them.

Can the minister highlight how our government is once again supporting the manufacturing sector and talk about the expansions in my riding and the city of London?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you to the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London for that great tour yesterday. Together, we welcomed over \$14 million in new investments from two area manufacturing firms.

Great work, Rob.

Edge Automation builds massive machinery for companies to automate their businesses. They're investing over \$5 million to expand their facility. The facility is well under construction, and they're buying really innovative equipment. They're creating 12 jobs along the way.

We went over to St. Thomas and saw Takumi Stamp-ing. They manufacture auto parts over there. They're investing \$9 million. They got a \$1.3-million injection from the province. They're expanding that current facility and creating 65 brand new, really good-paying jobs.

Speaker, this is how we're supporting Ontario's manufacturing sector.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Rob Flack: Thank you to the minister for his answer.

When the previous Liberal government announced that Ontario's economy would shift away from goods-producing to service-producing sectors, they spurred an exodus of jobs from this province. The 300,000 manufacturing jobs that were sent running from Ontario came as a surprise to no one. They left, causing damage economically to our communities.

Programs like the Regional Development Program have been a game-changer for manufacturing and new job creation throughout Ontario.

And it's long overdue that both businesses and families receive their fair share of support.

Can the minister explain what our government is doing differently from previous governments to support business growth and long-term job creation?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Since we got elected, our government has put all the pieces in place to create the environment, as Premier Ford just said, to create 600,000 jobs in the province of Ontario. We got there with absolutely no help from the Liberals or the NDP. Think about the fact that they voted against every single thing that we put in place to create jobs and help families. They voted against every skilled trade enhancement we've put to help people prepare for the jobs of the future. They voted against every infrastructure investment, whether it's roads or bridges or highways, to get these people to work. They voted against every single lowering of taxes for families to help save money. They voted against every housing initiative so people have a place to live. They voted against every time we lowered the price of energy. Speaker, who the heck does that?

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier.

According to Feed Ontario, food bank use remains at an all-time high in Ontario. There has been an increase in food bank use of 42% over the last three years and a 47% increase in people with employment accessing food banks since the Conservatives formed government in 2018. One in four people using a food bank are children living in poverty in this Premier's Ontario. Two out of three people who access food banks are social assistance recipients.

People in my riding and across Ontario are struggling to provide food for themselves and their families. This is not normal.

Will the Premier commit today to at least doubling ODSP and OW rates and stop legislating poverty?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member opposite: There's no question that many are feeling the pinch in this province and many are hurting.

Our government understands that taxpayers are under pressure. That's why we acted quickly last year to improve the cost of living for many in this province. We didn't wait.

1110

Let me just acknowledge a few other things while we're at it. Why don't I acknowledge the Minister of Energy, who reduced energy costs so that people could afford electricity prices? Why don't I acknowledge the Minister of Colleges and Universities, who froze tuition to make it more affordable for many people in Ontario? While I'm at it, why don't I congratulate the Minister of Education, who is providing child care so they can take their kid to school and have a world-class education?

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock.

I wish to inform the House that we have had a fire alarm in the basement and it is currently being investigated. We'll provide more information as we have it.

Start the clock.

The supplementary question.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's absolutely shameful that the minister stood there applauding his government when my colleague from Sudbury just talked about the hospice there having to fundraise or their patients having to use food banks.

Between January and September 2022, the number of people visiting a food bank increased by 24%; first-time visitors increased by 64%, and one in three of those people never had to use a food bank before.

Food banks are concerned that the need may outpace the capacity of the provincial food bank network. This is an unprecedented crisis. This is not normal.

After five years in government, the Conservatives should be absolutely ashamed of the consistent increase in the number of people living in poverty.

Can the Premier explain why he and his members applaud themselves for making life more affordable when in fact more and more Ontarians are living in poverty under their watch?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Well, perhaps the member opposite could explain why they have not supported any of the measures that we've put forward on this side of the House and over there to reduce the cost of living for many in this province. There's no question that many people are hurting. That's why they should look, perhaps, to their support for a carbon tax. Do you know what a carbon tax does? A carbon tax puts the burden on many families across the province—a carbon tax actually increases food prices in this province.

Inflation came down this morning from 5.2% to 4.3%—almost a full point. It's still too high.

That's why this government took action before. That's why this government continues to take action. And we'll—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Response?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: —to help the people of Ontario.

ONTARIO PLACE

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure.

Ontario Place was originally created as a place to reaffirm our identity as Ontarians and Canadians, with many of us having special and fond memories from being there. The space is now used by many as a beautiful outdoor public space to make more memories with friends, family and the community, as well as the natural—the birds, the insects and animal life.

What has happened to the Ontario in Ontario Place? What has been an attraction to celebrate Ontario through design, materials, landscape and programming is now going to feature an Austrian spa franchise, Therme. Even the west island entrance is to be rebranded as Therme.

Can the minister please explain how she believes an expensive, privately owned spa developed by an Austrian corporation represents the identities of Ontarians?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Scarborough—Rouge Park.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Our government is bringing Ontario Place back to life, making it a remarkable, world-class, year-round destination that will include family-friendly entertainment, public and event spaces, parkland and waterfront access. Once completed, Ontario Place will be open 365 days a year and welcome from four million to six million visitors annually.

This site is in the process of redevelopment, and the site preparation is under way. This project will create 5,000 jobs, with 3,000 construction jobs and 2,500 permanent jobs.

I look forward to this afternoon's announcement with the Premier and Minister Surma.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The supplementary question.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Ontario is, as we know, open for business. We want to support our local economy and be a destination for people across the world. I agree—it's a great idea to create new attractions for both our residents and tourists to enjoy. It should be somewhere that is affordable and accessible and be representative of who we are as Ontarians.

It really makes me wonder, why Therme? How was this decision even made?

My question to the parliamentary assistant, since the minister is not here, is, what other options—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member not to make reference to the absence of another member and conclude her question.

Interjection.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay. Thank you, Ms. Heckler.

My question to the minister is, what other options for the development on the west island of Ontario Place were considered by the government before they decided on a spa with Therme, and why weren't proposals from Ontario-based and even Canada-based companies considered?

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Mr. Speaker, the redevelopment of Ontario Place is a once-in-a-generation opportunity that will revitalize our beloved waterfront destination and bring tourism, commercial and social benefits to both the province and the city.

The previous government left Ontario Place in a state of disrepair and neglect. Attractions are currently closed and left abandoned, while flooding, electrical and plumbing issues are frequent on-site.

Our government will bring Ontario Place back to life and make it an affordable, world-class destination for Ontarians from all corners of the province to come and enjoy.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock.

I just wish to inform the House that I've been informed that the fire alarm is turned off and it's all clear.

The next question?

Start the clock.

LITERACY AND BASIC SKILLS

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: My question is for the Minister of Education. I want to thank him for coming to the riding of Barrie—Innisfil, where he heard first-hand from many parents—parents like Lynn, who is a working mom of five and is also serving as a school trustee locally. He heard resoundingly that we need to focus on teaching relevant life skills, job skills—things that will help their children succeed not only in the classroom, but also in today's modern economy.

While our government is actively modernizing course content and providing historic levels of funding, we must also make sure that leadership and governance at the board level continue to reflect the priorities that will serve our students best.

I want to ask the minister—speaking to parents not only in Barrie—Innisfil, but all across this province—how are we going to focus on what matters most in our education system and strengthen our education system?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you very much to the member for Barrie—Innisfil for this question. I know she, as a new parent—a lot of skin in the game to get this right.

We're working together, across our communities, to make sure all children succeed.

I want to assure families that we are going to challenge the status quo, lift standards and expect better for Ontario children. That is something that I believe should unite us all in this Legislature. We're going to start that by increasing investment by 693 million more dollars next year. We're going to continue to build momentum by hiring 2,000 skilled, focused educators when it comes to literacy promotion, mathematics and destreamed courses.

We're going to continue to reform the system, and part of this plan is to ensure that school board priorities reflect those of parents, whom we represent—back to basics, refocusing the system on what matters most, on strengthening fundamental, foundational skills of reading, writing, math and other STEM disciplines.

1120

We know there's more work to do, and we're prepared to do it together to improve our schools for our kids.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I want to thank the minister for that great response and for really listening to all Ontarians.

Our government is focused on student achievement and will help to improve results in many areas.

When it comes to students and their achievement and their experience in schools, we can all agree that a great teacher makes a big difference in the classroom. I think growing up with Mr. Jean, Ms. Gillis, and Madame Potvin—top educators, who are the ones who really connect well with students, who are able to teach relevant life skills, job skills and critical thinking skills.

In order to uphold our commitment for students to succeed, it is our government's responsibility to ensure that educators are equipped, qualified, and available to teach fundamental subjects that are essential to changing the world.

Speaker, I want to ask the minister: Can he elaborate on how our government is supporting our educators so they are best equipped to meet the needs of the future?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member for Barrie—Innisfil for this question.

As the Premier often says, we have among the best educators in the country. We're proud of what they do. We want to set them up for long-term success. Frankly, we want to continue to invest in their development.

Mr. Speaker, right now, a problem we are committed to fixing is that faculties of education currently have no requirement to work with the college of teachers or the Ministry of Education to set out minimum requirements for their professional development or learning experience. We're now going to be involved at the front end, setting prerequisites related to mental health, special education, the science of leadership, of literacy promotion, according to the new curriculum and, of course, their mathematical competence. That is what a modern teacher should look like. It's what we are endeavouring to do. It's what we're going to do through this bill.

We're also going to literally reduce the amount of days by half that it takes for the process to certify a new educator, a highly talented person from around the world or at home. We're going to do it quicker.

Finally, we're taking zero tolerance when it comes to crimes against children—by ensuring they are lifetime-banned from teaching in this province.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH SERVICES

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is for the Premier.

On April 1, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services cut the complex special-needs funding for nursing and PSW supports, which families with medically fragile children need to hire their support. These cuts impact approximately 100 families who have some of the most medically fragile children in the province. These cuts happened without warning, and no transition plans were

provided to these families. This is completely unacceptable and must be reinstated immediately.

Can the Premier explain why this essential funding was cut, why there was no transition plan provided for families, and how his government plans to address this?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I'm very pleased that I have the opportunity to talk about an announcement that was made just last month in Hamilton, at the McMaster Children's Hospital—it's a three-year pilot project called integrated pathways for children. It was lauded, it was celebrated by families and by clinicians, because they understand that children with special needs have unique challenges—and that may be mental health concerns, developmental disabilities, or chronic conditions. Now, with this integrated pathway for children, it's going to connect those highly individualized care programs that are so important and so critical for those families, into Holland Bloorview in Toronto, McMaster Children's Hospital in Hamilton, and CHEO in Ottawa. It's a really, really exciting program. I've already said that if this three-year pilot ends up being successful, it will no longer be a pilot; we will make sure it's across Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Miss Monique Taylor: Back to the Premier: One of the families is Nicole—her daughter Alexa receives funding through the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. This has allowed Alexa to receive the nearly 24 hours of ICU care at home which she requires. These cuts will result in service gaps which her mother will be left to fill, because the ministries are working in silos instead of working together. Alexa is palliative. Her family should not be wasting their precious time jumping through hoops with this government.

Can the Premier commit to ensuring that ministries will start to work together to find long-term solutions for families with medically fragile children, so they can get the care they need, when they need it?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I trust the member opposite has connected that family with the McMaster Children's Hospital, to ensure that they are part of the integrated pathway for children, because as I said, it is exactly what families and clinicians have been asking for. We are funding, through the \$97-million investment, a three-year pilot project with those three community agencies.

And we are working more closely together with ministries within government than we have ever seen. It is exactly why we want to be able to offer programs for the families. This is not about funding organizations. This is about ministries working together to make sure that those families do not have to go through multiple doors to look after their children.

MUNICIPAL PLANNING

Mr. Ted Hsu: Speaker, if we believe there's a housing crisis, shouldn't we be thinking hard and planning for smart growth?

I'm worried about this line from the proposed new provincial planning statement, from the Environmental Registry: "Municipalities would be allowed to create new settlement areas and would not be required to demonstrate the need for expansion."

This government is continuing to encourage thoughtless sprawl and not thinking about affordability, whether it's in the cost of new infrastructure required or the longer-term costs of living in urban sprawl. For example, the goal to "shorten commute journeys and decrease transportation congestion" is left out of the new provincial planning statement.

Why does this government want to bake in an older, more expensive and unsustainable way of providing housing?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, let's think for a second about what the opposition means when they talk about sprawl. It means they don't think that people should be living in some of our fastest-growing communities. Think about young people who want to live in the community that they grew up in. Think about the NIMBY-style politics that the opposition continues to cater to.

We on this side of the House have a fundamental disagreement with that type of politics. We believe you should not be talking down Ontario. We believe that all parts of Ontario should be a place to grow—to grow your family, to grow your business and grow your community. That's the type of policy we're going to bring forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Well, Speaker, here's another problem with municipalities creating new settlement areas without being required to demonstrate the need for expansion: This change in the provincial planning statement has the potential to create a greenbelt-palooza across the province. If you don't worry about a rationale for urban expansion, then these decisions become more political.

The government is encouraging the business model of buying up land and then trying to influence elected officials to expand settlement areas onto their land, thereby delivering the hope for windfall profits.

Speaker, if you thought developers buying greenbelt land just before it was taken out and given to development smelled bad, allowing thoughtless urban expansion could create a province-wide greenbelt-palooza that makes that stag and doe look like a tea party.

Hon. Steve Clark: Again, I want to remind Ontarians what this member and his party talk about: They're against farmers being able to sever a lot for their son or daughter. They're against that, just like they were against agriculture when they were in power.

Remember Kathleen Wynne closing, in my riding, an agricultural college? That froze out all of eastern Ontario. Remember that type of policy?

Speaker, I'm going to quote from the Toronto Star today: "Permits to Build New Ontario Condos Soar by 25% as New Policies Speed Approvals."

We've seen a 13.6% increase in February compared to January for multi-dwelling permits. That's the type of success that our housing supply action plan continues to build upon.

Again, the Liberal Party that did nothing for 15 years when they were in the balance of power—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The next question.

1130

GO TRANSIT

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: My question is to the Associate Minister of Transportation, who is constantly getting our people moving.

Barrie–Innisfil is home to an exciting transit-oriented community project; we're going to create more housing. But it's also home to people, over 80% of whom commute to get to work. They rely on the GO train network that connects the Barrie South station to Union Station to downtown Toronto. Unfortunately, riders on the Barrie GO train continue to experience growing delays due to increased traffic at the Davenport crossing. This is one of the busiest at-grade crossing stations in North America, creating a bottleneck of rail tracks impacting both freight rail and GO train services. That is why it's critical for our government to show leadership by taking action to address this long-standing rail problem.

I want to ask the Associate Minister of Transportation how he's bringing hope, real investment and leadership on the progress our government is making on this particular train.

Hon. Stan Cho: This government has a lot of love for Barrie–Innisfil and for that member, who does great work and who asked a great question this morning.

Speaker, I'm very happy to say that two weeks ago, we finished major construction of the Davenport Diamond's beautiful, new elevated guideway that now lifts the Barrie GO line above freight train tracks. But that's not all. GO trains are now travelling along this game-changing piece of infrastructure, which will reduce congestion for one of the busiest train intersections in all of North America. There's more. This guideway also provides pedestrians and cyclists with more terrific connections by enabling GO trains to seamlessly travel above existing traffic.

Our government is delivering outstanding GO expansion upgrades across the Barrie line so riders can get to work, critical services, and back home with speed and ease.

The opposition did nothing for the people of Barrie–Innisfil.

This government is getting it done.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you to the minister for his hard work.

It's welcome news to all folks in Barrie–Innisfil—especially when I talk to people like Tina-Anne, Kyle and

Nick, who commute five days a week to come to work here in the GTA.

Transit infrastructure is vital, and the GO train network is important to get people connected to all communities and to their work.

Across the greater Golden Horseshoe as a whole, reliable and convenient transit service is essential, as the population is expected to increase over the next three decades, increasing the demand on our transit services and the upgrades that are needed now to ensure that frequent and convenient service is there for years to come.

We can't afford to delay or hold back transit investments. Our government must deliver on our commitment to bring relief and new opportunities to transit users and commuters.

So I'd like to ask the associate minister: Can he please elaborate on how our government is investing in expanding the GO Transit network?

Hon. Stan Cho: Well, Speaker, I'm going to elaborate all right—the largest transit expansion plan in Canadian history. Over \$70 billion to build transit—that includes our transformational GO Expansion program.

The Barrie line stations—we've already finished major upgrades at Rutherford GO station, and amazing work is under way to deliver additional platforms and revamped facilities at the Maple, King City, and Aurora GO stations. When it comes to the Barrie line corridor, Metrolinx is adding an extra track between Union and Aurora GO to help with the traffic, as we watch the Leafs win the cup this year—two-way service all day to the Barrie line, every 15 minutes, every day of the week.

But our efforts don't just benefit riders. In fact, the GO expansion as a whole will generate 8,300 construction and supply chain jobs every single year.

Speaker, the NDP and the Liberals simply didn't build transit when they could have, for decades.

This government is not only getting shovels in the ground; we're making the rider experience better all along.

ISLAMOPHOBIA

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier.

Speaker, in the aftermath of the horrific act of Islamophobic violence that took the lives of four members of London's Afzaal family in June 2021, the Muslim community in London and across the province came together to develop comprehensive anti-Islamophobia legislation: the Our London Family Act. That bill was tabled last February, but instead of allowing it to be debated, the government referred it to committee, promising to study it and bring it back.

More than a year later, Islamophobic hate is on the rise. Why is there still no government legislation?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

Hon. Michael D. Ford: I want to thank the member opposite for the very important question. We've had a conversation on this a number of times.

Mr. Speaker, let me be clear: Islamophobia and hate of any kind have no place in Ontario—especially violence, vandalism, or intimidation towards any community group or faith. The rise of Islamophobia-motivated instances, especially during the holy month of Ramadan, is deeply concerning.

Our government will always stand shoulder to shoulder with our Muslim community.

In one of my first days as the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, I drove out to visit a London Muslim mosque. I personally met with the imam, the former mayor and community leaders to discuss how we can work together to fight Islamophobia and make Ontario a safer and more inclusive place for everyone.

Our government will continue to work with partners in our Muslim community to find community-based and community-centred solutions to make communities stronger, safer and more vibrant.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: The Muslim community brought a solution to this Legislature last year. This government has not passed it.

Speaker, June 6, 2023, will mark two years since the Afzaal family so tragically lost their lives, and Muslims in Ontario continue to be targeted and retraumatized.

Last week, following a hateful attack at a Markham mosque, Nadia Hasan from the National Council of Canadian Muslims said, "The time for action against Islamophobia is now.... We call on the Ontario government to expedite the passing of the Our London Family Act in Ontario."

This government has had more than a year to study that bill. The official opposition is prepared to pass it.

Will this Premier commit to introducing and passing the Our London Family Act before June 6, 2023?

Hon. Michael D. Ford: Our government has taken strong action and made considerable investments to defend the right of every person in this great province to practise their faith safely and peacefully.

With the help of the Anti-Racism Directorate and my ministry, we have allocated over \$40 million to enhance security and safety at places of worship and places where cultural communities gather as they build capacity to combat racism and hate.

Our government is always providing tools to help police and the justice sector prevent, investigate and prosecute hate crimes through the hate crime and extremism investigative team, the hate crime investigator course, and the hate crimes community working group of crown attorneys.

We have also taken steps to address racism in schools by creating anti-hate programs and educational resources to counter Islamophobia and all forms of hate.

Speaker, we have been taking a whole-of-government approach to combat hate, and we will continue to work with our partners from the Muslim community and all communities—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. The next question.

ELECTRONIC SERVICE DELIVERY

HOUSING

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is for the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery.

As the representative of a growing rural community, I hear from my constituents about the challenges they encounter when accessing government services, including those relating to marriage licences. In rural areas, barriers such as travel and lineups at municipal offices can often be a more prevalent occurrence than in other parts of the province.

It is essential that our government continues to modernize processes and make it easier to access government services, including obtaining a marriage licence.

Can the minister please explain how our government is working to ensure that services are convenient and accessible for every Ontarian, regardless of where they live?

Hon. Kaleed Rasheed: Thanks to the member from Oxford for his question.

Speaker, our government understands that there are many Ontarians who face barriers when it comes to accessing government services. That is why we are hard at work to modernize how Ontarians access our many new and updated services, including obtaining a marriage licence, by making it more accessible for new and young couples to apply quickly and conveniently online, regardless of where they live. Offering online applications in six municipalities, as part of this new pilot project, is just the beginning, as we are quickly seeing the benefits of this change. Couples are now being able to enjoy a faster, more convenient application process that lets them focus more on what matters most to them. My ministry is committed to expanding this service province-wide, and I'm looking forward to my colleague—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. The supplementary question.

1140

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you to the minister for the response.

My supplementary question is to the Associate Minister of Housing.

There is still much more work to be done when it comes to making life better for people across our province. Whether it is a newly married couple who want to buy a home or individuals and families at different stages in their lives, people are experiencing challenges in finding affordable housing. Our government must continue to deliver on our promise to address the housing crisis that is affecting both rural and urban regions.

Can the associate minister please explain how our government is working to address the serious housing shortage situation facing our province?

Hon. Nina Tangri: I really want to thank the great member for Oxford for his question.

Our government is working to make sure all Ontarians have access to the dream of owning a home. We had close to 100,000 new housing construction starts in 2021, which is the highest in over 30 years. Last year, we also surpassed 96,000, which is 30% higher than the annual 65,000 home average over the past 20 years—pure neglect by the previous Liberal government.

In 2022, we saw the most purpose-built rentals on record, with almost 15,000 units. This represents a 7.5% increase from 2021.

Through our More Homes for Everyone plan, which the opposition NDP voted against, we've already made changes that will accelerate approval timelines for new housing and protect homeowners from unethical practices.

As the Premier said yesterday, it's all hands on deck to solve the housing supply crisis. We're working—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. The next question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Minister of Health.

I've heard from a local nurse on sick leave who has been suffering from debilitating pain connected to endometriosis. Her local OB/GYN can't help her, because her nerves are affected. She was referred to see a neuro-pelvic OB/GYN, but apparently there's only one in Canada, who only works here half the year. She sits on this waiting list, doesn't have an appointment date. She's in bed-bound pain. Once she has the appointment, she may have another 12 to 24 months to wait for the surgery. She has no hope in sight. She has said that a surgeon in the States has quoted her \$60,000 for the surgery she needs, but she cannot afford to cover it, due to Bill 124 and no wage increases over the last few years and inflation.

She said, "Seems to me the Ontario government should be doing everything possible to keep an experienced nurse at the bedside, yet I am sidelined with debilitating pain and can't get the help I desperately need. What can I do? Because at 33 years old, MAID is looking pretty tempting."

When will this government fund our hospitals so we can meet the needs of desperate and suffering complex medical patients like this nurse?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The member opposite should know that we have, through a surgical recovery fund of almost \$1 billion, invested over three years to ensure that surgeries can continue to be expanded, both in hospital as well as, of course, in our community surgical centres. That work has been happening for the last three years—and we've seen, in fact, our surgery backlogs have gone down to pre-pandemic. But that's not enough, and we know it's not enough.

So through the Your Health Ontario plan, we've actually mapped out an expansion that will ensure that

regularly scheduled surgeries that can appropriately happen in community, closer to where people live, are going to be expanded. That will ensure that the highly complex surgeries that the member opposite is talking about have the opportunity—and more capacity within our health care system and our hospitals. We understand that when we take those regularly scheduled, more routine surgeries into community, closer to where people live, it gives more capacity in our public health system.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our question period for this morning.

This House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1145 to 1500.

PETITIONS

LABOUR LEGISLATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you so much, Speaker, and I would like to thank Mrs. Michelle Legault from Lively in my riding for these petitions.

“Enact Anti-Scab Labour Law....”

“Whereas strikes and lockouts are rare: on average, 97% of collective agreements are negotiated without work disruption; and

“Whereas anti-replacement workers laws have existed in Quebec since 1978, in British Columbia since 1993, and in Ontario under the NDP government,” but “it was repealed by the Harris government;

“Whereas anti-scab legislation has reduced the length and divisiveness of labour disputes; and

“Whereas the use of scab labour during a strike or lockout is damaging to the social fabric of a community in the short and long term, as well as, the well-being of its residents;

They “petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To pass the anti-scab labour bill to ban the use of replacement workers during a strike or lockout.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask my good page Olivia to bring it to the Clerk.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Jeff Burch: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the current Niagara Health system restructuring plan approved by the Ontario Ministry of Health includes removal of the emergency department, emergency surgical services and associated beds and ambulances service from the Welland hospital site once the Niagara Falls site is complete, creating inequity of hospital and emergency service in the Niagara region and a significant negative impact on hospital and emergency outcomes for the citizens of Welland, Port Colborne and all Niagara;

“Whereas the NHS is already experiencing a 911 crisis in EMS, a shortage of beds and unacceptable off-loading delays in its emergency departments across the region;

“Whereas the population in the Welland hospital catchment area is both aging and growing;

“Whereas the Ontario Legislature passed a motion by Niagara Centre MPP Jeff Burch on April 13, 2022, to include a full emergency department and associated beds in the rebuild of the Welland hospital;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To work with the Ontario Ministry of Health and the Niagara Health system to implement motion 47 from the 42nd Parliament to maintain the Welland hospital emergency department and adjust its hospital plan accordingly.”

I affix my signature and send it to the Clerk.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I have a petition:

“To Raise Social Assistance Rates.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s social assistance rates are well below Canada’s official Market Basket Measure poverty line and far from adequate to cover the rising costs of food and rent: \$733 for individuals on OW and (soon) \$1,227 for ODSP;

“Whereas an open letter to the Premier and two cabinet ministers, signed by over 230 organizations, recommends that social assistance rates be doubled for both Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP);

“Whereas the recent small budget increase of 5% for ODSP still leaves these citizens well below the poverty line, both they and those receiving the frozen OW rates are struggling to live in this time of alarming inflation;

“Whereas the government of Canada recognized in its CERB program that a ‘basic income’ of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

“We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to double social assistance rates for OW and ODSP.”

I’ll be signing this and sending it with new page Cole.

MISSING PERSONS

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition titled “Vulnerable Persons Alert.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is a gap in our current emergency alert system that needs to be addressed;

“Whereas a vulnerable persons alert would help ensure the safety of our loved ones in a situation where time is critical;

“Whereas several municipal councils, including, Brighton, Midland, Bonfield township, Cobourg and Mississauga and several others, have passed resolutions calling for a new emergency alert to protect our loved ones;

“Whereas over 90,000 people have signed an online petition calling for a ‘Draven Alert’ and over 6,000 people

have signed an online petition calling for 'Love's Law', for vulnerable people who go missing;

"Whereas this new alert would be an additional tool in the tool box for police forces to use to locate missing, vulnerable people locally and regionally;

"Whereas this bill is a common-sense proposal and non-partisan in nature, to help missing vulnerable persons find their way safely home;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Support and pass Bill 74, Missing Persons Amendment Act, 2023."

I wholeheartedly support this and will give it to page Claire to bring to the Clerk.

DÉTACHEMENT DE LA PPO

M. John Vanthof: « Gardez le détachement de la PPO de Noëlville ouvert.

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Alors qu'il n'y a pas eu suffisamment de communications et de consultations avec les collectivités et les intervenants concernés au sujet de la poursuite des activités du détachement de Noëlville de la PPO; et

« Alors que les résident(e)s et les visiteurs des municipalités de la Rivière des Français, Markstay-Warren, St.-Charles, Killarney et Britt-Byng Inlet ainsi que les Premières Nations de Dokis et Henvey Inlet méritent un accès équitable à une intervention policière fiable, rapide et efficace;

« Nous, soussigné(e)s, demandons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario d'ordonner au ministre du solliciteur général et à la Police provinciale de l'Ontario de garder un détachement opérationnel à Noëlville de la Police provinciale de l'Ontario. »

I am fully in agreement with this, attach my signature and give it to page Randall.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mary MacGregor from Garson in my riding for these petitions.

"Ontario Dementia Strategy...."

"Whereas it takes an average of 18 months for people in Ontario to get an official dementia diagnosis, with some patients often waiting years to complete diagnostic testing and more than half of those suspected of having dementia never get a full diagnosis;

"Whereas a PET scan test approved in Ontario in 2017, which can be key to detecting Alzheimer's early is still not covered" by "OHIP and research findings show that Ontario will spend \$27.8 billion between 2023 and 2043 on alternate-level-of-care ... and long-term-care ... costs associated with people living with dementia;

"Whereas the government must follow through with its commitment to ensure Ontario's health care system has the capacity to meet the current and future needs of people living with dementia and their care partners;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To develop, commit to, and fund a comprehensive Ontario dementia strategy."

I fully support this petition, Speaker, will affix my name to it and ask my good page Mridul to bring it to the Clerk.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Eric Brunet from Blezard Valley in my riding for these petitions.

"911 Everywhere in Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas when we face an emergency we all know to dial 911 for help; and

"Whereas access to emergency services through 911 is not available in all regions of Ontario but most Ontarians believe that it is; and

"Whereas many Ontarians have discovered that 911 was not available while they faced an emergency; and

"Whereas all Ontarians expect and deserve access to 911 service, throughout our province;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To provide 911 emergency response everywhere in Ontario by land line" and "cellphone."

1510

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask my good page Dominic to bring it to the Clerk.

ANTI-VAPING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Colin and Hélène Pick from Capreol in my riding for this petition.

"Protect Kids from Vaping...."

"Whereas very little is known about the long-term effects of vaping on youth; and

"Whereas aggressive marketing of vaping products by the tobacco industry is causing more and more kids to become addicted to nicotine through the use of e-cigarettes; and

"Whereas the hard lessons learned about the health impacts of smoking, should not be repeated with vaping, and the precautionary principle must be applied to protect youth from vaping; and

"Whereas many health agencies and Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada fully endorse the concrete proposals aimed at reducing youth vaping included in" my bill;

They "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To call on the Ford government to immediately pass ... Vaping is not for Kids Act, in order to protect the health of Ontario's youth."

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask my good page Claire to bring it to the Clerk.

PUBLIC SECTOR COMPENSATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Dolores Robert from Val Caron in my riding for this petition.

“Repeal Bill 124....”

“Whereas Bill 124 removes the right of public employees to negotiate fair contracts;

“Whereas Bill 124 limits the wage increase in the broader public sector to a maximum of 1% per year at a time of unprecedented inflation;

“Whereas Ontario’s public servants have dealt with” three “years of unheralded difficulties in performing their duties to our province;

“Whereas those affected by Bill 124 are the people who teach us, care for us, make our hospitals and health care system work and protect the most vulnerable among us;

“Whereas the current provincial government is showing disrespect to public servants to keep taxes low for some of our country’s most profitable corporations;

They “petition the Legislative Assembly ... as follows:

“Immediately stop and repeal Bill 124 and show respect for the public sector workers.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Randall to bring it to the Clerk.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I’m sorry to stop the filibustering of petitions over at Nickel Belt here, but I want to have a chance to put my petition in today.

“Extend Access to Post-Adoption Birth Information.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas current legislation does not provide access to post-adoption birth information (identifying information) to next of kin if an adult adopted person or a natural/birth parent is deceased;

“Whereas this barrier to accessing post-adoption birth information separates immediate family members and prohibits the children of deceased adopted people from gaining knowledge of their identity and possible Indigenous heritage;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to extend access to post-adoption birth information (identifying information) to next of kin, and/or extended next of kin, if an adult adopted person or a natural/birth parent is deceased.”

I fully support this petition. I wish to sign it and give it to page Leonard to deliver to the table.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mark Therrien from Hanmer in my riding for this petition.

“Making Psychotherapy Services Tax-Free....”

“Whereas mental health care is health care; and

“Whereas the mental health crisis facing Ontarians has gotten worse with the pandemic; and

“Whereas BIPOC, 2SLGBTQIA+ folks, women, and people with disabilities have historically faced significant

barriers to accessing equitable health care services due to systemic discrimination; and

“Whereas registered psychotherapists provide vital mental health services, especially as an early intervention; and

“Whereas a 13% tax added to the cost of receiving psychotherapy services is another barrier for Ontarians seeking this vital care; and

“Whereas registered psychotherapists are still required to collect HST from clients, while most other mental health professionals have been exempted;

They “petition the Legislative Assembly ... as follows:

“To pass the Making Psychotherapy Services Tax-Free Act, 2023, immediately, to remove this barrier to access mental health services.”

I support this petition, Speaker, will affix my name to it and ask my good page Olivia to bring it to the Clerk.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank John Martin from Capreol in my riding for this petition:

“Improve Winter Road Maintenance on Northern Highways.”

“Whereas highways play a critical role in northern Ontario;

“Whereas winter road maintenance has been privatized in Ontario and contract standards are not being enforced;

“Whereas per capita, fatalities are twice as likely to occur on a northern highway than on a highway in southern Ontario;

“Whereas current MTO classification negatively impacts the safety of northern highways;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To classify Highways 11, 17, 69, 101 and 144 as class 1 highways; require that the pavement be bare within eight hours of the end of a snowfall and bring the management of winter road maintenance back into the public sector, if contract standards are not” being “met.”

I support this petition, Speaker, will affix my name to it and ask page Mridul to bring it to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HELPING HOMEBUYERS, PROTECTING TENANTS ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023

VISANT À AIDER LES ACHETEURS ET À PROTÉGER LES LOCATAIRES

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 17, 2023, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 97, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to housing and development / Projet de loi 97, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne le logement et l’aménagement.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I look forward to speaking on Bill 97, the Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act, 2023.

Speaker, of course, it is no surprise that our government is absolutely committed to making life easier and more affordable for people across the province of Ontario. A big reason why is to reverse the decades of inaction of previous governments and to address the mountains of red tape that previous governments had amassed. This latest piece of legislation and the three previous housing supply action plan pieces—through those, we're continuing to increase Ontario's housing supply so more families can find a home they can afford. But we're not just working to meet the goal of building 1.5 million homes, we're also supporting renters and increasing protection for new homebuyers.

As I mentioned earlier, this is now our government's fourth housing supply action plan. I think the real reason why we need to talk about supporting 1.5 million homes is just to look around, Speaker, and see all of the development that has happened here in the province of Ontario and the huge demand for homes that will continue.

Speaker, I can tell you that we are extremely pleased with the latest economic development venture that is going to bring thousands of new jobs in Ontario and create smaller communities turning into larger communities, and that is of course landing Volkswagen to the province of Ontario. They've announced that they're coming here to build a gigafactory. This is going to be a massive facility in St. Thomas. We will be hearing from them very shortly as they return to Ontario to talk to us about the details, but if we think about the fact that it's going to be a multi-billion-dollar facility that is being built, it will require thousands of employees, which will, in itself, create thousands of spinoff employees.

1520

All of these families will need a place to live. There will be a tremendous amount of new homes built in Ontario just to satisfy this one sliver, this one sector, the auto sector of Ontario and the growth. We have talked many times in the past about the fact that, under the previous government, they had made the declaration that Ontario would be getting out of the manufacturing sector and settling into the service sector. That was going to be our lot here in Ontario. Thankfully, in the previous Liberal government's—what turned out to be their final—economic statement, when they made that declaration—we declared the opposite, that we're not throwing in the towel on the manufacturing sector; that we believe deeply in the people of Ontario and the expertise that they have created. We have turned that around and saved the 100,000 auto sector jobs, but also have opened the door now for tens of thousands more jobs being created in this electric vehicle revolution. Because of that, it is going to put an even larger demand on housing. The 1.5 million homes that will be built in the province of Ontario are going to be absolutely critical to the people of Ontario.

These changes that we've made—you heard me in question period earlier today talk about the fact that they

came with no help from the NDP or the Liberal members of Parliament. They voted against, and I went down the line and started talking about the various things that they voted against. It all was to help these families and all to help build these 1.5 million homes in Ontario. You can't do that if you don't have—and I pointed at the Minister of Labour—the skilled workers that are being trained. They voted against all of the programs to bring in skilled workers in Ontario and to help train them.

I talked about the fact that you can't have those companies come here, you can't have 1.5 million homes if you don't have—and I pointed at the Minister of Transportation—the roads and the bridges and the highways to get you to those homes and to get you to those businesses. I pointed to the finance minister and the Treasury Board president. This opposition has voted against every single tax break that we have offered to families, to seniors, to kids in school—all of these things they voted against, each and every one of those items, as well, again hurting families, slowing down the growth, doing everything they can to delay progress and to stop the building of 1.5 million homes.

I pointed at the Minister of Energy and talked about the huge energy reduction programs that have come from this government that the opposition has voted against. All of those are critical in building 1.5 million homes. I can tell you, Speaker, I could have pointed, had I had more time, to each and every other department, each and every other ministry. I could have talked about the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and the programs that we have that are helping to bring in our auto workers. We have 24 colleges and universities that have programs for those auto workers.

When I sat with Volkswagen and when the Premier sat with Volkswagen—for myself, many times; the Premier four times in his office, with the executives from Volkswagen—they always talked about the talent that is found here in Ontario. They've asked us, "How are you going to get these people into St. Thomas? Where are they going to live?" These are the kinds of questions that we talk about on a daily basis to make sure that we have the right people, the right talent, the right training, the right ways to get there, the right electricity sources for all of these groups who are coming here. That's why we've seen these record housing starts. Just last year, rental housing starts in the province set their own record as well.

That is a result, absolutely, of our government's policies, and that's why we're continuing to build on that work, to build houses at a record pace. It's really critical that we have support for our housing bills, because that's the support that we need as we travel to other countries and other companies to visit and talk to them about why they need to be here in Ontario.

This bill is important because it has a lot of other changes that help protect renters. It supports landlords. It's a really wonderful mix. It clarifies, it enhances the tenants' rights, for instance, to do something as simple as install an air conditioner. It further strengthens protections against evictions due to renovations or demolitions or conversions. These are all things that are very important. We

want people to come to Ontario. We want people to build in Ontario. We want people to build rental properties. We want people to rent properties. But all of these things need us to help them along, and so we've done things like protecting homebuyers with a cooling-off or a cancellation period. Those are really important items to have when you're buying a new home.

We also want to make sure that deposit insurance for first-home savings accounts will be expanded to credit unions. These are the kinds of things we're doing. You can see, Speaker, that every little nuance, every little thing that we're doing, is to help those families, help people get into a home, help people get into their first home, help people rent with confidence. All of these things are all critical.

We're reducing the cost of building housing. We're putting 74 provincial fees that are going to be frozen at their current rate. That's going to help keep prices where they are. All of the things that we're doing is because we have tens of thousands.

The Premier said it earlier today: Governments don't create jobs, but we can create the environment for job creators to create jobs here. And as a result of all the policies the Premier has talked about today and all the policies that we talk about in this Legislature, over and over and over from the economic development side—we've seen the results, Speaker: Over 600,000 men and women went to work today in a job that they did not have, that was not in existence when we got elected; 600,000 new jobs since we got elected. That is almost unprecedented in our history, and we're only beginning.

We have great companies who are making announcements here in Ontario. All of those people, all of those companies will have employees that will need a place to live. So we're giving them this confidence that we're doing when we're protecting renters and we're supporting landlords and we're freezing fees so that house prices can stay where they are.

Speaker, we're going to invest \$6.5 million to appoint 40 additional adjudicators and five staff to the Landlord and Tenant Board, and that more than doubles the number of LTB full-time adjudicators. We understand that that's a critical part of the housing structure. We're going to seek continued input on a proposed land use planning policy document. That's going to streamline Ontario's land use rules, and that's going to encourage more housing. You see, Speaker, everything we've talked about is about encouraging more housing because of this huge demand.

1530

I talked a few minutes ago about the fact that, when we first took office, the previous Liberal government had said, "We're out of the manufacturing business in Ontario; that's not where we want to go." It's printed in their document that we are moving from the manufacturing to the service sector. They threw the towel in and settled for a different prize. Some 300,000 manufacturing jobs fled the province.

We took office, understood the problem in a business-like way, and immediately were able to reduce the cost of doing business by \$7 billion annually, or in the new budget

now, it's \$8 billion annually of lower costs for business. I have heard the opposition say, "Oh, my gosh, \$8 billion less revenue for you. How are you going to survive?" We understand that lowering taxes, lowering costs, all of that means higher revenue. That's exactly what has happened here in the province of Ontario.

When we first got elected, our revenue in the province was \$154 billion. We reduced all the costs of doing business by \$8 billion, reduced our own revenue temporarily and watched it bounce now to \$204 billion annually. Our revenue is \$50 billion a year higher than it was. Why? Because we reduced the cost of doing business and businesses came. Some 85,000 businesses opened in Ontario last year; they hired 600,000 people in the last four and a half years. They need a place to live. That's why we have this bill, Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act, 2023. It's because all of these companies that are coming here need a place for their employees to live. That is the bottom line of every bit of it.

When we talk to these companies around the world, they say a couple of things that are consistent. No matter which country this year, no matter which company, they talk about the fact that the world is in a turmoil. Coming off a pandemic, we're not yet settled. We have Russia's illegal war in Ukraine causing a lot of turmoil. We have this elephant in the room of China that we don't quite know what to do with. There's a lot of turmoil going on, and they all look at Ontario and they point to Ontario as a sea of calm. Country after country after country have said those exact words to us this year: Ontario is a sea of calm. It's stable. It's reliable. It's predictable. We know what we're going to get in Ontario—and it all happens to be lower cost, by the way. Lower-cost jurisdiction, low taxes: That's what they see in Ontario. It's a stable environment.

The other thing they say to us is that Ontario is safe. It's a safe place for our employees, it's safe for our families, and it's safe for our executives to go overseas. They found Ontario to be stable and safe. That's why these companies are coming here, because we provide that stability and that safety. Those employees are going to need places to live. The thousands and thousands and thousands of jobs that are being created, the hundreds of thousands of jobs that are being created from all these investments are going to require many, many more homes for their workers to live in.

That means we need to have more homes built, not just in the GTA, but in places like St. Thomas and Loyalist and in Thunder Bay when we see them becoming a big part of the electric vehicle revolution, as we, hopefully, will have lithium coming out of the ground in the Far North and in northwestern Ontario, and a lithium hydroxide facility somewhere in northwestern Ontario—maybe even two of them. Those are billion-dollar facilities, each going to employ hundreds and, ultimately, thousands of people. They're all going to need a place to live. That's why, with this legislation and our housing supply action plan, our government is ensuring that there are enough homes for everyone, including those who will be employed all across Ontario's world-class auto manufacturing ecosystem.

Speaker, I said it earlier: Sadly, the opposition continues to push back and vote against anything that helps Ontario's housing supply. We've seen that. They voted repeatedly against the housing supply action plans 1, 2 and 3. They keep supporting the red tape. Everything they've done has attempted to slow down the building of more homes. They voted against the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act. They voted against the More Homes Built Faster Act. They voted against the Better Municipal Governance Act. It's quite clear now, Speaker, that the opposition is not actually interested in increasing Ontario's housing supply, and that's why they continue to put these roadblocks in our efforts to do exactly that.

I mentioned red tape earlier, and I have to say that the legislation that we have, the red tape legislation—this is another one of the nine red tape reduction bills that we've passed. In this bill, you will see how we're looking at reducing red tape, keeping costs down. We know that we've taken about 400 individual actions to reduce red tape so far. And in housing, our government has cut red tape to make it easier to build the right types of housing in the right places. That's our goal. That's what we have done. We've cut red tape to reduce the timelines for development and to address local barriers to build more homes. That was our goal. That's what we're doing.

Now, by proposing to streamline Ontario's land use planning rules, we're once again cutting red tape to encourage even more housing. We know that by lowering taxes, cutting red tape, reducing energy rates—all of these things have brought the success to Ontario that we're seeing today.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to questions and answers.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Bill 97 once again relies almost entirely on deregulation and tax cuts to incentivize the for-profit private market to deliver 1.5 million homes over a decade. Yet the recent Conservative budget reveals that project housing starts in Ontario are going down, not up.

The minister spoke about ensuring that there are enough homes for everyone in Thunder Bay, and yet, in Thunder Bay, we have two shovel-ready projects that would immediately add 105 new units of housing in our region while also making another 60 properties available for purchase.

Can the minister tell me why there is nothing in this bill to help the not-for-profit housing? This is housing that is ready to be built right now, and it's blocked because this government is doing nothing to support middle-level housing anywhere in Ontario. So I'd like to know why that is nowhere in this bill.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: It's funny the member mentioned that there are tax cuts and cutting red tape. It's those tax cuts that I spoke of earlier—

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Did I?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Yes, those were your exact opening words. I wrote them down: tax cuts and red tape.

Yes, it's those very tax cuts that I spoke of earlier. By reducing the cost of doing business in Ontario by \$8

billion a year, those lower taxes have brought those businesses here. They have brought 600,000 men and women working for the first time. The reduction in red tape is a big part of that \$8-billion reduction.

I realize that they voted negatively, Speaker—they voted no—to Bill 3, the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act; to Bill 23, the More Homes Built Faster Act; to Bill 39. Speaker, we understand they don't want to build any new housing.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Billy Pang: I am very pleased to see that our government continues to take the housing supply crisis seriously. This is the government's fourth housing supply action plan, which builds upon the success of the first three. The More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022, was introduced only a few months ago.

Can the minister please let us know why the government is moving on this housing supply crisis so urgently and introducing yet another plan?

1540

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Thank you for the question. We know that the status quo is broken. We've seen the system in the past; the dream of home ownership, it falls further and further out of reach of hard-working families. I spoke with someone one day and said, "From the time you knock on a farmer's door north of Toronto and start negotiations for the purchase of the land to the time you hand over the first key, how long does it take?" "It's now 16 years," is the answer that I got, which is a little less time, actually, than it takes for young Ontarians to save for a mortgage.

Again, we know we need to do more to hit the target of 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years, and that's why this is the fourth bill now put forward.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I'm going to take us a little off-topic. It's nothing for the minister to fear what's going to come out of my mouth. Actually, I've noticed when the minister speaks, he always has quite a delivery. He sounds very proud about the legislation that he is bringing forward, and I've always found that an interesting delivery when he does so. I've also noticed that he's always talked about the daily vitamin; I think he's said that in a number of his speeches. He sends to the Premier every morning a new business and he talks about it—I'm not sure what's in that vitamin. I'm curious what he sent this morning.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I will read from my iPhone, if you don't mind, Speaker: "Today's one-a-day: Edge Automation is investing \$5 million in London. They provide custom automated solutions in mechanical electrical design and programming, product manufacturing and custom machine building. They are investing in a building expansion and new advanced equipment. This project will create 13 new jobs, with a \$778,000 loan from our Southwestern Ontario Development Fund Corp." That was at 8:27, so thank you.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the minister for his remarks. I listened intently, and I was wondering if the minister could elaborate—he's doing great work on behalf of our Premier and our government to bring businesses back to Ontario after the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP, drove businesses out of Ontario.

In Bill 97 and our proposed changes to the planning policy document is: "protecting employment lands." I know it's very important to do that, so I was wondering if the minister can elaborate on why our government is focusing on doing this to ensure we attract businesses going forward.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: It's really interesting. I'm going to talk about Volkswagen, because it's the most current and we saw the most media about it.

When we had the Volkswagen announcement made here, one of the biggest deals in the history of the entire province—as you'll soon hear the details coming—all of the American media just blew up about "How did this jurisdiction in Canada win this bid?" They talked about the top 10 things—I think it was the top eight things or the top 10 things—that Ontario did, and one of them was what they called "mega-sites." It's having an actual piece of land that's available that has servicing or services available.

So the employment lands are really critical. You cannot attract economic development opportunities if you don't have a place for those businesses to be. So we need 1.5 million homes, but we also need land to be able to have these industrial and commercial developments take place.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: The minister had mentioned the umpteen times that the opposition doesn't vote with them, votes against their bills and their proposals. And I think possibly that is because sometimes the bills don't go far enough. In fact, I wonder why the government is being so timid about some of these housing policies, and my question would be: Why not propose four units as of right per lot, and why not consider or mandate up-zoning arterial roads, main streets in urban centres? What are you afraid of?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I appreciate that question. I thank you very much. I would refer the member to the last bill, Bill 39—is it the one?

Hon. Michael Parsa: More Homes Built Faster Act.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Yes, the More Homes Built Faster; Strong Mayors, Building Homes; and the Better Municipal Governance Acts. I know you voted against all of those, but that may well have been covered in one of those bills, so have a peek.

I can tell you, I would also encourage you to look at, when I was in opposition, my private member's bill that encouraged 14-storey wood buildings. It was really something designed to support us in the north; a really great opportunity to build and sequester carbon by building wood buildings. So I would also encourage to have a peek at that. It's just a little race down memory line, but it's really fascinating and it would shine a light on the kinds of things that interest us.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): One last question?

Ms. Sarah Jama: Madam Speaker, I hate to break it to you, but this bill on helping homeowners will unfortunately help to perpetuate homelessness. This government refuses to get rid of the loophole it created that denies any rent protections to tenants living in rentals first occupied after November 2018, in a lot of cases resulting in double-digit rent increases, directly leading to homelessness. In fact, this government has defended rent increases as high as 57%.

Minister, will this government put real rent control in place for tenants who moved into their units after November 2018?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: The \$202 million that was just added to the Homelessness Prevention Program—I can tell you that I went—

Interjections.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Yes. We obviously look for your continued support in that bill, as well.

But I can tell you I was home in North Bay on Friday, one of the rare times I got back to my beautiful home in the beautiful city of North Bay, and I went to my constituent office and we held a press conference at Northern Pines. It is one of the three homelessness buildings that we have built; one of the 100 units—a 60-unit, a 24-unit and a 16-unit. I was able to share the news that they're receiving \$3 million more annually.

I think I did an announcement for your riding, as well, MPP Vanthof—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. That's time, Minister.

We're going to move to further debate.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm really delighted to stand and speak to this bill because I want to bring a story from our constituents and kind of bring some reality to what people are experiencing daily. Not everybody has a beautiful home wherever they live. People have situations that are out of their own control.

So I received this letter and I have permission to use the names of these constituents and I'm going to read the letter. It's a couple of pages, so bear with me and I ask you for your patience when we're listening to how people are living today in all of our ridings.

"Dear Ms. ... Armstrong,

"My name is Lori ... and fiancé Ron ... resided in a two-bedroom apartment for 11 years. The apartment was located within a fourplex. We are also writing on behalf of other tenants who lived in the fourplex. Tenants in unit 1 were an elderly couple in their mid-seventies of which had health issues of heart attack and stroke. We resided in unit 2. In unit 3 this couple had unknown health issues. In unit 4 the couple who resided there were again another elderly couple in their seventies with diabetes and requiring knee surgery for both legs. The fourplex was put on the sellers' market in June 2021. An investor purchased the fourplex. Once the finalization of the sale was completed all the residents of the fourplex were given N13 notices of terminating tenancy due to extensive renovations that were

going to be involved. We were given till January 31, 2022 to vacate the premises.

“We (all the tenants of the fourplex attended) had called a meeting with the new landlord on September 27, 2021 to discuss our rights to reoccupy the unit once the renovations were complete. We were told the renovations had to be done in accordance of insurance and to upgrade to building code standards. The renovations would take four to five months to complete. It was felt by the landlord to complete all renovations at the same time instead of doing one unit at a time. We prepared to vacate by the date of January 31, 2022. We wrote a letter to the landlord stating our intentions of reoccupying once renovations were complete.

1550

“Our belongings are being stored in a storage container upon which we pay a monthly fee. We decided to leave the utilities account open in our names so as not to pay for any reconnection fees or deposits once returning. We have been living in a motel room for now 365 days. The renovations have not been completed in the four to five months as informed. We have had no apparent contractors at our home to do any of the renovations in months. We have emailed the landlord on numerous occasions for an update on when we can reoccupy. We have received the same response each time: ‘Renovations have been stalled due to increased costs of materials and unable to secure trades.’

“As stated, we are residing in a motel with our 11-year-old cat and our belongings are kept in a storage container. The utilities (costs are minimal) are still being paid by us. We had personal property insurance while living in the apartment which we had to inform the insurance company that our property is in storage. This caused an increase in the personal property insurance.... All costs are amounting to more than double what we were paying while living in our apartment. We have not been compensated for anything. The close quarters of living in a motel are stressful at times. The financial burden is also stressful. We have tendencies of feeling anxious as we don't know when we will return to our home.

“We also have children” who “are unable to visit us because of the living situation. I have a son with autism” who I've “missed spending weekends for birthdays with, Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving. Our grandson hasn't been able to spend weekends” with us because we are living in a motel.

“We also have a growing fear of the landlord flipping the fourplex: meaning he will resell the apartment fourplex and we don't know where we” will “stand or what rights we have to reoccupy our home if this were to occur. There have been rumours he intends to resell as individual condominiums. We have not been informed of his intentions. We felt it was in our best interest not to look for another home for the reason of a binding lease upon which we would have to be signed for a year. We were told the renovations would only take four to five months to complete. It is now a year of being homeless.

“My fiancé and I are employed and make good wages between us. We don't live beyond our means. We don't

make enough to buy a home or even to rent at the going rate of today's market. The apartment where we resided was very affordable for us. According to the” Residential Tenancies Act “the landlord must charge the same rent as when we resided there. The landlord does have the right to increase the rent up to 2.5% in 2023 as well as applying for an additional amount by the Ontario Landlord and Tenant Board due to renovation cost which is up to an additional 3%. This would still fall below the market rent rates of today and” be “affordable for us.

“We feel something needs to be done about landlords evicting tenants to do extensive renovations. Landlords should be held accountable to tenants when they have to evict and the tenant wants to reoccupy. Our suggestion: Landlords have other property for their tenants to reside till renovations are complete. Also, to continue paying the same amount of rent as if the tenant was living in the original rental unit. Additional suggestion: Landlords compensate for the above costs incurred while living outside of their home” to “which they want to return. Landlords need to be accountable to do their due diligence in completing renovations in a timely fashion so ... people can return to their homes. It is not the tenants' fault that there has been an increase in material costs. It is not the tenants' fault that there is a labour shortage.

“This is our outlook on part of the reason there is a homeless situation across our country.

“We would be happy to release further information of our situation if you feel you want to contact us.”

Speaker, I wanted to read that letter in full because here are tenants who are doing all the right things. They were told four to five months. They moved into a motel, and that's pretty expensive. They said they didn't want to rent or lease a full apartment because they'd have to commit to a year. They put their contents in storage. When you have contents in storage, that's a higher risk in insurance portfolios, which means they're paying much more. They can't have their family come into a hotel room to celebrate holidays and special occasions. And yet landlords are allowed to control people's lives in extreme fashion.

Imagine being out of your home for four to five months—that's what you were told—and the contractor is coming in to do some renovations in your own home, and it goes to 365 days, a year. How would it make you feel? What kind of laws would you want? Would you want to be compensated for the extra cost that you incur because of these renovations? I suspect you should want that because there's no incentives if we don't have built-in costs for long-term inconveniences—upheaval, quite frankly—of people's lives. So what's the incentive? Currently, it's up to two years. Can you imagine living somewhere else for two years, waiting to be put back in the home you were in originally?

It doesn't make good business sense for landlords to have that tenant come back and pay the same amount after they've fixed up a unit. The laws we have now that are being proposed are somewhat improvements, but they're not strong enough to make sure people act according to what agreements are supposed to happen between people

who don't have the legal means to argue about where they were originally living, and it also perpetuates the cost.

She has said that the cost of today's market, even if they wanted to go somewhere else, is out of their reach. Just recently, I think it was just yesterday—yes, April 16 here—there was an article in London's paper that said, "A Stunning Year-Over-Year Spike in London's Apartment Rental Rates." It says, "London apartment rents soared by more than 25 per cent over the past year, one of the largest increases in big-city Canada, a new market snapshot shows."

I'm going to say that's little old London because that's how I remember it, but it's growing exponentially, and the cost of living is outpacing what people can afford. If these tenants were in a small fourplex and there's rumours of it going to a condo, well, they can't afford—she said, "We can't afford to save enough money. We make a decent wage so that we can cover our expenses that we can predict now and budget for now, but if you're asking us to pay 25% more rent or to buy a condo because he's transferred it over to a condo complex, we aren't in that position."

The bill that's before us talks about doubling fines when landlords break the rules, from—I think it's from \$50,000 for individuals to \$100,000; that doubled that. In corporations, I think it's up to \$500,000. That's all good, and it pays—all these fines go to the Landlord and Tenant Board. I haven't checked this question out, but I got curious once I heard that the fees go to the Landlord and Tenant Board. I'd like to know how those fees are used. Do they help to educate tenants? Is there some kind of victims fund for tenants so that they can recover some of the losses, that if they were bad-faith landlords, bad landlords that acted in bad faith and they lost financial means—what happens? Does anyone know what happens to those fees that are paid to the Landlord and Tenant Board?

I know the government has talked about increasing adjudicators on the Landlord and Tenant Board. I believe they said 40, and that's good. We need to speed up those processes. But again, I'd like to know how they're going to manage that. Are they going to look after the big landlords first or are they going to look after the tenants and the small landlords that are really, really suffering when the system is broken at the landlord tribunal?

1600

We have had many solutions to helping the rental market. No one is disputing that people need to pay their rent on time so that landlords can have a good business investment, but when we're rolling back rent control, that's something that leaves people in a position of uncertainty when their annual lease is due for rent increase. That's so unfair. It's just so unfair. You're not able to budget if you don't have a predictability of your rent increase.

Part of this bill could have had a strengthening of putting on rent controls on all buildings, because it does look like, in this bill, if you're going to build a new rental building as a developer, gosh, the sky's the limit for what you can charge for rents in this province. With people such

as Lori and Ron, these are the people who we're leaving behind when we don't strengthen legislation to ensure we're not causing another trickle effect of another problem. You fix something over here, and something is broken because you haven't dealt with the whole picture.

The other couple of examples I want to use—it's interesting, because the bill does talk to the examples that have come into my office before the bill was written. Here we go; we have a woman here named Nicole. She called back in January of last year and she had an issue with her landlord with wanting to put a window air conditioner in her three-storey apartment building.

Again, that is something that has gone to the Human Rights Tribunal. There has been a decision placed that tenants now can do that. There are stipulations it has to be safe, make sure that they're the ones apparently going to be responsible for the extra electricity costs. If you already have electricity covered in your rental agreement right now, can the landlord increase those rates? There are so many unanswered questions.

I really think, if the government is going to allow those air conditioners to be put in and put conditions on those, one of the conditions that I think should be in there is that the landlord should actually oversee that installation. Because what if you're an elderly person, or maybe you don't know a contractor, or you hire a contractor, a handyman, 1-800, and they come and they do the work and everything looks good on paper, but then it's not installed properly? Where is the landlord's responsibility to make sure that apartment building is safe—working with the tenant, and both of them making sure that they're happy with the installation, that it's a safe installation and it's going to be there and work the proper way.

Just putting it on one party when two parties have a vested interest in something I don't think makes for good outcomes. I really don't. It just causes, I think, more arguments. But if you had the landlord involved in making sure that that got done properly, you can get things done on time, instead of the landlord calling up the tenant, "Oh, your air conditioner is in there. Give me the paperwork." I can hear it in the const office. I can hear all about it.

The other one who had the same problem with the renovation was Henryk, and he's an elderly gentleman. He came to my office, and again, it was a renovation. He had to leave his unit, and he has been out of his unit for quite some time. He came to me in—I think it was November of 2022. He has been out of his unit for—and that was before that. He came to see me in November, and he was out of his unit for months and months and months.

It's not right and it's not fair. What I'd like to see is the rights and the fairness balanced between both parties in having someone leave their unit because it's going to be renovated. I know there's a stipulation in there that says that if the tenant could stay there while renovations are being done—that's another thing we need to assess. If you ever have renovations in your home, I don't think you're asked to leave your home. If you're going to do the kitchen, somebody comes in and, yes, you might be without a kitchen sink for a couple of weeks, but you're

not asked to leave your home for months and years at a time for those renovations to be done. There has to be more of that.

The Landlord and Tenant Board: Again, there needs to be more support for tenants when they go there. I've heard so many stories that they feel that they're being pushed into agreements; they can't hear the proceedings, perhaps; they're not getting proper representation; they get cut off. Those kinds of things don't help the tenant-landlord situation either. I think people in this Legislature want things to work for both parties, but we have to create that environment for that to work. That means making things happen for both parties, not just one; levelling the playing field; making sure adjudicators provide the services that they're supposed to—not cutting people off, not giving opportunity for representation, not explaining things. How many of us have had phone calls from tenants where they didn't even understand what was happening to them and they were evicted?

There are some things in this bill that go beyond some of the things that we expected, so it is somewhat supportable, but there are things in the section where there's sprawl. We have a lot of land inside London. London Psychiatric Hospital was a wonderful piece of land that government owned, and the Liberals put up for sale and the sale was completed under the Conservatives. There's a piece of land that could have been kept in the public realm and there could have been a mixed housing in that. It was right in the city of London. It was on a transit route, as the government talks about wanting to have.

Having those infill projects are good for the locally owned businesses. It's good for the economy if you build those homes inside the city limits. They support local business and small business. We all want our BIAs to thrive. They had a very difficult time under the pandemic. Here's a way we can bump up that economy if we build homes inside the city boundaries. There are opportunities, like I said, with the London Psychiatric Hospital, and they sold it to a developer. Now, with the fact that development charges are being waived, gosh, they haven't built since they bought it; I wonder what—they're going to take advantage of that, I'm sure. That means, again, economic loss, funding loss for the city of London.

I look forward to the questions from the other side. I specifically focused on the renovictions, and I'd like to hear what they think about Lori and Ron. Did they do anything incorrectly? The circumstances of what happened—why has it taken a year? Why hasn't their landlord responded? To have them, the tenant, prove that the landlord is doing something wrong, that's another expertise all in itself in order to get justice.

I'll end my debate here and I look forward to questions.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to questions and answers.

Ms. Laura Smith: I listened intently to the member opposite for her statement, and I too have heard from many constituents. In a previous life, I actually dealt directly with the Landlord and Tenant Board, and I had to deal with many situations, including landlords who were unable to pay their mortgages because they weren't getting the

rental from the renters. This was actually a consistent issue.

One thing in common with all of us is that we hear the frustration with the backlog and the delays in the Landlord and Tenant Board. I know other members opposite have talked about this. We actually have a quote from the member for Toronto Centre: "We are seeing many people struggling as they're waiting for a hearing date, and of course, while they're waiting, that means everything is in limbo.... It benefits no one when the tribunal system doesn't work." That came directly from the member for Toronto Centre.

We're going to be increasing the adjudicators, and we're wondering and we're hopeful that you will be receptive to this move and talk to your constituents about—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We'll ask the member for London–Fanshawe to respond.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm glad that the government is recognizing that we need more adjudicators. They need to be experienced and knowledgeable and trained, absolutely, and they need to have support services when tenants come to the Landlord and Tenant Board—and for small landlords too, because a lot of small landlords don't know what's going on either. Between the tenants and landlords—the corporate landlords, they kind of know; they've got their legal representation. But I hear more from people who are living in smaller units, single-family homes, and they're struggling. So having more adjudicators is a good start, but we need to make sure that they're qualified, trained and look at the portfolio in there and try to figure out who we can help that doesn't have those resources.

1610

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from London–Fanshawe for her portion of debate today and for sharing her constituent's story, which should touch the ears of, hopefully, many in this Legislature today, to hear about what tenants go through at no fault of their own, playing by the rules, thinking they're doing a good thing, paying all of the bills. There has to be a repercussion now for this landlord, but that will be a very extensive process through the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Could the member possibly go a little bit further into what that will mean for those constituents trying to get their money back or get into the unit that they've been promised?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: One of the hurdles is that legal proceedings are very expensive, and they said they make a good wage, so who knows if they'll actually meet the very low bar of legal aid. That could be out of their realm, out of their accessibility. When you can't access that legal aid, first of all because it's costly—but then you also want the advice. So if you can't get either one of those things, they probably will not be equipped to go to the Landlord and Tenant Board and win that case, which means the landlord will get away with this renoviction and

there will be no enforcement. It will teach the landlord that there is incentive to taking advantage of good tenants when they don't know their rights.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the member from London–Fanshawe for her comments on Bill 97 and for sharing her constituent's letter with the House.

My question, Speaker, through you to the member opposite, is: Our government has already increased, as they're aware, the fines for violations under the RTA. Now we're increasing them more, to the highest level, actually, in all of Canada. So my question is, will they not support us in punishing the bad landlords that she is concerned about and ensuring that we are protecting tenants and continuing to do that? Would the member opposite be willing to, hopefully, support this bill?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I think everybody here is—hopefully they're all in agreement that when people break the rules or break the law or take advantage of someone, the rules should be enforced and, yes, they should be hefty so that there's a deterrent, so that they won't do it. These fines of \$100,000 for individuals right now and \$500,000 for corporations are a good start. They're deterrents. I want that to be a deterrent, because if there's a deterrent, then there will be less people going to the Landlord and Tenant Board.

But then when they do, how are these fines going to be enforceable? I'd like to know, because oftentimes tenants, as I described, don't have the means to actually take to task the landlords at the Landlord and Tenant Board. So to the member: Yes, it's good that you have the fines, but there have to be ways to get there to punish those bad landlords.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I appreciate your comments very much, and I'm wondering whether you see an advantage to perhaps having a public education campaign. For example, there could be a hotline; there could be a mail-out that goes to all tenants that spells out the rules and their rights because, for the most part, they don't know what their rights are. I wonder if you could perhaps make a recommendation to the government about how to further support tenants.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I think when people buy homes or rent homes—we go into it necessarily for the first time; maybe you've bought two or three homes and, still, it might be 10 years in between, or renting—you forget what the rules are. Hopefully you can educate yourself, but those resources are few and far between—where to find them.

So I agree with the member, education is a key piece. And maybe the Landlord and Tenant Board should have that as part of their mandate: to educate tenants and landlords of the right things to do and the wrong things and what's punishable. Maybe that's part of their 40 adjudicators. Rather than creating more, why don't you ask the Landlord and Tenant Board to start educating tenants? Have sessions so that people can connect. If that's where you go to fight a landlord, that's also where you go

to get education on your rights before you have a problem with your landlord, or landlords should go there before they have a problem with their tenant.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The next question.

Mr. Billy Pang: We have heard the Leader of the Opposition say that she shares our goal and objective of building 1.5 million new homes by 2031. While we have that commitment in common, it is only our government that has taken action and demonstrated our commitment to actually getting this done. The opposition has not presented anything credible or concrete beyond telling us what they oppose.

My question to the opposition is, what is their plan? How would they build 1.5 million new homes without a plan?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Okay, I have to tell you, your government, other governments, if we're government—everybody has ideas, and everybody wants to make things better. There have been governments that have made things better. You may not agree with it, but everybody has done what they think is right.

We do have a plan. We had an opposition day back in November 2022. We outlined our plan very clearly to your government of how to build affordable homes, how to build not-for-profit homes, how to make sure rent is affordable. If you were here on the opposition day—sometimes it's very scant attendance during oppo days, but if members were here, they would have been very clear on what the NDP's position is on housing. I can even send over the opposition day notes if the member wishes. Our plan is here. We've talked about it several times, and we'll keep talking about it.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): A quick question.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Picking up on the comments from my friend from London–Fanshawe, one of the things that bothers me about this government's approach is the lack of balance between public and private. Are there opportunities for public investment to solve the affordable housing crisis in her riding that she'd like to talk about?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I have a very short time. There are always opportunities for any government or leader to set, in any housing plan, no matter private or public—having that element in that plan so you're planning now for what we need, but also for what's in the future. I think that's where governments have misstepped. They don't plan for the future. Whether it be houses that are affordable, whether they're not-for-profit housing, we need to make sure we look to the future to build those stocks so we're not in the same position that we're in today.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): That's time. We're going to move to further debate.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: The theme of my talk today will be about being brave and being bold and going further to address our housing crisis. We all know we are in one, and the government has been pushing many different bills regarding that. I would argue that I don't

think they go far enough, and I want to encourage them to go further.

We were talking about, earlier, four units per lot, making that as of right; upsizing main streets, arterial roads, upzoning them—why not six storeys right across? Why not eight storeys? We're looking at Europe, Paris, amazing cities over there that have beautiful walkability, livability factors, and they are built up like that, especially along subway corridors. This government seems to let sprawl take over.

The provincial government should ensure that the elected municipal councils in Ontario and regions and cities be respected and allowed to plan for livable, walkable and affordable communities. That's the other thing we want to emphasize: We need affordable homes. We need affordable rentals. We need affordable communities. We are driving people so far out of urban centres because of that and farther and farther away. They're being forced to destroy farms and forests to create low-density, car-dependent, expensive and polluting sprawl.

1620

I'm just wondering: We have these growth plans. We invested the time, energy and money. We have respected, supposedly, the experts and asked them to create these growth plans. Why not double down on the growth plan, instead? Put sharper teeth into it, enforcing smart growth principles. We know it is much cheaper to have these compact urban environments than building, or proposing to build, homes in areas that lack the infrastructure. I mean, it doesn't make any sense, especially for a government that prides themselves on being fiscally responsible.

There's many, many housing advocacy groups—amazing groups—all over Ontario and beyond. We have one, More Neighbours Toronto, and they have said that “the government's new plan won't put the kind of housing people want to buy in the places they want to be.” And that is so true. People want to be where the services are, where the amenities are, where the infrastructure is. They want walkable, livable communities and, of course, sustainable. That is what's sustainable, especially when we're in this climate emergency. So we need to be focusing on that and I don't see that in Bill 97 whatsoever. I don't see the emphasis on densification, on infill, on encouraging—what is it? You're eliminating the requirement for municipalities to prioritize infill development before expanding urban boundaries to overrun natural lands. Why not prioritize infill developments? We have the land. Your own studies have proven that we have the land without going outside to the greenbelt.

You received a letter eons ago for other bills from a whole slew of amazing, reputable, responsible, credible planners in Ontario; some in British Columbia, as well, because obviously the things we're doing in Ontario are alerting other people across Canada to what's going on here and many of them are alarmed, so even they're writing in from other provinces. And they're saying, “Toronto has received an unprecedented flood of housing proposals, totalling 456 development projects that together contain over 237,000 residential units. The potential housing in Toronto alone now totals over 700,000

units. This represents almost half of the entire 1.5 million housing units your government wants to see built over the next 10 years.”

Here it is. In Toronto alone, you can achieve your goals. I'm with you for building these homes; albeit I think we may have a different opinion of what a home is, because I'm all for anything and everything—co-ops and garden suites and laneway suites and four units on one lot and building up the avenues—and I'm not sure you're there yet. I think you're still focused on the monstrosities with the white picket fence and three-car garages or whatever you're proposing. So we need to get together on that type of home, but we actually can build the homes. It's a lofty goal; it's a great goal. But let's build them in the right area, and that's not what I see in this bill. We are in an affordability crisis, of course. We all know that, unfortunately, and I don't see that in the bill. I don't see anything addressing affordable housing. It's very vague.

The rental protections, the rent control: We need more of that. Now, you are addressing a little bit with regard to renters: the tribunal—yes, that's good stuff; the air conditioning, for sure. You remember my private member's bill, which you all voted against for some bizarre reason—I guess you feel your communities won't flood, but that's another topic—Bill 56, but extreme heat is another concern with a climate emergency. We know the Intact Centre at the University of Waterloo has reported on extreme heat—flooding is number one; extreme heat, number two: “Warming and more intense extreme heat will be present for decades to come. If an extreme-heat event coincided with an extended electricity outage—with no fans or air conditioning running—loss of life could easily jump to the thousands.”

That's great. You're working on proposing air conditioning for tenants. It's long overdue. But maybe requiring a maximum temperature that landlords need to adhere to, like the minimum temperature we have in the winter—but that's good. I'm throwing you a bone. That's good. Believe it or not, I'm throwing you a bone.

There are other things, for sure. You're making it easier to build houses on industrial and employment lands. Our employment lands are so vital. You yourselves want jobs, job creation, manufacturing and whatnot in Ontario, so I'm not sure why we're getting loosey-goosey with that. It's all about building up; it really is. We need to intensify our neighbourhoods. We want to do that, and we want, as I said, the right kind of housing in the right space, where people want to live.

This morning, there was a comment by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing that people want to live—you know, kind of the sprawl argument and people want to live where they grew up. That's true. I'm from a small town; there are also people who are from small towns who move to the city, to urban centres, so we need to think about that too. Sure people want to live where they grew up, and other people want to get the heck out of those towns, move to a different place, reconfigure and start the next phase of their lives.

We have 700,000 units in the pipeline for Toronto. We could be building them right here, right now, if you

doubled down on the growth plan and gave it sharper teeth. It costs more; sprawl costs more. We've talked about that. I agree that we need to declutter the planning system a little bit—not to the extent that you're doing. As far as what you're telling urban planning as a vocation, you're basically saying, "Forget it, kids. Don't go into urban planning because we're just removing all that good information and good regulations, and we're just handing it over to the minister for him to make the final decision."

I guess our students, our kids interested in urban planning are going to have to go to a different province to study and get a job. I don't know what's going on there. I don't know if you have more respect or less respect for planning departments than you do conservation authorities. I'm not sure what's going on there.

I would just encourage you to be bolder, less timid. Be brave. I'm happy to give you a backbone injection to do that, to build up your avenues, build up your main streets, upzone them as of right, get that in in residential areas. Look at the yellowbelt in Toronto, figure that out and remove that if you have to. Let's do it.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We're going to move to questions.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you to the member of the opposition offering backbone injections to get us to speed on this. My question is, where was that courage when 12 years of Liberal government did not see that crisis coming?

Today, what we live in is a result of bad planning, not seeing the crisis, not seeing it coming, not planning for it, not trying to mitigate the shortage which we are in now, which should be taken care of via the planning you were talking about, the urban planning you're talking about, the city planning you're talking about, which we didn't see happening for 12 years.

Now my question is, are you going to join us to try to solve that issue before it's too late?

1630

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I would encourage you to check out my track record as Toronto city councillor for beautiful Beaches–East York and what I did for development, then you'll see what kind of backbone I had and how I have some to spare for you guys. We have a 12-storey at Woodbine and Danforth right on the subway line where the average is two storeys—two storeys, and we have a 12. We have a couple of 10-storeys down the street that I put in on the Danforth. We have another one, Options for Homes affordable home ownership, further down, which is about 12 or 14 storeys. So I'm single-handedly trying to build up the avenue myself, because you guys could be bold and put that in and then we wouldn't have to do it individually.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: It's interesting; I've already received emails about this bill, and I'd like to read a piece:

"As my MPP, I urge you to demand that these proposals to gut the sustainable policies of the growth plan and provincial policy statement be dropped. Instead, the provincial government should ensure that the elected municipal

councils in Ontario's regions and cities be respected and allowed to plan for livable, walkable and affordable communities instead of being forced to destroy farms and forests to create low-density, car-dependent, expensive and polluting sprawl."

Now, you've already spoken to a number of those issues, but I wonder if you could speak to concerns about the loss of authority of municipal councils.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Well, that's a great question, to the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North. Thank you very much. It's an interesting question because—I would like to do a study here, so put up your hand—there are many of us here who came from municipal backgrounds. I don't know the number on that out of 124 of us. So I am sure when we were sitting councillors, deputy mayors, mayors or whatever our role was at the time, we would be pretty darn upset if the province came in, bulldozed in and started telling us what to do in our own municipalities. So I am shocked at that attitude from this government. It's a lack of respect as it is, a lack of respect for the planning departments and, as we know, the conservation authorities. They're the experts. They know their neighbourhoods. So it's surprising.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague from Beaches–East York. I will put it on the record: my favourite Liberal in the House—no offence to the Speaker. Back row, we've got to stick together.

My question, though, to the member from Beaches–East York: She was talking about development on main streets. Obviously, coming from rural Ontario—and I won't ask what happened in your hometown and why you didn't want to go back. But in the provincial policy statement proposal, it includes "all types of residential intensification, including the conversion of existing commercial and institutional buildings for residential use." So this is like commercial use and having apartments above stores on our main streets in rural Ontario. This is important densification, as the member alluded to. So will the member support our initiatives to have this gentle densification in rural Ontario and across Ontario?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The favourite Liberal member, the member for Beaches–East York, to respond.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Sure. In answer to my second-favourite Conservative colleague—because my first would be the member from Windsor–Tecumseh, who's not here, but, sorry, who is my first-favourite.

In response to your question, absolutely, living above storefronts—it's a smart thing to do, building up the main streets. I think I've told you this story: When I was first elected, there was a proposal on Queen Street for a Lick's hamburger joint. If anyone ever enjoyed one of those burgers—yummy, yummy Lick's. Unfortunately, it went bankrupt, so developers bought the building and proposed a six-storey building. Some of my residents got quite upset about six storeys on a main street in the city of Toronto. I had to tell them, "I'm from a small town." They were

saying, “Well, we’re from a small town.” I had to tell them, “Well, I’m from a small town.” And Collingwood, at the time, was proposing a six-storey, because they were being bold—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you for the reply. We ran out of time.

The member for Hamilton Centre for the next question.

Ms. Sarah Jama: My question is to the member from Beaches–East York. As a city councillor in your past life, you’ve directly participated in debates around housing and homelessness. How has this experience helped to influence your opinions on Bill 97?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Definitely, we are in a housing crisis. We’re all very worried about that. We do not want people living on our streets. We want people to be housed. It’s a human right. As we’ve mentioned over and over in this chamber, housing is a human right. We want people to live with dignity. We want them to be in safe, secure, warm-in-the-winter, cool-in-the-summer, welcoming, affordable homes. So we need to all do our part and work together to achieve a better society that respects everyone and houses everyone.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): For another question, the member for Thornhill.

Ms. Laura Smith: I respectfully listened to the member opposite and appreciate small towns as well. Thornhill, my own riding, borders on some areas that we can get to pretty quickly, but we’re always aware of the farms and the areas that are just outside of our reach, so hopefully she will appreciate that the newly proposed provincial planning documents will allow the residential lot creation on farms. I’m just wondering if she has an opinion on this, because we will not have—it means that a farmer will be able to sever his lot to a son or daughter to build on a house, and it also means there can be more housing to accommodate farm workers. I’m wondering what the opposition’s opinion is on this.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Farmers feed cities. We love our farmers. We respect them. We owe them a debt of gratitude. It’s a hard gig—I won’t say gig; it’s hard work. I sure as heck couldn’t do it. I started a farmer’s market in my former life and learned first-hand what’s all entailed. Even for them to drive the three hours, some of them, into Toronto to sell their wares at markets and then drive the three hours home—we actually started feeding our farmers, because we thought we’re going to feed the farmers who feed us.

Yes, I think definitely, especially when next generations—some of them aren’t thinking of going into that vocation. We need to allow them, if the farmers want their family to live on the farm. But it’s a fine balance too, because we still need the farmland, so we want to be careful about paving over and building in our wetlands, our farmlands, our sensitive areas like that. It is a balance.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We don’t have time for another question. We’ll move to further debate.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I’m very happy and very delighted to stand to support Bill 97, Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act. Today, as we see the

dream of owning your own home become so far—all my constituents in Erin Mills, when they come to speak to me, they speak about the house prices. They talk about, “How can we imagine that our kids will have houses in our neighbourhood? We want our kids to be in Mississauga, close to their family.” Now, the smallest house in Mississauga maybe became higher than \$1 million, which is not achievable for even a middle-class family with two members of the family working and having income.

When we look into this current situation in the market, it is due to lack of availability, lack of variation and different housing options. When I came to Canada 28 years ago and I decided to—at some point, when I get back to my profession—buy a house, and we were a one-family income at the time because my wife was still studying to do her credentials as a doctor, we managed to buy a house.

1640

I used to take a tour—when I was working for Tim Hortons night shifts in the morning, I would tour in the neighbourhood, and I liked some street. I said, “This street with a park and everything looks nice. I like that street and I would love to maybe someday buy a house in this neighbourhood.”

When we decided to start looking, I tried to always look into that street. The real estate agent kept coming back and saying, “No, we can’t. There’s no availability on that street.” Of course, the first question any real estate agent asks you when you ask to buy a house, they ask you, “What’s your budget? What’s the range of the price?” We put a range which can be affordable to us. One day, I was crossing the street and found an on-sale sign on one of the houses in the street I liked, and I called the real estate agent. I said, “This is the house I want. I want this house.”

The guy checked and came back to me. He said, “Your taste is much higher than your budget.” He said, “This is beyond the budget you talked about.” I said, “Let’s just let me see it.” I wanted to walk in. Anyway, he got me a visitation, and we managed to work out to put an offer on the house. At the time, we managed to get the house because of the 5% new homebuyer, which allowed us to put 5% only to buy the house. We put the offer and we got the house. It’s actually the house I still live in until today.

The moral of the story is, with one family income, with a newcomer—at the time I was three years, four years in the country. But the dream to own a house and grow roots, and start looking to settle and feel at home or “this is my future and this is my family home,” is the dream of every Ontarian. When I talk to even my kids now, who are—one of them is doing his internship and the other guy is in second year of dentistry. They have a concern. They have a concern about if they will be able to afford buying a house in Mississauga, or do they have to go further out to be able to afford housing.

This is what we are having today, a crisis situation. Availability of housing is not there. That’s causing pricing to go up.

A couple of months back—three months, I believe—there was a house on sale on my street. Out of curiosity, as soon as the for-sale sign came, I checked the asking price, just to know what’s the average of my house, because it’s

very similar—two houses from my house. When it got sold, I called and I said, “Can you check, please, and tell me how much it was sold for?” And it was sold above the asking price: \$480,000 above asking price—some \$400,000-plus above the asking price. Why? He said there were 12 bets, that 12 people betted on the house to get the house.

Why is there no availability? Everybody sees, “That’s a house, looks like the house I want, the size I want, the price I want. I will continue bidding until I get it.” That will drive the house price up.

This government has been trying very hard to come up with solutions for a crisis we are tackling in hand now. It’s not the first bill. Actually, this government put four housing bills before this one.

We put the More Homes for Everyone Act, which is to protect homebuyers from unethical development practices and accelerating development timelines to get more homes built faster.

We put the Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, empowering municipal leaders at first-tier cities to work more effectively with the province to reduce timelines for development and standardize processes and address local barriers to increasing the supply of housing.

The third one was the More Homes Built Faster Act. To help with the crisis, towns and rural communities grow with a mix of ownership and rental housing types that meet the needs of all Ontarians, from single-family homes to townhouses and mid-rise apartments.

Then we came up with the fourth, which was the Better Municipal Governance Act, which allowed a province-appointed facility in some of our fastest-growing regions—Durham, Halton, Niagara, Peel, Waterloo and York—to help determine the best way to extend these powers into two-tier municipalities.

And that’s the fifth piece we are having in hand. Madam Speaker, we have a crisis in hand now, and we are expecting to receive 500,000 new immigrants for the next three years. That’s almost like 1.5 million new people coming to Canada. How many of those will be coming to Ontario? The estimate and the statistics are showing that between 40% and 60% of those go into the three biggest or four biggest cities, because it’s very normal.

Any newcomer, any new immigrant is looking for more services, easier transportation, easy access to malls and groceries and any aspect of life he needs. He most probably will be taking English classes and going to school, doing his credentials, studying, so he needs full access to many, many ranges of service. That’s why they will come to the big cities. They will come to Mississauga. They will come to Toronto. Mississauga especially has been receiving a lot of new immigrants; Mississauga and Oakville are receiving lots of new immigrants, especially Arabic speakers, Middle Eastern, which made housing prices go up because there’s a huge demand. Everybody wants to come to the area where they think they will be settling in in the new country. So we are expecting more and more. We are expecting to see more immigrants coming to Mississauga. There is no more land in Mississauga to build on. We have to intensify, add more

density to be able to accommodate more residents in Mississauga.

Also, we are building a lot of infrastructure transportation projects. LRT, GO train extensions and adding more tracks for GO trains will allow more people to be able to live in Mississauga and work in Toronto or work somewhere else. These are the facts we have in hand today. We need to tackle that.

This piece of legislation is actually adding to all the different pieces we added before to be able to accommodate this growth. It’s not going to happen in a day and night; it’s going to take time. But when we look at the other four pieces of legislation we’ve brought, when we look at the trends and see what happened based on those four pieces, starting in 2019, the first one, till the last one, which was very late last year, there is an increase in the rental housing market in 2022. Last year, Ontario surpassed 96,000 housing starts, the second-highest number since 1988; 15,000 new purpose-built rentals.

Doesn’t that tell us that this is the right direction? We are walking in the right direction. We are going in the direction where we are accelerating, encouraging, creating a good environment for investors and developers to start putting together projects, getting shovels in the ground and getting those units available for utilization very soon. I think adding more in this direction is needed. We tried to address the crisis with the last pieces. This piece is another building block in this suite of legislation which is allowing more housing to be built.

We are looking into new changes to help Ontarians to be able to buy a new home, to have their own house. When we look into the exact pieces that this legislation will add, we are proposing some changes to the Planning Act so we can facilitate priority projects. It gives the minister some authority to exempt individual projects from certain provincial policies, and specifies zoning as part of the MZOs. This is to, again, accelerate some of the projects which we feel go with the plan we are putting out. It requires homebuilders to work with the provincial land and development facilitator to come to an agreement. So we are adding some facilities so that they can negotiate and get things done faster.

1650

Integrate some of the government policies into the single provincial planning statement: Developers were complaining that every city, every region has its own policies. After they satisfied the provincial requirements, then they face some different requirements in their region or their city. That’s kind of duplicating some of the work they are doing. So we are integrating this provincial policy statement and A Place to Grow plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe. We’re providing a variety of housing options, adding employment zones, density near transit stations—so where there is a transit station, we’ll allow more density to be built around that.

Also, to help accelerate the projects we have in hand, we are freezing some of the provincial fees to reduce costs to start the projects. There are 74 different provincial fees that will be frozen if this bill passes, including the Ontario Land Tribunal and the building code.

Now, we are having another issue at hand, which is because of COVID. Because of stopping the evictions because of the economic situation during those two or three years of COVID, we have a huge backlog in the Landlord and Tenant Board, the landlord-tenant tribunal. We needed to accelerate that because we have been receiving emails from tenants, saying, “I have been waiting for six months, seven months, eight months.” And those issues always have some financial burdens, either on the tenant or the landlord.

So we appointed about \$6.5 million to hire an additional 40 adjudicators, which is double the number we have, and five administration staff. The process and scheduling and resolving applications will be faster. We will be able to clear the backlog which accumulated through the three years. We’re also improving the service standards and the client experience with the landlord and tenant tribunal.

Also, we have an issue at hand which we are tackling in this piece of legislation. Some of the older buildings don’t have air conditioning, and the majority of time, the landlord or the management company or the owner of the unit do not allow the tenants to install their air conditioning—in multiple different ways. Either we don’t know if the circuit can accommodate it or the price of the unit includes the utilities, so that any equipment added will cause electricity bills to go up and we don’t want to install that.

It was a negotiation between the tenants and the landlords, especially when the case is older people. Like all the people, they actually suffer in the summer, during the summer months. My mom used to—it’s still in the rental unit to date. We had to install her air conditioning unit, a mobile one, so that she can afford the weather in the summer, especially that her apartment is facing the sun. At least six hours of the day, the sun is coming through the front windows. So we had to go through some arrangements.

If the landlord is understanding, it goes well. If they don’t or they are not co-operative, it becomes an issue. If this bill passes, it actually gives the tenant the right to install an air conditioning unit on the window, of course, with all the precautions needed for protecting the electric circuits and the fire hazards and everything else. That’s not negotiable. But the fact that he has the right to install an air conditioner will give them that right. And, even if the rent is including the electricity costs, they might have to pay some costs—again, to be negotiated. During that period of time, the two or three months, they might have to pay some costs for the electricity. That basically will allow a good portion of renters to be able to install air conditioning during summer months.

Also, if this bill passes, we are proposing some changes on the deposit insurance for first-home savings accounts at Ontario credit unions. There are 1.7 million Ontarians who are members of credit unions. They are putting in savings. So we are opening that, allowing Ontarians to save up to \$40,000 towards buying new homes.

In summary, Madam Speaker, I think this bill will add another building block towards solving or tackling the crisis of housing. Maybe it’s not the only piece, maybe it’s

not a bulletproof solution, but it’s at least a building block towards solving some of the issues. Also, it will work with other pieces, and maybe other pieces will be coming to tackle other parts of the problem. When we look into what we did, I think no government did as much as we did to tackle the housing crisis. After 12 years of Liberal government that did not do anything towards it, even planning—I don’t think they even saw that crisis coming at the time. Now, we are in the crisis. We have to move fast.

According to the University of Toronto, the Smart Prosperity Institute predicted Ontario will need a total of 1,506,400 net new homes by 2031, which is much nearer than the 1.5 million our government committed to in the next 10 years. So in summary, I think this is a good move. We need more steps towards solving this crisis, tackling the crisis. The status quo is not an option. We have to come up with solutions. It’s maybe not the final solution, but it’s a step towards finding a suitable solution for the crisis. I really hope that the opposition comes to the table and tries to work with us hand in hand. As Premier Doug Ford said, we need all hands on deck to be able to solve this issue.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We can now go to questions and answers.

Ms. Sarah Jama: We know that renters continue to be left behind by this government and live under the constant threat of eviction due to a lack of renter protections. The Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario has said recently that Bill 97 does not go far enough to protect renters and fix the dysfunction at the Landlord and Tenant Board. Adding adjudicators to the LTB is not enough. Will this government finally prioritize at-risk renters and commit to fixing the dysfunction at the Landlord and Tenant Board?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much to the member from the opposition. I disagree with you that adding more adjudicators will not solve the problem, because what we have is a backlog. We used to have a specific number of cases per month, but during the COVID time, we had been receiving this number, but it’s waiting. There’s nothing that can be done about it. Because of COVID, we stopped everything, all the evictions. Now we have a backlog. This backlog, as soon it’s clear, we will go back to the normal levels of cases.

1700

In regard to disputes between landlords and tenants, I don’t think there’s anything that will solve that issue. It’s going to continue, but we need to be more clear in the guidelines of the legislation so that it lowers the chances of having a dispute.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The next question?

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you to the member from Mississauga—Erin Mills for sharing your personal story of looking for your dream home. For most homebuyers, a new home will be the largest purchase of their lives, and I’m glad to see that on the other side of the House, we understand that Ontarians should feel secure when investing in their future. Can the member elaborate on the

measures this government is taking to protect homebuyers?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much to my colleague for the question. Again, I would like to go back and say that tenant protection is part of that legislation. We are doubling the fines for the bad players, for the landlords who are trying to do fake evictions to get people out of their units. We are trying to add, if this legislation passes, some measures so that tenants can go back to their units after renovations.

This is not actually the first piece we did. Before, in More Homes for Everyone, we protected homebuyers from unethical development practices, like if a developer, for example, put a unit for sale and then they went up in price, they'd try to return the down payments and resell the unit. This is going to be—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. The next question?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thanks to the member for the contribution to the debate. Yesterday, I understand that the mayor of London was here visiting and spoke to, I'm assuming, the Premier and the municipal housing minister. London has said they're having a shortfall because of the development fees that have been waived. They're estimating a \$100-million shortfall because of Bill 23. This new bill is about building homes, helping people build homes and apartment buildings. With development fees being waived, how is that hole of economic loss to the city of London going to help build those homes without the infrastructure and development fees that cities depend on?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: The fees which we waived here in this bill—if you're talking about the other bills that we did before, it's only on small not-for-profit rental units and attainable homes. If you are talking about the provincial fees which we froze here, it's not affecting the municipalities at all. But if you are referring to the other bill in which we did reduce some of the developers' fees for a specific type of unit, again, these are not the units which we anticipate that will be a huge income for municipalities.

To be honest with you, even in our city of Mississauga, the majority of the time, the city, the municipality itself does this reduction for those specific cases, not-for-profit or rental. They do this reduction in—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you for the reply. Next question?

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to congratulate my friend, who was able to acquire his dream home. We also talked about being a landlord and tenant, and some of us have also discussed what modifications are required for the system to continue, the challenges that have been faced, the long delays and the unethical actors who take advantage of the LTB system. I'm pleased to see that we're finally getting this fixed to address these issues.

But can the member elaborate on what steps the new housing supply action plan takes to protect both the

landlords and the tenants and the critical issues reported by the Landlord and Tenant Board?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member from Mississauga—Erin Mills.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Through you, thank you very much to my colleague for the question. Again, I would like to say that it's a building block. It's not one piece. Those legislations have been—we have been on the road to build up on the other pieces we put.

Starting with the More Homes Built Faster Act, we did actually include the strictest and most comprehensive fines for bad actors across Canada. These are the highest fines in any province for the bad players in the landlords or the building developers, to make sure that we are protecting the homebuyers.

When we come to the tenants, again, if this piece of legislation passes, we are adding more protections for rental tenants suffering from the evictions, and they can go back after the renovations.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Another question.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member for his comments. Planners across Ontario have told us that there are over a million homes in the system that builders and developers have the approvals for but they're not moving on those approvals, and it's a huge problem. I wonder if the member can tell me, why is this government punishing municipalities for the length of time it takes for approvals?

I agree that there needs to be a reasonable length of time, but they let developers basically do whatever they want and are not following the advice of their own experts, who say there needs to be a use-it-or-lose-it clause for developers so that if they have the approvals, they can't just sit on them forever. They have to build the homes.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much to the member from the opposition. This is actually a very good question. Who is the controller, the developer or the city authorities? If the city authorities have two years' period to appeal the final design, within that two years, they can come back and change everything, say, "We want to add more parking spots. We need to lower this. We need to raise this. We need to get that back and go back to the board and rebuild all of what you did. All of the designs, all the blueprints have to change."

It's not fair. I don't think it's an easy task to navigate through the municipalities to get approval to build anything—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Answer.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: —modified so that it encourages developers to build so that we can get houses ready for people to use.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We don't have time for another round of questions.

Report continues in volume B.

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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 civiles et du Multiculturalisme
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
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	
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	
Jama, Sarah (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
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)	Kiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Mantha, Michael (IND)	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
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	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, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associée du Logement
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	Kanata—Carleton	