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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

F-26

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

F-26

**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Building a Strong Ontario Act
(Budget Measures), 2023

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Wednesday 26 April 2023

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

Loi de 2023 visant à bâtir
un Ontario fort
(mesures budgétaires)

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mercredi 26 avril 2023

Chair: Ernie Hardeman
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Président : Ernie Hardeman
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

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

Wednesday 26 April 2023

Mercredi 26 avril 2023

The committee met at 0902 in room 151.

**BUILDING A STRONG ONTARIO ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2023
LOI DE 2023 VISANT À BÂTIR
UN ONTARIO FORT
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 85, An Act to implement Budget measures and to amend various statutes / Projet de loi 85, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à modifier diverses lois.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Good morning, everyone. I call the meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to order. We're meeting today to resume public hearings on Bill 85, An Act to implement Budget measures and to amend various statutes.

Please wait until I recognize you before you start speaking. As always, all comments should go through the Chair.

The Clerk of the Committee has distributed committee documents, including written submissions, via SharePoint.

As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. After that, we will hear from all three presenters. The remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be for questions from the members of the committee. This time for questions will be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition members, and two rounds of four and a half minutes for the independent members as a group.

**ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF CERTIFIED
ENGINEERING TECHNICIANS
AND TECHNOLOGISTS**

VISTA CENTRE BRAIN INJURY SERVICES

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We will start the first panel this morning. The first panel is Ontario Association of Certified Engineering Technicians and Technologists and Vista Centre Brain Injury Services.

As you heard, you will have seven minutes to make your presentation. We ask you, before you start your presentation, to state your name and position—to be recorded in Hansard—to make sure that all your comments are

attributed to the right person. At six minutes of the presentation, I will say, "One minute." That doesn't mean you stop; you have one minute to really tell us what you came here for.

We'll start with the Ontario Association of Certified Engineering Technicians and Technologists.

Ms. Cheryl Farrow: I'm Cheryl Farrow. I'm the chief executive officer of the Ontario Association of Certified Engineering Technicians and Technologists—it is a mouthful; I will be referring to us as OACETT for the balance of the presentation.

I'd like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs for the opportunity to present to you this morning.

OACETT is the certifying body for more than 21,000 engineering, technology and applied science professionals in Ontario. We confer the certifications of certified engineering technologist, which is CET, and certified technician, C.Tech, and the rights to those titles are protected under an act of Parliament. CETs and C.Techs have typically come through the engineering programs at the college level. They're highly skilled engineering professionals, and they're working throughout Ontario's economy. They collaborate with professional engineers, with architects and skilled trades to provide the technical expertise and support that's necessary to keep our province rolling. They provide critical day-to-day leadership and expertise for thousands of employers across the province, including in airports, mines, the auto industry, advanced manufacturing, infrastructure projects, and much more. We certify in 15 different disciplines. While people tend to be familiar with professional engineers and tend to be familiar with the skilled trades, our technicians and technologists who are in the middle are sort of the unsung heroes, and I can tell you engineering in this province doesn't happen without our members.

Of particular relevance for today's presentation, we're especially proud of OACETT's role in helping thousands of internationally trained professionals succeed here in Ontario. While I mentioned that the most common route for our certified members is through the Ontario college system, currently one in five, or over 3,000, of our certified members were actually trained in countries outside of Canada, and every year 10% of our new applicants for the CET and C.Tech certifications are educated and have work experience in other countries.

We know that the skills and expertise of these internationally trained professionals are in high demand and contribute to the Ontario economy, so I'm particularly proud that OACETT is actually a recognized leader in reducing barriers to internationally trained engineering professionals, given the labour shortages that we're currently encountering in many sectors across the province. We have a proven track record of helping qualified individuals enter Ontario's workforce more quickly and contribute to the province's strategic economic priorities at their full potential. That's one of our major concerns—while we bring skilled individuals into Ontario, are we actually making use of those skills properly, or are they encountering barriers? So our goal is to help them contribute on that basis and also put them on the road for a better life for them and their families. It's something that OACETT has actually been doing with great success since 2016, when we eliminated our Canadian work experience requirement from our certifications. That came well before the recently mandated Working for Workers Act. At that time, we replaced that Canadian work experience with a new exam. We consulted with employers and with technical experts, determined exactly what it was that Canadian work experience gave to these individuals, and we developed an exam that could help evaluate whether they did bring those skills and aptitudes to the workforce and could help to remove that barrier. This is an approach that has been applauded by Ontario's Fairness Commissioner, and we're trying to help and work with the other regulators who are now encountering issues with compliance with the Working for Workers Act.

It's this type of flexible skills-first approach that's needed if we're going to address Ontario's labour shortage and ensure that newcomers can participate to their full potential—bringing greater attention to an individual's experience and transferrable skills, and moving away from past practices that we feel have led to over-credentialing and are actually exacerbating some of the labour shortages we're currently experiencing.

While my remarks this morning don't specifically reference Bill 85, we are wanting to take the opportunity to applaud the Ontario government's efforts through the 2023 budget, and as referenced in Minister Bethlenfalvy's introductory speech, to ensure that internationally trained professionals can meaningfully contribute to Ontario's economy as soon as possible.

Specifically, a month ago I had the opportunity to attend an announcement by Premier Ford, Minister Bethlenfalvy and Minister McNaughton that Ontario will be doubling its allocation under the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program and investing an additional \$25 million over the next three years to help ensure that these immigrants can "hit the ground running," to borrow a phrase from the finance minister.

Most excitingly for us at OACETT, the Premier and his ministers were joined by Clarence Walters, who is one of our proud certified members and, today, is one of the mechanical systems leaders at Pearson airport. Clarence came to Ontario from Pakistan 35 years ago with valuable

transferrable skills, practical experience and unshakeable motivation, but, like so many others, Clarence faced many obstacles from employers and regulators who were unable or unwilling to break free from their rigid approaches and bias when he didn't have Canadian work experience. Clarence was washing windows. He was working part-time where he could find work to support his family. Decades ago, it was OACETT that opened the door for Clarence, as it has for thousands of others, by recognizing the value of his skills and experience and giving him his C.Tech certification. That opened the doors to new opportunities and challenges that Clarence has seized and that have propelled him through his career, and he's now a strong champion for our association.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Cheryl Farrow: It's the same type of opportunity that every internationally trained professional should have when they choose to bring their skills and expertise to Ontario.

0910

This work is just beginning, and there is more to do. Our members are committed to working with the Ontario government to identify barriers that these highly trained and necessary skilled workers face, and to find ways to break those barriers down. Whether those barriers are legacy regulatory barriers, training and certification barriers, language proficiency or integration challenges, OACETT is here to be a partner in breaking them down, sharing our experience and finding a way to welcome these critical skilled workers into our economy.

Thank you very much. I'll look forward to your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for your presentation.

We'll now go to Vista Centre Brain Injury Services, and the same rules apply to you, sir. The floor is now yours.

Mr. Denis Boileau: Thank you very much for your invitation this morning so that I can address this committee and simply talk about finances and, I'm going to say, the Ontario community support network and associations. I'm going to try to explain a little bit of what we do and how we do this etc.

My name is Denis Boileau. I'm the executive director for Vista Centre Brain Injury Services, or le centre de services pour traumatismes crâniens. We are located in Ottawa, but our catchment area is the whole Champlain region. This agency that I am from—we provide different services to people with brain injuries.

Just to give you a little bit of statistics, and then I'll move on: The average brain that we all have weighs about three pounds, per se, but it does contain millions of neurons, and it is that feature that makes it that every brain is different. We cannot necessarily compare one brain to another; we are all completely different.

In Ontario, just to give you some statistics again, one in three people is directly affected or impacted by a brain injury, or disorder, if you wish. These brain disorders, from highly preventive to highly complex—many of them

actually come from motor vehicle accidents, partner violence etc. The most prevalent and the most complex cases represent about 10% of the community that have a brain injury; there is a 90% which is less, but 10% is actually—I will use the word “complex,” but also severe brain injuries.

Again, just to give you a bit of statistics: In Canada, every 3.5 minutes, there is a brain injury. I will repeat that: In Canada, every 3.5 minutes, there is a brain injury. I will leave you with this last statistic: Therefore, in Ontario, one in three people is impacted by a brain injury.

Moving on now from the statistics to other issues: One of the issues that we are facing is a lack of funding, not only in regard to the community health sector, but also certainly ABI agencies across Ontario. My agency has received a 2% increase in the past 10 years. Many of the community support agencies within Champlain are surviving on 2012 funding levels. We haven't seen a cost-of-living increase for 11 years, but we are called upon to provide more services to more clients and deliver these services to the same level, even though the costs have increased dramatically in the past 10 years.

As the chair of the Champlain ABI Coalition, the number one issue that has been identified in my area is housing, and when I talk about housing, I mean specialized housing, not only for people with a disability, but for people who have an acquired brain injury.

So my ask from the government is to consider, at a minimum, inflationary increases to the entire community support services sector, including ABI. Without such increases, this sector will need to consider cuts in services and staff, and the ramifications of this will translate into more emergency room visits by our clients, which we do not wish, but that would be a fact. Without that, also, there is the aspect that employees are burning out and caregivers are also demanded to give more services to the people they need to provide services to.

We do not want to see clients in the emergency rooms, and we would like to continue to offer our services as best we can, so we ask the government to consider giving us an increase in our basic funding. I know that Ontario Health will flow the money to us, if they do have the money, in order to increase our base funding—but it is always a condition.

Within this sector, we have many collaborative partnerships with one another. One of them I'd like to highlight is that at my agency, we have partnered with the Ottawa Hospital or the Robin Easey Centre, whereby we've created a transition program. What this means and what occurs is the following: Someone has a brain injury, they go to the Ottawa Hospital, then they go to the rehab centre, Robin Easey Centre, and we have a worker from the Robin Easey Centre and one from Vista Centre—so a hospital setting and community setting coming together so that the patient flow of this individual is done dramatically faster. We have statistics and we can show that if we have that partnership going together, the patient flow is much quicker, but the patient is also happier when they get transferred from a hospital setting to a community setting.

The community support services sector provides excellent services, as identified by our satisfaction surveys, and we provide outstanding services for the dollars invested. Help us to further enhance the quality of life of our clients.

I will leave you with this pondering quote: “Our brain defines who we are.” And you can refresh what you're thinking about and how your brain functions. You can put in some fresh air and insights and learn new skills. That's what we do every day within the ABI sector.

Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation.

That concludes the presentations. We'll start the first round of questions with the official opposition. MPP Begum.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much to both of you, Ms. Farrow and Mr. Boileau.

First, let me just start off with Vista Centre Brain Injury Services, just because as you were speaking, it resonated so close to me. My father was injured from a motor vehicle accident. We have seen the transition from St. Michael's Hospital in downtown Toronto, then to Toronto Rehab, then to the services at home with PSWs and occupational therapists, to physiotherapists. Today we have him with us because of the health care services that we received in this wonderful province. My grandfather called me from back home, where we emigrated from, and said, “The reason he's alive today is because of the wonderful system that you have in Canada,” that we're so proud of.

When you talk about the fact that you're still sustaining at a level of 2012 funding, it breaks my heart, because what we went through in 2001 with my father—we are seeing that system deteriorate over the last two decades. Right now, we don't have that integration, and it breaks my heart to see people who are going through brain injury—the fact that we have one in three individuals in Ontario suffering from that, and you're trying to make do with that limited amount of funding, and you need so much support.

What would you ask this government to do, especially to be able to have a sustainable level of service for Ottawa and for Ontarians?

0920

Mr. Denis Boileau: That's a huge question, and I will try to answer this in this fashion—because there are many parameters that I could go on, and I could take the rest of the 45 minutes to talk about my wants and needs, but I'll specify just one, because as I said, I am the chair of the Champlain ABI Coalition. The number one issue that we have identified in my region is housing. Within the region of Champlain, there is something like 16 beds that are fully funded by the Ministry of Health of Ontario. That is just not enough. If you were to require a residential bed within my region, you are going to be waiting 15 to 20 years. I will repeat that: You will be waiting 15 to 20 years to have a dedicated bed that is fully funded in the province of Ontario for a person with a brain injury. I'm just using that statistic to say we certainly do need more money at the base level for every agency—and not only for ABI, but the

whole community services sector. But when we're talking about housing, and we need specialized housing—I will repeat: You are waiting 15 to 20 years for a bed to open so that you can have a residential spot within my area.

Ms. Doly Begum: I think it really speaks to the type of housing. You've clarified it really well. It's not just about having structures or buildings; it's about the needs of those individuals and how we service them in the best way possible.

The next point that I want to talk about is something that you touched on, which is the burnout of health care workers. I'm sure you're seeing that a lot.

Mr. Denis Boileau: Most definitely. As I said, at my agency in the past 10 years, we've received a 2% increase. You can't imagine that. We keep asking our employees to do the same, more. They are dedicated employees etc. But I am losing employees. Many of us are actually losing PSWs—and I'm going to say this—to the hospital sector. Nothing against this, but we are losing them because when they go to the hospital sector, they can actually be paid more and they have better benefits etc.

It is not only a case of losing employees, but also, with the present employees we have, because we keep asking them to do more and more and with the same amount of dollars, there is some burnout.

Ms. Doly Begum: Would you say that as a government, we have a duty to make sure our health care workers are paid well, respected and retained in their professions?

Mr. Denis Boileau: Most definitely. I'm sure if you talk to the Ministry of Health, they are going to say that they are aware of the issue, certainly in terms of funding for salaries etc. But I will also say that one of the key factors within the health care sector is that we are very dedicated. We really don't necessarily think of the amount of money, but we think of our clients. Thankfully, we are made that way. I'm just going to say—and I'm going to have a little bit of fun with the committee—our brains are wired differently in the health care sector than the other sectors. But I will not venture to say that as a fact.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you so much, Mr. Boileau.

I'll move on to Ms. Farrow. You touched on another topic that I've worked on in the Legislature very closely as well, which is the recognition of internationally trained professionals. I actually brought in engineers who have extensive amounts of experience and education to Queen's Park to do a press conference, share about their struggle, the barriers they have. I just want to say thank you for highlighting—and you summarized it so well at the end; very few do that. I hope that my colleagues are listening, because at the end, you talked about how there are some very basic things: One is the legacy barriers that we have. The other one is looking at training and the bridging, for example. And the last one is integration. Sometimes we get one or the other, and we forget about how they all impact the ability for someone to go through the entire process and become a certified engineer, become a technician—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Doly Begum: —or whatever they may be. I would love to hear your thoughts in terms of what you expect the government to do to make sure that we can address those three.

Ms. Cheryl Farrow: I think in many cases, it requires us bringing the specific cases around the piece. I think the government has gone forward in terms of the training program. We've got the bridging program that was part of the budget as well, so there have been some pieces there. They are working on it on the certification side, with the Working for Workers Act. We were pleased to see some of the pieces being brought there and following our lead.

We did have an interesting piece on the integration side, though, and an experience this week where one of our staff members encountered somebody who is working in parts in an automobile dealership—the individual is actually a trained mechanical engineer, so of course he was promoting to him that he should come and talk to us and look at certification and look at support through our organization. And the individual said, "I can't even focus on that until I can figure out the housing situation for me and my family."

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes the time.

We will now go to the government. MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the presenters for coming. Absolutely, the advice that you're giving is valuable to us.

I have a quick question to Vista Centre Brain Injury Services.

You talked about how you hire a PSW or other worker and then the hospital scoops them up. I want to share with you, technically speaking, across the province, we see a labour shortage. Just to make you feel a little bit okay, we have a similar issue: We hire somebody in our constituency offices, and ministries scoop them over. Most of us have the same issue, as well. So if you can find an answer, please let us know, as well.

What I do want to talk about is that there is an SDF fund, the Skills Development Fund. Are you aware of that?

Mr. Denis Boileau: Yes, I am.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Is there anything we can do within that perspective to help you?

Mr. Denis Boileau: Yes, definitely. I will just say that the Ministry of Health is aware of these issues, and it's not that they're turning a blind eye to all of this. We are working in collaboration and co-operation with them. But I think one of the key things is, again, funding will always be an issue. And you've mentioned it—we feel sometimes that we are training the PSWs and then they go elsewhere. But that is just a fact of life. It's simply because it's not equilibrium—so if there was an equilibrium, we wouldn't be necessarily losing all of our PSWs. And that's just one aspect.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I appreciate it.

No, it's called progression. We actually feel good when all these employees we trained actually go to the ministry. We feel bad—I'm not going to lie—but we feel good that they're going to progress in their lives.

Cheryl, you talked about clearance—by the way, I was in that announcement. I came to Canada on January 15, 2000. I was an undergraduate in chemical engineering. I started as a lab technician, thanks to Paul Kuzmenko, who supported me with the education, and I became a quality manager because of him and the education.

You touched on the Working for Workers Act, so thank you for that acknowledgment. We truly appreciate it. My colleague PA Smith is also here. We value your feedback a lot.

One thing we keep talking about, the foreign credentials and the foreign professionals—they come here and then they drive taxis, they go to Tim Hortons and do those kind of things. I was one of them, and one of our MPPs, Sheref Sabawy, came as an engineer. He worked in a Tim Hortons for five years. So these are very common things.

I think one of the things which I felt was, yes, when we come new, we have to struggle to find a place for our children, for our family, to have a minimum wage, enough to survive, and then we can focus on going ahead. But when we go ahead, we talk to the employers, and they talk about, “Oh, you don’t have Canadian experience.”

What can we do, as a government, to change that mindset of the employers so that they can hire those employees?

Ms. Cheryl Farrow: I think perhaps some of the same arguments that we’re looking at through the Working for Workers Act, which is that there have to be alternatives to—you can’t leave people in this vicious cycle of, “Well, I can’t get a job if I don’t get Canadian work experience, and I can’t get Canadian work experience if I don’t get a job.” I think we have to perhaps educate employers more on the concept of transferable skills, the fact of looking at what these individuals have done in their country, both from an education and from a practical work experience perspective, and help people to understand how those equivalencies can be determined.

I know things like our Canadian credentials, like our credentials through OACETT, are a big help for employers, because we are the ones that help to determine where there’s equivalency and to demonstrate that. And then I think it’s a case of the immigration agencies, for example, and those who are supporting new Ontarians to know about these organizations and to be able to direct them accordingly so that they can actually get their experience and credentials recognized.

0930

Mr. Deepak Anand: There’s an organization called Coding for Veterans. What they do, actually, is they go backward: They go to the employer first, they ask what they need, then they go to the veterans and teach them those skills which are gaps and get them the employment they need. So maybe you can do something similar.

I don’t need an answer, because I’ve got my colleagues who want to ask you—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Byers.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you for the presentations this morning—very interesting, both of them.

Continuing with Cheryl: It’s great work your organization is doing. What is the trend? Are there more applications, more interest in the field, internationally, of folks coming into the province, or is it flatlined? Can you give a sense of what the market is, if you will, internationally?

Ms. Cheryl Farrow: We’re finding that our numbers are growing in terms of the number of applicants who bring international education or work experience, or both. So, yes, that trend is increasing, and I think it’s increasing with the number of immigrants we’re welcoming.

We’re also starting to see more of the people who, internationally, are engineers coming to our organization, because there is a challenge getting through the engineering process, and we have the ability to recognize their credentials and at least get them working in the field of technology while they still continue to pursue equivalency for a P.Eng.

Mr. Rick Byers: That’s great to hear. All of us are hearing all the time about the labour shortage, and it’s real. It will take a while to sort out. But does that give you some encouragement about the ability to meet the labour shortage over the next period of time, whatever that is?

Ms. Cheryl Farrow: Based on where we sit with unemployment rates right at the moment, I think there’s still a long row to hoe, but I think everything helps, and certainly the government’s increase in the number of immigrant nominees—we have to know that that’s where any growth in our labour force is going to come from.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you.

Denis, thank you very much. The brain injury sources, if you will—we heard about accidents. Is it work-related, as well? Can you give us a sense of the “source,” if you will, if that’s the proper term to use?

Mr. Denis Boileau: I talked a little about the statistics now. We do know that in the workplace, a certain percentage do not ask you for the correct number, so I would not be able to—but there are certainly, in the workplace, people who are injured and who do have a brain injury. We have clients, and we work with WSIB because they’re on WSIB. It is a factor in the workplace. But I could not give you an exact number. I could get a number, if you wish. I could contact my colleagues at WSIB and everything else. But yes, it is—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question.

We’ll now go back to the official opposition. MPP Begum.

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to come back to Ms. Farrow. When we’re talking about recognizing internationally trained professionals, one of the things I—actually, this, I probably never say in the Legislature or in committee, and I’m sure my colleagues will be happy to hear this. I don’t often get a lot of positive response from the government, being an official opposition member. But I do have to say, when I first got elected and started raising this issue of credential recognition, seeing the Working for Workers Act include that part of it was very positive for me, because I was asking questions. I actually brought a bill forward, as well, Bill 98, which talked about recognizing workers, especially health care workers. Even though my bill didn’t go through all the different stages, when the

government came back and took parts of it—it's still a win for me, because it took place, and it's a win for the province. So I'll take that and show my gratitude to my colleagues on the government side. It did miss one bit, by the way, which is something that you touched on, which is the vicious cycle of getting Canadian experience, and then the requirement that has been removed of Canadian experience—because without that, when you go to an employer, you don't have anything to show on your résumé, for example. I remember talking about this when the first Working for Workers Act came out. I said, "You're not understanding what an actual employee or what an actual worker faces when they go through this entire process." I know you started talking about it a little bit. I want to hear your thoughts about how we could have changed that and done a little bit more in terms of that integration part of it and the vicious cycle that people across the province face.

Ms. Cheryl Farrow: I'll speak a little bit more, because I think it does go back to that employer education piece. There was certainly an aspect of that that our organization has started. We have a 360 Partnership Program. So while our association represents our members and the certified individuals, we've also looked at partnering with key employers so that they recognize the value of bringing in certified individuals, whether they're internationally educated or educated here in Ontario. I think that's one piece.

The other place that we have found education to be quite successful is working through the chambers of commerce and getting some of that information delivered at the local level where employers are. I think it's 80% of employers in Ontario are small and medium-sized employers. They're the ones who need the message. They're often working through the chambers and the boards of trade. It's a good place to provide messaging on the whole issue of transferrable skills and needing—if our economy is going to continue to work, we have to take advantage of the skills that people bring in from other countries.

Ms. Doly Begum: I think another piece that—and I would love to hear your thoughts on it. What I hear from workers is, there's a huge burden of funding. They are concerned about providing food on the table, rent, all those things, and to get an education, to be able to go through the entire process is extremely difficult. When you come from another country, shifted your whole life—and to be able to do that is extremely difficult. One of the asks that we had from a lot of internationally trained professionals was: "Support us as we go through the process—the bridging process, the training process—so that we can get the Canadian experience," which is sometimes actually a good requirement to have, because some of those skills are transferrable, but you need to have a little bit of awareness of what the differences are in different jurisdictions, for example.

Ms. Cheryl Farrow: Most definitely. Again, I think part of that is in the government's bridge training program, which was also part of the budget. So there are some funds available for individuals for that.

OACETT itself—our Fletcher foundation—provides a bursary in every Ontario college, that's available for international students and local Ontario students to take advantage of.

It's true; there are these—Maslow's hierarchy of needs. If people are worried about putting food on the table and where they're going to live, it's hard for them to focus on—"How do I take full advantage of my skills? I just need a job to look after my family." So that is a challenge.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much. I'll yield my time to my colleague.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to both of you for coming to committee this morning. It's important to hear the impact that this budget will or will not have on your respective associations.

Denis, thank you for raising the issue of brain injuries related to domestic violence. It's not a well-known issue or accepted issue.

I do a lot of work with the Brain Injury Association of Waterloo-Wellington. They just received a Trillium grant to further explore the impact of brain injuries on victims of domestic violence. In fact, they're working with the local police association—because police have admitted that sometimes they are interacting with a woman who has been a victim of domestic violence, intimate partner violence, she's not coherent, and this is due to a brain injury. It's a small investment; I think it's \$26,000.

It just shows you how much good work is happening at not-for-profit agencies—and by local volunteers, really.

Fundraising is a huge issue. Basically, they're fundraising for operational funding.

Can you just give us a sense—because you've come here with a direct ask: You need investment in your organization so that you can help more people. And by intervening, you're actually saving the system money down the line. So it's a smart investment. I just wanted to get you on the record so that this government understands that upstream funding and how it actually saves money and is a more compassionate and humane response to brain injuries.

Mr. Denis Boileau: Thank you for bringing that up. We do know right now—and please do not take this negatively—that it's not only in this province of Ontario, but across Canada, that there is a huge impact—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Denis Boileau: —of partner violence as well as brain injury, and I guess that would be a specialized field. We're not necessarily able to deal with that, because, again, there is a lack of funding. But there's a lack of funding for many different aspects, when you talk about brain disorders.

0940

Ms. Catherine Fife: The supportive housing piece is something that we've tried to get the government to pay a little closer attention to. In this budget, there's \$202 million, and honestly, the need out there far surpasses \$202 million—but at least that's one good thing that I can say. Do you know what I mean? You have to sort of try to find the balance sometimes.

I do want to say thank you for the work that you're doing.

We're going to move some amendments. Unfortunately, the process for us is that we can't introduce amendments for additional funding, but the government members, my colleagues on the other side, could. They could hear your testimony and—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We will now go to the government benches. MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you to both witnesses.

Mr. Boileau, I know you came from Ottawa on the train, so you've come a ways to get here.

We've had some discussion about foreign workers and getting those integrated as quickly as we can, and I appreciate your comments about how you pioneered that.

Certainly, this government is working very hard across the sectors, from health care to other professions, to increase foreign-trained workers.

I have a question for both of you on local, Ontario-based kids who are coming up through the system. We focus very heavily in this government on getting training to get people educated and into the workforce—from PSWs and nurses to certified engineering technicians. I'm wondering if you can comment on what you're seeing from the local Ontario education system in terms of producing workers in both of your fields.

Mr. Denis Boileau: Do you want to go first?

Ms. Cheryl Farrow: I can speak quickly to that.

I know, because we work very closely with the colleges, that basically any growth they're seeing in their programs, they're telling us, is coming through international students at this time. So the enrolment and the movement forward is fairly flat from a domestic perspective.

The biggest challenge that we are facing—I'm going to call it stigmatization. We remain in Ontario with an issue that everybody should be going to university, and if you can't hack university, well, then college is an okay second-best, and if you absolutely can't hack that, well, then you have to go into the skilled trades. I think that until we've got some communication to break down that hierarchy, we are going to continue to struggle with filling these positions, which are critical to the province, and end up with—and I'm a university graduate—too many graduates out of arts programs in universities, because society just doesn't value those outcomes equally.

Mr. Denis Boileau: When we're talking about training—and I'm going to link it to different aspects in regard to training. All of our employees are trained in recognizing signs and disorders and how to treat people with a brain injury, and I have to comment about the good work that the Ontario Brain Institute is actually doing in regard to that. But I'm going to link it also—when we're talking about training, let's talk about shelters, women's shelters and all of those aspects. We know in the city of Ottawa, 30% of the people who are homeless actually have a brain injury, and they could end up in shelters, but

unfortunately the individuals who are in these shelters and the workers per se are not trained within the whole aspect of brain disorders.

So what I would recommend—this is a recommendation that I'm doing—is that we as an agency partner with those other community services, such as shelters, and provide them with that education of how to actually interact with someone who has a brain injury, even though it's very complex; how to interact with them and the services that they require, so that we could work in partnership with these various other community services. We have a specialty, they have a specialty, but let's work together and train those individuals within the shelters so that they have more knowledge in regard to brain disorders.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I appreciate your comments.

Cheryl, I actually taught at Georgian College. I taught in their automotive program, and it was interesting to me; you could kind of divide the classes into three: There were the younger kids right out of high school, then there was a large sector of kids who had come from university—they had student debt and they wanted a job, and they hadn't been successful—and then there were some more senior students.

I would be interested in your thoughts about how—you mentioned it briefly, Cheryl—through education or promotional programs, we can impress upon young graduates that college is not the second option, that it is a primary option. We've worked very hard with this government, through Minister McNaughton—in the skilled trades—and Minister Dunlop. So I'd be interested in your thoughts about how we could increase awareness of the college programs and make them pre-eminent as well, or on par with university.

Ms. Cheryl Farrow: I would probably defer to my college colleagues for some of the solutions on that. Their response would always be: equivalent funding and promotion.

I think the biggest challenge, as well, is that it's not so much the students; it's their parents we have to convince. We know students will say they've got an interest, and Mom or Dad will say, "Yes, but you're going to university."

It's definitely a huge communications piece. I think the province is going to need to get behind a public communication piece that speaks to an equivalent valuation of all levels of education, and that can be university, college, or apprenticeship through the trades.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Mr. Boileau, do you have anything to add? It's a tough question, I know.

Mr. Denis Boileau: Well, I will come back to saying that I'm willing to partner with any community agency so that they can learn more about brain disorders and how to treat them, but if I was going to be asking—again, an ask is that I have a dedicated person in my agency to do that, because in my agency, we only have three people in management, and I'm one of them. I can't divide myself in 20 other people—even though my board would like to clone me, that is not a possibility. But if that was an ask—it's to have a dedicated person to go out and do that

educational aspect with the shelters and more of those community services.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you. Those are my questions.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We have another 1.2 minutes. MPP Smith.

Mr. David Smith: Thank you, Mr. Boileau and Ms. Farrow, for presenting here today.

I'm a little startled by the number, 3.5 minutes—that every 3.5 minutes is a brain injury. That's very serious. I'm coming from a sports background and football, and—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. David Smith: —as a result, I'm concerned with what you've said.

I know you have an ask. You spoke about Champlain. What area of Ottawa does that consist of? Is this in Ontario, or is this a part of the Hull region? Can you explain what that is?

Mr. Denis Boileau: The Champlain region—I'm going to try to give you a visual map. Once you pass Kingston, it's Kingston all the way to, I'm going to say, the Quebec border, and then a little bit north—not as far north—but all of eastern Ontario. So my region that I have to serve is quite large, and to be honest, I cannot get service to everybody. We are concentrated mainly within the Ottawa region, because that's where most of the services are, but my mandate is to serve anybody within the Champlain region who has a brain injury.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes the time.

That also concludes the time for this panel. We thank you very much for coming in and helping us with these deliberations, and we wish you well.

We are also done for this morning. We will recess until 1 o'clock this afternoon.

With that, the committee stands recessed.

The committee recessed from 0949 to 1304.

ALZHEIMER SOCIETY OF ONTARIO

MS. NINA DEEB

EARTH EDUCATION LEAGUE,
ONTARIO CHAPTER

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Good afternoon, everyone. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to order. We're meeting this afternoon to resume public hearings on Bill 85, An Act to implement Budget measures and to amend various statutes.

Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak, and as always, all comments should go through the Chair—these comments are meant for the committee members.

The Clerk of the Committee has distributed documents, including written submissions via SharePoint.

As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. When we've heard presentations from all three presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the

time slot will be for questions from the members of the committee. This time for questions will be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition members, and two rounds of four and a half minutes for the independent members as a group.

We have the first panel. It consists of Alzheimer Society of Ontario, Nina Deeb, and Earth Education League, Ontario chapter. I believe Earth Education League is virtual.

As you start your seven and a half minutes—at six minutes, I will say, "One minute." You can keep going for that one minute; don't stop, because it isn't the minute and a half.

We ask each one, before you make your presentation, to state your name for Hansard and your position.

We'll start with the Alzheimer Society of Ontario. The floor is now yours.

Mr. Kyle Fitzgerald: Good afternoon, Chair Hardeman and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Kyle Fitzgerald. I'm the director of public policy and government relations with the Alzheimer Society of Ontario.

Our feedback on the 2023 provincial budget will be divided around two themes: keeping Ontarians living with dementia out of hospital today, and preparing for a future treatment that will lower demand for hospital in decades to come.

The Alzheimer Society is a federation of 26 front-line health care providers operating in every community across Ontario. Last year, we supported just under 100,000 clients, including both Ontarians living with dementia and their care partners.

There are over 275,000 people living with dementia in Ontario today. In addition, there are over 150,000 informal, unpaid family caregivers supporting them, who are often older adults with health concerns of their own. Both of these numbers—the number of people living with dementia and the number of caregivers—will triple in Ontario within the next 30 years. By 2050, unpaid caregiving for Ontarians living with dementia will equal 322,000 full-time jobs, making dementia the largest employer in the province. We are not prepared for this drastic increase in dementia prevalence. Already today, home and community supports are insufficiently resourced, and people living with dementia have nowhere to turn other than hospitals and long-term-care homes.

A full 50% of ALC beds in Ontario's hospitals are occupied by people living with dementia. That's around 3,000 hospital beds filled in Ontario on any given day, or about 9% of our total hospital capacity, occupied by someone living with dementia who does not want or need to be there. Our hospitals today exist, to a large extent, to house people living with dementia who are not being supported at home. This is not a sustainable situation. At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario was able to temporarily add around 3,100 critical and intensive care hospital beds. If the status quo remains unchallenged, we will need to add double that number permanently, solely for people living with dementia who have nowhere else to go. There is no realistic chance of this happening.

We must either do more to keep Ontarians with dementia living at home or accept that the standard of care we expect for our parents and grandparents today will not be there for us in decades to come.

Budget 2023 reiterated an investment made last year of an additional \$5 million per year for community dementia programs. This is a prudent investment and could be put to immediate use keeping Ontarians living with dementia out of hospital beds. Unfortunately, to our knowledge, none of this funding has actually been spent, from either 2022-23 or the current fiscal year. Promises made in the budget will make no difference to Ontarians living with dementia if they are not kept.

The Alzheimer Society First Link program would be able to support an additional 6,980 clients per year with an investment of \$3.26 million—funding, again, that has already been approved but has not been spent. This funding would enable us to avoid 405 hospital visits per year, equivalent to over 6,800 hospital days, saving taxpayers nearly \$5 million per year in avoided hospital costs. This investment is ready to happen. The Legislative Assembly approved it in last year's budget, and we are pleased to see the assembly recommit to it in this year's budget. We urge the government to make good on this promise.

The Alzheimer Society is a willing and able partner to immediately get to work keeping Ontarians living with dementia out of hospital.

One potentially game-changing development in our shared mission of keeping Ontarians with dementia out of hospital and at home is the imminent arrival of a disease-modifying therapy, a treatment. There are currently three drugs approved for patients living with dementia in Ontario, all of which treat the disease's underlying symptoms. Canada does not currently have a treatment for Alzheimer's disease itself; only its symptoms. That will soon change. Earlier this year, the US FDA approved a treatment for emergency use against Alzheimer's disease, the second such treatment that has been approved for use in the United States. We expect this treatment will be submitted for approval soon in Canada, and it has already been submitted to regulators in the European Union and Japan.

This treatment and future breakthroughs that will follow have the potential to revolutionize dementia care in Ontario. Research out of the University of Southern California last year, sponsored by the Alzheimer Society, found that Ontario could save nearly \$10 billion in avoided long-term-care and hospital costs with the efficient, timely introduction of a treatment for Alzheimer's disease. We are not ready for that treatment. The same research study found that wait times to receive a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease in Ontario would skyrocket to seven and a half years if a treatment was introduced and approved. That is longer than many people will live following a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease.

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Budget 2023 includes new funding and resources to reduce wait times for surgeries and procedures but does not speak to addressing wait times for diagnosing Alzheimer's disease, nor does the budget prepare for future capacity constraints and lengthy wait times that will

arise if and when a treatment for Alzheimer's disease is available in Ontario, which is likely to happen within the next two years, or within the current mandate of this Legislative Assembly. As one example, to monitor safety and efficacy, in the United States all recipients of this newly approved treatment require four MRI scans within a one-year period. Assuming that requirement is also imposed by Health Canada and that there is roughly equal demand for this treatment in Canada as we've seen in the United States, Ontario would need to provide an additional 16,000 MRI scans per year—a number that would increase with each passing year.

Scan capacity is just one impending bottleneck in diagnosing Alzheimer's disease. Ontario has about half the number of geriatricians we need. And there are tens of thousands of older adults who don't have a family doctor in Ontario. Family doctors are often the first point in someone's dementia journey and serve as a first point of contact for a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease.

We are running out of time to prepare for a crisis in diagnosing—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Kyle Fitzgerald:—and treating Alzheimer's disease. The hope and relief that would be felt when Canada's first-ever treatment is approved will quickly turn to despair and anger as thousands of Ontarians realize that they will miss out on a life-changing treatment because their government wasn't ready.

We implore the province to focus some of the wait-time commitments made in budget 2023 on initiatives such as MRI and specialist capacity that would help prepare for the imminent arrival of a disease-modifying therapy for Alzheimer's disease.

I thank the committee for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation.

We now go to Nina Deeb.

Ms. Nina Deeb: My name is Nina Deeb. I am a full-time real estate broker in this province, since 1996. My career pre-exists most of the regulators in this province, and there have been more and more regulators since I've become a realtor. These are private entities.

My recommendations on this budget—I actually did speak at the pre-budget consultation, and I had some recommendations, mostly on housing.

One of the things I have noticed here is the Ontario Place sale—so the government action as the agent representing the people of Ontario in a real estate transaction of public lands. Contract law in Ontario—represented parties in a real estate transaction include an acknowledgement section that stipulates that the parties to the contract have received a copy of their contract and are aware of their commitments from their representative. I request a written copy of this lease.

The Ontario Science Centre: Status quo. That does not need to be changed. That should remain as it is.

Highways: I would like them to remove Highway 413 and the Bradford from the budget—we should not be

building these highways. This is not the time for highway building. Highway 407 is underused and overpriced. It already exists, and we should be using it. This is the immediate and best solution to our traffic congestion. We should be using the already built 407.

Transit: I'm very happy with the tunnelling and the boring machines. I do support this transit growth. More of this form of transit is encouraged. The most appropriate location for transit planning in large cities is underground.

Building: The budget plans to build new highways, roads, schools, hospitals, long-term-care homes, and transit. What's missing is housing. We should be building housing, as our number one priority. It shouldn't come behind all these other provincial projects.

Revenue, not-for-profits: There are approximately 59,000 not-for-profits in this province. While the province plans to grow revenues by approximately 5% per year, there are billions of dollars escaping taxation. Very wealthy private corporations are qualifying as not-for-profits. Some of these entities are grossing in the range of \$1 million per employee. These corporations that are not paying taxes have been awarded fines without hearings. I spoke out on this. I sat in this very chair and spoke out about fines without hearings for private entities. This has been passed, and this exists in our economy now. One of these private entities has bought and sold \$25.63 million worth of real estate in Toronto in the last year. These corporations are very wealthy, and they should be paying taxes. They have stood alongside true not-for-profits and claimed to be not-for-profit too. They're very wealthy. They actually have more money than the government.

As far as the Ontario health premium—the economic outlook is to increase by approximately 5% per year. I am an employer in this province. This makes Ontario a much more expensive location for employers to locate and operate. The CPP ceiling has increased to \$7,508.90 from \$6,999.60—an increase of 7.3%. The CPP ceiling has increased by \$2011.10 over COVID, since 2019. This increase equates to \$1 an hour for a full-time employee. This makes Canada a much more expensive location for any employer to locate or operate. This does not encourage investment.

As far as reserve funds, the province is holding approximately \$1 billion and then is looking to hold \$4 billion. These funds should not be held by the province. These reserves are inappropriate.

Page 16, the \$5.4 billion to help colleges and universities: I do not support this. Colleges and universities should be ensuring appropriate levels of student residence spaces for the international students they invite to Ontario, so that they are housed. This is creating a housing deficit within the true market. My opinion on this excludes the Indigenous institutes, which are supported. Conestoga College, which operates in my region, Waterloo region, has five locations. They have a residence with 520 beds, and they have close to 19,000 international students. I don't think this is appropriate. The colleges shouldn't be on the receiving end of any tax dollars. The colleges should be audited on their student housing quotas, what they have,

and they should be prior to inviting more students to Ontario. I am very supportive of international students, and all students in general, but we need appropriate housing.

Also, reducing administrative burden: The reduction of administration shouldn't be for the administrators. This actually misses the point. It should be for the people who are being administered and for the people who are paying these fees. And it should be relief for consumers, not for administrators.

The Ontario investment tax credit, a 10% refundable corporate income tax credit for investments by Canadian-controlled private corporations: I don't support this. I don't believe in giving subsidies to new corporations coming here. There are a lot of subsidies already in place for this, and a 10% reduction, which is a subsidy by the taxpayer—I don't agree with this.

Modernizing the capital markets and financial services, on page 39: Enhancing consumer protection requires transparency and accountability.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Nina Deeb: NGOs are freely operating while consistently lobbying government for profits, financial penalties, unappealable decisions, and to not pay taxes. Not-for-profit definitions have loosely embraced these private entities.

On page 52, "The province works to help build 1.5 million homes": A bold plan requires a budget. The province must invest taxpayer money to help. The province has collected over \$20 billion of first-level taxation on housing sales. Indigenous consultations should occur and be considered prior to these decisions being made, and \$15 billion should be downloaded to the 444 municipalities to support supportive affordable housing.

In addition, the municipalities should be made whole, as was promised by the government regarding the negative financial impacts of Bill 23 on municipal financial affairs. This has left a very big hole in our infrastructure on municipalities. The province of Ontario downloaded housing responsibilities to the municipalities in the mid-1990s—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for this presentation.

We now will go to Earth Education League, Ontario chapter. This is virtual.

Welcome. The floor is yours.

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Ms. Jodi Koberinski: Thanks for the opportunity to present to committee today. My name is Jodi Koberinski. I'm a PhD candidate and a SSHRC fellow at the University of Waterloo currently. Today I'm speaking, though, on behalf of the Earth Education League, a not-for-profit organization of which I sit on the board. I want to discuss the impacts of Bill 85 on public education.

The Earth Education League is a dynamic organization that increases capacity to deliver ecology-based higher learning, and focuses on the following three activities: developing ecology-based curriculum, land-based projects and trainings, and speaker and performer development.

Our work depends on a very strong and well-supported public school system, and we have deep concerns about the directions that this bill is taking education in the province.

The Minister of Education has said of this bill, “The goal here today is to send a signal to school boards to refocus their energies on what matters most, which is improving reading, writing and math skills and STEM education.” Many of us in the province share OSSTF president Karen Littlewood’s question about that: What are we supposed to be leaving out here, if our focus is now supposed to be only on STEM? I’m afraid that those of us paying attention to the targeted attacks on our school boards across the province have answers to that implication, and we may well be asking who is supposed to be left out here, as much as what.

It would seem that the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario is correct when they suggest the government is creating a crisis in public education where none currently exists. We are puzzled by such rhetoric as “back to basics” and the need for “overhauls,” given the government’s own materials state that Ontario is among the top-performing education systems nationally and internationally, and that’s backed by data. Why is an overhaul necessary?

A refocusing of the education system should not include government overreach.

As I understand it, Bill 85 includes funding for school boards for the next academic year at a mere 2.7% increase; 2.7% is significantly below the rate of inflation and won’t meet the student’s needs. Critics have indicated that when accounting tricks are set aside, we are seeing a decrease in per student funding of nearly \$1,000 as a result of this budget. We need to invest in classrooms, in educators, in adults in the room, not on online learning, not on TVO and D2L, not on privatization through back doors.

A teacher colleague of mine, Derik Chica, went through the act that is being proposed, and in it, the words “literacy,” “math” and “reading” appear each one time, while the words “power,” “sale,” “lease,” “property” each appear between 11 and 21 times. So where are the “basics” in this act? What is the priority of the government under this bill?

There is a lot in this bill pertaining to school property and what could correctly be characterized as a property grab and a power grab. Communities own the lands at this time; those school properties are school board properties. This bill seeks to shift who owns those properties and who has a say in how they are utilized. At a time when we are finally beginning to embrace the kind of education that our organization supports and we’re seeing increasing use of schoolyards for gardens, the notion that the province can come along and determine how school boards are going to use their lands is really out of touch with the direction that education is moving.

Just this week alone, at the Waterloo Region District School Board, we got to hear a round of announcements of \$500 grants being given to school groups for their edible classroom projects, outdoor education efforts through

gardening, expansion of food forests on school properties, and other food security and ecologically focused initiatives.

This bill moves us in the wrong direction of where we need to go for education.

Given that I have a little bit of time left, I would like to address a point that I brought up earlier in the presentation, when I asked who or what is it that this government intends to leave out in an act focusing on improving reading, writing and math skills, and no longer spending attention on things that don’t matter.

Our school boards right now in Ontario are the target of a well-organized, well-funded disinformation campaign to make it out as if schools are a place where students are being “groomed”—using their words, not mine—because we have GSAs and we follow the Ontario Human Rights Code when it comes to 2SLGBTQ+ students and staff. These attacks on queer students are escalating, and the not-very-veiled language that is present in the way the government is talking about this act, this intention to undermine the power of school boards and place greater control over local education in the hands of the provincial government, is just unacceptable to anyone who is paying attention to education.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you.

That concludes the three panellists, so we now will start the questions. We will start with the government. MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: First of all, thank you to the presenters for coming.

Nina, welcome back. It’s nice to see you again.

Kyle, we did meet earlier also, yes, so thank you again for coming.

In my riding of Mississauga–Malton, we have a Mississauga long-term care where we actually have a butterfly village. Dr. Saha will be proud of the work he has done in the field.

Before I say that on record, I want to say that I am a big fan of the Alzheimer Society of Ontario—time and time again, I have said that in the past—along with the blood donation, diabetes, and organ donation. These are some of the places I would like to give my time, and I value the work you guys are doing.

My question to you is, in terms of that butterfly village, what is your opinion about that, and is there something that we can do to expand that, or work to support the communities?

Mr. Kyle Fitzgerald: Yes, absolutely. And thank you, MPP Anand, for your ongoing support. I’m pleased to have had the chance to train your constituency office staff in dementia-friendly engagement, as well.

We fully support the butterfly model. It’s really the gold standard of long-term care that’s currently available in Ontario. It’s person-focused. It really meets residents where they are. But it’s highly staff-intensive, so the main barrier would be making sure we can actually get the staff and resources to roll that out to other homes in the province. At a high level, the only two options you have are to hire more staff or to keep people who are in long-

term care but don't need to be there at home. In our opinion, keeping people out of long-term care is much cheaper and easier to do than finding 50,000, 60,000 additional PSWs, so that would be a good place to start.

Mr. Deepak Anand: And do you have a labour shortage, as well? This is something which we hear across the globe—that everyone we talk about actually have, and was something I was talking about this morning. Believe this or not, we actually have a labour shortage in my office. We hire somebody and then we train them, and by the time the person is trained, ministries take them from us.

Mr. Kyle Fitzgerald: We have the same issue, but with hospitals. We often find that our PSWs and RPNs can make 30% to 40% more working at a public hospital for the exact same role. Part of that has been the wage freeze over the past couple of years, but even before that, there was a disparity between home and community care and long-term care and hospitals—same role, but drastically different pay. So we do have a labour shortage, for sure.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I just want to put it on record, Chair: I love when somebody from my office is being taken by the ministry. I call it a progression in life. I don't feel bad. I just feel bad that I have to train another person, but I feel good that I have the ability to train.

Have you heard about the Skills Development Fund?

Mr. Kyle Fitzgerald: I think it might just be your skill as a boss, MPP Anand, about why they're taking them up to the ministry.

We are familiar with that fund, yes.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you so much.

Nina, quickly on the same—I want to ask you: Do you see the labour shortage, and what is your suggestion on how we can solve the labour shortage problem in this province?

Ms. Nina Deeb: The labour shortage is going to continue because the environment doesn't exist for the youth to remain. I'm the mother of two teenagers, and it's quite devastating to me to hear them plan to leave. My children don't plan on staying in Ontario. They are 15 and 17, and they're not staying here. They both plan on leaving as soon as they can. So from the perspective of what is happening, we are actually paying people to leave, and the environment is not—we're aborting our youth. I would like to keep our children here. I'd like them to come visit me. I don't want them to leave Ontario. It's a very sad situation in Ontario right now. The environment is not of prosperity. They don't see hope for them here, and they're going where they are seeing hope. I'm listening to other provinces market to my children and my clients' children, and it's why I am here. I don't want to lose our next generation. I want them to stay. I'd like more people to come, but I'd like them to stay.

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Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you so much.

That's it from me, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Smith.

Mr. David Smith: Thank you to the presenters for being here.

My question is to Nina.

Nina, you obviously have a concern about the direction of this government in terms of Highway 413 and other things. You seem to have certain things that you want to see and certain things you don't want to see.

Could you elaborate to me why you feel that the 413 should not be built?

Ms. Nina Deeb: I really just want to grow responsibly. I see that we have assets that we're not using. So from the perspective of using what we already have, there are already alternatives. It's a very expensive—the plan that we have there, it's \$10 billion per year for 10 years. That's a lot of money, and quite honestly, we need that money for housing. People need to live somewhere first. We need the workers to build those highways. We need the workers to—it's just premature. It's not that I'm totally against it; it's premature. I'm not for that right now. I'm all about certain—the widenings and certain things, I'm very supportive of.

Mr. David Smith: So is there any fact-finding around why you are suggesting not that road and the 407—because, as you know, that's a private road. So how are we going to just jump up and say, “Will you take the 407”? People pay on that road, and I can tell you, for the times I've gone on that road, some of these trips are 50 bucks.

Ms. Nina Deeb: That's a problem. That's private equity. That's a pension fund that's controlling a major tract of land in Ontario. The majority owner of the 407 is CPP Investments.

Mr. David Smith: But you're realizing that's a corporation and we cannot go and interfere with a corporation and say, “Hey, somebody's got to pay for that,” right? That's the reason we are having urban sprawl, where people have to get into the city to come to work and do all those kinds of things. So how do we do it? We've got to build roads for people.

Ms. Nina Deeb: I think the way to do it is not to give up public lands to private corporations.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. David Smith: I agree.

I'm sad to hear that your children would want to move from here. But over the next 10 years, by 2031, there will be two million additional people living here in the province of Ontario. How have you planned to deal with that?

Ms. Nina Deeb: Well, we need a budget. We need money to build houses. Without money, we definitely won't build anything. To ask everyone else to come and make their commitments—the municipalities, the commitments they're making, they can't follow through with because the infrastructure is not going to be there. We're just putting things out of order. We're not developing in the order that we should be. It's much more expensive to develop the way that we're trying to develop. Developing by brute force will definitely get things done, but you're going to roll over a lot of—there's a lot of destruction in the way. We're destroying a lot of important things in the way.

Mr. David Smith: Quickly, before the seconds run out here, one other part I'd like to speak about is housing. Every single—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That's the end of the time.

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to all of the delegations. Jodi, Nina, and Kyle, I really appreciate you taking the time. There wasn't a lot of time allotted to actually register, so I appreciate you being here.

Kyle, I'm going to start with you. As you know, I'm doing a lot of work with the Alzheimer Society of Waterloo region, and things are pretty dire out there for folks. It's not the local Alzheimer Society's fault; it's the fact that they don't have the resources to meet the need, even though they've come out with very creative ways to try to help folks.

In your presentation, you mentioned that in the 2022 budget, the government had promised the \$5 million, but that money did not get to communities. I want to give you an opportunity to talk about what the impact of that was on local Alzheimer societies. I also want you to address the need for transparency in where the money is going. If the government is presenting a budget but the funding that's promised in that budget doesn't get out the door, what is the value of that budget? That's the transparency piece that, quite honestly, is causing a lot of concern around the province for many organizations. So please just focus on the \$5 million, if you would.

Mr. Kyle Fitzgerald: Thank you for your ongoing advocacy and your petition. We were glad to see MPP Gélinas introduce some more signatures in the House last week, as well; we're pleased that it's still around.

In terms of the \$5 million—that would be the difference between somebody getting four visits a year from a health care member versus two. Right now, some of our staff—the best practice is to have quarterly check-ins with a person living with dementia. We try to help as many people as we can, and without additional funding, we've had to cut back on intensity of service, so there might be six months between check-ins for health care members and people living with dementia. This funding could potentially allow people to get higher intensity of care. Also, as I mentioned in the presentation, we already have this proposal ready to go, where it would enable us to support about 6,900 additional clients across the province. That's a not insignificant number of people who would be getting care that has been shown to keep them out of hospital and keep them out of long-term care.

Ms. Catherine Fife: When we introduce amendments to this budget—because we have to try to make this budget a better budget—we're not allowed to introduce motions that would add funding. But we're going to try to introduce an amendment that actually would get the government to do what they're saying they should be doing, what they promised. So we really hope that money gets out the door to folks across the province.

Alzheimer's and dementia is one of the cruellest diseases. It has affected my family. I think that all of us

have examples of this in our communities and in our families.

You make a very strong point that when you do early intervention, when there is an early diagnosis, then that help can actually keep people from needing additional resources at the hospital level.

In your presentation that you made—I believe it was in Ottawa, right?

Mr. Kyle Fitzgerald: Sudbury.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Sudbury. Sorry. You pointed out that if we continue on this path of just the lip service on addressing Alzheimer's and dementia, every hospital in the province of Ontario will be filled with dementia patients. Already, we're seeing huge strain on that system.

So can you just talk about the fiscally prudent concept of investing early so that we don't pay later?

Mr. Kyle Fitzgerald: It really is difficult to overstate the scale of dementia in our hospitals right now. If you go into any emergency department of any hospital, most of the individuals who are waiting 12-plus hours to be admitted are individuals living with dementia, because they do not have an acute-care reason for being there; they're simply not being supported. Their caregiver is past her breaking point—and it usually is a her. They're not getting support at home, and they have no choice. We're actually aware of multiple regions of the province where care coordinator staff were advising their patients to call 911, demand an ambulance and refuse to take their loved one back, as the only avenue to get support.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, this has actually happened in Waterloo region on several occasions.

We'll try to get the government to listen on this issue. It defies all logic that the money did not flow in 2021 and 2022. But we'll try to get them to do it in 2023.

I want to thank you for once again coming here.

Jodi, thank you so much for coming to committee today. I can't tell you how encouraging it is for us to hear that people really do see past this latest education bill, this legislation. You make some very strong points which we're in agreement with.

I want to give you an opportunity to talk about—your language was very strong. You said that this is a targeted attack on education—

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: It is.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —and so I really do need you to unpack that a little bit, please, for us, so that all members of the committee hear the same message.

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: Thanks for the opportunity, and I really appreciate your leadership in our community.

1340

I've been a delegate to the Waterloo Region District School Board on a minimum of three occasions in the last two years, pushing back against attempted book bans; attacks on our educators, calling them “pedos” and “groomers”; trustees on the side of the far right; people who ran for trustee with no interest in education at all but to tear it down, who continue to bog down the one truly democratic institution we have, which is the school board, bogging down our school board meetings with anti-trans,

anti-critical-race-theory—anything that they call “woke.” Where this is coming from is the Leadership Institute in the United States, which, since 1979, has funded over 235,000 Republicans in far-right organizing techniques—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Jodi Koberinski:—including an entire workshop that some Ontario school board trustee candidate members attended last summer, that is a workshop for taking over your school board and instituting culture-war-type policies. We see this in the “don’t say gay” bill in Florida, and those are the same attacks that are coming here.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I totally recognize the direction that you’re going in. We saw that last night at the York Catholic District School Board—

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: We did, yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife:—with an attack, really.

I’m the past president of the Ontario Public School Boards’ Association and a former trustee. I’ve never seen anything like this.

One last statement: When children do not feel safe in an education setting, can those children learn appropriately?

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: We know from all of the research on this matter that that’s an affirmative no, they cannot. All of this effort that we’re doing is not instead of the basics, but it’s in order to ensure that all students have access to the basics which our schools in Ontario have for—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for the question.

We’ll now go to the government. MPP Kanapathi.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you, Kyle, for coming to today’s meeting and for doing the presentation. You made a good presentation about Alzheimer’s and dementia. It’s a very horrific disease, not only in Ontario and Canada, but in the world. We don’t have any treatment for that. Even the medical world is trying to figure out what would be the cause for dementia—same as Alzheimer’s and autism and all sorts of mental health issues.

You made a good point—I’ll give you more time to elaborate on some of your numbers; we are in the finance committee. How many people are affected by dementia and Alzheimer’s in Ontario? How many people are in the hospital, lying in hospital beds? I’ll give you more time to elaborate. You brought the good numbers, and we are numbers people.

Also, my mother had dementia. She was bedridden for three years, in home care—going back to why we are investing \$1 billion in home care. I’m going back to that point, but I want you to elaborate about the numbers.

Mr. Kyle Fitzgerald: We’re numbers people, as well, so I’m glad to hear that.

There are about 275,000 people in Ontario who live with dementia today; that will triple to about 776,000 by 2050.

I should clarify that “dementia” is an umbrella term. Alzheimer’s disease is the most common form of dementia. Other types—vascular, Lewy body—are all grouped under that dementia diagnosis.

Because this is the finance committee—it costs Ontario between \$30 billion and \$35 billion per year in direct care costs, so that’s hospital, home care and long-term care. That’s not including out-of-pocket expenses—caregivers across Canada spend about \$11 billion a year on their caregiving responsibilities. If you figure Ontario is about 40% of Canada, that’s \$4 billion to \$5 billion that every-day people are spending to take care of their husband, their wife etc., and there are about 150,000 unpaid family caregivers supporting people living with dementia today.

In terms of hospital capacity, about 9% of our ALC beds in Ontario are occupied by someone living with dementia, and there are additional beds that are occupied by people with dementia who are not ALC status—so over a tenth of our hospital capacity is dementia.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: You mentioned over 3,000 beds occupied by dementia patients—is that right?

Mr. Kyle Fitzgerald: That’s correct.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Across Ontario?

Mr. Kyle Fitzgerald: Yes.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: That’s the reason we want to alleviate the hospital pressure. The hospitals are getting more and more pressure from non-emergency patients going to the emergency departments—same as a bed. That’s why our budget this year includes \$1 billion over three years to get more people connected care in the comfort of their own home, through home and community care. We advocated, the first term we got elected—my colleagues Stephen, Rudy, David and Aris are here—because the demographics moving into our areas in the GTA are a lot of seniors. In my riding, Markham-Thornhill, almost every home has seniors because of the demographics. We represent the most ethnically diverse riding. That’s why we advocated for \$1 billion to home care. My mother was in home care. We didn’t dump her in the institution, in the warehouse. That’s why home care is very important. For the first time in history, the Ontario government has invested \$1 billion.

What is your take on it? What else should we continue to prioritize to support the dementia care workforce, to ensure we increase the capacity for family-managed home care? I want to get your take on that.

Mr. Kyle Fitzgerald: Home care is definitely part of the solution.

Something we hear from clients is that sometimes they will be allocated home care hours and not actually receive them. Sometimes a home care staff person will go to their home when they’re supposed to be there for two hours and will leave after 30 minutes. Sometimes visits will be missed. So certainly that \$1 billion—and I’m sure you’re personally familiar with the stresses of actually getting the care you’re entitled to in home care. So we support that billion-dollar investment.

It’s also important to stress that community care and community support services tend to be lumped in with our bigger brother, home care, but community support services are distinct as well, and those are the sorts of services that the Alzheimer Society provides, with things like recreational therapy, adult day programs and those

sorts of group programs—in-home respite care, as well, less intensive.

What we're finding is that because hospitals and long-term care homes are overburdened, people can't get into long-term care, they can't get into hospital, so they are coming to us instead. So we're caring for people who have a much higher acuity of need compared to what we should be caring for—people who are at early- to mid-stage dementia. As one example: For our adult day programs, we tend to target between 4 to 1 and 6 to 1 for a client-to-staff ratio, so for every staff person, we'd have four to six clients roughly; in some regions, that's now down to 2 to 1, because these are individuals who need help with bathing, they need help with feeding, they need help with these activities of daily living. They might not get a shower except for the one time a week they come to us. That's not traditionally the sort of client we support, but because they can't get into long-term care, we don't turn them away. They're coming to us, but that means the person who is 70, who has mid-stage Alzheimer's disease, may not be able to get the support either, because there's this other person who can't move up the chain of health care services.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you. I will pass it on to MPP David Smith.

Mr. David Smith: How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have 1.2 minutes.

Mr. David Smith: This question is for Jodi.

Jodi, in a post last year, you shared a quote that said that Doug Ford has decimated EV production in Ontario, and that he hurt communities like Oshawa and Windsor, despite any gains—but then the budget mentioned how the government has attracted over \$16 billion in investment by the global automakers and suppliers in EV batteries. Do you still feel that way today?

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: I'm here to speak to you about education. If you had an education question for me, I'd answer it.

I'll just say that this government is taking credit for work that the federal government has done in making those arrangements happen, and I'd happily debate you on that issue if I came prepared to talk about it.

I feel like this line of questioning is quite interesting. You could find many things I had to say about education online, and yet here you choose to pull out some tweet that I made that I don't have—is this how you conduct business? It's pretty outrageous, and I'm actually not going to answer.

Mr. David Smith: How do you feel—

Ms. Jodi Koberinski: I'm done with you, sir. I am done.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Smith will come to order.

We're going to go to the official opposition. MPP Begum.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you to all of you. Honestly, I am so grateful to have all of you here today. Your

presentations add such value and add so much more to the depth that's necessary when it comes to how this government prioritizes where the money goes—because that's really what the issue is here.

I'm also a little disappointed that we're using government staff to do oppo research on the delegates here, as well—but, Jodi, well done.

I'm remarkably impressed by the work that you all do, standing up for public services and public education.

I want to start off with the Alzheimer Society, Kyle—and I hope I can get through all of them, because I have so many things to ask about.

Kyle, you talked about MRIs, you talked about preventive measures and treatments that are available, so I won't even spend time elaborating on the question—if you would elaborate on the impact that it would have right now to fund those and what it means to be fiscally responsible by funding those now so that we're not suffering later on.

1350

Mr. Kyle Fitzgerald: About 40% of cases of dementia are not necessarily preventable but they're modifiable. We like to say, "What's good for the heart is good for the brain." So alcohol misuse, obesity, smoking—all of those risk factors that lead to heart conditions also contribute to dementia. A lot of people don't know that, so we need to be talking to people in their twenties, their thirties, their forties—what you do today could potentially impact whether or not you develop Alzheimer's disease in 50 years. There's a negative stigma around the disease, that if you get dementia it's either something you did or something that is outside of your control, so people feel, "Well, why bother?" But there are actually modifiable risk factors.

In terms of the financial argument, we released data at the end of last year showing that if we could delay the onset of symptoms of Alzheimer's disease by five years, we would actually reduce by a third the number of people who get Alzheimer's disease. The blunt reality behind that is, in those five years, a third of people would pass away before developing Alzheimer's disease. But this speaks to the importance of both risk factors and of getting a future treatment into the hands of people who need it, because that would mean that instead of having 770,000 people who have dementia, we'd be closer to half a million. We can't handle half a million, but it's a heck of a lot better than three quarters of a million.

Ms. Doly Begum: Yes, 100%.

There's another threat that we're facing right now, which is the privatization of our health care system and the fact that a lot of people are waiting for an MRI, for example, and the risk that that causes. When you don't get a diagnosis, the spiralling effect of that is also very damaging—if you want to share anything about that.

Mr. Kyle Fitzgerald: In terms of how it works today, most people living with Alzheimer's disease don't actually have a diagnosis; they have a probable diagnosis. They've been told, "You most likely have Alzheimer's disease." That's good enough for people today, but when we're

getting to the future, when there will be actual drug treatments, we cannot either in a fiscally or ethically responsible way give somebody an expensive treatment with potential side effects if we don't know, 99.99% sure, that they have Alzheimer's disease.

All of the treatments currently approved for use in the United States must be administered at the early-Alzheimer's-disease and/or the mild-cognitive-impairment stage. That's usually about either before you present symptoms or right when you start presenting symptoms. Today, most people don't get diagnosed until the mid-to-late stages, so we need to do a much better job of catching, diagnosing and detecting Alzheimer's disease much earlier; for example, by implementing memory assessment, cognitive assessments as part of your routine checkup.

Ms. Doly Begum: You need funding for that.

Mr. Kyle Fitzgerald: Funding—and not even us. That would go to primary care doctors being told, “You can do these checkups at age 60 to catch people early so they can get this treatment and not develop Alzheimer's disease, not become a long-term-care resident, not become an ALC patient in hospital.”

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you, Kyle. I really appreciate it.

Nina, I want to come to you now. I feel like you went through the entire bill and did a lot of homework on every single schedule of it, so thank you very much. I really appreciated your comments about Ontario Place. I appreciate the reflection on what we're facing right now when it comes to the 407 and the fact that that was leased for all these years, and right now we're seeing a replica of that with Ontario Place and the lease of 95 years. It's public land, just like the 407, which was built by using tax dollars, and now we have to pay to get on it. It's extremely expensive, and here we are with a really congested 401. I think that comparison highlights what we're facing with the threat of this giant 95-year lease for Ontario Place.

I hope you can elaborate a little bit in terms of what it means to respect tax dollars, people's hard-earned money. As a mother, I think it really matters to you, in terms of the public services and how we retain what we have.

Ms. Nina Deeb: I'm seeing public assets being moved to pension funds, private equity. What we're seeing in health care, this has already happened in America, and the private equity behind that was Blackstone private equity operating under—I think it was called “health inc.” or something like that. It was Blackstone that was behind the hospital and health care privatization in America, and it made things more expensive.

As far as pension funds go, we have the teachers' pension fund that owns one of the mortgage default companies in Canada, we have CPP Investments that owns the 407, and we also have OMERS that owns the Ontario land registry system. This has all happened during my career, so I have watched all this very carefully. These are all real estate assets, and these are all things that have been turned into billionaire corporations, but they were all originally public assets. Ontario Place, to me, is following in the

same line—do you want your time back? Because if I talked—

Ms. Doly Begum: No.

Ms. Nina Deeb: Okay.

I see that as following in the same line. This is the privatization of public spaces. This should remain in the public's books—not to be sold off, not to be a spa. I drove by Ontario Place this morning purposely—I came down Lakeshore—and it was beautiful. There were so many people there just to enjoy it.

Ms. Doly Begum: I think the difficult part of it is that people want answers; they want to know what the numbers look like, what the contract looks like, and this government has been really behind closed doors with a lot of these details. People want to know exactly what's going on with their land, with their money. The government and the minister should be very open and transparent about it, and that's missing right now.

I wish I had more time because I want to go to Jodi, and I also wanted to ask Nina about—you talked about the health care staffing crisis and—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That is the rest of the time—it's used up.

We do want to thank all three of the panel members for your participation and the time you took to prepare to be here.

Before we go to the next panel, I just want the attention of the committee. Members, the motion adopted by the committee on Bill 85 states that witnesses appearing are to be permitted to participate in person or participate remotely; however, a maximum of one individual may appear in person on behalf of an organization and any additional representatives of that organization shall participate remotely. We have two representatives in the room for the same organization. As both representatives can be accommodated at the witness table, do we have agreement to allow both representatives to participate in person? Hearing no objection, we will assume the motion carried.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES

HOSPICE CARE OTTAWA

COSTI

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll now go to the second panel, which consists of Community Support Services, Hospice Care Ottawa, and COSTI. Hospice Care Ottawa will be remote—virtually. It's COSTI that has the two representatives who will be sitting at the table.

You have seven minutes to make your presentation. We ask you to start the presentation with your name, your position and the organization. At six minutes, I will quietly, or loudly, say “one minute,” and that means there's one minute more, so you can make sure that what you want to say in the end—if there's more than one minute, you can rearrange that last comment.

The first presenter will be Community Support Services.

Ms. Dawn Rodger: My name is Dawn Rodger. I'm the executive director of Seniors' Community Services, located south of Ottawa in Kemptville. Joining me today is my colleague Colleen Taylor, executive director of the Olde Forge Community Resource Centre, who joins us virtually today. We'd like to begin this presentation today by thanking the Chair as well as each and every one of the committee members for the privilege of addressing you here today. We'd also like to acknowledge the support of Mr. Steve Clark, member of provincial Parliament for Leeds-Grenville.

1400

As members of the Ontario Community Support Association, we support their financial requests to the province for increased funding. Adding to their position, the focus of our presentation is about the need for adequate funding to help community support providers combat inflation and rising operational costs. We are here today to advocate on behalf of our colleagues, representing 31 community support sector organizations that provide critical services to seniors and people living with disabilities across Ontario. These include over 25 support programs that enable people to remain at home or in a location of their choice. Programs like diners' club provide access to food security and improve nutrition for healthier living. Day programs alleviate the burden of meal preparation, while connecting individuals to social activities and offering vital respite for caregivers. Transportation provides door-to-door support, assisting seniors to medical appointments, life-sustaining dialysis, chemotherapy, radiation and foot care, just to name a few. Caregiver support, hospice palliative care have programs that give clients and their families the opportunity to have the best quality of life until the end of their days and give families the chance to be a family rather than the medical service providers.

For someone who doesn't use these programs, they're simply names, but for the hundreds of people in my community and the hundreds of thousands of people in Ontario who rely upon them every day, these programs are nothing less than essential. Programs that offer the opportunity to socialize not only provide access to a hot meal, but they bring a connection that can often be lost for seniors aging at home. A ride to a doctor's office means someone is not going to emergency and is living at home independently longer. A day program means a caregiver is offered a break to fill up their cup in order to continue caring for their loved one and themselves.

The strain on community support services has been long-standing. Intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation and a competitive labour market, we, the service providers, are planning for up to a 40% cut to our services and/or an increase to client fees. Inflation has hit a 40-year high. Some clients do not have the financial means to pay increased fees along with the rising food costs, hydro and heat, resulting in a financial juggling act to keep on top of essential payments each month.

Cutting services is having an impact on the lives of our seniors. They're missing medical appointments, and they are more isolated. They're doing everything they can to

age at home the way they want to, and we're doing everything we can to help with that.

By providing adequate funding now, you are not only living up to promises made to seniors but you are supporting generations of taxpayers who have contributed to the financial well-being of this province.

The current system of funding is both inadequate and without foresight. Inevitably, we are all aging, and we need that reassurance that the infrastructure within the health system will be there when we need it most.

Today we respectfully request that the committee use its powers, exercise its influence and act to help initiate a program of change that would meet the needs of our diverse client base by supporting funding for the community support sector.

Colleen?

Ms. Colleen Taylor: I want to draw your attention to some facts. As we speak, there are community support services that have already been cut due to the lack of funding to community support service providers. Seniors are missing their appointments. Despite our warnings of service cuts and letters of support from our hospital partners, letters from the mayor of Ottawa to the Premier of Ontario and Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, we have not seen any increases in our bank account; we have not seen any letters coming forth saying that we have any increased funding. These are not home care services but rather community support services that we're talking about, and we're an equal partner to hospitals, long-term care and primary care.

I want to point out that we need to focus on upstream, preventive care that is offered by community support service providers so that we can see a return on investment of up to 26% in saved health care expenditures, which could align very well with the province's financial goals for Ontarians, not to mention provide a sustainable, integrated health care system.

I appreciate your time. We welcome any questions that you might have.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation.

The next presentation is from Hospice Care Ottawa, and it will be virtual.

Ms. Lisa Sullivan: My name is Lisa Sullivan. I am the executive director of Hospice Care Ottawa. Thank you for giving Hospice Care Ottawa the opportunity to make this presentation today and to follow my colleagues in the community support service sector, of which hospices are a part in our community.

I want to speak today to remind you of the important services provided by hospices in Ontario and the crucial need, like all community support agencies, for sustainable funding. I urge the committee to support the budget request from our provincial association, Hospice Palliative Care Ontario, to fund 100% of our clinical costs and to increase support for our community services.

Who is Hospice Care Ottawa? We're a community-based charitable organization. We provide compassionate, high-quality care to people and their caregivers from the

time of diagnosis with a progressive, life-limiting illness through their palliative and end-of-life journey, including grief and bereavement. All of our services are offered free of charge to clients and their families.

Currently, we have three sites in the city of Ottawa: the May Court site in Old Ottawa South, the Ruddy-Shenkman site in the Kanata west end, and La Maison de l'Est in Orléans. We have 21 residential beds split between two of our sites, and we offer community support programs such as day hospice, in-home visiting, and grief and bereavement at all of our locations.

Last year, we served over 1,000 people with care from our small group of dedicated professionals and over 400 specially trained volunteers. Those volunteers gave over 25,000 hours of their time.

Why do we need hospice? Hospice care is about living as well as possible as we journey through life-limiting and chronic illnesses. While people of all ages need hospice palliative care, the reality is that with our aging population, there's a growing volume of people aging out of life, and they most often require our help. We know that most people want to be at home or in a home-like setting when they're dying. It's such an important time of life to be surrounded by family, with comfort and support—medical, practical, psychosocial and spiritual. That's what hospice does.

Without hospices, people at end of life would likely end up in a hospital seeking relief from pain and symptoms. They end up in hospital when they are dying not because they need hospital care, but because they need care. Hospices provide that unique environment and support designed for end-of-life care. Hospice residences are for patients who need more care than home care can provide, but that high level and cost of hospital care is not needed. A residential hospice costs a third of the cost of a hospital bed.

Since 2017 in Ontario, over 23,000 people were either discharged from hospital to a hospice residence or bypassed hospital admission altogether by going straight from home to hospice. The calculations by our provincial association tell us that saves over \$396 million in health care costs per year and frees up over 370 hospital bed days for other people.

In Ottawa alone, by utilizing our 21 hospice rooms, we can save the system almost \$5 million a year. In addition, hospice provides services to people living at home, as I mentioned, with our community programs. These services, along with other important community support agencies services, are vital to help people stay at home as long as possible. Unfortunately, funding to community support services has not kept up with the growing needs, as you just heard.

Recent data from Hospice Palliative Care Ontario demonstrates the value-add of hospice programs supporting people at home. Our trained volunteers who provide practical help and support improve the success of home care for palliative patients. Right now, across Ontario, 16,000 trained volunteers help over 25,000 patients stay at home and support the well-being of family caregivers. More than

half of the family caregivers reported that the volunteer support averted a trip to the emergency room, saving the system over \$10 million in unnecessary emergency room visits.

So, with all of that, why are we asking for funding? Well, Ontario hospices are financially strapped, as the province only covers 60% of our operating costs. At Hospice Care Ottawa, our financial situation has become critical, and we are facing a budget deficit of over \$500,000 this coming year. For many of the reasons already talked about, we're facing inflationary costs, as well as costs for increasing compensation for our staff and scarcity of our nurses and PSWs.

1410

While the government has been a partner in helping to fund hospice residences for 20 years, the ratio of that funding has decreased, and there hasn't been an annualized funding increase for operating costs for hospice residences since 2016. We have relied on government year over year for one-time funding, but that's no longer sustainable when we don't know within the coming year whether we will be receiving that one-time funding or not.

We do raise over \$2 million a year in Ottawa, which we think is a sizable feat considering our small organization and competing with large hospitals and other foundations' fundraising campaigns. But with the increasing costs and even the COVID recovery, community donations and fundraising are struggling to keep up.

Our key ask is for the province to fund 100% of clinical costs, just as it does in hospitals. We appreciate that the government is trying to find ways to better deliver health care in Ontario, but we believe that investment in hospices would help the government realize significant annual savings—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Lisa Sullivan: —by keeping people out of more-costly hospital beds. Better funding of hospice palliative care will ease hallway medicine and pressure on those emergency departments and, more importantly, provide a more desirable, more appropriate type of care for those facing their end-of-life journey.

Many people think hospice is a sad place, and while sad things do happen here, those who visit know our halls are alive with what is sometimes called a special kind of magic. Hospice provides not just medical support, but physical, practical, psychosocial, social and spiritual support. And while some people may call that magic, I suggest to you that it is the high-quality care that all people deserve and that should be an integral part of our health care system.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation.

The next presentation is from COSTI. As I mentioned to everyone else, you will have seven minutes to make your presentation. I will let you know when there's one minute left. Please state your name as you start to speak for the Hansard. With that, the floor is yours.

Ms. Samina Sami: Thank you, Chairperson, and thank you to the committee for having us here. My name is

Samina Sami. I'm the chief executive officer of COSTI. With me here today is also—do you want to introduce yourself?

Ms. Janet Hallett: I'm Janet Hallett. I'm the senior director of planning and program development with COSTI Immigrant Services.

Ms. Samina Sami: I'll begin by giving you some background on COSTI. COSTI has a proud 70-year history in Canada. We're one of the most comprehensive social impact agencies and settlement agencies, with 18 offices in the GTA, with staff who speak over 65 languages. We offer, as you can see on the screens, a host of services, from employment through to language to sector-specific skills training, family counselling, mental health services, social services, services for seniors, services for youth, as well as services for refugees.

COSTI has a proud history. It is the one of the first organizations that built a skilled trades and a skills training program for newcomers in this province, and it has had a history of building prosperity for all Ontarians, especially those who are marginalized or newcomers. So I'm here today with my colleague to really encourage you to—the investments in immigration are critical at this juncture.

There are five areas that we want to highlight here today that are extremely important. When we look at immigration, investments in immigration and investments in skills training, we're building prosperity for all Ontarians. When we also bring an equity lens to these investments, then we're also addressing those who are unemployed, underemployed, on the margins. And when we lift up the margins, we're lifting up all Ontarians, of course, as well as building a stronger economy and a prosperous province.

The focused financial investment in skilled immigrants is particularly important. In this budget, we've seen a focus on this area in a way that we need in this province. Additionally, the removing of barriers for internationally trained professionals is a long-standing systemic inequity that needs to be addressed. It is keeping our province and this country lagging behind in the G8 countries.

Upskilling and flexible training for future economic needs in a rapidly changing economy: As I mentioned, for those who are on the margins, they're moving further out in the margins if we don't give flexible options for upskilling, skills training and education, and we're not going to be building the kind of prosperity that we want. We want to see investments in these areas.

Lastly, investing in entrepreneurship for Indigenous and racialized communities: These are the communities that have gross inequities, and the more that we leave them out on the margins, leave them out of business opportunities—the small and medium businesses that drive our economy—the less we all prosper as a province and as a country.

The areas that we're going to speak to specifically—this is within the context of building prosperity for all Ontarians.

I want to say that both Janet and myself are immigrants to this country. I came here from India, as my parents did. My parents helped to build northern Ontario—an area that

they didn't know, a climate that they didn't know. Janet is here from the UK. We have our lived experience on what works—and we have 70 years of experience, at COSTI, to emphasize the kinds of areas that work.

Building prosperity for all Ontarians: Focused financial investments in skilled immigration, in immigrants and settling immigrants is the way to go for building prosperity for the future of our country. We need to harness global talent. We need to build a competitive economy. We need to, of course, address the global labour shortage.

Secondly, the particular area I'd like you as a committee to focus on in this budget: removing barriers for internationally trained professionals. This is one of the gross systemic inequities we have had for decades. I'm coming at this committee here today in a completely non-partisan way. I myself have worked in community and education and business, but I've also been a former civil servant. All political stripes have raised this as a concern. I would encourage you to invest in this area, to remove those barriers. What do we have when those barriers are in place? We're reducing opportunities for harnessing talent. We're not being able to address critical gaps in sectors like health care and skilled trades and IT. Canada is currently lagging behind, so far, in terms of skilled immigrants, and I'll cite some examples for you.

For example, Australia, which modelled itself on many aspects of the Canadian immigration system, utilizes the points system, utilizes many of the kinds of numbers we have in immigration. Their statistics are that 47% of immigrants are able to work in their chosen field. What do our statistics look like? They range from 14% to 17%. What does that mean? That means that two thirds of the talent is talent we're not able to use. But Australia, which modelled itself on our immigration system, is able to do it. How do they do it? They focus on sourcing talent. Their outcomes-based approach is—immigrants who are able to settle the quickest in the jobs of their choice is their success outcome. We're not working with that as an outcome.

We need to make sure robust settlement services support skilled immigrants, because they need mental health services, they need health care, they need social services, they need acclimatization to Canada. These are the very kinds of things that COSTI has been doing for over 70 years. We are building a prosperous Canada. We have a history, as an organization, on what works and what doesn't work. So we encourage you as a committee in this area.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Samina Sami: The dignity of employment for all: This also reduces our impact on mental health and social services—again, critical areas of investment.

I'm going to turn it to Janet to speak to upskilling and the investment in entrepreneurship for Indigenous and racialized communities.

Ms. Janet Hallett: As Samina is saying, we've been with the agencies for many years to see many different pathways come through for training individuals to get them into the labour market. One of the things that we have noticed is the upskilling of their skills. This is a very

important position and tool that we should use on a constant basis. We see the necessity of them coming into the country. They have their own skills from their own country, they have their own education, but we need to get them upskilled into the Canadian environment and into the labour market here. Upskilling them will also open doors for employers, to see that they have some skills that they have gained—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time. Hopefully we can get the rest of your presentation in in the questions going around.

We'll start the questions with the government side. MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the presenters here today.

In budget 2023, the Ontario government pledged over \$25 million per year for the next three years, in addition, to help develop the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program. The funding will be used to attract more people in Ontario, including those with experience in the skilled trades and other sectors. I wondered if COSTI could speak to that and how that will help Ontario's immigration system.

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Ms. Samina Sami: As I mentioned, if we're investing in this area—this budget is focusing on bringing that talent, harnessing that talent. We can't continue with the sector gaps that we have, with some of the crises that we have in health care. We are seeing Australia and Germany and other countries source talent in this way to build prosperous nations. I would support this. We need greater investment in this area. We need skilled immigrants. They have contributed for decades to this country. We'd like to see more of this kind of investment.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: And I think we need it in pretty much all sectors of the economy, from retail to manufacturing to medicine, health care—it's pretty broad, so the people we need come from diverse backgrounds, diverse countries, but have diverse education as well.

You mentioned—that was interesting—about Canada and Australia and the difference there in the percentage of people who are working in their field. But you said it was more outcomes-focused? I thought we were doing that in terms of the point system and bringing people in, so maybe I misunderstood. Is there something more that Australia is doing that is matching people to their professions and their backgrounds? Could you expand on that?

Ms. Samina Sami: Their outcome specifically is—the faster that immigrants are able to work in their chosen field is the outcome. They've built their whole policy and investments this way. They screen and test immigrants ahead of coming to the country on the kinds of matching sectors that they could be working in, so they're coming in ready. When they come in, the kinds of services we provide—settlement, wraparound—all of those are ready and they already have the kinds of sectors they need to work with. They work with almost like, you'd say, an employment agency, resourcing international talent. We want to see that talent employed in those sectors as quickly as possible. That's the approach we need to take.

Along with that, though, are the regulatory barriers that are hurting us. We have had, for decades now, barriers that are keeping people from investing, contributing into our economies, into our sectors. The other thing Australia has done is really worked on the policy and regulatory changes to reduce those barriers so people can accessibly and quickly move into those professions in their chosen fields. This is what we need. We've been advocating for this for decades. Again, we cannot afford to lag behind, with the other G8 countries. We need those changes to policy and legislation, and regulatory reform.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: As you're probably aware, we have been making some changes where we do have provincial jurisdiction to speed those credentials up faster.

How much time is left, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have about 3.9.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay, so about half the time. I'll pass it to my colleague MPP Anand.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, MPP Crawford. That's more than enough for me.

First of all, welcome, Samina. It is nice to see you again. You're doing an incredible job through COSTI, so we appreciate what you're doing.

How many people actually immigrated to Australia? Do you have a number? Is that comparable to us?

Ms. Samina Sami: It is comparable to us. I don't have the exact number, but their numbers are comparable to us, and their point system is similar.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I absolutely agree with you; we need to do more. You talked about 14% to 17%—the ministry talks about 25% of immigrants work in the field they've been trained in.

I did my undergrad in chemical engineering, but when I came I started as a lab technician, thanks to Paul Kuzmenko. He paid for some of my tuition fees, so I could come back to my field.

One thing which I believe, and I noticed where we can actually leverage your support, is that employers—we need to do a little bit better on making sure that, as a new immigrant, somebody who comes with a degree and somebody who comes with experience—when they apply for the job, do they get the invitation for the interview? I'm not asking for a quota system—but I'm talking about once you go and visit and you prove that you're worth the employment that you want to seek. The cultural piece of it, where the employers understand the value of their degree—that's something which I believe is missing. Do you want to add something on that?

Ms. Samina Sami: Janet and I spoke about this. We also lag in an enterprising approach. We need to harness global talent and have employers that see global talent as competitive. The United States has industry after industry, multinational after multinational that sources global talent—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Samina Sami: —so we're also advocating, at COSTI, investing in employer education. I'd ask you, as a committee, that we need to do a lot more with investing in

employer education, workshops with employers, encouraging them to harness that talent.

I don't know, Janet, if you want to add to that.

Ms. Janet Hallett: Yes, this is exactly where we were actually going to go with our speech.

We recognize that employers are somewhat interested and open. But they need some assistance. They need some guidance. They need some information on how to retain or to work with new talent that's coming from overseas.

Mr. Deepak Anand: There is an organization called Coding for Veterans. When there are veterans looking for a job or there are veterans who are after a job at defence, they reach out to the employers and ask them what they need, go to the veterans, give them that training or whatever is required to fill up that gap backward, and help them to get the job. With a wraparound service, doing the whole model, they are able to help. Maybe it's something you guys can look into. There's the Skills Development Fund; you can look into it, as well—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We will now go to MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to all presenters.

I'm going to start with COSTI, because as MPPs, we deal with a lot of immigration and employment issues in our ridings. There's no doubt that there's room for improvement in Ontario, despite the good work that agencies like yours do, and the Immigration Partnership in Waterloo region. It's really sort of a "survival of the fittest" kind of model in Ontario, so I feel like you're asking the government for a more comprehensive, well-resourced and funded program, so that we can actually ensure that Ontario reaches its potential.

I want to unpack a little bit of the Australian model, because that does seem to be offering a more seamless pathway to successful employment. We all know that for immigrants who are coming to Ontario, that's their first goal. When I speak with them, they just want to get a job, they want to secure housing, they want to secure education for their children, and they're very motivated.

Recently, though, I am dealing with a case where the employer will not sponsor the new immigrant, so there is a power imbalance there. I'm learning about this, and I wanted to ask you: Is that something you've run into, whereby a new immigrant is a skilled worker, is working with a particular company for a certain amount of time, but then the employer will not sign off on the sponsorship of that new immigrant?

Ms. Samina Sami: Just to speak to that specific scenario, from time to time, yes, there may be employers who don't sign on. They adopt a kind of sponsorship relationship. Generally, I would say this: When an employer has a gap and they've taken the route to work with a sponsorship program for employment, they want to see more of that. I would say that's more of an anomaly; that would be an outlier, not the norm.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's good to know.

Ms. Samina Sami: Yes, it absolutely is. I would also encourage—in our presentation, we've put the models that

work for skills training and employment, and it is wrap-around services, as the MPP here has mentioned. We can accelerate all of this. We've done it for years at COSTI. We've got seamless pathways. We need the continuous investment in this area, and we need regulatory barriers and policy barriers removed to create that kind of seamless pathway. We have, for reference, presented to you in our presentation the kinds of models that do work, and we've seen them work.

Ms. Catherine Fife: My interest in this is that this is not a one-off in Waterloo. I'm looking to find ways to protect new immigrants from that power imbalance. So if you feel that's an anomaly with regard to COSTI, that's fine, but it's an ongoing issue, unfortunately, for us in Waterloo.

I'm going to move on, please, to Hospice Care Ottawa. Lisa Sullivan, thank you so much for presenting. Hospice Waterloo has done a very good job of sharing their journey with all the area MPPs. It's a relatively new hospice. They did receive some capital funding, but they crowdsourced and fundraised their way into existence. That's what I have to say.

The issue of asking the government to fund 100% of the clinical costs and some of the operational costs is quite timely, primarily because last week we were asking a question about hospices, which are very special places—and I'm not sure why the government hasn't embraced this hospice model; the barriers are very real in this regard. Last week, we had learned of hospices that are actually using food banks to feed their clients.

I just wanted to give you an opportunity, please, to address what that gap in operational funding and the clinical costs means on the ground for clients, for their family members and for the community at large.

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Ms. Lisa Sullivan: Thank you for the question.

The reason that we're asking for 100% clinical costs is because while hospice provides a range of services, the service in residence is the kind of clinical care that you might receive in another health care organization, and there's no other health care service provider—hospitals or clinics—who don't receive full funding for the basic care needs. So paying our nurses and our PSWs—that essentially is what the 100% clinical costs would be for us to cover. As a community organization, we are connected to the community, we're very grounded in the community, so a certain portion of funding does come from the community—but at this stage, we're raising 40%, 45% of our overall dollar, which is just not sustainable. So the difference for us would be, if we knew that we could cover those clinical costs, that would allow us not only to meet the pressing needs we have now to meet the needs of our clients and meet the needs of our employees, but it would also allow us to expand some of those other programs that aren't fully funded, such as meeting perhaps francophones in our community, grief bereavement and community supports.

The food bank story is not our story. I hadn't heard that before, but it's certainly—and we're not at that point, but

we will be at a point where we'll have to shut doors and shut programs if we don't get sustainable funding.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, it was a hospice in Sudbury.

The fact of the matter is that not every community can fundraise. If the economy is depressed in a certain area, that impacts the ability for hospices to fundraise.

You did mention that you're going to have—is it a \$500,000 deficit? Yes? Can you tell us about what impact that will have on your ability to meet the needs of clients?

Ms. Lisa Sullivan: As a non-profit organization, going into the year in a deficit budget is not good. I think we're fortunate in that in previous years, we have a healthy balance sheet, so that means that we'll get through the next year but we won't get through following years. So we won't have to make cuts this year, but we are seriously making plans to figure out what to do next if no further funding or one-time dollars come through. We sort of rely on this one-time funding model, which is just—

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's not sustainable—the one-time funding—so you're asking for annualized funding so that you can plan and be prepared in your community. This is a reasonable request, especially given the fact that you've proven that you're saving \$10 million in unnecessary ER visits and then \$5 million to the health care system at large. That's demonstrated savings to—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

We'll now go to the independent. MPP Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: How much time do I have, Speaker?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Four and a half minutes.

Mr. John Fraser: That's great—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Four left.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you, Chair.

I'll go to Hospice Care Ottawa. It's nice to see you again, Lisa. It's strange to see you not where we live but on the screen here.

I just want to follow up on the questions my colleague was asking. That \$500,000 deficit—you're going to fund that from either reserves or cash on hand that you have. That's your operating deficit for this year. So, two things: When you're asking for 100% of clinical funding—you're not asking for 100% funding for your hospice, are you? That's not going to cover all your costs.

Ms. Lisa Sullivan: Yes, that's correct, John. We've talked about how hospices are really grounded in the community and it's really important that our support continue, but to raise 45% of our dollar is just not reasonable, so the clinical costs would free that up for us to be able to use—we already raise \$2.2 million a year just to operate.

Mr. John Fraser: So things like psychosocial care, outreach programs—those are the kinds of things where you're working in the community that you fund too. That's not part of the clinical costs—and I'm asking these questions on behalf my colleagues on the other side, because this is a really important issue.

Ms. Lisa Sullivan: That's correct. I think it's important to remind people that those community programs—we're

part of the community support services that are underfunded, so that's why these presentations together make sense.

Mr. John Fraser: I understand that the government has done, over the course of the pandemic, in your one-time funding—not base funding, not an increase to your base, not an increase to clinical funding—that's about 50% of what you actually need the government to do. Is that roughly the amount? I know they're doing year-end.

Ms. Lisa Sullivan: Actually, with our one-time funding that has come from a variety of sources, we managed to—I would say it's more like 70%. They've brought us up much closer to what we can manage.

Mr. John Fraser: So to my colleagues on the other side—you're 70% of the way there, and the only thing you need to do is to add the 30% and make it annualized?

Ms. Lisa Sullivan: Exactly. It's the annualization. Waiting at the edge of your seat every year doesn't work.

Mr. John Fraser: These are nurses, these are PSWs, these are clinical costs that would be in a hospital or a long-term-care home. What we're talking about here is a rounding error in the health care budget, and this is really important.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Which you ignored for 20 years.

Mr. John Fraser: No, actually, I helped to build 25 hospices in Ontario, helped to establish OPCN, did four years of work that I'm really proud of. If you'd like to be informed about this, member Sabawy, I'd be glad to sit down and talk with you about it. So please—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Through the Chair.

Mr. John Fraser: Then I would ask respectfully, Chair, that the member across the way not interject while I'm speaking. Thank you.

Thank you very much, Lisa.

I would like to turn to COSTI. It's really hard to break down the barriers because a lot of those barriers here that exist are economic, are the interests of the established professions that are here, not allowing people—engineering is a great example. You probably know that. This is something governments have been working on for a long time. What would you do to solve that problem? Governments have been trying to get their heads around, how do we actually break that protectionist behaviour, essentially?

Ms. Samina Sami: It's how far protectionism can go. I know that we've brought all of these professions to the table in the past. What's that protectionism doing now? That protectionism is creating a crisis in the health care system. It's not allowing us to bring people in the skilled trades. We need engineers for all of our builds and other forms of infrastructure in Ontario. I think at this point, it's got to be a mutually interested discussion of not we and us and them anymore. It's got to be that there's mutual interest in this province and this country to facilitate and break down the barriers that are meeting mutual interests.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that answer.

We'll now go to MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I'm going to speak to Ms. Samina from COSTI. I've known COSTI for a long time. I know you work here with many refugees, including the Syrian refugees, which is—I'm of Egyptian origins, so I've been close to that community. I appreciate all you're doing to help new refugees and immigrants.

I liked the presentation very much that you did today. I would just like to point to some points in the presentation. I think very much of that presentation should be directed towards the federal programs—like making the pointing system for immigrants and picking the right immigrants or skilled workers who can immediately integrate into the system.

The pieces which we can help with, as the Ontario government—I think we are doing very good in it. We are adding more spots, for example, for the new IMGs, international graduates. My wife happened to be a medical graduate, and during the time she was doing the exams, there were 24 spots across Canada every year. This year, by itself, other than the 150 spots we have in Ontario, we added 195 spots for new doctors, international medical graduate doctors. I think this is the biggest change maybe since I came to Canada—maybe before that, 28 years ago. So I think we are going in the direction you're asking, to add and try to integrate more international skilled workers.

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Talking about integrating international students, for example: Ontario has 55,000 international students. The majority of them, after they finish their studies, are here in Ontario; they are not going anywhere. So we are going in the direction you're asking.

My question for you: What do you see, out of the presentation, directed towards what we can do as a provincial government, because it's more generic—"We need programs to do this. We need programs to do that." I need specifics, please.

Ms. Samina Sami: It's a big question. I'll start with a few, and Janet can join me.

I know, just as our hospice colleague has said, the return on investments on annualized funding makes a difference. I can bring up all sorts of stats and everything. If we're going to be reactive with our investments, we're not going to get anywhere. As you said, we've gone from the 24 spots to 150 spots. That's a proactive approach. We need to increase that even further. We then want to provide the settlement services, the wraparound services to those families to quickly get them independent and on their feet. But if we're doing that in a reactive way, not with a five-year plan—

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Settlement services, by my understanding, are federally funded.

Ms. Samina Sami: Right. But what we mean—along with the provincial. So let me turn to the provincial—what you were asking specifically—what we can do as a province.

In the province, you have jurisdiction, of course, over employment; you have jurisdiction over health care; you have jurisdiction over housing; you have jurisdiction, to an extent, with MOUs with the municipal government.

What we're seeing more and more—we have to fund the ecosystem. So the areas that you have jurisdiction over, the immigrants who can get housing quickly, who can then also get their mental health services or wellness services, whose family can quickly move into a neighbourhood—that also helps; they're on their feet all the more quicker; they're independent.

So I would just say, in the areas that the province has jurisdiction, not to treat immigration as separate from housing and other social policy issues and health care. Treat it like an ecosystem that helps support newcomers to this country. When we have housing, social services, health care, and all of that come together with employment, we have success.

That would be my quick answer. I don't know if Janet wants to—

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you. I'm passing the rest of my time.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: My question is to COSTI—and I will come back to the hospice issue.

I have been involved for almost 40 years in immigration issues in Canada. I have advocated to federal and provincial governments on the issue of accreditation and foreign-trained skilled workers.

The current Ontario government went a long way to address some of the issues you raised. For example, at the ministry of labour and immigration we are working on the foreign-trained nurses issue, and we have succeeded in achieving a few good things on it. Also, we doubled our quota from the federal government on the foreign-skilled-trade nominees to, next year, close to 19,000. So we are cognizant of the issues related to the provincial government, and we are working hard to address them, because, after all, it affects us and affects the issue of employment and finding the trained people.

Of course, the federal government has a role to play in this, and I know COSTI is very closely working with the federal government. You receive substantial financial support from them to address those issues, and I think many of these issues should be raised with the federal government to try to bring their own share of addressing this issue—it's not only the province. It is fine to bring immigrants from overseas. All of us are immigrants, and we went through that system. Next year or the year after, we're going to have half a million people coming every year. Unless the federal government comes with concrete policies, process to address the skills of those immigrants—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Aris Babikian: —we are going to face this problem forever.

I think you have great influence to address this issue also to the federal government, and try to correct some of the issues before the immigrants even arrive in Canada. I don't know if you would like to elaborate on that aspect a little bit.

Ms. Samina Sami: I agree, and I'd say please don't think that when we took up the opportunity to be here—we've taken up the opportunity to be at the consultations

on the federal immigration review. We are vocal advocates of the sector of newcomers—of who can benefit. So we're equally there, also advocating for the kinds of things that we think will make a difference. I agree that this is both a federal and provincial issue.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you. I have a quick question to the—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much, but you won't get to ask it. We're out of time.

MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to move on to Community Support Services, with Dawn Rodger and Colleen Taylor. Thank you very much for being here this afternoon.

In your presentation, you talked about the 40% cut. I'm the finance critic and Treasury Board critic for the official opposition, and I've raised this number with the government on several occasions.

Just prior to you being here, we heard from the Alzheimer Society. In the last budget, they were promised \$5 million in 2021-22, but that money never flowed; it never got to the community.

Just being fully transparent, because the government is not, there's a lack of transparency and accountability in the funding of Ontario, and this is a real problem for agencies, particularly for the not-for-profit sector.

I wanted to give you an opportunity to give us a better understanding of that 40% cut—obviously, tied to inflation—and then we can talk about what the impact is on the ground, if you don't mind. That cut is a real cut. Would you say it's a real cut?

Ms. Dawn Rodger: We've been working with one-time funding on an ongoing basis, not allowing us the opportunity to plan in advance. Increases have been inconsistent in terms of base funding; 2% increases haven't kept pace with the expenses that we've incurred, especially post-COVID. Two examples that would illustrate this: Day program fees for food have increased 12%, and simple things like paper have increased by 40%. So we're not seeing the funding increases keeping pace with our expenses. We're not able to be competitive with wages, given, in particular, for example, our agency operates with 45% base funding.

So what those cuts look like to our clients is missed doctors' appointments, decreased social activities, inability to keep their mental health in check, increased isolation.

I'll defer this question to Colleen for her comment.

1450

Ms. Colleen Taylor: Thank you. As a group of 31 agencies in the greater Ottawa area—the former Champlain LHIN—we have tried to gather some of these numbers independently. I can tell you for my agency alone, which is a fairly small agency, we're looking at cuts to about 95 people. That means that 95 seniors, over the course of the year, will not get as many drives as what they were looking for. We're looking at 1,000 people who won't get as many drives and who are being discharged from our adult day programs, and that number increases even further when you consider the caregivers who will not be getting a piece of respite when that happens. So this

number, expanded across the Champlain region—we're still adding the numbers up right now, but just for the agencies that were able to collect the data, we're looking at somewhere between a \$7-million to a \$10-million gap, which equates to thousands of vulnerable seniors. These are not the well seniors. These are thousands of vulnerable seniors, just in Ottawa, who won't be able to access—adult day programs are a big one, and the food security programs, such as diners' club. We've already increased our fees. We've already increased volunteers. We've maxed everything out, so we're looking at cuts to people, and these cuts have already happened. As we speak right now, we closed one day program that was running off of one-time funding. We brought people in with one-time funding and we sent them home, because that one-time funding ended—these are full-day.

So this is happening across the entire province—this is not just Ottawa and the Champlain region. This is happening down in London, in areas around Ingersoll and—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, it's happening in Waterloo. You're quite right, Colleen; it's happening across the province.

I think that there was a lot of hope, actually, when the government announced \$1 billion about a year ago—maybe a year and a half ago—and lots of ribbon cuttings and press releases and announcements, and then re-announcements announcing the announcements. And boy, you can't feed people with an announcement. But what we learned is that of that \$1 billion, only \$130 million got out the door—and that's across the province; that's from the FAO, and that's from estimates. This is a real issue with this government.

I volunteer and go on the trips with Meals on Wheels, and getting those eyes on seniors, visiting, addressing the isolation and seeing how those meals—I once met a lady who took her lunch and would divide it into three for the week. If you blew hard, she would fall over. It was heartbreaking.

Do you have the Meals on Wheels program as well?

Ms. Colleen Taylor: We do not have a Meals on Wheels program. We do have food security programs. Meals on Wheels, for sure, is an essential program, but there are other ones, as well, like a diners' club program that addresses—we bring people into our building, we feed them and provide them with social isolation programs.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Dawn, did you want to also address the seniors' program and the impact on seniors in particular?

Ms. Dawn Rodger: The impact on our seniors in particular—we have a Meals on Wheels program which would see significant cuts. Each year, we service about 738 clients, so we're going to be seeing a lot longer waitlists in our area. We're in a predominantly rural area, a bedroom community to Ottawa, and our community heavily relies, much like other community support agencies, on action-oriented services.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for the work that you're doing, and thank you for being here today, because the government needs to hear this. When

those seniors don't get the diners' club or the Meals on Wheels, when they don't have the nourishment, when they don't have the social interaction, these seniors will likely end up in the emergency room or in the hospital, and that's way costlier than actually funding these programs. So that's what we're going to continue to fight for, and I really do hope that that this government is listening, because there's a lot at stake.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll go to the independents. MPP Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: I'll direct my questions back to Hospice Care Ottawa. Lisa, before we got interrupted and distracted there, I just wanted to say thank you for all the work that you've done in the community. I know for my family in particular, almost a decade ago—I know exactly how important hospice services are to families not just in our community, but across Ontario, and hopefully your requests will be heard by the government.

I did want to direct my questions to Community Support Services in Ottawa, as well. The first question that I have is, when was your last base funding increase?

Ms. Dawn Rodger: Thank you for your thoughtful question.

For us, in North Grenville—we're about 30 minutes south of Ottawa—the last time we received a base funding increase, to my knowledge, is 2008.

Mr. John Fraser: That's how long it has been? So a pox on all our houses. What kind of funding increase do you need?

Ms. Colleen Taylor: The has represented us quite well and has brought forward recommendations to the province for base increases of 13%; 13% funding is the base increase that we would require to get us out of our current situation, to stabilize our workforce and to begin to catch up on those 10-plus years of no base increase.

Mr. John Fraser: In terms of numbers of people, seniors who could be affected who you're just not going to be able to serve because you don't have the money, what would that mean? And do you just give it as one organization, or—

Ms. Colleen Taylor: Sorry; I'm not sure if I understand the question.

Mr. John Fraser: In other words, are there services that you have right now that you will have to cut? If you could describe further the situation of one of your agencies—what you're going to have to drop, one or more.

Ms. Colleen Taylor: I can tell you that we will be closing down an adult day program. And I've heard of cuts across our region, in particular, where we are already saying no to transportation drives to dialysis, to hospice programs—we're already turning down on a regular basis because we don't have enough drivers. Volunteers have dropped out of the sector, and we cannot continue to—we're leaning on one another, for sure. We're using everything we can, but we can't afford to pay drivers, so we have to say no to seniors, who are usually low-income in the first place, which is why they're coming to us.

Mr. John Fraser: Those adult day programs are really important for respite for families.

Ms. Colleen Taylor: The adult day programs are twofold: They are beautiful programs that bring people to our facility, to facilities across the province, to maximize the skills and the use that these people still bring to the table. The other side of that is giving caregivers a rest, because if we don't have these programs, the client is going to end up in long-term care, which is totally unnecessary, and the caregiver is going to end up in hospital, which is more expensive and, again, totally unnecessary. The province has already told us where people—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Colleen Taylor: —and the province has already told us that they want to stay at home.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, I am going to finish here. I want to thank everyone who presented today for all the work that you do to improve people's lives.

Chair, through you: I'd like to ask, if my colleagues on the other side wanted some of my time, that they make a formal request through you. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for this presentation.

We want to thank all the panellists, both those who were virtual and those who are here at the table, for taking the time to prepare to be here and to spend the hour with us to help us understand the challenges that we face in your sector.

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL
TEACHERS' FEDERATION

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' FEDERATION
OF ONTARIO

ONTARIO AUTISM COALITION

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The next panel is the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, and Ontario Autism Coalition.

Welcome. Each panellist will have seven minutes to make a presentation. We hope that you start it with giving us your name and your position. At the six-minute mark, I will say, "One minute"—I'm going to say it again, because everybody stops talking when I say, "One minute," to find out what I said. Let me tell you, that length of time comes out of the minute, so don't stop. Get your punchline in before the minute is up.

Thank you for being here. The first presenter will be the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: Thank you to the members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. My name is Karen Littlewood. It's my privilege to be here today as the president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, representing over 60,000 education workers and teachers.

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In February 2023, some of you may recall, OSSTF/FEESO provided 31 substantive recommendations to this committee, focused on strengthening public education and rebuilding Ontario based on the expertise,

experience and concerns of more than 60,000 dedicated front-line education workers and teachers. Investing in Ontario's publicly funded education system is essential for Ontario's future success and is the cornerstone of this province's economic growth.

In its 2019 report, the Conference Board of Canada found that for every dollar increase in public education spending, \$1.30 is generated in positive economic impacts for the province. Investment in public education creates a range of social and fiscal benefits, such as higher tax revenues and cost savings in health care, social assistance and criminal justice. To borrow a phrase from the Premier, "Investing is economics 101." Shouldn't this apply to public education, as well? That question should be rhetorical.

Unfortunately, this budget again shortchanges Ontario students. Instead of investing in public education, the government's budget has prioritized sprinting towards a surplus. To us, it looks like the government is trying to balance the budget on the backs of Ontario students.

With my limited time today, I will focus on some of the budget basics and their actual impacts on Ontario students and the public education system.

For 2023, Ontario is planning on spending \$34.7 billion on education programs. That's for the approximate two million students from junior kindergarten to grade 12, plus child care. The minister has repeatedly touted a 2.7% increase in base funding for the Grants for Student Needs, or GSNs, for next year. I want to ask you a simple question and see if you agree with OSSTF/FEESO that this budget shortchanges public education. Did you know that, in 2023, public education costs will increase by at least 2.8%, including the costs associated with the rising enrolment, transportation and wages, yet the GSN funding only increased by 2.7%? If there is a 2.7% increase in base funding but also a 2.8% increase in costs, here is my question: How is that an example of investing in public education? And of course, that 2.7% increase does not account for inflation. When inflation is taken into account, in 2023-24, school boards will receive roughly \$1,200 less funding per pupil when compared to the 2018-19 school year. Using basic math skills, we can see that the school boards will have to figure out how to do more with less money. This could lead to decreases in services provided to students, especially those in need of additional supports in order to succeed. How can the government justify this lack of investment to students, parents and guardians? What message are they sending to Ontarians?

In terms of new education initiatives, the 2023 budget will include approximately \$51 million. Let's discuss some of these new initiatives as the minister has yet to share the finer details with the public. In the absence of consultation with the government, we've done our own analysis, and you will find it on page 6, table 1, of our written submission. I believe you all have a copy. My colleague John, who is online, can answer any additional questions on these numbers.

Recently, the government announced \$12.6 million in new funding over two years for math supports in targeted

schools across the province. This new funding will lead to an increase of 300 math educators in Ontario. There are 72 school boards, 4,800 schools and approximately two million students in Ontario. So let's do some more math. If \$2.6 million is for one targeted school at each of those 72 school boards, the money works out to about \$87,500 per school for two years—but only for that targeted school. If we do as the minister said in the press conference and the money goes to historically underperforming schools in the bottom 20%, that would mean those 966 schools would only receive \$7,500 per year per school for two years.

The same underfunding and underspending continues to happen in the post-secondary sector, as well. According to the Ontario Council of University Libraries, in 2022, the total student population attending all Ontario universities was just under 550,000 students, but the only increases are going to select, undoubtedly much-needed, programs in medicine and veterinary medicine and select research programs. There are no new investments that will have an impact on the majority of Ontario's 550,000 post-secondary students.

Although the 2023 budget offers some investment in education, when you take a closer look at these allegedly historic numbers, you will see that the government totally ignored the 31 recommendations provided in OSSTF/FEESO's pre-budget submission—they're listed as a table in the back of your package, as well. They do not factor in rising costs due to inflation. And they do not, and will continue to not, provide enough funding required to sustain the current public education system in Ontario. And this is not just from our analysis—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: It's also from numbers provided by the independent Financial Accountability Office.

For these reasons, my ask of this committee is simple: Please share our report with Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy and Premier Ford. Let them know that OSSTF/FEESO is always willing to offer our advice and expertise from the front lines of public education. If they truly care about students, who are the future of the province, they need to amend the budget and significantly increase funding for education, from early learning through to post-secondary. It's time for real investments. It's time to stop shortchanging the students of this province and invest in their future.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation.

We now will go to the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario.

Mr. David Mastin: My name is David Mastin. I'm first vice-president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. I would like to start by thanking the committee for the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of 83,000 ETFO members who work in Ontario's public elementary schools.

A couple of months ago, my colleague President Brown spoke to this committee about the importance of investing in public education. At the time, she urged the government

to carefully consider our recommendations and allocate the necessary resources to undo the damage caused by years of funding cuts. It was our hope that the government would shift direction away from damaging cuts to public education and begin to focus on providing the necessary resources and supports to address the diverse needs of students in Ontario. Instead, the government has decided to continue to underfund and undermine public education.

The budget tabled by the government not only fails to address the long-standing gap in education funding identified by the FAO, but it will also defund up to 7,000 positions in Ontario's public schools. The loss of these positions will have a devastating impact on student learning conditions. Despite claims made by the Premier and the Minister of Education, unless this budget is amended, it will leave students with fewer supports.

While the government has attempted to obscure the cuts to public education, they are undeniable. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives reported last week that per student funding has decreased by \$1,200 when adjusted for inflation since this government came to power. That means that every student in Ontario's public schools is being shortchanged by this government.

Based on this budget, school board funding will increase by 0.7% on a per pupil basis for next year. The inflation rate for 2022 was 6.8%. That means that the increase in funding for schools is roughly one tenth the rate of inflation. The reality is that this budget cuts funding for our public schools in real dollars and, once again, asks students, educators, families and communities to do more with less.

This underfunding of public education comes at a time when the system is already overstretched by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We know these negative impacts were disproportionately felt by already marginalized communities, including Black, Indigenous, racialized, disabled and low-income communities. These communities are also the ones most impacted by unprecedented inflation. Right now, students need more support, not less. They need more caring and qualified adults in the classroom, not fewer. They need access to special education and mental health supports.

Violence against educators remains a concerning, pervasive and growing issue. Many school spaces are not safe, especially for those working on the front lines. Without adequate funding of dedicated resources and supports for students who need them, violent incidents in schools will continue to threaten the safety of educators and students and place additional strain on educators' mental health.

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The solution to many of these problems is known and within grasp. At risk of repeating some of the recommendations we made to this committee in February, here are a few of those solutions.

Smaller class sizes: Smaller classes help improve student behaviour and peer relationships, and increase student engagement and achievement in the early grades. Smaller classes mean educators have more opportunity to

give students individual attention. The government should establish a class size cap of 24 students for grades 4 to 8 and a cap of 26 students for kindergarten classes.

Special education: Students need access to educational assistants, behavioural counsellors, child and youth workers, psychologists, and speech-language pathologists to help them learn and thrive. The government should increase special education funding and ensure that special education grants are based on the actual needs of students.

Mental health: The mental health of teachers, education workers and students requires the provincial government's urgent attention. The government must fund the supports in schools and the community that ensure students' developmental, emotional and behavioural needs are met, so that ETFO members can focus on supporting students' learning needs. The government should also develop and deliver long-term, fully funded, comprehensive, culturally responsive mental health supports for students.

Hybrid and remote learning: The use of hybrid learning models by some school boards has students and educators facing unprecedented challenges and pressures, further compounding the ongoing mental health crisis. The use of hybrid learning by school boards in Ontario must end, and the government should abandon its plan for permanent virtual learning in elementary schools.

Addressing equity and anti-Black racism: The government must also take concrete steps to ameliorate the inequity experienced by marginalized communities and build a more just Ontario for everyone. We call on the government to provide additional funding to school boards to hire additional counsellors, social workers and school nurses who would specifically assist families and students from Black, racialized and Indigenous communities, as well as students living in low-income communities.

These proposals are entirely achievable. The province has more than sufficient fiscal capacity to make the necessary investments in public education; what is missing is the political will to do so. Students and educators need the government to stop looking at public education as a business opportunity and recognize that public education is the glue that holds our communities together.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. David Mastin: We need the government to stop looking for ways to sell off our public schools and focus instead on improving them and ensuring that students in this province have access to the equitable, high-quality, public education they deserve.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you.

Our next presenter is the Ontario Autism Coalition.

Mr. Bruce McIntosh: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members. My name is Bruce McIntosh. I'm a director of the Ontario Autism Coalition. It's a province-wide group of 20,000 parents, family members, people with autism themselves and their allies.

It may surprise you to hear that I am not here today to ask for more money. Members of our organization, however, are extremely concerned about the management of the Ontario Autism Program budget in delivering core services funding. The breathtaking amount of red tape that

has been created under this government's new structure thwarts this government's goals, is impeding access to therapy by the children and youth it is supposed to serve, and puts many of the parents responsible for the use of their funding in an untenable financial position. I'll return to the matter of how that impacts the budget in a moment or two, after I walk you through the waiting that has been added by the new Ontario Autism Program.

After a family registers for the program, they wait for an invitation to core services funding. Right now, those invitations are being offered to people who registered for the program in 2018. Once they get the invitation, they wait to schedule a determination-of-needs meeting and, having scheduled it, wait for it to occur. That wait time is more than a year at this stage, and that's a leg of the wait that did not exist under the old program.

Those 2018 families who get their invitation right now are going to wait until 2024 to get that determination-of-needs meeting, and once that happens, it will be another 12 weeks until they actually get funding in their bank account that they can use. When the service contract is issued, they can begin spending money, but if they don't have their funding, they have the challenge of spending that money out of pocket. I can assure you that young families who have their first mortgage and a new car loan and probably student debt to pay and all the other expenses that go with starting a family are not in a position to front what could be as much as \$10,000 or \$15,000 while they wait for 12 weeks to get the money.

The most egregious part of that wait is the determination-of-needs meeting. This did not exist under the old program. It is a four-to-six-hour meeting that will happen every year, and if they're booking 14 months out now and the government plans to add the same number of children next year, they're going to need twice the number of those care coordinators to deliver those determination-of-needs assessments. Those people cost somewhere between \$60,000 and \$80,000 apiece. By rough math and the number that we have been given by AccessOAP for the number of them who are working in the system, it works out to somewhere around 1.5% to 2% of the program budget, and that will double in the subsequent fiscal year if more are hired. These people do not deliver a nano-second of therapy to children.

There are ways to solve this: reducing the number of determination-of-needs meetings—they could be held less frequently; they could be modified so that after the first year, the clinician, who will have data on the child's progress, could simply submit that directly to the ministry without waiting for the meeting to happen. The creativity needed is not very great, but it seems to exceed that of the MCCSS bureaucrats who have put this system together. They've built a very good job creation program for bureaucrats. We asked for needs-based funding—the needs of the children. What we're getting is a program that serves the needs of the bureaucrats.

The other problem with the administration of the money is the wait for reconciliation of a block of funding, and having reconciled, the subsequent wait to get the new

block of funding into a parent's bank account. This is going to happen once or twice or perhaps three times a year, and each of those waits is about 12 weeks. For a child who's on a \$60,000-a-year program, for a parent to reach into their pocket and spend during that 12-week wait, it's about \$15,000. I assure you that most of them can't find it. And even if they do have the room on their plastic—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Bruce McIntosh:—the interest charges that it racks up are not going to be reimbursed by the autism program.

The old program suffered due to a lack of funding. This program suffers due to poor administration, red tape, and over-bureaucratization. I'm here today to ask this government to use every one of its available fiscal, regulatory and legislative tools to eliminate that red tape and accelerate the progress of children through the program.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to me today. I welcome your questions.

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The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that presentation.

That concludes the presentations. We now will start the rounds of questioning, and we will start with the King's loyal opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting that the three of you are the last presentations in a very limited consultation on this budget. There were only 36 hours that were open for you to apply. So I want to thank all of you for coming forward.

I will start with you, Karen. I notice that in your presentation here you've asked that the government listen to your 31 recommendations, which they did not, and that we forward this information to the finance minister—and at least accept amendments proposed by opposition MPPs to significantly increase funding for public services, including education and post-secondary education. I just want you to know that the process—we can't introduce new money motions to this budget. If we could, we would certainly do some reprioritizing about where the money is going, for sure.

Perhaps this question could go to both yourself and David. Things are really bad right now in education, and we can't make the government—even though we bring personal stories, even when we're sharing the stats, we're sharing the gaps, the job vacancies, the attrition, they're not willing to see it or they're intentionally not paying attention. I came into this entire sector because of education during the original Mike Harris years and Bill 160, so it's going back a time. I've never seen it this bad. It's such a poisoned environment. It seems like it's also translating down into our local school boards. We had an earlier presenter talking about this new legislation and how the government will be able to oversee what messages come from school boards to parents. It's very Orwellian and shocking, actually, because public education is the cornerstone of our democracy, and so the stakes are so high. I don't want to get emotional about it. I just want to give you both an opportunity—before I deal with the

autism—to tell the government what’s at stake here. It’s about a relationship that is broken between the provincial government and the very people who are on the front lines in education.

Karen, do you want to start?

Ms. Karen Littlewood: Yes. Thanks so much for that opportunity.

I want to apologize, too: The trees and I are not getting along these days. It’s so close to Earth Day; I feel badly, but that pollen is really affecting my voice and my ability to continue at length here.

I have been in education since 1991. We’ve had many different governments over those years, and this is absolutely the worst I have ever seen, as well. I think about the days when I started teaching in elementary in York region and we had a full-time guidance counsellor in a school. I could ask my colleague beside me, “Do you have many schools with a full-time guidance counsellor?” That was pretty standard then, back in those days. They were able to identify and provide supports. And where they weren’t able to provide the supports within the school, they were able to reach to outside—whether within the board supports that were there or other agencies—in order to meet the needs of the students. That’s not happening now. In fact, where we see a need, we’re finding that social workers are shared between multiple schools and unable to meet the needs of the students, and students with significant needs who are putting out a call for help are waiting 10 days, 14 days, 20 days for supports. In many cases where you have a parent who is able to advocate for the student, they’re taking them to the hospital to try to get that kind of support. It is really, really challenging. I’ve never seen so many people working in education and feeling guilty for the fact they’re not able to provide for the students. So much of that has to do with the fact that they’re doubling up, that they’re covering for each other. We don’t have everybody filling in when there are absences. It is incredibly challenging.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And that’s real.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: It’s so real. But this is a long-term impact. So this is right now and today, and I can tell you what’s happening, but—I’m sure you all change the oil in your cars regularly. Why do you do that? Because you want to go to Oil Changers and spend \$70 on a synthetic oil change? No. You do it because you don’t want to buy a \$5,000 engine in a few years. If you’re not doing that with education, if you’re not investing in education, if you’re not investing in the students of the province, it has a long-term impact, and that goes all the way from junior kindergarten to grade 12 and into post-secondary.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. David?

Mr. David Mastin: I think I’ll attempt to answer the question by making reference to our collective experience during the COVID-19 crisis that we’ve all lived through and are still, to some extent, living through. The thing that got us through those times was the public sector, public services. It wasn’t the business community. It wasn’t the private sector. It was the public services that existed here

in Ontario and Canada and across the world. I thought our experience during those years would have shone a very, very bright light on the need to invest in public services, not just for anticipation of the next pandemic, but for the investment that is so vital, especially in education and health care and all the other sectors that are struggling desperately right now. That didn’t happen. We come out of the heat and the depths of despair of that pandemic, and what do we see? We see budget cuts to most vital public services that got us through that time.

I’m going to bridge from that to what our kids need right now. Our kids are in desperate need—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. David Mastin: —of proper services, of more services, and instead they’re getting less. They’re getting less professionals working with them, less adults, and that is taking a bad situation and make it far worse.

We’re finding ourselves at the bargaining table not like we used to, bargaining for salary and prep time and those types of teacher-focused things. We’re at the bargaining table bargaining for students now, and our members are desperate that we’re bargaining for students because the students are not taken care of. This government needs to do a lot better.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The math that you presented, Karen, is really salient to this discussion, because you will see that the Minister of Education stands in his place and talks about historic investments, and our critic Chandra Pasma has really outlined where the gaps are, and those gaps are truly going to hurt students.

I want to thank you for coming here today and—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you for that. We’ll now go to the independents. MPP Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you to all the presenters for being here today.

You’ve all heard the word “historic” applied to the funds, applied to the concerns that you have and your own interests. It’s a term that’s used quite a bit. I want to read this, because somebody sent this to me and it was interesting: “The minister boasts that the historic \$300 million in education is more than any other government in history. So there’s about two million students registered in our province’s schools. That works out a little less than \$150 per student. In 1965, when the Robarts government put through the foundation tax plan, they invested about \$32.7 million, which, by the Bank of Canada interest rate calculator, comes out to about \$304 million. And at that time, there were 1.7 million children in schools, which works out to about \$175 per pupil. So we can now refute the historic argument forever.” It’s not about historic; it’s about outcomes. It’s about what’s happening, in this case, to our children, our neighbours’ children.

Bruce, I thank you. You really articulated very clearly—I’ll put in a nice term—the “administrative challenge” of being a parent of a child with autism.

I want to ask you another question—about children on the program or not on the program yet, transitioning into schools. Do you have anything that you’d like to say about that?

Mr. Bruce McIntosh: My fellow presenters to my left will by now be very well aware that the so-called legacy kids who were in service under the last government's autism program are now transitioning into the current government's program. Where they were not in the past subject to age-based limitations—which are absolutely irrelevant to the nature of autism. A child's needs do not magically change on their birthday. But because of the institution of lower funding levels and age-based funding levels, which means that at eight years of age, the funding decreases even more, these are the kids who are now moving into school. They're not going to be getting as much therapy. They're not ready for where they're going.

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I see on a regular basis how hard it is for our members to get a school to provide an EA to support their child. There just aren't enough of them, and this is going to add to that problem, because many of these kids are not even in school part-time. They're on the way this fall.

Mr. John Fraser: This is the first big year of that?

Mr. Bruce McIntosh: Yes.

Mr. John Fraser: David, do you know that they're coming?

Mr. David Mastin: Yes, and what they're coming to is a system that's not prepared or equipped to satisfy the needs that these students have.

Mr. John Fraser: So there's no real plan? We have probably a few thousand students, or a thousand students, coming into the system.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Bruce McIntosh: If I may, we've been given hints since the news conference that we had last month to talk about this issue, that something was coming. We've yet to see it, and we're almost in May. This is the time when IEPs for the fall are going to be prepared. Once again, the government is behind and scrambling.

Mr. John Fraser: We didn't see that in this budget. It's not clearly articulated and not clearly earmarked.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): To the government. MPP Smith.

Mr. David Smith: I thank all the presenters here this afternoon. It's really great to hear the positions.

I have to let you know that I served as a school board trustee for the last 12 years and I've seen a lot of changes, not only at the largest school board in Canada, the Toronto District School Board, but also on the Toronto Lands Corp., the negotiating and steering committee, which deals with unions and the needs that they have in terms of all those parts. I want to speak about that, because I had an opportunity today—and I've read the pre-budget submission with interest. Funding for education has increased every year of our government, and it is at the highest level ever. I'm not sure if we are reading the same pages. In fact, over the last four years, the base GSN funding has gone up 10%, while the total student enrolment is less than 1% over the same time period.

In addition, funding for some of the specific areas that you point out has also substantially increased, including special education. The latest GSN is at \$3.4 billion per

year, and students' mental health is now funding at over \$100 million per year, nearly five times what it was when we took office. I'm not sure if you are seeing that, and I'd like to get your comments on those dollar amounts—that it's not going into the school system. Also, at the same time, I know for a fact that 80% to 85% of this budget is going—since it's a service-driven industry, you can see how it can get to those numbers. But the GSN is still bringing up and topping up some dollars. What else can we do? That's a question.

David?

Mr. David Mastin: I appreciate the restating of the numbers. When we look at the analysis, when we look at inflation and when we look at the FAO report, we're hearing that the numbers don't speak the way you're sharing them. On the ground, our members are experiencing something very different. If I listened as a layperson to your description, since you came to office, "We have invested X and Y," I would say, "What is going on?" Because it's not translating to the service that we need on the ground. So I'm not going to speak anymore about the numbers. We all know what the numbers are. We need to include in that conversation what the impact of inflation is; we need to include in that conversation whether those dollars are servicing on the ground what we need to have serviced—and the answer to that is, it's just not.

I'll turn it to my colleague, and maybe further information can come from that.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: Big numbers sound great. They're very popular when you talk about the numbers and you compare this year's number to last year's number, but when it's not keeping up with inflation, then it's not keeping up and it's not going as far. And that's really challenging. In 2018, 18% of the budget went to education, and now it's 17%. That's a cut. That's less money for education—

Interjection.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: No. We have a 0.6% increase in students. So perhaps we need to get together to talk about the numbers. I've got my colleague John online, as well. Our numbers are different than your numbers. They get reported in the media and people say, "That's a lot of money," but what they're not saying is, "My student, my child, has what they need in the classroom." What they're saying is, "I'm not getting the supports." And to Bruce and the Ontario Autism Coalition and groups that—students, perhaps, who have more significant needs are not getting what they need either. So we have to look at that reality, and not look at this number compared to that number. Let's look at the inflation number and if we are keeping up with that.

Mr. David Smith: Yes, teachers are well taken care of in Ontario and for all good reasons. We need them to take care of our students and to keep them going.

Also, Ontario has the lowest class cap through grades 1 through 3. We're looking at Ontario's 19.1 students versus BC's 25 to 27 students. So we are changing education for the elementary, specifically, to make certain that those students are getting the pieces.

I do realize that the dollars will never be enough. It doesn't matter—50 years from now, we'll probably have that same conversation in this room about dollars. Where do dollars come from? We're not going to do economics today.

But do you agree that the students who are in grades 1 through 3 are getting a better deal than students in Vancouver and Quebec and all the other places that have higher class sizes?

I remember, when I went to school, I was in classes with 40 students. Today, it's down dramatically, to make certain that those class sizes have caps between those years. What are your thoughts on that?

Ms. Karen Littlewood: My thoughts are that the students need more supports and they're not necessarily getting them. We can compare to British Columbia, but your government has been in power for five years. What has changed? I'm hearing that about 20% of schools are historically underperforming. What's being done differently?

Mr. Bruce McIntosh: Mr. Chair, may I interject a brief response to that question, from the point of view of parents?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The time belongs to the member. If he—

Mr. David Smith: What do you have to say about that?

Mr. Bruce McIntosh: Well sir, it's immaterial to compare this jurisdiction to others. What is important to our families is what is happening in their children's school here now. And if your statement with respect to—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Bruce McIntosh:—the increase in the GSN were accurate, that it is providing better service, why then are we hearing from Ottawa public, Toronto public, Peel public, Waterloo Catholic—our president is on the SEAC for the board that serves Thunder Bay. They are all hearing that either there will be cuts to the number of special-needs spaces or that, simply, intake will be frozen so that new students showing up can't get a chair.

Sir, what's happening on the ground means that you're just not correct.

Mr. David Smith: I'm correct, sir, and I'm responding to you. I'm glad you got into this before my time ran out. I have seven children, and I have children right now in school who are going through those same things, and I'm working with the system. I think the system is doing great. I'm seeing those changes, and I can speak to that.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We are out of time for that question.

We will now go to the King's loyal opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: This is really interesting. This is exactly the dissonance that we're experiencing at Queen's Park. It's a perfect example. The fact that someone can say, "Oh, well, I was a trustee"—I was a trustee. Where we used to put our funding was in people, because people make the difference in the education system. And that is not happening. You should look at the vacancies that are happening across boards across Ontario.

1540

I'm going to give Bruce an opportunity—because from a parent's perspective, I really appreciate the fact that you weighed into that discourse, Bruce. This government says that they're champions of parents, but the fact of the matter is that somebody needs to be a champion for students in the province of Ontario. And that's what I'm hearing—the call for investments.

Bill 124 is pushing people out of the education system, and also autism therapy services and the not-for-profit sector. We've heard it for the last two days. We also have heard that funding that was promised in the 2021-22 budget didn't get out the door. I know for a fact that Waterloo Region District School Board dipped into their reserves—\$5.7 million—to address learning gaps because of COVID. That's because this government failed those students. It's so frustrating because the government has the money to do the right thing. That's why this budget is unsupportable: because it fails Ontarians. The fact that the government lost in court on Bill 124—it was deemed unconstitutional. This government is fighting an unconstitutional piece of legislation that they created and capped workers at, which is hurting students. It's unconscionable.

Bruce, you're asking for less red tape. We support less red tape in the autism program. Monique Taylor, who has come before this government on several occasions, explaining the program to the minister who is responsible for the damn program—who actually resigned. It is a mess. It's hard to imagine it getting any worse. I want you to focus as a parent, please, and then also explain why this program needs to be fast-tracked—because Merrilee Fullerton told my parents in Waterloo, "Wait by the phone. You're going to get a call." They're still by the phone, they're still waiting, and their children are still suffering.

Please go ahead, Bruce.

Mr. Bruce McIntosh: The calls that the parents get—and I see this daily in our Facebook group—make them think that something is actually happening. They open up an account on a server to get correspondence back and forth with the new program, and then they wait for that invitation to services. That wait, as I explained to you, is years long. The government stopped publishing the number of registered children in December. At that point, it was 60,411. Four months later, I suspect it's approaching 65,000. And they missed their target at the end of the year to bring kids into the program. The kids they do bring into the program are faced with more waiting. And the kids they fail to bring into the program to meet their targets are, you guessed it, faced with more waiting.

This program needs to be made more efficient. The bureaucrats have to get out of the way of the clinicians. The red tape and delay in reconciling a group of—we had a mom whose entire submission of invoices was rejected because she uses a post office box for correspondence and as a billing address. The people at the ministry took issue with the fact that she was apparently presenting herself as living at the post office—seriously. They sent it back to her. It added another three weeks to getting a new block of

funding. This is just one in hundreds, thousands of these sorts of incidents.

This government has a minister for red tape reduction. For heaven's sake, what is that fellow doing?

Ms. Catherine Fife: That is a wonderful amendment. We are going to introduce an amendment, Bruce, because that's a common-sense solution. We're going to move an amendment to get the minister of red tape to deal with the autism program. We can't do anything about the funding per se, but this is an unethical process that has been set up that is hurting families. I'm reading about the financial ruin that parents are facing. So thank you for raising that.

I want to give the last word to Karen and David, please. Name just one thing that this government could do to help kids.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: Just one thing—it's really hard. Can we revisit the amount of funding that existed in 2018? Your government came into power then. It's \$1,200 less now per pupil. Is there something you can do to make up for that shortfall? This is inflation. Again, we're talking about \$1,200 less. What can you do to make up for that loss?

Ms. Catherine Fife: David?

Mr. David Mastin: My answer would be the same thing. Unfortunately, there's no "one thing." There are far too many things at this point.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. David Mastin: But on top of the item that my colleague has mentioned—some respect for education workers. I heard Mr. Smith make reference to educators being treated very nicely. If that were the case, we wouldn't have qualified individuals not taking jobs in the province of Ontario. Unfilled vacancies are out of control. It has to do with respect. It has to do with compensation. It has to do with people saying, "This is not worth it for me to walk into these classrooms, so I am not taking that job." There are lots of qualified people out there; they're not taking the jobs.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, you can't build a strong public education system without qualified, supported people in that system. That is the message around Bill 124 that we've been trying to get through now for years. They're going to lose the court case. It's going to cost the province a lot of money, but more importantly, it has caused a lot of damage to the system.

Thank you very much for being here today.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll now go to the independent. MPP Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm going to say two things very quickly, and then I'm going to give you each an opportunity to get the last word in. You can pick which one speaks last.

I don't think Kafka could have written what you described today into one of his novels. It's an incredible bureaucracy that people who are already busy and under incredible pressure are being forced to be put through and to wait. That's a problem for public education. There was a Premier in this province a long time ago who understood that. His name was Bill Davis. Even John Robarts

understood. The reason that it's important is to give opportunity for all.

Actually, if we want to be economically successful and vibrant, we need not just a good but a great public education system, and you don't get that unless you value the people who are in it—it's the outcomes, it's the kids and the people who care for them in our schools. That's the most important thing.

You guys can pick who speaks in what order.

Mr. David Mastin: Go ahead.

Mr. Bruce McIntosh: We've been asking for ABA services in schools since our organization was founded 18 years ago. What we get are itinerant ABA teams who have a two-year waiting list to see any individual pupil and then, having seen that pupil, drop a report of recommendations to the classroom staff, who may not have the training to implement it and certainly aren't resourced to do it.

Go, guys. I'm beyond frustrated.

Mr. David Mastin: I'm not even sure what to say. There's so much that needs to be said. I appreciate the forum. I wish it would make a difference. I'm feeling a little bit at a loss, actually. So much needs to be done. So much more respect needs to be given. Education is an investment; it's not a series of ledger entries compared year over year.

Unfortunately, I think this government has treated education and other public services as though they are business opportunities or businesses where you can take out money and satisfy the shareholders. That's not the way public services work, but that seems to be the approach of this government.

A cynical person would suggest that this is done deliberately to underfund, to create chaos, to create a system that the public does not trust anymore and, therefore, create all the conditions necessary to turn the entire system over to the private sector. That would be a cynical person who would suggest that might be what's happening here. It's an investment.

1550

Ms. Karen Littlewood: I'll just give you some numbers: two million students, and I think there's about \$4 billion in your contingency fund. Every dollar you spend on education, you get \$1.30 back. Why wouldn't you be investing in education? Why wouldn't you be investing in the students of the province? There's \$1,200 times two million students less this year than in 2018, when you came into power.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute left.

Mr. John Fraser: I just want to thank you all for presenting very clearly and thoughtfully what's happening to the people you each represent. I'm sure that my colleagues on all sides are listening very closely to what's happening out there in people's lives.

The last thing I'd like to say is, if you want to talk about schools, just go knock on doors. You'll hear about schools, about how people feel about it, how families feel about it. That's actually what's most important.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We'll go to the government side. MPP Smith.

Mr. David Smith: I've knocked on doors for 12 years, yes, being a school board trustee, and the people were kind to send me back to continue doing the work I did, working very hard for students. I do get the component of the various visible minorities and other students suffering in there, and trust me, my voice is my action. So I work on the things that I thought were needed.

I have to say that I have done a study. Somehow our information seems to be criss-crossing. The teachers in Ontario—I don't know why they'd be leaving, because the province of Ontario teachers are the highest-paid in Canada. Are you aware of that? Yes? No?

Mr. David Mastin: I'm aware that we have people who are not willing to take the jobs.

Mr. David Smith: Our teachers are the highest-paid teachers in all of Canada.

Mr. David Mastin: Shame on the other provinces.

Mr. David Smith: Go check it out. That's true.

With regard to autism, it's a serious area, and it's near and dear to me even though I don't have any family member. I care about communities, and that's a part that, if you can talk to us about it—because I'm hearing more dollars are needed, but there's no actual or factual dollar. Have any studies been done as to what might be needed—I keep hearing more dollars, and that's important. You know money comes from somewhere. Everybody here has a paycheque, and you can't spend beyond or else you can create your own deficit in your own homes. What is the dollar amount that we are spending? Is there any calculation that has been done? I think you have some time to submit those things as an ask. If you would like to do that, maybe you can. But to come here and say you need dollars or more funding is needed—what is that dollar amount? Any one of you, could you answer that?

Ms. Karen Littlewood: Are you keep keeping up with inflation?

Mr. David Smith: Keeping up with inflation? No one is at this time.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: So that's an excuse to short-change the students of the province.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The question has been asked. Let's not have an argument back and forth.

Mr. David Smith: No. You asked—

Ms. Karen Littlewood: I thought he asked me a question.

Mr. David Smith: Through you, Chair: Everyone is trying to keep up with inflation. It's not just schools. We've got to build hospitals. We've got to build roads. We've got to build schools. We've got to build long-term-care facilities. The list goes on and on. Education is very important as a foundation; that's the base. But all these other things have to be taken care of.

You talk about how we have some reserves. If you take all of them and we hit another pandemic or some other crazy thing comes into us, where do we go? Borrow some more money somewhere?

That's all I have to say.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Babikian.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, all of you, for coming and making your compassionate and passionate presentations. I strongly believe that all of us—opposition, government, you—care for our children, and all of us are doing our best to look after their needs. I understand. I hear some of the points you raise—but at least let me give you some of the issues where, as a government, we are trying to help our students.

On an average provincial per pupil basis, funding is projected to be \$13,125 per student, an increase of \$1,062 per student since 2017-18. In 2023-24, our government is further investing \$100 million in additional staffing—close to or maybe over 1,000 educators—to assist in the implementation of fully destreamed math courses, supports for grade 7 to 8.

While many parents and educators have noted stagnation or regression in reading and math skills, our government is meeting this challenge head-on with \$180 million for foundational learning support. That includes \$109 million for professional assessment and reading intervention programs for children who face difficulty learning to read, as well as \$72 million to support the hiring of over 380 educators who specialize in math and to improve new teachers' math competence.

So these are some of the concrete measures that our government is doing. Is it enough? Probably not—but we have to address, as my colleague mentioned, some of so many others. I understand that you are in the education field and your main focus is education, which—nothing is wrong. But as a government, we have a province to run and we're doing our best to set up a bright future for our students to learn etc.—and it's not only these measures. For example, someone mentioned earlier the safety of teachers etc. I was wondering, when this issue started becoming a pandemic in our schools, why is it that when we had safe schools, when we had either security guards or police officers in our schools, the Toronto District School Board, for example, decided to eliminate all of these security features in our schools? Isn't this also part of our concern and we should address it? I am very much concerned with the safety of the teachers and the students, and what are we going to do about that?

These are some of my comments, some of my thoughts, and I would appreciate your feedback on them.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: I appreciate the opportunity to address violence in the schools. It's not new. It has been reported a lot, and it makes big, splashy headlines—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Karen Littlewood: —and they're very tragic situations that are happening. The school resource officers did not solve the problem in the schools. In fact, they further marginalized students. We'd like to see other supports, not just when an incident happens, but before that. We need to be identifying those needs much earlier and providing those other supports—having those mental health supports; having those social workers, those child and youth workers available. It's not a Toronto thing. It's not a high school thing. My colleague beside me will attest to the fact that it's JK to 12 and beyond, and this is across

the entire province. It is tragic what's happening in the schools. We need to have those other supports to be meeting the needs. We are in a mental health crisis right now with our students, and we need to be putting everything we can into that, instead of one year of COVID funding and then saying, "We're done. We're all better." We're not all better. In fact, our students are really suffering right now.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Just a comment, Chair, if I have time.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You've got eight seconds—and now you have none.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Just my luck.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That does conclude the questions for this panel. We thank all three panel members for being here and all those on the screen who—the panel members answered the questions so well that there was no need to bring in the experts, but we do thank you all for joining us today and preparing for this.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We have a comment from MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much. Can you clarify when the amendments are due and when we're going to go to clause-by-clause?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I will get to that.

As we said, this concludes the business for today. Thank you again to the presenters.

As a reminder, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. on Wednesday, April 26, 2023.

The committee is now adjourned until 10 a.m. on Tuesday, May 2—

Interjection.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Vanessa Kattar): I can answer MPP Fife's question.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Clause-by-clause, please.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Vanessa Kattar): The committee will be meeting next Tuesday, May 2, for clause-by-clause on Bill 79. We'll be meeting on May 10 for clause-by-clause on Bill 85. The amendments for Bill 85 are due by 5 p.m. on Friday, April 28, which is next Friday.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Vanessa.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The committee is now adjourned until 10 a.m. on Tuesday, May 2, 2023, when we will meet for clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 79.

The committee adjourned at 1600.

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