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(Hansard)**

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**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Pre-budget consultations

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Wednesday 13 December 2023

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

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43^e législature

Mercredi 13 décembre 2023

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Président : Ernie Hardeman
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Wednesday 13 December 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

Mercredi 13 décembre 2023

The committee met at 1000 in Hilton Toronto/Markham Suites Conference Centre and Spa, Markham.

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Good morning, everyone. Welcome to Markham. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to order. We are meeting today to resume public hearings on pre-budget consultations 2024.

Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. 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 we've heard 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 and two rounds of four and a half minutes for the independent members as a group.

ABBVIE CANADA

ARTHRITIS SOCIETY CANADA

**ALS SOCIETY OF CANADA, CENTRAL
AND CENTRAL EAST ONTARIO**

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): With that, we'll call on the first presenter. I do want to remind, also, that the seven minutes are broken up only by the sound of my voice that says, "One minute." That doesn't mean you stop; you have one more minute. But at seven minutes, I say, "Thank you very much for your presentation."

With that, the first panel this morning is AbbVie Canada; Arthritis Society Canada; and ALS Society of Canada, Central and Central East Ontario. We will start with the presentations in that order.

AbbVie Canada, the floor is now yours.

Ms. Amanda Thambirajah: Good morning, everyone. I'm Amanda Thambirajah, manager of government affairs and policy for AbbVie, one of Canada's top five largest pharmaceutical companies. Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

AbbVie's mission is to discover and deliver innovative medicines that solve serious health issues today and address

the medical challenges of tomorrow. We strive to have a remarkable impact on people's lives across several key therapeutic areas—immunology, oncology, neuroscience and eye care—and products and services across our Allergan Aesthetics portfolio.

In Ontario, AbbVie employs more than 350 people and has an office right here in Markham. We continue to be a leader in research and development. In 2022, we invested \$13.5 million across 106 Ontario clinical trial sites, and we continue to invest each year.

AbbVie would like to congratulate the government of Ontario for its commitment to the life sciences industry and the ongoing development of Ontario's Life Sciences Strategy, including this year's inclusion of a red tape focus to ensure new innovations reach patients faster. Many of the government's recent health care announcements and proposals are designed to improve patients' timely access to care and bring care closer to home, while also opening the door to innovation: for example, expanding the prescribing scope of pharmacists, nurses and midwives and investing in the long-term-care sector and pediatric care.

But there's more we can do to improve care for patients in Ontario. Improving access to innovation is a key solution. Take glaucoma, which causes progressive vision loss. Despite treatment, 60% of patients with glaucoma will have their disease progress. According to the Canadian Council of the Blind, it will take an estimated two years to clear the backlog of ophthalmic surgeries. Patients face the reality of losing their vision while languishing on waitlists.

Solutions exist. The Ontario Health Technology Assessment Committee recently provided a positive draft recommendation for funding minimally invasive bleb surgery, MIBS, which treats mild to moderate glaucoma. This surgery can be performed two to three times faster than the traditional trabeculectomy, at approximately the same cost, and requires less post-operative care for patients than the current standard of care.

Some hospitals and a clinic already provide the surgery in Ontario, but primarily in urban areas. Inequitable access to care exists because there is no province-wide funding pathway for the type of medical device it uses. A provincial government investment of \$2 million a year would help close to 2,000 Ontarians with glaucoma each year while also helping to reduce the province's surgical backlog. Ontario can be a leader in Canada by being the first to provide province-wide funding for MIBS as quickly as possible to help prevent vision loss for patients.

When it comes to patient access to drug therapies, Ontario also has the opportunity to be a leader. Among the provinces, Ontario currently ranks fourth in the time it takes to list new therapies on public formularies, nearly double the length of time of the fastest province, Quebec. This has an impact on patients who are looking for improvements in their care.

For example, patients with inflammatory bowel disease face a high likelihood of surgery and hospitalization, which causes additional strain on an already overburdened health care system. Up to 60% of Crohn's disease patients require surgery after 10 years following diagnosis. Newer advanced therapies have been shown to improve patient outcomes, but public access to these therapies takes time.

In oncology, Canada has some of the longest medication-access wait times in the world, and thousands of years of life are lost every year as Canadians living with cancer cannot access effective new medications. In fact, a report by the Conference Board of Canada showed that "Canadian patients could have had an additional 226,445 years of life through access to breakthrough treatments in the past decade." These life-years lost had an economic value of \$5.9 billion, it estimates.

AbbVie is recommending that the government of Ontario make the reimbursement process for all drug therapies more collaborative, transparent and allow for more stakeholder interaction sooner in the process to facilitate a smooth implementation. With oncology, we recommend the government grant access earlier to medicines with promising value and in areas of high unmet needs. We also recommend that the government increase transparency on the work the government and its public drug program are doing to improve time to patient. Industry would like to collaborate and play a productive role in identifying opportunities to improve the process.

Leadership opportunities exist elsewhere too. With hepatitis C—HCV—Ontario committed to the WHO elimination goal of HCV by 2030. Unfortunately, Ontario is only one of three provinces that have fallen behind this global target. A coalition of Ontario-based health care professionals, researchers and patient association representatives specializing in HCV have published, in 2023, a comprehensive HCV elimination road map, providing government with a detailed priority population HCV elimination approach.

Accelerating elimination efforts to meet this target would save Ontario up to \$114.5 million in health care savings by preventing long-term liver disease, including cirrhosis and liver cancer. With a renewed commitment and more targeted testing, our province can get back on track to eliminating this potentially fatal disease by 2030.

In conclusion, AbbVie would like to work with your government to address these health care system challenges, improve the quality of life for patients and reduce unnecessary hospitalizations. To help make these possibilities real, we encourage the government of Ontario to apply resources, including funding, to the Life Sciences Council, and implement recommendations from that body,

especially as they relate to improved time to patient and better access to novel innovations in therapy.

Thank you for the opportunity to present here today on behalf of AbbVie Canada.

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

We now will go to the Arthritis Society Canada. I did want to make sure I mentioned: Always, everyone who speaks, introduce yourself for Hansard to make sure we attribute the comments to the right person.

Ms. Joanne Di Nardo: Great, thank you. I'm Joanne Di Nardo, senior director, public policy and government affairs. I will be joined online by Anna Marie Sneath, who is director, clinical impact performance, at the arthritis rehabilitation education program.

Good morning. Thank you for inviting Arthritis Canada to present here today.

Arthritis is serious, and seriously misunderstood. It affects more Canadians than any other chronic disease, and there is no cure. Over six million people living in Canada—one in five—live with arthritis, with that number projected to grow to nine million by 2040. In Ontario, 2.3 million people have arthritis and it is a leading cause of disability and workplace limitations.

If you think it is a disease of the elderly, it is not. Half of Canadians living with arthritis are under the age of 65, and nearly one third of people living with osteoarthritis are diagnosed before the age of 45. There are 25,000 children and youth living with arthritis. It is clearly not "just" arthritis.

We were at Queen's Park in October for our MPP education day, where we, along with many patient volunteers, presented our policy recommendations, which are:

- reducing wait times for joint replacement surgeries;
- ensuring people with arthritis have access to medications, which, for arthritis, is a range of treatment options, including biologics and biosimilars; and
- importantly, supporting community-based care programs for people with arthritis.

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Today, we wish to focus this presentation on the importance of the Arthritis Society Canada's Arthritis Rehabilitation and Education Program—the acronym, AREP—and in particular, a pilot project we are requesting funding of \$683,000 to support: a rapid access clinic for rheumatology called the Rheum-RAC, a community-based model of care that will improve access to care and time to diagnosis, which is critical for inflammatory arthritis and helps address the health human resources challenges through the integration of specially trained allied health professionals into primary care.

I would like now to invite my colleague and director of clinical impact and performance, Anna Marie Sneath, to speak on this program.

Ms. Anna Marie Sneath: Good morning, and yes, I am Anna Marie Sneath, the director for AREP.

The Arthritis Rehabilitation and Education Program is a \$5-million program delivered by Arthritis Society Canada with funding from the Ministry of Health. The program

provides community-based physiotherapy, occupational therapy and social work rehabilitation services for Ontarians across the province and has been doing so for over 50 years.

We provide about 12,000 visits per year. With 12 specific AREP offices, we also operate in 58 other community spaces that function as partnerships in kind. This allows us to see as many people as possible over as wide a range of geography as possible, in centres like primary care physician offices, clinics, hospitals and other community centres. We have expanded our reach by harnessing technology and virtual components, matching the needs of the clients we serve by offering everything from telephone to computer and in-person visits.

We provide the self-management chronic disease model, which empowers individuals with the knowledge and tools they need to manage their disease over the course of their lifetime. It is a very efficient program consisting of one to four visits, including education, splinting, activity and exercise prescription, resources and linkages to other services. Individuals may access our program as many times as they need over the course of their life—because it is a chronic disease.

With over 90% client satisfaction, the AREP program has been identified as, often, the very first time patients have had the opportunity to talk with a health care provider about how to properly manage their disease.

AREP has had a long history of working alongside rheumatologists. Over the last 20 years, we have invested in nine advanced clinical practitioners in arthritis care, known as ACPAC, therapists. These are occupational therapists and physiotherapists specially trained in arthritis care. To support health system innovation, we have applied for government funding to pilot a rapid access clinic, RAC, model for rheumatology that would place ACPAC therapists directly in primary care to serve as a conduit between the family physician and rheumatologist. The purpose is to ensure the patients receive timely access to the right care at the right time from the right provider.

According to Canadian Rheumatology Association benchmarks, best practice for arthritis is to see a rheumatologist for diagnosis and appropriate medical management within four weeks or less. Sadly, two bottlenecks are consistently blocking this pathway: one, the referrer, which is the family physician, and secondly, at the level of the receiver, the rheumatologist.

The lack of family physicians, combined with those experiencing burnout or planning retirement, is very real. Rheumatologists are low in number, with many retirements and several new physicians choosing to work only part-time. Their wait-lists are often closed. Many referrals that occupy space on the rheumatology wait-list—approximately 40%—are not necessarily suitable for these services.

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

Ms. Anna Marie Sneath: The resulting limited access leads patients to further deterioration, suffering, increased costs, repeat family doctor visits and unnecessary testing.

We must look beyond physicians to close this gap. ACPAC therapists have the specialized skills to assess and triage arthritis, are quicker to train, and costs are lower. The evidence shows excellent agreement in assessment

findings of ACPACs with rheumatology. ACPACs are well respected in the world of rheumatology, using their skills and knowledge to triage referrals based on urgency. This can produce faster throughput.

We currently have a pilot site and MOU with the Windsor Family Health Team, and we are moving in similar ways with the Peterborough Family Health Team. Government funding would allow us to develop in three more sites across the province as well as to support adequate collection/analysis of metrics and data so integral to this work. We are dedicated to pursuing the model because it makes good clinical and economic sense.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the seven minutes. Hopefully, we'll get the rest of it in the questions.

We now go to the ALS Society of Canada, Central and Central East Ontario. The floor is yours.

Ms. Joanna Oachis: Thank you all for this opportunity to share with you the urgent needs of the ALS community. My name is Joanna Oachis. I'm the community lead in central and central east Ontario. I'm here on behalf of ALS Canada, representing approximately 1,300 Ontarians and their families living with ALS.

ALS is a terminal disease that gradually paralyzes people. With no cure, 80% of people living with ALS will die within three to five years. The progressive nature of ALS results in substantial care needs that increase over time. However, Ontario's health care system is not meeting these needs, leaving people living with ALS unable to access the critical care and support they urgently require. These issues extend beyond the immediate health care concerns. It impacts our communities, our economy and our very fabric of Ontario. Without dedicated and sustainable funding for ALS care and support, people living with ALS face greater risk, leading to increased strains on our health care resources.

The five ALS clinics located in Ontario are working beyond capacity, unable to meet the unique levels of complex care patients require. ALS Canada addresses the gap in clinical equipment and community support services by providing over 40 different types of equipment in a timely manner and direct psychological support to communities to more than 8,000 Ontarians affected by this disease. These vital services should not be funded by donor dollars; this is unsustainable. This puts Ontarians living with ALS and their families in an increasingly vulnerable position, where we are seeing one out of four people living with ALS choosing to go through with MAID.

However, between these challenges, there is hope and an opportunity for change. To respond to this urgent need, ALS Canada, in collaboration with the five regional ALS clinics, developed the Ontario Provincial ALS Program, which presents comprehensive solutions to complex issues. For budget 2024, we are asking the provincial government to implement the recommendations outlined in the Ontario Provincial ALS Program:

(1) Investments in ALS clinics to ensure the clinical care needs of the communities are met.

(2) Sustainable funding for ALS Canada's equipment program and community services so people living with ALS in Ontario can maximize their quality of life and minimize additional costs to the health care system between emergency interventions.

(3) Formation of a secretariat to ensure the program's effectiveness and value for money.

(4) Development of a regional strategy for people living in northern and rural Ontario to get the care they need.

The total investment required for this transformative program is estimated at \$6.6 million, which is a modest figure in comparison to the profound impact it promises.

As we consider budget 2024, together with the Ontario government we can ease the burden of ALS and ensure Ontarians living with ALS and their loved ones receive the care and support they rightly deserve.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak here today.

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

We will now go to the questions and answers. We'll start with the official opposition. MPP Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to all presenters this morning. I appreciate you coming out to share your thoughts on budget 2024.

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I will start with you, Joanna, just because I think by now most committee members will now know somebody or have a family member or friend who is dealing with ALS. I would also say the same thing with arthritis, for that matter.

I just wanted to give you an opportunity to expand, please, on your third recommendation. Obviously, the clinics are needed to maximize access to the best kind of health care, and a regional strategy is absolutely needed, given the disparity in resources based on where you happen to live in Ontario. And the equipment piece as well is, obviously, key for the quality-of-life piece. But the third recommendation—can you just expand on that a little bit, please?

Ms. Joanna Oachis: I think our advocacy team requests information of a secretariat in order to oversee the program effectiveness. I don't have a lot of details about this, but I can definitely put you in contact with our advocacy team that works on this.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. That's good. It's interesting, because whatever money goes into this budget to address these key health issues, I think that we're all invested in making sure that that money is well spent and strategically invested. So I would appreciate some follow-up on that, if you don't mind.

Ms. Joanna Oachis: For sure.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The \$6.6-million ask: Can you give some context for how this investment would play itself out, given what folks who have ALS and their families are going through right now?

Ms. Joanna Oachis: For sure. In my role, I work directly with families that are diagnosed with ALS. I can speak about the families' needs, for sure, and the need for funding. The current funding mechanisms for clinical care and community support—of course, equipment is included in this—

are inadequate and inappropriate. All the equipment that we provide is funded by donor dollars. The equipment requires quite a significant amount of our funding throughout the year, and it's definitely unsustainable at the rate of increasing cases in Ontario.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, that's another point that I wanted to—so it's safe to say that right now, we're fundraising to ensure some kind of quality of life for ALS patients. Is that accurate?

Ms. Joanna Oachis: Yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: But there is a rise; there has been an uptick in ALS patients and cases. Can you speak to that at all?

Ms. Joanna Oachis: Yes. We track the uptick, and it's over 20% in 2023, an increase in ALS cases in Ontario. I'm pretty sure, because the clinics work at capacity right now and they're finding themselves limited at accepting people—we're afraid that a lot of people will fall through the tracks because there's a lack of funding in the clinics. They don't have the staff to deal with all the new cases that come their way.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And that leads me to the research question, and then I'm going to segue to the arthritis society. Investing in research pays dividends, actually, in the quality of care and ensuring, when we do invest, that those dollars actually impact the lives of Ontarians. So, research is something that I'd also like to follow up on with the ALS Society as well.

Just moving over to you—is it Joanne?

Ms. Joanne Di Nardo: Yes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I wanted to give you an opportunity also to talk about the impact of research dollars on arthritis and patients in Ontario, because we are seeing more juvenile arthritis in society. Can you talk about the impact of those needed dollars and how it would improve the lives of those who are dealing with arthritis?

Ms. Joanne Di Nardo: Definitely. In October, we actually released a State of Arthritis in Canada Report Card in which we graded provinces across the country. Ontario received a grade of C, as did BC, Alberta and Quebec. And that was the highest grade, so it tells us that we have a lot of work to do, and especially on the research and innovation side of things.

We are the largest funder of arthritis research in Canada, the Arthritis Society Canada, and we see that research translate. However, their research investments have stagnated over the last 10 years. They flatlined. The investment in research for arthritis has stagnated. With a population that is aging—although it is not a disease just of the elderly—and with innovative therapies that we need to look at in treatment options, self-management, it is so important that we continue to invest in arthritis and help these researchers continue and action the research which we fund them for.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It kind of ties in with equipment and also funding for ensuring that people can live in their own home, for instance, for as long as possible, because some arthritis is completely and utterly debilitating. Can you speak to the community support that's needed?

Ms. Joanne Di Nardo: Yes, and I'm going to pivot that to Anna Marie, because the program which she works with, AREP, is fundamental to that self-management and community support.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Please go ahead, Anna Marie.

Ms. Anna Marie Sneath: Yes, okay.

People, as you put it, living in the community, staying in their homes—that is the aim. The key with arthritis, though, is to get your diagnosis and to get medication. If you can't get that, the deterioration happens tremendously. This is why we are pushing to try and get a clearer line between the client and not having to wait a year or two years to see a rheumatologist. That's the ACPAC program that we have applied for the innovation funding model for. With a modest fee, I think—

Ms. Catherine Fife: What is the actual financial ask, Anna Marie, for that program?

Ms. Anna Marie Sneath: We're asking for \$683,000. The model of care fund goes up to \$2 million, and we're asking for \$683,000. The arthritis society is putting in over \$900,000 themselves in our current work, because we're so committed to this.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. You're doing the heavy lifting on the fundraising and some of the community care piece. So the \$683,000, that would fill in the gap to ensure that more people have access?

Ms. Anna Marie Sneath: Exactly—that we can place people more strategically across the province to get connected to rheumatologists so that they can get their diagnosis and their medication going.

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

We'll now go to MPP Pang.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you, firstly I want to welcome everyone to Markham–Unionville, which I have the honour to represent and to serve. Through you to all the presenters, thank you for your dedication to health initiatives serving different groups of people.

Our government's plan to build includes more than \$48 billion over 10 years in health infrastructure, including \$32 billion in capital grants to support more than 50 hospital projects that would add 3,000 new beds over 10 years to increase access to reliable quality care. To all the presenters, how do you see this investment, like this, can impact the work your organizations do? Maybe follow the presentation sequence.

Ms. Amanda Thambirajah: Sure. I think, in terms of investing more into infrastructure, that opens up an opportunity to improve upon care pathways for patients as they move from acute care to community care to long-term care. For example, patients with post-stroke spasticity—ensuring that, as that infrastructure is built, it's built in such a way that allows for proper assessment, diagnosis and treatment for people with post-stroke spasticity and ensuring that they can receive care equitably across the province. Developing those models of care alongside those infrastructure investments is really important in terms of ensuring that patients have optimal health outcomes.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you.

Ms. Joanne Di Nardo: I guess I'm next in order.

Yes, I definitely agree that investments in infrastructure are key to ensuring that the patients have access. But it is not only, "We build it; they come." We build it; we need to ensure they have the access, and what are they coming to? And do they need that care at this time? So, really, at Arthritis Society Canada, us ensuring that patients have access to connected care, and speaking to the community aspect that was just mentioned is critical in ensuring that the entry into the system is appropriate.

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So, if we're talking about wait times for joint replacement, for example, we want to make sure that patients have gone through self-management, a community joint management program, so that they are the appropriate candidate to utilize these fantastic investments in infrastructure. Really, we definitely applaud those investments; those are key. Now, it's really about making sure patients have access, but the right access at the right time by the right provider.

Ms. Joanna Oachis: I totally agree with the other presenters as well.

I think investment in infrastructure is important and focusing on investing also in the community to help the community and people living with the illness—it's important as well, like equipment for people diagnosed with ALS. Supporting the clinics that diagnose and support these people throughout the course of the disease is important.

So, yes, thank you for looking into investing in that.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Anyone else? MPP Triantafilopoulos.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you very much to all the presenters. You all work in very vital areas of our health sciences and, obviously, disease that, for many years, have not perhaps gotten the attention they needed, both in arthritis and with respect to the ALS Society.

I would like to ask you both, and then I have a question as well for you at AbbVie: If there was one thing—one ask you would have of the Ontario government—that would make the life of an individual who is currently suffering with ALS or with arthritis, what would that ask be?

Ms. Joanna Oachis: Yes, I would definitely say that investing in the equipment program at ALS Canada is important. It's hard to weigh—the clinics or equipment, but I would opt for the equipment. Working in the community and seeing these people every day, they're struggling and we don't have all the equipment that they need sometimes, and the amount of money they have to spend dealing with the illness and losing their jobs—the caregiver losing their job as well. It's really heartbreaking.

If there's one ask, I would ask for the government of Ontario to invest in ALS Canada's equipment program.

Ms. Joanne Di Nardo: And, for us, it is definitely the Rheum-RAC proposal that we have in, because that is really how to triage patients effectively when we have the bottleneck, which Anna Marie referred to—that bottleneck

that happens at the family physician level and at the rheumatologist level. We can avoid that by implementing these community-based solutions.

They also target populations that are not in the urban demographic. They target populations in the rural demographic, and really help to provide that access to care and to connect people with arthritis to other like-minded people as well, because that program expands not only specifically in that rheumatology, but is connected to the arthritis rehabilitation and education program that addresses osteoarthritis as well.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Now, you mentioned there are about six million people in Canada—about 2.4 million in Ontario—that suffer with arthritis. I know that arthritis is a very complex disease, and it's not just osteoarthritis, but it's also rheumatoid arthritis. Could you expand on that?

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

Ms. Joanne Di Nardo: I'm going to let Anna Marie speak to that, as she's more the specialist in that area.

Ms. Anna Marie Sneath: There's over 100 different types of inflammatory disease. You mentioned rheumatoid, that's one, but osteo—everybody seems to know about—and the inflammatory side of the house. Connective tissue diseases—there's multiple and they often affect multiple systems of the body; it's not just your joints. So, the effects can be quite disabling, impairing ability to work, to care for one's self—it goes on and on. It's so critical that people get an early diagnosis and on their way to their medical therapy, in order for us to keep moving the needle and do the rest of the work.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: And how many people in Ontario would in fact be suffering from ALS?

Ms. Joanna Oachis: In Ontario, we have about 1,300 people living with ALS.

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

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to all our presenters who have come to committee this morning.

I'd like to start my questions off with Joanna from the ALS Society of Canada. First, I just want to thank you and your organization for presenting yesterday, today as well as tomorrow. It's very clear that you care quite deeply about the people you serve, and I just want to thank you for that.

The deputation yesterday mentioned that ALS patients have about three to five years left on their life after they're diagnosed, and it really brings to mind the question about access to many different types of therapy.

I wanted to specifically ask about the types of equipment and modifications that patients have to make to their homes. First of all, what are those modifications, generally speaking, and what happens if patients aren't able to make those modifications to their homes? Where would they end up going?

Ms. Joanna Oachis: I can definitely speak to that. Working directly with families, I see a lot of things in the community. ALS is a neurological progressive disease, so definitely, people diagnosed with ALS go from using a

walker to a wheelchair, a hospital bed, a Hoyer lift, so equipment needs are changing constantly.

With that, home modification: installation of stairlifts, porch lifts, bathroom modification to make it wheelchair accessible. Doors need to be wide because constructors don't think about widening the doors when they're building. That's a few of the major challenges our clients have during the course of the disease.

Every piece of equipment costs a lot of money, and some families have to—the caregivers have to leave their jobs. Obviously, people diagnosed with ALS lose their jobs as well, so they find themselves in financial restraint. I've had families who had to move into a basement apartment just to be able to live. A few of them chose MAID because they didn't want to be a burden to their families. It's really heartbreaking to see this in the community.

Like I said, we struggle at ALS Canada to provide all the equipment needs for our clients. On a day-to-day basis, equipment comes in in the local and goes out. We have a lot of deliveries, and we cover all of Ontario.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Okay, thank you very much for that. It's disturbing for anyone to hear that one of the options that people are considering is MAID because of that lack of support from the provincial government.

I also wanted to ask, in terms of families—I'm thinking of the caregivers, the spouses as well as the children and all of those affected. If there was support from the government for ALS patients, would you also like to see certain services that could be delivered to the families through the ALS program?

Ms. Joanna Oachis: Absolutely. The biggest challenge—I will say, all our clients want is to stay at home and die at home. When you have this terminal diagnosis, you don't want to go into long-term care. You don't want to end up in a complex care unit or a palliative care unit or a hospice. They want to stay at home, and they want to die there, and that's why we have all these systems in place. ALS clinics, multidisciplinary clinics—we work very closely with them. They provide occupational therapy services, social workers.

They don't necessarily have to access everything in the community, so if there's a need, I communicate directly with the clinic and things are getting done. That's why funding for the clinic and ALS Society of Ontario is very important, because we are a team. We're a big team. We're not alone.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you very much.

My next questions will be for the Arthritis Society of Canada and Joanne. Myself, my background is in education. I used to be a teacher. It's disturbing to hear that Ontario is getting a C grade. How could further funding help us raise our grade from a C to a B or even to an A?

Ms. Joanne Di Nardo: Yes, so many things: improving wait times for joint replacement surgeries; enabling better access to care; continuing to expand the list of medications, ensuring that arthritis patients have a range of treatment options; investing in research.

And also, to talk about the research that was done to get to the grades in Canada, we had a limit on data. We just don't know a lot. So there is a pan-Canadian data strategy,

which we're following and looking towards that implementation and being involved in that. But it is so important to have the sharing of information and data available so we truly understand what the challenges are. Some of those grades may not be the true grade because we don't really know, and that's really what this report shone a light on: that we don't know a lot and we need to know more. We've sort of been this underdog condition disease that really needs to be paid attention to because, like MPP Fife said, everybody knows somebody with arthritis.

1040

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Most definitely. I just want to thank you for also pointing out the number of young people who suffer from arthritis and helping to shine a light on that as well.

When was your funding request submitted, and have you had any response whatsoever from the government?

Ms. Joanne Di Nardo: Anna Marie?

Ms. Anna Marie Sneath: We submitted at the end of August as a submission under the Models of Care Innovation Fund, but we haven't had any notification yet. We're not sure that anyone has. We were expecting to hear much earlier.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you very much for that.

My next questions will be for Amanda and AbbVie Canada. Amanda, you mentioned the scope of practice for midwives. As you might know, Ontario midwives won their lawsuit last year because midwives experienced gender-based discrimination and should be compensated equitably to eliminate the gender wage gap. Do you find that pay equity issues contribute to the problems with barriers to access to care?

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's a big question.

Ms. Amanda Thambirajah: That's a very good question. AbbVie focuses on ensuring that you have the right types of care, including health care professionals as well as access to innovation, so some of them that I mentioned—all of that contributes to executing on a care model that can improve patient outcomes. So there's always necessary functions that need to take place in order to provide that care to patients.

I do have a few of my colleagues on the virtual Zoom. Would any of you like to contribute to that question? David?

Mr. David Link: No further comments other than what you've already mentioned.

Ms. Amanda Thambirajah: Okay. Thanks, David.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I did want to ask, what recommendations would you make to the government with respect to clinical trials in Ontario?

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Oh, I'm sorry about that. Another big question.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: First of all, thank you to all the representatives who are here. Thank you for taking the time and coming here.

I'm going to start with Arthritis Society Canada. First of all, I'm blown away with the data that you provided, so thank you for providing the data. I knew that arthritis is one of the most common diseases, but I didn't know the extent. I always feel when we say one in five, in other words, 20%, but for the person who is suffering, it is not 20%, it is 100%. That is very valuable to us, so thank you.

I was looking at the information: "fighting the fire of arthritis with research, advocacy, innovation, information and support"—amazing mission statement. As we all know, Ontario expanded the use of biosimilar drug treatments for Ontarians this year and you have applauded it, so thank you for that applause.

Talking about the data which you were just talking about, do you have data on demographics? I did look at your report for the year. It talks about age, it talks about gender, but do you have location—where in Ontario? I'm more concerned about Ontario being a part of the Ontario government.

Then, ethnicity—as an example, when we talk about diabetes, we talk about Peel region as the capital of diabetes—so that we can focus, as MPPs of those areas, as well. Do you have the data available that you can share?

Ms. Joanne Di Nardo: I think we would like to dive into that a lot more. We probably have some early numbers, but not enough to report. I can say that is sometimes a challenge. When you're trying to report data in a region to understand the impact on ethnicity, you don't want to make statements that aren't actually correct or evidence-based, so we are definitely looking at that data a lot more. We have pieces, but not enough to fully report.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Perfect. I would appreciate if you could share it with us when it is available and ready.

You talked about how it's going to be nine million in 2040 which, technically speaking, is going to be 50% more than today. But in terms of the population, what percentage is it increasing? Is it increasing because, technically, by 2040 the population is not going to be 15 million, it's going to be more than 15 million? You don't have to answer it right now, but if you can share that as well, not just as a number but as a percentage of the population so that we can see the trajectory in terms of support needed, in terms of funding needed—as my colleague was talking about, moving from C to B to A. Of course, we always try to be A in every category from the government side—

Ms. Joanne Di Nardo: Sorry, just to respond to the question on demographics also—I didn't mention, though: It does impact women more than men, so on that side we definitely see more arthritis in women than men. Also, in terms of the percentage, I can get you that information, but also to know that it's likely under-reported because some people don't recognize or don't associate arthritis with their joint replacement, for example, or their knee or hip problems or whatever—their joint issues.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Absolutely. And, again, going back to fundamentals and what I started with, maybe it's one in five, but for the people who have it, it's 100%. So we definitely want to help the community.

Being in the Ministry of Labour, I always look at that angle, as well. Arthritis is one of the most common disabilities. It can impact people's ability to take part in the labour market. Our government provides ODSP employment support for people with disabilities. We recently made an announcement of \$6.5 million to support 3,770 people with disabilities to find meaningful jobs.

Since you know arthritis and you know people with arthritis, what suggestion do you have to expand—if we can take any initiative, especially to support innovative solutions that would help people with arthritis to find meaningful jobs, or whatever they're doing, to help them to do better?

Ms. Joanne Di Nardo: Yes, we definitely want the acknowledgement of episodic disabilities integrated into that definition of "disability" and we've seen that with, for example, the Canada Disability Benefit, in which we had many of our volunteers provide their input and their patient experience with their own disability, with their arthritis. We would want to make sure that there are accommodations available to people with arthritis and the ability to do their work and to understand that sometimes the pain is too much, or the pain is not manageable, and they might need a hybrid working environment or they may need accommodations in their workspaces.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Quickly, in less than a minute if you can because I have to pass on to my colleague: Your idea of self-management, can you elaborate?

Ms. Joanne Di Nardo: Definitely what is taught to them from the Arthritis Rehabilitation and Education Program and through even the Rheum-RAC proposal that we have in, that would give a patient the resources, teach them what exercises they can do, how to best manage their medication, storage—all those aspects in which they can manage their condition independently, but still come back to us to utilize our resources if they need it.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you so much, Chair. To MPP Smith.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm going to start with AbbVie. A little background on this: I've been involved with the SCOFEA budget consultations for the entire five and a half years that I've been an MPP. One year our provincial budget was about \$181 billion, and we had \$202 billion in additional funding requests that year. We increased the funding by about \$9 billion. When we do these kinds of consultations, we get a lot of requests for a lot of funding, and there are a lot of challenges that are involved in it because obviously there is only a certain amount of money that we have.

Being a pharmaceutical group, I greatly appreciate that you're coming forward and looking for faster—

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

Mr. Dave Smith: —approvals on different types of treatments. Should we also be looking at, when we bring something on that's new and innovative, removing something that potentially that new innovation could replace, or should we continue to fund things that have always been on the list simply because they have been on the list?

Ms. Amanda Thambirajah: I'm going to refer that question to my colleague David. David, would you like to answer that?

Mr. David Link: Yes, thank you for the question. From our perspective, those decisions in terms of what existing technology should no longer be funded is really left to the provincial government decision-makers, and they have lots of those people, including the committee for evaluation of drugs in Ontario.

I'll just stop there and see if my colleague Adam has any other comments on that.

1050

Mr. Adam Cook: Yes, thank you, David. I'm Adam Cook, manager, government affairs and market access, with AbbVie.

I would agree. I think there's a lot of—we call these formularies, the list of the publicly available drugs—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question. We'll have to move along.

It also concludes the time for this panel, so I want to thank all the presenters for taking the time to prepare for this meeting and being here and sharing it with us. I'm sure that it will be quite helpful as we continue our deliberations for the 2024 budget.

THE ATMOSPHERIC FUND

MS. MARION BURT

ONTARIO MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Our next panel is the Atmospheric Fund, the Ontario Museum Association and Marion Burt, if they will come forward. Marion Burt will be virtual, for the information of the committee.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I'm just told we are a little ahead of time. We'll start with the Atmospheric Fund presentation. We may have to recess for a few minutes for the other two that are not present yet.

With that, I think we heard the instructions before. You will have seven minutes to make your presentation. At the start of the presentation, we ask that you introduce yourself to make sure that Hansard records the name properly to the comments that are made. You have seven minutes, but at the six-minute mark, I will say, "One minute," and then at seven minutes I will say, "Thank you very much for your presentation."

With that, we'll ask you to start with your presentation.

Mr. Evan Wiseman: Great, thank you so much. My name is Evan Wiseman and I am the senior climate policy manager at the Atmospheric Fund. We are a regional climate agency that invests in low-carbon solutions for the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, and we help scale them up for broad implementation by working with stakeholders in the private, public and non-profit sectors.

I'd like to begin by thanking the members of the finance and economic affairs committee for this opportunity to provide feedback on this budget. I realize that the time is

short and we have a lot of people who asked to appear, so I really do appreciate talking to you about our comments today.

My goal is to offer you recommendations that the Ontario government is uniquely positioned to take to increase energy efficiency and directly reduce costs to taxpayers and ratepayers alike. I will talk to you about new homes, retrofitting existing homes and electric vehicle adoption today.

First, I'd like to begin with energy efficiency. Housing prices are high and the stated goal of 1.5 million new homes will help ease the situation. Those homes are only affordable if they are affordable to operate. The Ontario government has powerful means at its disposal to help make those homes more affordable to live in and reduce the impact on our electricity grid, which will help prevent electricity rate increases.

This is done by increasing the conservation demand management budget. The Independent Electricity System Operator, or IESO, has said that for every dollar spent on conservation, it saves taxpayers and ratepayers \$2 of investment in new electricity supply. Conservation programs are currently funded exclusively via the rate base, which seriously limits the potential to invest in energy efficiency programs that provide long-term benefits to both ratepayers and the electricity system generally.

We recommend allocating \$250 million annually from the tax base to supplement the CDM budget over the next four years. This will directly reduce the budget impact of electricity rate subsidies, which are currently absorbing about \$7 billion in taxes annually and rising. This would produce almost half a billion dollars in savings each year. As we say in the efficiency game, the cheapest kilowatt hour is the one you don't use.

Additionally, on the energy efficiency side, we would like to recommend enhancing the conservation demand management budget to restore some of the previously existing programs that incentivized high energy efficiency construction in new builds. The 1.5-million new homes, if they are built, will be largely inefficient homes that will put unnecessary and expensive strain on the provincial electricity grid and require additional energy supply to accommodate them. Historically, new construction programs were the most cost-effective program that the government had, generating almost over \$5 in system benefits for every \$1 allocated.

The second point, and it's a far smaller budget ask, is to build on an existing program that the Ontario government is already pursuing. That is the \$12-million Clean Home Heating Initiative, which is currently in six municipalities in southwestern Ontario and in Durham, serving a maximum of 1,500 single-family homes right now.

We recommend allocating an additional \$12 million to create a multi-residential system stream, supporting the adoption of hybrid heat pump solutions in apartments and condos. Multi-unit buildings in communities like Markham, York region and Ontario generally represent about a third of Ontarians who are left out of almost every government program.

The hybrid heating is more cost-effective in multi-family homes. We estimate a \$12-million program could reach over 5,000 households. Expanding this program to the multi-unit building sector can help reduce energy loads and save ratepayers by enabling smart fuel transition.

My last point is around electric vehicles. The government has made significant investments in the automotive industry to ensure its continued growth and development in Ontario. However, without adequate infrastructure, EV adoption will be slow. Ontarians should be able to drive the cars that they make.

We have a straightforward recommendation, and that is to expand the current ChargeON program from its one-time \$91-million budget to an annual budget of \$91 million for four years. We would also recommend broadening this program to include multiple funding streams, mirroring programs like the federal ZEVIP program or the BC program CleanBC Go, including the funding stream to support EV readiness in multi-family housing.

These three points will have a demonstrable impact on reducing rates, saving taxpayer dollars and increasing the affordability of homes. If you have any questions, I'm more than happy to answer them today and also to follow up with any additional information after this session.

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

Our next presentation is from Marion Burt. I believe that she's online. It's a virtual presentation.

Ms. Marion Burt: Yes, I am.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): There we are.

Ms. Marion Burt: Yes, can you hear me?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Yes, we can. Thank you very much. You did hear the instructions, I hope, from—

Ms. Marion Burt: I did, and I've done this before.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Very good, thank you very much. Then the floor is yours. Introduce yourself for Hansard and then carry on with your presentation.

Ms. Marion Burt: First of all, thank you very much for having me here today. My name is Marion Burt, and I'm a vaper. I'm retired, and I have never been associated with the vape or tobacco industries.

I am part of an informal group called Vapers for a Smoke-Free Canada that regularly meets with the director of tobacco and vaping control at Health Canada, at her request. She seems to understand that Parliament and Health Canada serve all Canadians, even adults who smoke or who have escaped from smoking by switching to vaping.

Ten years ago, my doctor warned me that I was developing COPD and should stop smoking. I bought a vaping starter kit, and from my first puff of apple-flavoured e-liquid, I knew that I would never smoke again. And I haven't. My doctor pronounces my lung function as perfect at every checkup.

I am just one of thousands of success stories in Ontario, but I'm sure you seldom hear about us. Some of us are retired. Some are well-to-do. Others survive on CPP or modest pensions. Most of us started to smoke when it was accepted, but switched to vaping for the sake of our health,

or because the increasing taxes on cigarettes made it impossible for us to continue. You'll see that as a good thing, and so do I, but I don't think that the people who devised this tax know much about vaping, so I'll explain. There are several types of vapes. I use the original model that is sold in dedicated vape stores. This is a type that contains a battery, a tank to hold the liquid and a coil. The liquid is sold separately, and it's available in several levels of nicotine, allowing vapers to gradually taper down through less nicotine if they want to.

1100

When I started to vape, I knew nothing either. That was where the dedicated vape stores came in. The owners and the staff of these stores had almost all switched from smoking to vaping and wanted to help others make the same switch to better health. For the past more than 10 years, they have been patiently guiding and advising people who currently smoke how to use these devices, giving encouragement and answering questions.

Then, about five years ago, new devices appeared: pod systems and disposables. They're simple to use, and there's almost no maintenance. They contain only a couple of nicotine levels, both a lot higher than what most adult vapers use. Most dedicated vape shops do not carry the disposables and only a few types of the pod systems. These are sold primarily in convenience stores and gas stations.

It's true that this tax seems to be higher on the disposables, but you must remember that most kids get one or two high-nicotine vapes for a party. Adults who vape consume a lot more e-liquid, and the tax will have a huge impact on them. A 60-millilitre bottle of e-liquid originally cost about \$30 plus HST. The federal excise tax implemented last year added about \$10 plus more HST. If Ontario accepts the invitation to take part in this tax, the same bottle will cost \$50 plus even more HST.

Since most of this e-liquid contains less nicotine than the pods and the disposables, possibly resulting in the use of more e-liquid, adults like me will actually be paying more than the kids. The rationale behind this is that kids are less able to afford such a price hike, but simple observation shows that most middle-class kids have more disposable income or money than retired people, especially those who have spent thousands of dollars over decades of smoking. So my choices are:

(1) Pay the tax very resentfully, because past experience tells me that the proceeds will go to spreading anti-vaping reports and rumours.

(2) I can increase my nicotine level, hoping that this lets me use less e-liquid.

(3) Find a black market source of e-liquid on which I will pay no tax. I won't have the confidence that the e-liquid is clean and without harmful additives. This happened with the EVALI disaster in the US a couple of years ago.

(4) I can make my own e-liquid. It's not difficult. I'd rather not have bottles of nicotine in my freezer, but if it becomes a choice between that and smoking, I'll do it.

If many people take the latter two options, what will happen to the dedicated vape stores? Their only source of revenue is the sale of the devices and the e-liquid. If the sales of the e-liquid fall off, the stores will close. Several long-term stores in Ontario have closed in this past year because of the effect of the federal tax. If Ontario decides to double the tax, we'll lose even more.

Note that this won't have much effect on the convenience stores and gas stations. They have a variety of products to sell, and the kids will get what they want. But every closure of a vape store means that adults who smoke are deprived of the support, advice and encouragement that it can provide. It's time that the government recognized that vape stores perform a service for public health and deserve to be treated with understanding and respect. Please don't join the federal government in its attack on adult vapers—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. We've run out of time for the presentation. Hopefully the rest will come through in the question and answer period.

We will now go to the Ontario Museum Association, and I believe that I gave the instructions prior to you being here, so you have seven minutes to make your presentation. We ask you to introduce yourself to make sure we get your name correct in Hansard, and at the six-minute mark I will say, "One minute", and at the seven-minute mark, I will say "Thank you for your presentation." With that, the floor is now yours.

Ms. Sandy Chan: Good morning, honourable members, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Sandy Chan, and I am the executive director of the Ontario Museum Association. Today, I'm here to ask the province to partner with the museum sector across Ontario in support of growing employment in the heritage sector.

Did you know that the museum sector employs over 9,000 workers across the province, supporting Ontario's \$26-million cultural industry? The tourism industry is a key incubator for career growth. We hire more young people, more women and more new Canadians than the overall workforce. To ensure that museums thrive in Ontario, we need less precarious jobs.

There are over 700 museums in the province and yet 534 of them—that's over 75%—have no operating support. We are asking the province to invest sustainably in this sector so that institutions can feed the skills and the talents that we develop in museums back into Ontario, which directly contributes to economic well-being.

In one year, Ontario's museums attract 20 million visitors to communities across the province. Cultural tourism is the fastest-growing type of tourism globally. Attracting visitors to stay longer and spend more, our 700 museums across the province provide important economic stimulus in both urban and rural communities across the province.

Museums are also important local community hubs, and I want to take a moment to highlight the work of my colleagues here in Markham. The Markham Museum and the York Region District School Board Museum and

Archives collaborated with over 300 community partners to bring the community together through a community-driven project entitled “Standing in the Doorway: Lived Histories and Experiences of the Chinese Community.”

This project brings to light the history of the Chinese Exclusion Act to foster community engagement, to develop cross-sector collaborations and to boost the local economy. There are currently very few exhibitions and projects which address topics that are reflective and relevant to this diasporic community. Topics such as impact of historic anti-Asian racism, the repeal of the Exclusion Act and the recent impacts of the pandemic on our Chinese community. Still fewer will realize and know about the parallels between the experience of Chinese Canadians and the Indigenous peoples.

So, this exhibition tells an important story through our culturally responsive and anti-colonial narrative. It is a story not only about Canada’s discriminatory history, but it is also a story about the resilience and the rich, vibrant arts, culture and contributions of a diasporic community here in Canada.

The Markham Museum and the York Region District School Board Museum and Archives are an example of how museums reflect the experiences of diverse community groups in Canada and how museums can captivate its local community and beyond. This exhibit was able to harness power to bring about sold-out tours, boost record numbers in online and in-person visits, and increase programming participation by 117%.

1110

These programs bring together school-age participants, seniors and new Canadians. All of these are vulnerable segments of our community. You can see how museums and their work contribute to local and cultural tourism, not just in a transactional way but in a way that invests back into improving the well-being of our society.

While the work of the Markham Museum and the York Region District School Board Museum and Archives are impressive in scope, projects like these are impossible to sustain. The kind of development of projects like this is difficult without a more stable funding base.

To enable museums to play an expanded role in supporting the growth of Ontario’s population, we ask the Ontario government to consider the following recommendations:

First, to invest \$10 million in support for community museums, from the current 166 communities to 300 communities. Unfortunately, museums now are forced to spend too much time—

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

Ms. Sandy Chan:—pursuing scarce, short-term, project-based funding to carry out their service to communities. There is no strategy for the sustainable growth of this sector. Investing in the ongoing operations and the infrastructure of museums will allow us to build a strong foundation that ensures our future.

To conclude, I want to circle back to, “Why invest in the cultural sector in a time where there are pressing priorities like jobs, hospitals, housing and infrastructure?” I will say that it is in this time of social, financial and

health pressures that museums play a vital role in helping citizens feel they are valued contributors and participants in society and in our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak and thank you for your consideration.

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

We will start this round of questions with MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank all the presenters for their submissions today.

I’d like to start with the Atmospheric Fund. Thank you for your comments about the high-efficiency home improvements, as well as the electric vehicle infrastructure. I’d like to actually get your thoughts on this point: Right now, the government’s position has been that we must invest in the EV industry to land it, and this is where our focus must be so that we have the jobs and the production in the province of Ontario. If we divert from that, then we will be subsidizing foreign-built vehicles and foreign jobs. I wanted to find out from you if you see, notwithstanding that we have attracted sizable EV investment, that we may end up producing vehicles that we are not going to be able to buy domestically.

Mr. Evan Wiseman: Thank you. Through the Chair: One of the chicken-and-egg situations we’re finding with EVs is—and I’m sure you’ve seen it in the news—reports around charging issues, infrastructure challenges.

Some important stats around EVs: About 80% of people expect to be able to charge their vehicles at home, and that is a significant departure from how we currently operate. I will be filling up my car with gas when I leave here, because I need to. In comparison, people expect to have a charge at the end of the day. For the most part, what we call level 1 chargers can be accommodated in single-family homes through the jacks in the laundry rooms, basically, which feed into garages. Most people will be able to get a charge that way, and that will serve a lot of it.

Where we are concerned with it in particular is with some of the misinformation around EVs and the dangers that they pose in terms of: You won’t be able to get to work; you won’t be able to take your kids to school. Most Ontarians don’t go more than 80 kilometres in a day—and we’re talking about most people; there are obviously exceptions to that, and then there will be exceptions to the rules for the exceptions. But the point that we’re making is specifically around this charging infrastructure. We think it’s great that the cars will be produced here. We think it’s important to have these types of investments in order to attract the businesses and supply chain, then it scales the batteries and it just helps everything in the sector and decarbonizing. So, that is really great.

Where we start to get into some of these recommendations around charging and being able to purchase is really making sure that the consumer isn’t concerned about being able to charge and being able to operate the vehicle that they want. When they go in to ask for an EV—because there’s a lot of benefits to it. It’s much cheaper to operate over the lifecycle. You don’t have to pay for gas, which—recently, the prices were crazy and so we saw a lot of demand

skyrocket for EVs, but the supply wasn't there. As a result, we're seeing stories now: "Oh, well, the demand has dropped for EVs." Well, if you're told that it's going to be 18 months to get you an EV, yes, you're not going to buy an EV. You're going to buy something else that's on the lot.

What we're trying to do is we're trying to head off some of the issues that consumers are facing, and charge anxiety is becoming an issue around making sure that people feel confident that they can operate the vehicle that they want to buy, as well. It's partially having conversations around what's available to them, even just in their homes, but then it's also making sure when they go out for a drive that they see charging stations, that they know that they're supported. Then, again, the apartment buildings and condos, for instance, present a particular issue, because it's about a third of Ontarians, and in their cases, they aren't able to just plug into a laundry socket. We're talking about retrofits for those buildings.

The ChargeON program is really great, because it helps to push out charging infrastructure along the major corridors, so people see it when they're driving and they're thinking, "Oh, I can do a long drive, because I remember seeing it when I stopped. That's possible." You see it everywhere you go in Europe nowadays. It's the same type of argument, basically. Where the ChargeON program is particularly useful and why we suggest expanding it is because it would further add on to the existing investments that Ontario is making. This is really a space where the government could exceed rapidly, even just the private deployment, because we don't have a charging infrastructure plan in Ontario as much, so we don't have something stitching all the regions together. The ChargeON program really just does that by default. It's a good program. It's really effective, and we've been excited to see it. As it's been deployed, we've been excited to see how it goes, and we really think that it's important to start to have these conversations, because it was a one-time \$91-million investment, and we really think that this is the type of program that really needs long-term certainty and will have a dramatic impact in supporting EV adoption across the province.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you. Through you, Chair, just a follow-up for you on that: Is the issue, really, this fear of not finding a charger—is it specific to geography? The reason I ask that is, yesterday, my colleagues across the way—I visited both their communities in recent months with my electric vehicle, and I didn't find a lack of chargers. What I did find was a lack of mileage per charge, and so the trips took a lot longer than they would in a normal vehicle, but I was always able to find a charger. But I could imagine, if I go to a rural community, to a northern community, finding those chargers may be far more difficult.

So, would your recommendation be to focus on remote areas—

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: —or do you find there's a lack of availability in urban areas as well?

Mr. Evan Wiseman: Just to answer that directly: The ChargeON program focuses in outside of the major urban

centres, and that's part of the reason we really recommend recapitalizing it—because that is exactly the problem. Once you get into northern Ontario, you get into eastern Ontario, you're going through Northumberland, you're going through Lanark, Frontenac, Hastings, those are some long drives, having done them.

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It's important that there's infrastructure available, and there are a lot of host groups that are willing to take it, especially gas station operators, where they don't get a lot of money from fuelling up. What they get is from the operating. And so there's a really great fusion with small businesses and EV charging deployment. It's actually a really great business opportunity for them as well.

It's usually just that there are some capital cost, increased challenges, and then also concerns like, "Well, I'm going to get it, and then no one's going to be wanting to use it." But you need to build it, and then the cars will come. It's a really great fusion between the two models. It helps independent businesses as well.

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

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to our presenters who have arrived here today to present at committee.

My first questions will be for you, Evan. I first want to thank you for the work that you're doing. It's almost like coming into the lion's den with this government's track record on environmental protection—ripping out charging stations at GO Transit and firing the Environmental Commissioner—so kudos to you.

But, more seriously, we have seen a year of drastic climate events, some of the worst forest fires in Ontario. It really should be a wake-up call. It's time for the government to take real climate leadership. Ontario can and should be a leader in green energy strategies. I know on this side, the official opposition side, we've put forward solutions such as providing subsidized heat pumps, so I was very thankful to hear your recommendations for that.

Would you like to see the government ensure that consumers have subsidized heat pumps in residential homes?

Mr. Evan Wiseman: Yes, absolutely. Heat pumps are really the way of the future.

In addition to the home-building side, I think it's important to talk about the transition, because there are some communities that are seeking out gas extensions to them—rural areas, in particular around farms—to get off diesel. The Atmospheric Fund partners with organizations to help with decarbonization efforts, like heavy steel and aluminum production. Moving off of coal requires natural gas, usually. So there are certainly areas for natural gas.

Where it's important to understand why we are so supportive of heat pumps, in particular in the residential sector, is it saves an awful lot of time building homes. Enbridge, I've been in meetings with them. They say it takes two years for them to site a new community for their infrastructure development. These pipelines are then put on 40-year contracts with the government, whether you use it or not. That's before getting into the health arguments around natural gas

in homes, that heat pumps, you just don't have the same risks with.

So, heat pumps save time on the actual siting and building of homes, and then they help save, especially on a new-build home—they certainly save operators for that. Once you get into retrofits and fuel switching, the subsidy definitely assists in the adoption and ends up saving consumers in the long run.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Excellent. I also want to thank you for your recommendation to expand the ChargeON program and thank you for your clarification for the committee that that does support rural and northern communities. It's something that we've heard from the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario. It's something we've heard from many wonderful local economic developers in other areas of the province. I think it's a way in which the province can support tourism. They can support those small local businesses. They can support the growth and expansion of so many different areas in the province. So, I want to thank you very much for that.

My next questions will be for Sandy. Sandy, to start off, the recent Auditor General's report found that the government "does not have an effective long-term" strategy "for supporting and growing tourism in the province." That's a quote directly from them.

Can you tell the committee a little about how museums can be a partner in helping develop that strategy?

Ms. Sandy Chan: Of course. Thank you for the question. A lot of the funding from the government right now is based on projects for museums, and the projects are obviously based on delivery and service to the communities. But to be relevant, for museums to really be a part of the community, we have to be responsive. And sometimes, without the infrastructure of operations, it's very hard to jump on issues, to reflect the current issues of society and to be able to really speak to what matters to Ontarians right now.

All of our energy is spent on chasing after this short-term scarce funding that—we've become like hamsters in a wheel. Program after program after program, and none of the funding is being invested into the management of the museums. How do they become sustainable? How do creators then learn the skills of business acumen to really know how to grow and make museums continue to be revenue-generating, to continue to be relevant, to continue to be up to speed with technology and aligned with all the developments that are happening across all of the other sectors?

We want to be integrated and work together in collaboration with other sectors: with tourism, with health, with technology. And yet, we are struggling because all of the energy is harnessed right now into this short-term project work. So, we are asking for a strategy to really invest in building a strong foundation that will allow young people to stay in the sector, for their skills that we develop in them to be invested back into this industry so that they won't leave and then we have to start again and keep building on the skills that we need for museums to thrive.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Most definitely. I want to thank you very much for your comments, because I think there is a misconception that museums look backwards, whereas, in actual point of fact, they look forwards and they help us correct the mistakes of history. Ultimately, they should be responsive to their communities.

At the Museum London, Julie Bevan, for instance, is a wonderful person who is reflecting the community through so many different exhibitions—the Museum of Ontario Archaeology and so many more. But I don't want to waste your time. I also think of the children's museum in London, who have also, despite numerous letters and invitations to the government—

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: They have, unfortunately, received very little support. Other levels of government have supported them to the tune of millions of dollars, yet there is very little in terms of project-based support or capital funding.

I also wanted to specifically ask: With a lot of non-profits, I've noticed that a lot of the amazing people working in museums are women. Would supporting museums help the sector be able to offer competitive wages that help us close the gender wage gap?

Ms. Sandy Chan: Because of the wage disparity, there are a lot of skills that are leaving the sector, and we see it more in men than in women. But for both genders, it is an issue of—

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

We'll now go to the government side. MPP Byers.

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank all of the presenters for sharing your views this morning.

I wanted to follow up, Evan, on the discussion on housing. I'm just curious about the CDM fund. I'm a member of government and perhaps should know what the fund does, but as my colleagues know, I'm not the sharpest knife in the drawer. Can you give us a little bit of—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: You're the nicest one.

Mr. Rick Byers: Yes, okay. Well, thank you. Sorry, Mr. Chair. I'm just having a little fun here.

Can you give a little overview of that program, if you wouldn't mind? It would be helpful.

Mr. Evan Wiseman: Sure, yes. The CDM, conservation and demand management, budget is complicated. When I first joined TAF, my background was just in government generally and I didn't have a clear understanding. It's easy to think of the CDM budget as kind of a waste, because you're like, "Well, you're spending money to save money. Why not just save the money?" Because sometimes that's how it gets described.

But really what happens with the CDM budget is that it gives the regulator and some of the other agencies financial capabilities to go in and create negotiations with contracts to bring more assets online when they're needed, to time-shift some of the demand on the system, to invest in efficiency and training. It's a really comprehensive budget, and it's really not funded enough.

Ontario, in regard to Canada, is about fifth in our efficiency spending, so we spend very little money on actually making sure our system is efficient. In North America, we are very low in terms of jurisdictions. California and New York vastly outspend us. There's suggestions that Ontario could quadruple the budget and still see significant gains in efficiency in the system.

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What we're asking for and why we mention the tax dollars being associated with it is that for a long time there has been a significant separation between the rate base and the tax base, and then people just saying, "Nope, they can't interact ever." Over the last 10 years or so, that orthodoxy has gone away, and I personally think that's a good thing, because you're really just dealing with a situation with one hand tied behind your back when the efficiency budgets really result in significant savings.

This isn't something the private sector can do. It has to be the government, because the government is the regulator. They control the system. There's really no role in CDM for the private sector beyond interfacing with it after the decisions have been made. The government providing clarity, as well, around how much of the budget will be available is important too, because in the past it has been not as clearly communicated, and it's been difficult for the private sector to understand what might be coming. By saying, "We're spending half a billion dollars in efficiency this year," the private sector can go, "Okay. We can plan for that."

Mr. Rick Byers: That's very helpful.

I'll just pass to my colleague. I want you to know, your comment on gas infrastructure and timelines is interesting because we built our home 12 years ago, and we're rural and had no gas infrastructure, so we actually installed geothermal at the time and love it. Hopefully that gives me a good *[inaudible]*.

Anyway, thanks so much for your presentation—much appreciated.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Next, MPP Pang.

Mr. Deepak Anand: No, Smith.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Oh, Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thanks, Chair. How much time do we have left?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have three.

Mr. Dave Smith: Three minutes?

Interjections.

Mr. Dave Smith: If I could, I'd like to go to Sandy. You made the comment that museums are looking for one-time grant funding consistently. One of the things that the Auditor General report pointed out was that a number of different groups and organizations in our attractions side of tourism typically aren't aware of some of the opportunities that are available to them.

Along those lines, museums become part of the attraction for a community, but there are opportunities available through the regional tourism organizations, the 13 different RTOs. Are you aware of the RTOs and how, working with them, you would have opportunities for other funding opened up for you?

Ms. Sandy Chan: Yes, of course. Thanks for the question. We are very aggressive about just aligning what we do so that it speaks to not just the cultural sector but the tourism sector: funding in education, collaborating with universities on research in communities and all these kinds of collaborative projects. But a lot of this funding doesn't actually fund the operations of museums, and that's where we're really seeing is the essence of sustainability.

But to your point: The available funding that we have to collaborate on projects does do a lot in making museums more relevant so that we are not on stage left, a singular sector on our own, but we are integrated into all the work of the government. We do a lot even in social services, in collaborating with programming to help seniors, to help new Canadians. All of these are based on a lot of funding from different sectors that help us generate.

That's where we also find our relevance, in understanding the current issues and in understanding the province's priorities so that we align our work with the province. I'm not asking for entitled funding to do what we want to do, but knowing what the priorities of the government are so that we can learn to be a contributor to the priorities of the Ontario government as well.

Mr. Dave Smith: Just for clarity, we have the museum operating grant currently. It's \$4.9 million; 166 museums currently have access to it. Are you asking for that \$10 million to be added onto the \$4.9 million as part of that program—

Ms. Sandy Chan: Yes.

Mr. Dave Smith: —or are you asking for a brand new program to be set up with \$10 million?

Ms. Sandy Chan: Onto that program.

Mr. Dave Smith: Onto the existing program?

Ms. Sandy Chan: Yes, because the program works, and we appreciate it. But we just need to expand our scope. But the program works.

Mr. Dave Smith: So you're asking for it to be tripled, is what you're saying. Okay. Thank you.

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

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to all presenters. I'm just going to start. Marion, I don't have any questions for you specifically, but I do want to say you certainly educated us on your experience as a vaper and some of the challenges that you're experiencing, so thanks for being here today.

Evan, I want to follow up on some of the heat pump conversation we started. In your comments to other members, you've commented also on natural gas expansion. This is problematic for us, I think, in Ontario. I think, so far, five municipalities have been proposed by the IESO to expand those natural gas plants to make up the gap. We see this as going in the wrong direction, I would say. Even as early as this last Monday, Halton Hills council voted nine to two against it, and I think the mayor actually had a quote: "Saying yes to supporting this plant expansion will mean turning our backs on at least 10 years of environmental stewardship," said Mayor Lawlor, according to the Star. "Do they really want us to say yes? If they have, why

didn't they give us a great pitch? Because I sure haven't seen it tonight."

It's encouraging to see some municipalities look at the long-term cost for natural gas. I wanted to give you an opportunity today to weigh in, because there are smart, strategic ways for this province to address the energy disparity, I would say. Then, there are directions I feel that we shouldn't be going in. I really just wanted to give you an opportunity.

Mr. Evan Wiseman: Yes, absolutely. Thank you for that, through the Chair. I was actually at that council meeting as well. I deputed there as well, just in full disclosure, against the plant expansion.

We are very concerned about the expansion of gas in the electricity sector. It's often quoted that our system is incredibly non-emitting, which historically has been true but is every year becoming less true. Gas went up by 26% last year in regard to the grid. I think it was on 2017 levels. By 2040, we're looking at an 800% increase. We already have 10 gigawatts of gas on our grid, so there's no indication that we're going to be looking at brownouts or power outages by 2035. So we take exception to some of the comments we sometimes hear around that.

But one of the issues with gas plants—I'll just say this in terms of what we're looking at right now—is the technology has really evolved across the board. We're looking at using energy closer to our homes to save on transmission costs. Historically, gas plants filled that role very effectively in comparison to a coal plant, which nobody wants. But we're starting to see the real costs of methane emissions, which is what natural gas is; it's methane. The reality is, between storage and solar and wind options, we can use power exactly where we needed to.

Cities like Toronto are energy-constrained, and so this is a real solution. There's a lot of red tape with the local utilities, provincial government, just in general in terms of what prevents solar adoption in Ontario. In 2022, Alberta installed 1,392 megawatts of solar; Ontario installed 10. So when we sometimes hear from the IESO that solar isn't cutting it, it's one of those things where of course it isn't. You don't even have the chicken yet, and you're asking us to lay eggs.

The reality is, though, with the storage advent—and we applaud the IESO on the storage side in particular because the storage contracts down in Oneida and the other 1,000 megawatts that they're procuring really change the game. Municipalities across the board are really clamouring to get these battery storage facilities. Brampton voted in favour of it when given the option between that and a gas plant expansion. Pickering has been supportive. Toronto has been supportive. Ottawa is looking at supporting it as well.

I think the other part of this though, just to the Monday night spot specifically, is this is really a governance problem too. When talking about some of these things—some of these deputations come to municipal councils and they're given 48 hours to review them, and they're 40-year contracts.

Halton council had incredible questions, just absolutely fantastic. The energy system is about as complex as it gets, especially in Ontario. The councillors out there were

thoughtful and came up with great questions. They all have a very diverse perspective. Given the opportunity, they really did dig into the details, and then they just found the proponent—in this case, Atura, which is a subsidiary of OPG—its application was just wanting. It just wasn't very good and—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you for that. I did see that you were on the list so I just wanted to give you another opportunity, but it's a bit of a dog's breakfast out there on the energy side, so we do need some options.

I just want to move into the direction around the heat pumps, because you made a very compelling point—I mean we are in a housing crisis in Ontario. We hear this "1.5 million homes" language. I just wanted to give you an opportunity to expand on how heat pumps actually could accelerate housing, because this is a very salient point for us in Ontario.

Mr. Evan Wiseman: Yes, absolutely. Thank you. So, through the Chair: When it comes to siting and planning, there are definitely areas where I wouldn't disagree that local planning is extensive on these things, but it's often because it's very complicated.

One of the things—that removing an entire element of the approval process speeds up time, it's just one of those common-sense things. So, just removing the need for natural gas infrastructure is important, and heat pumps are fantastic options and does it quickly. There are new heat pumps that operate at 100% efficiency all the way to minus 30. Even if it does get colder than heat pumps are able to operate at, they just reduce in efficiency; they don't turn off as we sometimes hear fearmongered—that's simply not how the technology works. So there's partner options for it, and heat pumps are a way to build homes faster.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Your other point around conservation—we would absolutely agree. I mean there are also good jobs to be created in local communities around conservation. There's even a consumer protection aspect if you tie it in a tax credit as well. So, those are really salient points for us as well.

The \$12-million program for the Clean Home Heating Initiative, we agree, should be doubled from \$12 million to \$24 million. This would be a good investment in the adoption of the hybrid heat pump solutions, but I think that we need to be more aggressive. Would you agree?

Mr. Evan Wiseman: Absolutely.

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

We want to thank all three of these presenters for taking the time to prepare to talk to us and to deliver that message in the expert way that you did. I'm sure it will be helpful as we move forward in developing a 2024 budget.

With that, it concludes the presentations this morning. The committee will now recess until 1 o'clock.

The committee recessed from 1143 to 1300.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Welcome back. We will now resume consideration of public hearings on pre-budget consultations 2024. As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. After we've

heard from all three presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be for questions from 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.

COMPUTEK COLLEGE FILMONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): With that, I realize we have just two presenters with us for this panel—it's the quality, not the quantity of the presenters, I'm sure: Computek College and FilmOntario. As I mentioned, you will have seven minutes to make your presentation. First of all, when you start your presentation, please identify yourself to make sure we have the name connected to the comments in Hansard. Secondly, at six minutes of the presentation, I will say, "One minute." That doesn't mean anything to you except that, one minute later, I'm going to say, "Thank you very much for your presentation."

With that, we will start with Computek College to make a presentation. The floor is now yours.

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: Good afternoon, Chair and members of the standing committee. My name is Kumaran Nadesan and I'm speaking today on behalf of Computek College. I'm joined by my colleague Dinesh Kumar. In my remarks today, I'm going to be focusing on the creating jobs portion of the government's priorities.

Computek College is a regulated career college with three campuses in Ontario: Markham, Ajax and Toronto. For over 30 years, we have been training newcomers in underserved communities to enter the job market. In Markham, we've been operational for nearly 15 years, and we're just down the road at Markham and Steeles. We are an OSAP-accredited institution, a designated learning institution and an EduCanada brand authorized college. We are a member in good standing of Career Colleges Ontario and the National Association of Career Colleges.

We offer training in health care, technology and business, as well as wraparound services, including mental health support, employment support and more that make our graduates highly competitive in the labour market. We're also able to move very quickly to address urgent labour market needs, like how we trained much-needed personal support workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have also proven ourselves as an active stakeholder through our participation in projects funded by the province's Skills Development Fund, in partnership with municipalities and non-profit organizations. Through this government's important funding, we were able to train 150 much-needed PSWs in a pilot project in 2022, which was followed by 300 PSWs in an expanded project this year, as well as 100 cybersecurity professionals in a pilot project also this year.

But there is so much more to be done to meet the current demands of the job market in Ontario's health care and technology sectors. Current stats show that Ontario will be

short 33,000 nurses and PSWs in four years and that the province needs a 45% increase in PSW resources. One in six cybersecurity jobs in Canada go unfilled, and current estimates reveal that we're still 25,000 workers short this year alone. This number is only expected to grow in the coming years.

We are planning on doing our part to address these demands by continuing our efforts this upcoming fiscal year by applying for provincial support that will enable us to do the following: train up 2,100 PSWs in the greater Toronto area, York region, Durham region and southwestern Ontario; as well as train up to 2,510 cybersecurity professionals in several parts of the province, especially from newcomer, refugee and historically underrepresented communities, to create a more robust and inclusive tech workforce that will safeguard the people, businesses and institutions of Ontario, including right here in Markham and York region. That's a total of just over 5,000 health care and tech workers we are looking to train for Ontario over the next three years alone.

The training program that we have proposed to the province has garnered support from well over 100 community organizations, employers and elected officials from across different orders of government. Ensuring that the province has highly skilled workers recruited and trained for the jobs of the future; helping adult learners get the skills that they need for their future careers by providing more access to practical learning; increasing people's confidence and participation in our ever-evolving digital world by encouraging college programs in cybersecurity; and addressing health care staffing shortages by providing programs for students to work in the health care sector: This is what Computek College aims to achieve for the province of Ontario.

Thank you for your time, everyone, and I'll be pleased to answer your questions.

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

Now we'll go to FilmOntario.

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: Good afternoon, standing committee members and fellow presenters. I am Cynthia Lynch, managing director and counsel at FilmOntario. We are an industry-funded consortium representing Ontario-based film and television production companies, unions, studios, equipment suppliers and other industry organizations working across the sector and throughout the province.

Our members produce and work on Canadian content that is made here and shown throughout the world: shows like *Murdoch Mysteries*, *Schitt's Creek* and *Sort Of*. They also work on many of Hollywood's most successful productions that choose to shoot here, including *Star Trek*, *The Umbrella Academy* and *The Handmaid's Tale*.

We are here today to emphasize the need to continue investing in the industry so that Ontario remains a competitive jurisdiction, with attractive incentives, beautiful locations and an extremely talented workforce both in front of and behind the camera.

Joining me today is my colleague Alistair Hepburn, who is the executive director of ACTRA Toronto and the board secretary at FilmOntario.

Over to Alistair, who is on Zoom.

Mr. Alistair Hepburn: Hello.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Oh, we're coming on the screen now, but we're not hearing anything yet.

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: Go ahead, Alistair.

Mr. Alistair Hepburn: Oh, is it my turn?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We're waiting for you, yes.

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: I already threw to you.

Mr. Alistair Hepburn: Terribly sorry; I didn't hear any of that. I'm so sorry.

Thank you, Cynthia, and hello to the committee. A special hello to my MPP, Ms. Triantafilopoulos. I've actually just moved into your riding, so thank you. And thank you to the committee for having us today.

As Cynthia mentioned—I'm sorry I missed it—my name is Alistair Hepburn. And on behalf of ACTRA Toronto, I am here to represent 15,000 performers throughout the province working on all of the shows Cynthia mentioned and many more. Currently, some of our members are actually working just around the corner on *The Jane Mysteries*, which is shooting in the Markham area right now. Markham has a rich history in the industry, and projects such as *Downsizing* with Matt Damon and *Orphan Black* with Tatiana Maslany have filmed there. We can even look back at a number of episodes of *The Littlest Hobo* being shot in Markham—a rich history.

The year 2022 was a very successful year for Ontario's film and TV industry. Productions spent a record \$3.2 billion in the province, supporting over 45,000 jobs. This spending was divided approximately 60% to 40% between foreign productions—shows mostly from the US who chose to film in Ontario—and domestic productions, shows that come from original intellectual property that is developed and produced by Ontario-owned companies. This balanced ecosystem is definitely Ontario's strength as a filming jurisdiction, and 2023 is a year when we have really had to draw on this strength.

As you likely heard, labour disruptions in Hollywood had a negative impact on production levels around the world. Ontario was no exception to that. According to the preliminary estimates provided by Ontario Creates, the provincial agency that drives investment in the cultural industries, spending on foreign production in Ontario in Q2 of fiscal 2023-24 was less than \$50,000, compared to over \$400,000 during the same quarter in each of the two previous years. In addition to this uncertainty, ACTRA members have been negatively impacted by a labour dispute in the commercial sector, which has meant that many of them have not had the opportunity to work in commercials for over two years.

We are fortunate that in Ontario we have still been able to work on domestic content. However, as we emerge from the strikes, and with uncertainty in the domestic market for film and television, we are entering a period of greater competition from other jurisdictions here in Canada and around the world, and it is vitally important that Ontario keeps pace with this competition.

What this past year has demonstrated is that investments in Ontario's content creators is more important than

ever. While we may provide greater detail in our written submission, today we would like to highlight two key points: maintaining our competitive and effective tax credits and making direct investments in Ontario productions. Cynthia is going to take you through some of the detail of those points.

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Ms. Cynthia Lynch: Thank you, Alistair. We appreciate this government's continued commitment to the film and television tax credits, and in particular to the previous commitments that have been made to updating the credits, to make sure we continue to be a competitive jurisdiction.

We know that tax credits are effective. For every dollar the government invests, a dollar is returned to the government in the form of municipal, provincial and federal taxes and fees. In addition, that same dollar generates an additional \$2.50 in labour income in the province and increases the province's GDP by \$3.40. In other words, tax credits work.

We look forward to continuing to work with the government on the commitments that have already been made to improve the credits. Thank you for already implementing expanded eligibility for location fees and for extending the credits to online productions. We are currently participating in the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport's consultation on approving the computer animation credit, and we are looking forward to doing the same when the promised consultation on the regional bonus begins. These improvements are necessary—

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

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: —as the industry continues to evolve and when dollars are stretched more than ever. But as Alistair has noted, this year has also highlighted the need to keep all parts of the ecosystem healthy. That is why we're asking the government to increase its direct investment in Ontario's production in two ways.

First, we would like the government to increase the Ontario Creates Film Fund by \$10 million a year. This fund has not been increased in more than a decade, but invests in feature films by a diverse group of Ontario and Indigenous producers that have achieved success with global audiences, films like *Night Raiders* and *Brother*. In spite of its limitations, Ontario Creates has introduced enhancements to the funds to improve its diversity, but at this point, the dollars can't be stretched any further. It's time to increase that investment.

Secondly, we would like to see the government invest in early-stage development for film and television through a \$10-million annual fund. This is the R&D of our industry where ideas turn into scripts, and then into the TV shows and movies that we all like to watch. This investment will allow Ontario companies to retain more of their Ontario-developed intellectual property, to exploit it more effectively and to reinvest in the companies here at home.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That does conclude that presentation.

I'll start the questions with the government side. MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I want to start by saying thank you to Cynthia and to Alistair. Full disclosure: I'm a big

believer in film production. I love film production. My wife, Aruna Anand, is actually a graduate of Toronto Film School, and we've seen films—not just entertainment—can bring in revolution. It's about many other things.

At this moment, I do understand you're talking about money. I don't know by percentage how much it is—less than inflation, more than inflation or just inflation—but I'll leave that aside. We have a wonderful champion from the ministry, PA Smith, who is also here. He is listening and he will be contributing to this conversation as well.

My questions are simple. Other than money, of course, with respect to the jurisdictional review, if we say we want to compete with BC, where do we stand and what do we need to do to be competitive?

And I just want to add one more thing: It's not just the actors from ACTRA; it is the background. My daughter worked as background and many of the friends she made are friends still, to date.

I live in Meadowvale Village in Mississauga. Some of the houses in Meadowvale Village are used as houses for the movie sets, so that's extra revenue for those owners and a contribution to the local economy. The impact is multifold.

But going back to the question: With respect to getting more dollars into the province of Ontario—and the Premier has been very open and vocal about it—we added \$3.2 million, but we'd love it to be \$5 million, because we know the value of these investments. What more can be done?

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: I'll start, and I'll let Alistair weigh in if I forget anything. Thank you for the question. In terms of competitiveness, you mentioned BC, which is a very strong jurisdiction within Canada, which does a lot more work from outside of Canada. So they were more negatively impacted by the strikes for sure, but they have also recently increased their investment in domestic production. They have added \$15 million over three years. We're not keeping up with that increase. We would love to keep up with that increase.

But in addition, the non-money things are some of the things that you mentioned, working through Ontario Creates with local communities to promote each community and also to make it easier to film on the streets. For example, access to government buildings is a huge thing that many of our locations—I believe, several years ago, Designated Survivor had the opportunity to film at Queen's Park, but it's very hard to film at Queen's Park, as you can imagine. So, more of those working with us to open up those locations to filming would be a great, non-financial investment in the industry.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you. And another question is that—not everybody can be, or wants to be, a doctor, engineer, or a lawyer. Especially talking about my riding of Mississauga–Malton, we were looking at the data: 18% of the people don't have high school; 26% had only high school.

So, what can we do as a government? As we talk about film and production, there are eight studios and 23 stages in Mississauga alone, on one side, and then we see, Malton alone, the youth unemployment is as much as 22% or 23%.

What can we do as a government to mitigate? When you see a lot of jobs going unfilled on one side, and we can help them to get to being a part of film and production—what can we do?

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: Thank you for that question.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the government for continuing to invest and flexibly invest through the Skills Development Fund. Many of our member organizations have been able to access that fund.

The good news is you don't necessarily need to have a post-secondary education to come into the film industry. Alistair's members are trained performers, but you can come on set and work as a carpenter, or as a grip, or as a lighting technician and we will train you on the job. So, helping us to promote those opportunities is always welcome and the continued support from the Skills Development Fund is also extremely important.

Mr. Deepak Anand: That's it for me. MPP Smith.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: Thanks, Chair. How much time do we have?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Three minutes.

Mr. Dave Smith: Three minutes? That seems to be a recurring theme. When he comes over to me, I have three minutes.

Kumaran, I'm going to apologize to you. I'm going to focus on the ministry that I'm the parliamentary assistant to, so I'm going over to FilmOntario as well. It's not that we don't like you. I'm sure someone will ask some questions as well.

We did a significant investment in northern Ontario with the film industry and I think that we're seeing some fantastic results for it. There have been some proposals that have been put forward to emulate that in other parts of Ontario.

One of the concerns I personally have on it—and I will freely admit my riding is one that would benefit from one of the proposals, so I'm wearing two hats in this case: I'm the parliamentary assistant to tourism, culture and sport, but I'm also the MPP for Peterborough–Kawartha.

My concern is that if we try to emulate what we're doing in the north right now, what will end up happening is that we will migrate some of the film industry from the north into southern Ontario, where we have been very successful in taking some of those jobs and moving up to the north. I think that one of the things that was most beneficial was the post-production capabilities that are now in the north as a result of that.

From your perspective, should we be looking at replicating that in different areas of southern Ontario, or should we maintain it as, “No, this is a northern Ontario feature and we need to keep it that way to keep those jobs in the north”?

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: Well, thank you for highlighting all the successes of the industry in the north. I appreciate that.

I think if we want to grow to be a \$5-billion industry, we will need to add to where we are already filming. We can't just continue to go back to the same places. So, I

think there is room for some of that expansion. And the market is changing a bit, so—

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

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: —as we come back from the strikes, we will see how that falls out.

I'm aware of the proposals from eastern Ontario and southeastern Ontario, and I think that, were they to emulate the NOHFC model—it is a good model and has proven successful—it does take time.

Mr. Dave Smith: Okay.

At present this year, it's about \$900 million in tax credits that the industry is going to receive. When we first got elected, it was about \$450 million—not quite \$500 million. Obviously, these have been very successful. How much of an expansion of that do you think we should be looking at, recognizing that although it's a tax credit, if the business doesn't come, there's no tax being paid by that business? So, it actually is a benefit to us on it.

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: If the business doesn't come, there's no tax credit to pay out, so that also goes down.

As we noted, the tax credits are an effective investment. The growth goes—

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

We will now go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

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Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm just going to continue on because I think that all of us actually want the film and television industry to thrive in Ontario. I think we also agree that there's room for improvement, and that's why you're here today.

I'm going to continue. Obviously, you know about the eastern Ontario mayors and wardens. They put forward a proposal around the accelerator fund. This has worked in other jurisdictions. They've actually argued for a regional approach, and that would get to MPP Smith's problem of one region competing with another. You could actually create regional leadership on these files. That's something that—a dedicated regional film stream would benefit all of Ontario and not displace some of those businesses or put those regions in competition with each other. Do you agree with that statement?

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: If I'm understanding it correctly, in that if we don't look at each region as a pocket but look at all the regions as a whole and encourage growth in all of the regions together, I think that's true.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. Good. Perhaps that's a direction that we could work together on. Cynthia, you mentioned the tax credits. Tax credits work. We know that they work. As New Democrats, we favour tax credits. They're very accountable, very transparent, and they are easily applied, really. It's not a burdensome administrative perspective.

The direct investment piece: That's what I would like you and Alistair, please, to focus on, because that actually would signal to the level of confidence that the province has in the industry and in the sector. Could you give us a sense of the return on investment for a direct investment into your sector?

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: Can I let Alistair start, and I will look at my notes?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. Please go ahead, Alistair.

Mr. Alistair Hepburn: Certainly. Thank you. In terms of direct investment, I think, as we pointed out earlier, the work that is done by performers, by technicians in this industry is blue-collar trade work. Ensuring that those individuals have good opportunities to work then increases the direct spend in the rest of the market. One of the things we saw in the downturn with the strike in Hollywood was the fact that there was less money spent on hotels, less money spent on car rentals, less money spent on mom-and-pop hardware stores. All of that trickle-down effect really is palpable within Ontario at this point.

Go ahead, Cynthia.

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: Thank you, Alistair.

In regard to the current Ontario Creates Film Fund, which is approximately a \$4.5-million fund, I don't have the return on investment. But right now, they're only able to fund approximately 30% to 35% of the applicants. So we never—I won't say never, but it would be unlikely that 100% of applicants in that type of program would be successful, but 30% is very low. There are lots of projects being left on the table.

A previous program that the previous government implemented to invest in the early-stage development returned \$4.98 in financing to the companies for every dollar they got through the investment that was made in their development activities. This let them capitalize their companies, reinvest in their intellectual property and stabilize those Ontario-based companies who are living, working and creating intellectual property here.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. That ties into your R&D pipeline as well. So where did you get the \$10 million from?

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: The previous fund was a \$10-million, one-time investment.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And that was successful, so you—

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: It was successful, so we'd like to continue to replicate that success. It also reflects—BC's domestic film industry is quite a bit smaller than Ontario's, and they're investing \$15 million over three years. We are at least double the size of their domestic industry, if not more.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Also, thanks for the commentary just around having access to locations. Obviously, Queen's Park is beautiful. I think some municipalities have really taken a leadership role in this. Cambridge, Ontario, close to my riding of Waterloo—the fact that sometimes we see handmaids from the *Handmaid's Tale* walking in downtown Cambridge is really quite unsettling. But it really has created this whole new creative ecosystem in that region. Thanks very much for your presentation. I hope the government is listening on this.

I'll move over quickly to Computek. Thank you very much for the presentation. I wanted just to talk a little bit about apprenticeships. I'm not sure if you offer apprenticeships or you also—that experiential learning opportunities for students in your sector—

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: Thank you, member, for the question. We do not focus on skilled trades, so not necessarily apprenticeships. But certainly in some of our programs, like the PSW program, we do offer workplace experiential learning components to that program, and I think that's been a real game-changer for us. We implement the curriculum that's set by the National Association of Career Colleges, and I just wanted to highlight the fact that in the Skills Development Fund, what we thought was a great thing was the wage subsidy that was introduced in rounds 2 and 3, which was increased in this fourth round. We found that the conversations with industry to be able to offer placement opportunities and get that experiential learning was greatly facilitated by that wage subsidy.

What I think I'll take the opportunity to mention, member, is the fact that there is probably a little bit more work that we need to be doing collectively on the industry side. This could be in part because of the demographic that we deal with—we deal with mostly newcomers, refugees, historically under-represented populations. There is still some, I'm going to say, education that needs to be done with the employer and with industry to make sure that they are opening up and they're willing to do some of the hard work needed to get these workers into their organizations. That will be the basis of a further policy submission that we'll be making to government.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Can you give us an example, for instance? You're quite right, the demographics you're dealing with—

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: —clearly there are some barriers there to accessing education. But once they access education, what are the barriers to employment?

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: A couple of things I think I'll take time to mention: One is maybe there should be changes to the wage-subsidy component, whether it's the formula, whether it's the size—how much—of the subsidy itself, to help employers hire through the skills development stream. The second is, I think there is—how do I put this—sometimes a bit of a cultural mismatch in terms of the workplace and how you deal with newcomers in the workplace. So there is, if I can put it in this way, more training to be done on the employer side as well in terms of how we engage and bring in newcomers into the workforce here in Ontario and really set them up for success.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And you say that you have a policy document to inform that process?

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: We are putting together a few policy ideas that we'd like to present to the government, yes—amendments.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. Thanks to both presenters.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank to the presenters for being here today.

I will start with Kumaran. I just wanted to get a sense from you of the employment rate for your graduates compared to public institutions.

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: I do not have the public institution stats off the top of my head, member, but great question. Our employment rates—the provincial minimum standard is 80%, whether that is through regular diploma programs or through funded programs, and we're meeting those performance commitments.

Interesting fact: I'm here representing Computek, certainly, but career colleges just generally in Ontario, which I didn't know prior to coming into the private sector—I worked in the OPS for a long time. More than 75% of PSWs in the province are trained at career colleges and not in public colleges. If you can think about the kind of impact that PSWs have had during the pandemic and the impact that they will continue to have as we look at an aging generation, the employment stats through career colleges will only increase in the coming years.

But the minimum standard is around 80%, to your question.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you. Could you talk a little bit about tuition for PSWs? What was it about five years ago, and what is it now?

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: Great question. That also ranges from college to college, and there are career colleges across—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: For your college.

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: It's just over \$7,000, and that's been the funded amount that we've done through the Skills Development Fund. One of the things that we're looking at as a college—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Sorry, because I have a limited time—how much was it five years ago?

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: I do not have that number off the top of my head, member.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Has it increased in the last five years?

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: I think it increased against inflation, certainly, but has there been any more of an increase? I cannot say at this point. I'm happy to circle back and provide that information to you if you'd like.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Yes. I'm just thinking of the freeze that we've had in the public sector around tuitions and the impact and whether that's—I don't believe that that's affected private colleges, so private colleges have been able to increase tuition at, at least, the rate of inflation, it sounds like.

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: Certainly at the rate of inflation. I think certain colleges have certainly done that in the past, yes, for sure.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: You are a private college. I'm not sure if your financial statements are public, but what would be the typical profit that you would make from a tuition of \$7,000?

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: Oh my goodness. I really can't answer that question just generally for the sector. We are audited. We do have to provide external audits to the government. I think we go through no less than four different audits for all kinds of things, so it's a very audited sector, which is sometimes missed in the news key messages. But the profit percentage, I think, varies from

college to college. I do not really have an industry average. I think Career Colleges Ontario will probably have a better handle on those stats.

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Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Do you think that's public information?

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: I'm not sure.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Okay. All right. Thank you. I will look into that.

Recently, your college, I believe, received about \$1.8 million related to the PSW training program, and I'm just wondering: Has all of that been spent? Dividing that by \$7,000, that would be a lot of students, so has that all been spent? How many students have participated?

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: That \$1.8 million was a partnership with the town of Ajax. The town of Ajax was the primary applicant and recipient of those funds. We were the training partner for the town of Ajax. That particular grant was to train 150 PSWs. Keep in mind, member, that that also includes—

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

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: —not just tuition, but also staffing, resources and support. One of the things that we've done is to provide laptops for PSWs because we really wanted to give them more of a sense of digital capabilities as they get into workplaces. So, it's not just tuition.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Okay. I have one minute left. What would be the impact if your tuition was frozen?

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: I'm sure there's an impact in terms of the finances. I cannot give you that number. But in terms of incentivizing people to get into the profession, I think there might be some chilling effects on that. This is not necessarily a high-paying occupation, and so people come into this knowing that this is an area of service. For us to freeze the tuition fees, or whether we freeze it or not, I think people come into this particular program for a whole different reason than necessarily to make money as such.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'm thinking about the impact on your college and operations. If your tuition was frozen for five years and you could not increase your prices, what would that do to your operations? I expect it would have a detrimental effect.

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: It could, absolutely—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. The time has been consumed.

We'll now go to MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm going to come back to Film-Ontario, just for one last thing to touch on something you had talked about. You do most of the training on site with new people coming into it. At present, we have 144 trades in Ontario. There are a number of general things that most people would think of: lighting, sound, costume, sets—those types of things. Is this something we should be looking at creating, film industry or theatre industry trades or set of trades on that, that could then be promoted at the

high school level through the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program?

The big challenge that we would have, obviously, would be to get that first tranche of people approved as journey-people on it. Is that an opportunity, then, to introduce to a younger generation the things they could do in the film industry that way?

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: Thank you for the question and for correctly identifying what the potential issue with that suggestion would be.

I will add that, currently, hairdressers are licensed and need to be licensed for the film industry, but the benefit of the other positions is that they aren't licensed in the same apprenticeship programs that some of those trades are. So if you're a residential electrician, you are licensed, but it doesn't work the same way in the film industry. That does make the industry more accessible, but you're also correct that it is a challenge to then promote it to especially high school students.

I'm happy to say that we've been working with many municipalities, including Durham, the city of Toronto and London, to go to their job fairs, and our union members show up to those and promote the opportunities that way. I think that would be a more effective way to focus on getting people in faster and still getting trained by those unions who do all the required training that they need and make sure that our sets continue to be safe places to work.

Mr. Dave Smith: Okay. Thank you very much.

I'm going to pass it over to my colleague MPP Dowie.

The Chair (Mr. Andrew Dowie): MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank both the presenters for being here. Actually, I've got maybe a common theme which I'm hoping both of you can answer. It has to do with the availability of the workforce. For the film industry, for example, in my community, I learned that our local college discontinued some of its film production programs, so it's important that we have some sort of a pathway. We have a casino, and we certainly have some films made. The province invested just about \$1.3 million into the Windsor Centre for Film, Digital Media and the Creative Arts to help create a pipeline for talent in all facets of production.

I know for Computek, for health care, the province is contributing \$1.84 million that supports health care workers, particularly—both equally important, and actually, dare I say, more important for our here and now. We need health care workers, definitely.

I just wanted to ask this question of you both: How important are investments in workforce development in order to ensure that we achieve the goals that both of your organizations are setting out?

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: Go ahead. You'll buy me some time.

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: Thanks.

Thank you for the question and for noting that important investment in Windsor. These investments are very important, and what's equally important is that—and I might

be giving you a lead-in here—those investments are partnered with industry.

I will give an example: York University has partnered with one of our private companies, Cinespace, to train production accountants in Toronto, working with DGC Ontario, which is the guild that supports that category of film worker. That gives those students an opportunity to get on-the-ground learning, and then it gives them a pathway into the industry through the union, and those are very important things. But those initial investments that come through the government, whether it's through funding of universities or dedicated funding, is incredibly important to the industry.

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: Thank you for that, Cynthia.

Thanks for the question, member. I just want to echo what Cynthia said. I think the Skills Development Fund, for example, has been a truly transformational program in the province. I think there is only more of that that's needed.

I want to take the opportunity of this question, member, to reference what member Bowman said, which is that part of the funding accounts for tuition fees and all of that. You can freeze those tuition fees, but then other investments need to be made in order to produce these health care workers for the province. For example, we made a decision two years ago at Computek that we were going to have fee parity between domestic students and international students. So, the \$7,000 you pay for PSWs in Ontario, somebody coming in internationally, they're going to pay \$7,000. And that comes up because we were on the other side of this table. Our organization came up through the ranks as newcomers. We were, once upon a time, refugees ourselves. We know the incredible barriers that newcomers face, and so these are the kinds of decisions, financial decisions, that we are willing to make.

That's all to say, though, member, that the Skills Development Fund, as I said in a previous question—the investments that come on the training side should also be taken into the industry side as well. I think there is some commonality there between the both of us. There is a lot of work that needs to be done on the industry side, as well, so that when the pipeline has been created, they're able to intake that in the way that at least our demographics need them to be taken in.

You have a quizzical look on your face, member—

Mr. Andrew Dowie: No, I think—through you, Chair—you've raised quite an interesting point.

If you've gotten to the point where the demand from international students is such that tuition has been reduced to encourage them, would you say we've reached a saturation point in terms of our domestic capacity to employ health care workers? We still have persistently high unemployment in some areas, but if our workforce is not available to be educated, is this what's driving that demand internationally?

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

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: I'm not necessarily talking about health care workers internationally, for us specific-

ally, but there are internationally educated health professionals coming in all the time. Once again, the kind of policy direction that this government has set in terms of Canadian qualifications and getting rid of that—I think all of this will contribute to the fact that there will be enough workers to take care of.

I don't think we've reached a saturation point, necessarily, member. It's just, do Ontarians want to get into the space? And if they're not ready to get into that space, we need those health care workers to come from somewhere to help serve the people of Ontario.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Okay. Thank you.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: Very simple, a straight question: Should we invest more in the Skills Development Fund—to both of you—and what's the benefit? Yes? No?

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: Easy answer: Yes.

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: Also an easy answer: Yes, and the benefit is just training the next generation of film workers, whether that's people coming out of high school or people looking for second careers.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you so much. I'm sure all the members are listening and they will vote yes to this.

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

We now go to the official opposition. Mr. Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to our presenters today.

I'd like to start off with Computek College. It's something that we hear as politicians all across Ontario, that housing and access to affordable housing remain one of the most pressing issues of our time. In fact, we finally heard the government admit that we need a wartime effort, something that the official opposition has been putting forward.

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I wanted to know: Could you possibly speak to the difficulty that international students face when trying to attain housing?

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: Thank you for the question, member. Our exposure on international students is quite limited at Computek, and we did that particularly for the question you've asked us, member. We were not convinced that we were ready at this point to truly give these students the experience that they deserve when they come to Canada. I live out in Brampton, and there are horror stories of—and I see them every day. I go to the grocery store; I see these young people coming in from the Punjab in India and the struggles that they have. So housing is a huge crisis.

The post-secondary education sector has a lot of work to do to be able to make sure we have the systems in place, and that is across the private-public divide. I think that's something that we all have to do. I think it's come to a critical crisis, and the point that we are saddened by is, then, that there is this anti-immigration rhetoric that has taken up the space, which is truly unfortunate, because these people are coming here, as many of our parents did, in search of greener pastures. I think we're failing them—I'm going to be bold and say that we're failing them as a

country in not being able to give them the kind of experience that they deserve.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Absolutely, and that's one reason that all levels of government have to return to their historic responsibility of providing that housing for people who require it.

I was also glad to hear your comments about fee parity. We've heard from many organizations as a committee about the problems with wage parity across sectors—you know, a PSW is a PSW is a PSW. Would you like to see PSWs paid the same regardless of their employer and of their location?

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: I do not think so, member. I think there is a huge demand in northern Ontario. I think that would require a different wage model for those PSW workers.

I can also tell you, anecdotally, that at least half of our PSWs, in our view, should not even come to our college, because they are trained nurses from the Philippines, from India, from parts of Africa. Why the heck are they coming to our college as PSWs? We've failed them if we actually keep doing that.

So for us, if there are people with a nursing background, given the fact that we don't need Canadian experience, that will help alleviate that. But a nurse from the Philippines with 20 years of experience—I don't see how they can be paid the same rate as somebody who grew up in Ontario and decided to become a PSW. So the wage parity one is a tricky one. I don't necessarily think it applies evenly.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: No, absolutely. I understand the different needs in the north, but what we're talking about is in similar areas across sectors. But thank you very much for your answers.

I would like to turn now to Cynthia and Alistair with FilmOntario. First, I want to apologize. There is nothing worse than coming to the government asking for increased investment and then being told to talk about something other than money. It's like travelling all day to a water pump and being told not to talk about your thirst.

As well, it's concerning that we have the Ontario government actively using scab labourers and undermining ACTRA, but you've really shown through your presentation how film is a great investment for the province, how it will reap dividends. It delivers economic as well as cultural results.

I think of Andrew Dodd of Film London, in London. It does wonderful work as a concierge service, and how that increased investment—it creates civic pride. It's a hyper-local investment, which also contributes so much to small businesses.

I did want to ask about the disparity with the NOHFC. While the Ontario Film and Television Tax Credit program does have that 10% regional bonus for productions outside of the GTA, the benefits don't necessarily outweigh the travel costs. In many productions, you might just choose to operate just outside of Toronto. Would you like to see an increased tax credit for eastern Ontario as well as for southwestern Ontario?

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: The government has committed to reviewing the regional bonus in the OFTTC, and we look

forward to participating in that consultation. That will be something that we hopefully will look into further.

The benefit of the NOHFC model as a regional development agency is that they have a dedicated film and television stream that's very helpful. They also—some of the regional development programs don't allow you to take other government funding. In southwestern Ontario, you can't take the tax credit and the development funding. So just fixing that would replicate the NOHFC model in a little bit of a way.

The other thing about the NOHFC is that that money does reduce your tax credit. If we were going to look at replicating that, getting rid of that, what we call, "grind" on the tax credit would go a long way to compensating producers for some of those additional costs when they go out to different regions, whether it's in the north, southwestern Ontario, southeastern Ontario—wherever.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: That makes a great deal of sense. We do look forward to those conversations, and they're ongoing. It's something that does need to be addressed. Ontario has a wonderful market for film and television and I don't think that increasing the attention towards southwestern, as well as eastern, Ontario is going to draw productions from the north. I think there is an opportunity for much more.

How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have 1.3.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I also wanted to commend you for your comments about how the government can also support through their additional locations, through the office space and through the resources that they do have. I think, as well, we see the government has many resources that they have—also, available land that could be used for many different purposes, whether it's film studios, etc.

I wanted to know: Is there anything that you missed from your presentation? I believe you got cut off a little early, so I wanted to just give you the last bit of time.

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: The last bit of time was just me saying that I look forward to your questions, so thank you for that.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Wonderful. No further questions, Chair.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Cynthia and Alistair, I'll start with you, and then I just want to come back to Kumaran. Just briefly, you've talked about the size of the industry: \$3 billion-plus. We heard about a goal to get it to \$5 billion, which of course, again, we would all welcome. Could you just again expand a little more on what it would take to get there, and over how many years? Can we set an ambitious plan to do that, and what else would it take?

Ms. Cynthia Lynch: I'm a little reluctant to set a number of years just because, as we come out of the Hollywood strikes, it's a bit harder to know what the new market is going to look like. But I think continuing to improve on the tax credits and keeping them—the open commitment to the stability of the tax credits is a great comfort for people looking to invest in Ontario. If there is a worry that the credits are going to be cut or going to go

away in a year or have a cap, that can lead to instability. Some of the production decisions are made one to two years out. If people are committing to a series, like many of the series that we have here in Ontario, they want to be able to stay in Ontario for that whole time.

And continued investment in training: I think, Alistair, I want to throw it to you to talk about how some of your members could benefit from that, as well.

Mr. Alistair Hepburn: Yes, the Skills Development Fund is wildly important, especially for transitional careers. As we talked about, the trades very much play a huge role in film and television, and we also know that performers can age out of being able to work. Being able to transition into other parts of the industry is wildly important, as is ensuring that we refresh the talent pool with trained and skilled individuals. If I can, I just—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'm going to have to stop you there because I do want to come to Kumaran. Thank you, Alistair.

Back to Kumaran and Computek: I know that you have a small percentage of international students that you mentioned, but there have been reports of many private colleges taking advantage of international students; we're hearing a lot about that in the news. It's very unfortunate. As you say, they're coming here to seek opportunity.

Could you talk about what the Ontario government needs to do to help address that problem and how to distinguish the good colleges from the bad actors?

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: Great question, member; thank you for that. I think the federal government has already begun some of this work through IRCC and through the trusted institutions list. I think, as a career college ourselves, we've asked that the sector be regulated fairly, but it should be regulated strongly because there are bad apples, for sure—bad-faith players.

It must also be said—and this is not an “us versus them” kind of situation. I think that this is a collective sector thing that we need to do. But in those instances that make it into

media where there are all of these students stranded at a private college, it comes up as a result of private-public partnerships. There is a public college involved in that transaction, as well, who rescinds the offers that the private college then goes ahead and makes to these students. And the fact that there was a report in the *Globe and Mail* a couple of months ago that officially, in Ontario, at least, the amount of money that is invested in public universities and colleges—

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

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan:—now outweighs the international fees that are collected by public institutions. All to say, member, that this is a collective responsibility that we have, and there are ways in which the government needs to do it, through regulations, through how we measure impact, that should be applied equitably across the public-private divide.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Are there active conversations going on now about what the Ontario ministry needs to do in that regard to help these students—

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: Yes. Career Colleges Ontario, which is our member association in the province, is having active conversations with the Minister of Colleges and Universities about this.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: When can we expect some reports on that?

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: I might have to get back to you once we talk to our CCO reps on that, member.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Kumaran Nadesan: You're welcome.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes our time. I thank the panellists for taking the time to appear and coming here to share the information with us.

With that, there being no further business, the committee is now adjourned until 10 a.m. on Thursday, December 14, 2023, when we will resume public hearings in Mississauga, Ontario.

The committee adjourned at 1351.

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