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**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Pre-budget consultations

1st Session
43rd Parliament
Tuesday 30 January 2024

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

Consultations prébudgétaires

1^{re} session
43^e législature
Mardi 30 janvier 2024

Chair: Ernie Hardeman
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Président : Ernie Hardeman
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Tuesday 30 January 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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

Mardi 30 janvier 2024

The committee met at 1001 in the Radisson Hotel, Sudbury.

**PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS
CONSULTATIONS PRÉBUDGÉTAIRES**

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Good morning and welcome to Sudbury. 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. 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 the 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.

With that, are there any questions from the committee? If not, we'll have the first group at the table.

**MIRARCO MINING INNOVATION
ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE
EMPLOYEES UNION
RÉSEAU ACCESS NETWORK**

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I believe we're present at the table: MIRARCO Mining Innovation, Ontario Public Service Employees Union and Réseau Access Network. As I mentioned in the opening remarks, you will have seven minutes to make your presentation. At six minutes, I will say, "One minute." Don't stop, because at seven minutes I will say, "Thank you," and you will stop.

With that, we do ask each presenter to start with stating your name for Hansard to make sure we attribute your great comments to the right person. And with that, we will start with MIRARCO Mining Innovation.

Dr. Nadia Mykytczuk: Good morning, I'm Dr. Nadia Mykytczuk, CEO and president of MIRARCO Mining Innovation.

Do I continue with my presentation?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Carry on.

Dr. Nadia Mykytczuk: Okay. I have shared slides that you can all see here.

Today, I was asked to present to the committee in response to the NOHFC funding that we received for an industrial research chair. If any of the honourable members of the committee remember, I did present as well last year, and I'd like to provide an update on the Centre for Mine Waste Biotechnology that we are hoping to build here in Sudbury.

MIRARCO is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. Over this period, we have done a lot of applied research with the mining industry in areas of geomechanics, safety, energy, software and, with my joining the corporation two and a half years ago, bringing my 18 years of experience, in biomining and bioremediation. This is the area that was funded under the NOHFC industrial research chair that was announced at the PDAC conference last year with the Honourable Minister Rickford and Vale as the key industrial sponsor. It is a five-year commitment that totals \$1.6 million, with NOHFC providing \$750,000. That was matched with \$875,000 over a five-year period from Vale. We have other academic and industry sponsors, and the goal of this industrial research chair is to address the huge opportunity that we have in Ontario and across Canada to extract value from mine waste.

This is the legacy of mining and tailings that we have across Canada. It is a by-product of mineral resource development. In that waste, there are billions of dollars of critical minerals. We cannot extract them using the traditional methods that we did in the past, and so we are looking for new technologies to extract those valuable metals and, at the same time, clean up that legacy of waste that exists in our environment.

The goal of this industrial research chair that NOHFC funded is to really support and advance sustainable technologies for the extraction of critical minerals. We have three key themes that are led by myself and my team at MIRARCO: mining value from waste, reducing those environmental liabilities, and we'd be remiss if we didn't accelerate and commercialize those technologies and put them in the hands of our industry partners.

To give you an example of what this means: I don't know how many of our committee members have had the pleasure of walking out onto a vast tailings pond. There are many here in Sudbury, and I believe our local MPPs would be happy to take you on a tour. But this is a very large landscape. These are hundreds of millions of tonnes

of fine-powdered waste materials. They are reactive, and they can cause quite a lot of damage to the environment. We are collecting those materials, taking them to the lab and developing biotechnologies to use bacteria to break apart those elements in the same way that a smelter does, but with lower cost and a lower carbon footprint. We are looking for a total-valorization solution, extracting critical minerals, removing the lesser elements like iron and sulphur that cause the majority of the environmental damage, and providing clean aggregates for a zero-waste solution.

This is a very exciting area of research. It's over 40 years in development. These are not new ideas, but for them to move into the hands of industry, we need to be able to scale up and de-risk those technologies, and that requires us to pilot and demonstrate those technologies. Those facilities do not exist in Canada, so MIRARCO has undertaken over the last four years to develop the plans to build a centre for mine waste biotechnology here in Sudbury. This will be a 45,000-square-foot facility equipped with industrial piloting spaces, analytical labs and personnel support.

The cost of this building has increased over the last year's estimates because of inflation costs and the site-build preparations, and amounts to \$38 million, for which we have undertaken grant applications to provincial, federal and municipal grant opportunities, as well as the private sector for capital investment. We have a number of grants currently in review. Over \$40 million is currently being reviewed by different agencies, and the key ask—and one that I'd like to update for the provincial government—is that we have a Skills Development Fund Capital Stream grant in the final stages of review with the provincial government. This would be a \$10-million investment from the provincial government into this project. We're really keen and anxious, and hoping to hear good news from the province very soon.

We do still have an aggressive timeline. We are hoping to break ground at the end of this year. Hopefully, if I am able to come and present to you this time next year, we will be able to share the good news in launching this exciting project. We will continue with the work of the industrial research chair in updating Minister Pirie, Minister Rickford, the NOHFC and our industrial partners on all the good work that we are completing under the NOHFC program—many of the highlights noted here.

We are keenly aware of the challenges of advancing critical minerals for Ontario as a strategic area. Here in Sudbury, that is something that we live and breathe every day. From the rocks to the automobile, we are looking to support every step of the supply chain.

With that, thank you very much, and I'm looking forward to questions.

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

We now will hear from the Ontario Public Service Employees Union. The floor is yours.

President JP Hornick: I'm JP Hornick, president of OPSEU/SEFPO. My pronouns are they/them, and I'm happy to be here with you all today.

OPSEU/SEFPO represents more than 180,000 members, front-line workers with unique insights to be able to make recommendations to you on how to make all our lives better through this budget process. Our members come from all social, economic, racial and cultural groups. We live in communities across the province, and we work in over 20 sectors. We are the ones who keep Ontario running.

We call on the government to use the province's 2024-25 provincial budget to make things better for ordinary people in Toronto, not worse; to invest in the public services that people rely on for decent lives; to support the workers who deliver these services; and to reverse the cuts in services, the reductions in spending on public services and the caps on public-service and non-profit-sector salaries and wages. We'd also like you to stop the giveaways to your rich friends, CEOs and corporations.

Ontario has a healthy fiscal situation. The government's 2023 fall economic statement made that clear. Budgets are not neutral; these are choices. Ontarians are living through a current affordability crisis, and they are acutely aware of the pressures that are on them and their household. Every aspect of this province's budget impacts Ontarians.

1010

Spending on public services and programs has not kept up with inflation, nor with population growth. In fact, it has declined each year since this government was elected. As a result, public services suffer and so do the people who rely upon them.

Public services do provide a foundation for reducing social inequality and poverty. When governments invest in public education, in public health care, in public housing, in public transit and in decent public sector jobs, then we create a floor for equality within this province. Cutting those services increases inequality and poverty.

The affordability crisis is a crisis of inequality. The growing gap between the rich and the rest of us is something that we have not seen in a century.

There are two ways to fix an affordability crisis: You can either make things cost less, or you can make sure that ordinary people can afford a decent life and ensure that they can rely on good public services. This government has done neither.

You can't get a family doctor. It takes months to get a diagnostic test or common surgery. School boards don't have enough resources to meet student needs and keep kids safe. The need for mental health services—especially for youth—is at record levels, yet patients in crisis may wait years to access the care that they need. Colleges and universities have to cut programs and rely on international student tuition to stay open. Affordable housing is hard to find and impossible to get into.

This list goes on, and these are choices that have been made by the Ford government.

It is a choice to pay 300% more for private surgeries than public hospitals would be paid for the same surgeries. It is a choice to reduce public revenue from alcohol sales and distribution so that the Westons and others can make more private profits selling wine, beer and ready-to-drink

cocktails in grocery chains and big-box stores. It's a choice to turn over provincial landmarks like Ontario Place and the Ontario Science Centre to private developers and then build a multi-million dollar parking lot with public funds. It is a choice to ignore advice from the provincial civil service, to eviscerate municipal planning bylaws and rezone huge tracts of the greenbelt so that benefits go to friends, to the tune of \$8 billion in increased property values.

With this budget, however, this government has an opportunity to do better.

Ontario simply isn't spending enough on the services Ontarians need, and it shows. We now have the fewest hospital beds per person of any province in Canada and funds for hospitals at the lowest rate in the country.

Last year, Ontario hit a new and terrible record for hallway medicine: over 1,300 people a day in the hallways. There were over 200 temporary hospital emergency room closures between July 2022 and June 2023, mostly in rural and remote areas. The funding of new long-term-care beds will not meet demand and is problematically directed to the private sector.

Last summer, northern Ontario faced real danger when the province was short 50 fire crews. These jobs are three- and six-month contracts. These jobs are tragically underfunded, and the staffing levels reflect that. They are not appealing to firefighters, who would now rather work for municipalities. So they flew in firefighters from Mexico.

Our court system is on the edge of collapse. Criminal and civil cases alike are postponed beyond any reasonable timeline, and ultimately, some are being thrown out.

Ontario's correctional system is in crisis. We spend less per offender than any other province and our institutions are crumbling. There's a critical shortage of corrections officers. This at a time when the dismantling of the social safety net in Ontario has led to an increase in the incarceration of people with complex mental and physical health needs the system is not equipped to handle. The youth justice system is in shambles since half of the services were closed in 2021. This is still ongoing, including Cecil Facer here in Sudbury.

Ontario doesn't have a revenue problem. Revenues have grown at twice the rate of inflation since the government was elected. In fact, the government's own policy choices are throwing away public revenue.

The Ford government's plan to scrap the cap on big-box grocers and convenience stores who sell alcohol will take millions out of public revenues from the LCBO. The LCBO generates \$2.5 billion annually in revenues that go directly back into the public coffers to pay for public services.

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

President JP Hornick: We all know this is part of the privatization trick: cut back public services, let them run down until they're failing and then give people a chance to look for private alternatives as the only solution.

Public funds going towards shareholder profits are not caring for Ontarians. We did not vote for private health care, our lives are not for profit, and our best advice is to use this opportunity to make things better for ordinary

people in Ontario, not worse. Properly fund public services, invest in the services that people rely on for a decent life and in the people who deliver those services. Stop the giveaways and redirect this back into the public coffers, where it belongs.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much for the presentation.

Now we'll hear from Réseau Access Network.

Ms. Amber Fritz: Good morning, everyone. My name is Amber. I am the manager of the supervised consumption site in Sudbury. I work for Réseau Access Network, which is the organization that supports operations of this site. I'm here to talk to you today about the importance of harm reduction and supervised consumption services and why funding is so incredibly important in this province, in this country and especially in this community.

Supervised consumption sites and harm reduction are known to be incredibly cost-effective. As well as save lives, they prevent new infections of HIV and hepatitis C. They connect people to care. They connect people to treatment, should they so choose. They act as a bridge to other health care services. And they're a place of safety, a place of welcoming and a place of warmth for people who are often stigmatized and excluded from traditional health care settings. We built trust, we build connection, we build love, and it really is special what happens in the walls of these programs.

If you see in the slide that I have up on the screen now, that's actually an image of our harm reduction room at the supervised consumption site here in Sudbury, where we distribute a wide array of harm reduction supplies so people can use drugs in a safer way. We, of course, distribute naloxone, which is a life-saving medication that reverses opioid overdose. And one thing that is important is that we're open 365 days a year, so we're a point of contact for harm reduction supplies when every other service is closed. We know that when folks do not have the supplies that they need, there is the potential of sharing supplies, and when people are sharing supplies, there's a potential of transmission of HIV and hepatitis C.

Supervised consumption sites can be a little controversial for some folks. I personally don't think so. We know that they save lives. There are over 100 operating worldwide. They've been in existence since the 1980s.

We have reversed over 24 overdoses at The Spot, which is what the site is called, and not once have we had to engage EMS. All of our overdoses or medical emergencies have been responded to on-site with the staff that we have. This reduces visits to the ED, this reduces calls to EMS, which of course translates into cost savings.

This also becomes a point of connection to other services as well. When people feel safe and comfortable and not judged, they're a lot more likely to open up to you and say, "Hey, I need help and this is what I need," in the most honest and truthful way. And when we don't have these services, people that are stigmatized and left out of traditional services don't get the help that they need. That's when we see mental health issues explode onto our

streets. That's when we see people struggling even more with their substance use issues.

It is a place of dignity. It is a place where people do not have to consume drugs behind dumpsters and in alleyways in the freezing cold. We know that people are going to use drugs regardless. People always have and people always will. So why not support people to have the dignity that they deserve. People who use drugs are Ontarians as well and they deserve to be supported the way that everyone deserves to be supported.

It's probably not a surprise to some folks in the room that there is a considerable health inequity in northern Ontario. We have less services. There are only three supervised consumption sites in all of the north, one of which has long-term funding from the province, which is Thunder Bay. The Spot, the site here in Sudbury, is operating on a very generous donation from Vale Base Metals right now. We do not have provincial funding. We've been waiting for over two years. Our site is set to close. Timmins is in the same boat. They are set to close at the end of March if they don't receive funding.

So that means between Toronto and Thunder Bay, there are no supervised consumption services, which, again, we know save lives, reduce the spread of HIV and hepatitis C, and refrain people from going into the emergency department when an overdose occurs and from calling EMS when an overdose occurs.

We know that Sudbury, in particular, and Thunder Bay, Timmins and Algoma are disproportionately affected by the drug-poisoning crisis. We need these services desperately.

1020

A little bit of math for folks that like numbers: One course of hepatitis C treatment can cost between \$50,000 and \$70,000. For a little bit of context, the cost of a single syringe is about \$1. So the cost saving there I think is pretty significant. A year of HIV medication: \$15,000 annually. What's a great way to prevent the spread of HIV and hepatitis C? Harm reduction: harm reduction programs distributing sterile drug use equipment—because it's not just needles. You can transmit hepatitis C and HIV through pipes as well. So it's important to have very robust fulsome programs to recognize that people consume drugs in different ways and to support them in those different ways.

The district of Sudbury-Manitoulin: In 2022, 112 people lost their lives in this community. When I say 112, I would really like people to think not of a number, but of the human beings that are behind that 112: mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, friends, children. And it didn't have to be that way. It doesn't have to be this way. These deaths are preventable. We know what to do to prevent these deaths. We know what to do. We are hit so hard in the north. We need these services desperately. If you look between January and August in 2023, again, 54 members of our community gone—people, not numbers people. That represents a significantly higher percentage per capita than the province of Ontario or the province as a whole. If you look at 2022, 54.1 deaths per 100,000 popu-

lation per year, and the provincial average was 16.8. So there's a considerable disparity.

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

Ms. Amber Fritz: And if you look at 2023, again a disparity.

So as I mentioned, our site is set to close. We've been operating since September 28, 2022. We've been getting busier and busier every single month. If you look at the month of January up until yesterday, we have supported 376 consumptions and 302 visits in 29 days. The longer we're open, the more people we can reach and the better we can do.

We're hoping to move to a downtown location. Right now, our location is not ideal, but we're still doing remarkable things, even with the barrier of a not-ideal location. If we had the funds to move to the downtown core, which is where we know we need to be, we estimate that we would probably have upwards of 60 or so visits per day, which is pretty remarkable, because those are even more people we can reach and even more people that we can help.

Again, our future is very uncertain. We submitted our application to the province in August of 2021. We are still waiting. We understand that there's a review taking place, but people are dying today—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time, and hopefully we can finish that through the question period.

We'll start the questioning with MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to all our presenters here today. I'd like to begin my questions with JP from OPSEU.

JP, I just want to thank you for the way in which you represent the 180,000 members and front-line workers who are OPSEU members.

It seems this government is laser-focused on enriching wealthy developers and land speculators as well as US-based corporations, while sitting on a \$5.4-billion slush fund. Yesterday, it was a pretty unhinged train wreck of a media scam. I'm sure you saw. The Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery promised the Ford government would release the business case for relocating ServiceOntario centres. As you know, they're relocating them to wealthy US-based corporations—Walmart as well as Staples. It remains a concern, because the government has tied a bow on that deal, and they're also providing public dollars to these for-profit corporations in sole-source contracts. They're not even allowing Canadian companies to compete.

I wanted to know, what are your thoughts about this lack of competitive business bidding process? Why were Canadian companies cut out from this deal?

President JP Hornick: Any answer I would give on why Canadian companies were cut out or why creative alternatives to expanding ServiceOntario locations in public institutions would be pure speculation on my part. But I would suggest that this seems to be part of a larger pattern of behaviour. Instead of working with the people who deliver the public services, instead of working with municipalities, looking for alternatives that expand our options

within the public sector, this government seems to consistently turn to profiteers.

The piece about this that frightens me is a couple-fold: (1) the loss of good public service jobs, but (2)—and public service jobs are foundations upon which communities are built. It's not just about keeping my members employed; it's about those dollars circulating in the communities in which they live and work. It's about making sure that people have time to participate in meaningful ways by ensuring their working conditions are adequate. It's also about improving the health of Ontarians by making sure that people have access to what they need.

The second piece of this—and I think this is even more important in many respects—is the privacy aspect and the accountability pieces. When we see what has happened in the past when ServiceOntario locations have had information breaches, where Ontarians' information is then circulating on the Net in ways it was not intended, there is no accountability piece in this. So what I would suggest, and thank you for the question, is that we need to scrap that as a—it's not even a business case. This is actually just sucking money out of Ontarians' pockets and putting it into that of the guy who owns Staples and the guys who own Walmart. Let's be real about what that means for your average Ontarian. These are good, community-based jobs, and they should stay in our communities in the public service.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you very much. I want to thank you for your comments about turning over provincial landmarks to private developers as well as your comment that our lives are not for profit. Let's hope this government is listening.

Next, I'd like to go over to Amber. Amber, thank you very much for your presentation. I want to know: Can you discuss the artificial and arbitrary cap that this government placed on the number of safe consumption sites?

Ms. Amber Fritz: I would love to know the reason why that cap exists. I don't understand why there's a cap of 21. I believe that currently, there are 17 operating and, if I'm not mistaken, there are four pending applications. I was very surprised to see a cap. You don't see a cap in other types of health care services, you know what I mean? I think that that kind of speaks a little bit to the stigma toward people who use drugs.

Some people believe that supervised consumption sites enable folks to continue "trapped" in addiction and terminology like that. What supervised consumption sites do is enable life and enable dignity and enable connection and enable care. I don't understand why we wouldn't want an abundance of these sites.

There's plenty of data out there that says it does not increase crime. It doesn't create a honeypot effect, meaning that drug dealers fall from the sky and start taking over communities. Staff, at least the staff at our site, are very diligent about the perimeter of our site. If we see people kind of hanging out and using on-property, we're like, "Hey, man, would you mind just taking it off-site?" And they're like, "Sure," because we're kind.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Understood. Supervised consumption sites have been very much a political game under this government. We've seen Premier Ford betray his own lack of understanding and empathy and, really, ignorance on the topic of the science of addiction when he said, "I don't believe in safe-injection areas, as I call them. I believe in supporting people, getting them help"—when we know that that is exactly what you're doing, getting people help.

Chair, I'd like to turn over my time to MPP West.

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

MPP Jamie West: Nadia, I just want to echo my support that I've had in the past. I'm going to probably spend most of my time talking to the other presenters, but I do want to let my colleagues know, if you want the opportunity to go to a tailings pond to see the amount of waste that is there and the potential for profit and how Ontario could be an industry leader—this is a use-it-or-lose-it opportunity. The states will come calling. We have a very talented individual here. The states will come; they'll invest, and they will have that technology. They'll be leaders, and we'll be left behind. I know that Minister Rickford and Minister Pirie know this already.

Amber, I wanted to ask you a question. This came up in 2018. We had a town hall about opioids, and one of the questions that came up there from people was, "Why don't people just quit or go to jail?" Is that a solution to addictions?

Ms. Amber Fritz: I personally don't think so, no. I think it's important to highlight as well that not everyone who uses drugs is addicted or has a substance use disorder or an opioid use disorder, and they're at risk of dying as well. They're at risk of developing health complications as well. When people do have that opioid use disorder, that substance use disorder, you can't just snap your fingers and say, "Okay, I'm done. That's it." You need the support; you need the help; you need the care; you need the compassion. Consumption sites and other harm reduction programs do exactly that.

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

MPP Jamie West: Just with the one minute, I'll just wrap up by sharing a story. We had a support sort of walk for the supervised consumption site, and at one point we stopped at the white crosses. What stood out to me was that people were asked to speak, but no one could bring the words. It was a silent sobbing. When you talked about the deaths, the 112 people who had died, all of those people as individuals as well, it's the effect they have on the families. That was a moving moment for it, when you recognize that these are people—people who others care about, their sons and daughters, their parents. It's very moving.

1030

I'm very proud that Sudbury has had this support. Sudbury believes in the supervised consumption site. We do need the provincial government to provide the funding that's needed. It's absolutely unreasonable that since 2021, we've been asking for this, and there are only three in northern Ontario. Northern Ontario is the size of France. It

is ridiculous that we don't have the support and the funding that's there.

I think I'm going to run out of time—

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

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you all for being here this morning and for your compelling remarks.

Amber, I think my colleagues on the official opposition have covered this topic well. I just want to say I do support your work, and I think that—could you just repeat the ask? How much your operating request would be to keep operating for another year?

Ms. Amber Fritz: What we asked of the province, if I'm not mistaken, was \$1.3 million or \$1.4 million. Right now, we're kind of going month to month on donations, which is \$75,000. And we're not operating at full capacity because, of course, the majority of my full-time staff have now resigned because they don't have any job security.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: It's an interesting number. The minister of public service delivery just announced that they'll save about \$1 million—we're not sure, because we haven't got the business case—from moving the ServiceOntarios into Staples and Walmart. Maybe they could give that \$1 million to you and do some really good work.

I do want to talk to JP about that as well. While I know that there are different models for the ServiceOntarios and that some of them are private already today, and they're run by individuals, entrepreneurs and members of the community, there's a big ServiceOntario near my riding—I'm in Don Valley West. Just outside of Thorncliffe Park, there's a large ServiceOntario centre in Flemingdon Park. It is now, we know, one of the ones announced to be closed.

Just this morning, on CBC, a member of the community talked about how so many residents, especially newcomers to Canada, walk to the ServiceOntario or it's a very easy bus, but it's very close. It's about a kilometre walk to get there from the furthest residence in Thorncliffe Park. Moving it to Staples will be at least a two-kilometre walk—not terrible, but it could be unmanageable for some with small children in tow and all those things.

I just want you again to highlight the impact in terms of not just the dollars, because I've asked the FAO to do a cost-benefit analysis, but in addition to that, the impact on communities when these things move.

President JP Hornick: Yes, absolutely. I think that that is one of the things we see: that cuts to public services in this manner disproportionately affect women; they disproportionately affect new Canadians; they disproportionately affect folks who are living in communities that don't have access to good public transit, to services generally. What we look at is that any cut within the public service sector means that the very people that it's designed to support lose even further. They lose more ground. A two-kilometre walk for somebody who either has a disability, who has kids, who can't otherwise afford—that changes everything about your day.

We see this also even in decisions that don't involve community consultation. Moving the science centre, for example, is another thing. That changes the lives of parents who have kids with autism in that area, who are there on a daily basis, because it moves it from a space that is accessible, that is community-based, that has actually changed generationally the lives of people by getting folks into the sciences. Moving it down to the waterfront, where the only people that can get there are folks with cars, is absolutely ridiculous, and it was done with zero consultation.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Certainly, I've spoken a lot about this issue. I attended a rally on the weekend, and I said it was akin to the city of Toronto saying that they were going to move the Rob Ford Stadium out of Etobicoke. The science centre is part of the community in Thorncliffe Park and in Flemingdon Park and Don Mills, and we want it to stay there.

Nadia, just briefly with you: We met here last year, and I want to just thank you again for the innovative research that you're driving in the critical mineral sector. I think it's really important. It has both an environmental impact and economic impact, and so I just wanted to say thank you and acknowledge that.

Do you feel like you've made some good progress in the last year in terms of advancing this work?

Dr. Nadia Mykytczuk: We have. It has been very challenging raising funds for projects that have had so much support. We've had federal and provincial ministers saying we need to get this built, but the follow-up and being able to secure the capital funds to build the project are very challenging. We have made great progress. We're very excited about where we're at with our architects, design plans and research. But if we don't build it, we can't get it done.

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

We'll now go to the government. MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It's great to be in Sudbury, Ontario. Thank you to all the presenters. I'll start my first round of questions with Nadia from—how do you pronounce it?

Dr. Nadia Mykytczuk: It's MIRARCO. I know it's hard.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: MIRARCO, okay. Yes. That's good.

I appreciate the great work you do. You touched a little bit on what your organization has the potential to do for helping the mining sector and a clean environmental track record here in Sudbury. I think to date, within Canada and Ontario in particular, we are among the cleanest jurisdictions with respect to mining in the world. Of course, there's more we could do.

And thank you, MPP West, for your discussion there on the technology with respect to the tailings; I appreciate that, and I will certainly pass that on to the ministers involved in that particular file.

I wanted to get a sense from you of the importance you feel for this province with respect to the Ring of Fire and what the potential upside is there for our province, for the

people of the north, the Indigenous communities, the mining sector and employment, as well as a cleaner environment for the world, because I think there's potential there to supply critical minerals to the global economy and a new green economy. Could you touch on that?

Dr. Nadia Mykytczuk: Yes, I'm happy to. Ontario is endowed with incredible mineral wealth. We have many deposits that can be the next big Sudburys of the future, including the Ring of Fire. There are a lot of challenges in developing a new site, especially in a remote area like northern Ontario. They can learn a lot from what we've done in Sudbury in terms of advancing and supporting mining communities, but there are a lot of potential mistakes that we could make if we don't do it properly.

Incorporating technologies that will not build another tailings pond—Sudbury is home to one of the largest tailings deposits in all of Canada, and that legacy is there for thousands of years if we don't do something to address it. The First Nations communities around the Ring of Fire will not support development of that deposit if we are going to leave the same legacy. So Ontario really has to be conscious that, if we're going to develop new mines faster than we ever have done to meet the critical minerals demands, we have to do it differently than we did in the past. That is part of what we're trying to do in supporting the mining industry.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Right. And is your organization a non-profit?

Dr. Nadia Mykytczuk: We are not-for-profit, yes.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. I know you've touched on government support at various levels. Have you also had collaboration from the private sector in this space?

Dr. Nadia Mykytczuk: Absolutely. We have about a third of the capital investment that is going to be through private sector funds, and the operational funds we have in our business case for the centre when it's built are based on industry membership. There are three tiers of members—Vale, for example, committing \$150,000 a year for a five-year commitment for access to the centre. The facility is developing research programs, so that is where private sector will invest. They will bring their challenges to us; we will work with them to develop IP and solutions for them and then help commercialize them.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: And in terms of your technology with respect to the tailings, how far along are you in terms of the research process to being commercially and practically viable?

Dr. Nadia Mykytczuk: Every tailings deposit is different. The chemistry—the elements that we're trying to extract—is unique. I'll give you an example of what we're doing here with Vale. They have pyrrhotite tailings that are rich in both nickel and cobalt, two battery metals. We are very close to piloting and coming up with the best flowsheet solution that they'll be able to incorporate here in Sudbury to start extracting \$8 billion to \$10 billion worth of metals that remains in those materials. We are two to three years away from having a viable flowsheet. We're doing similar things with other industry members across Canada and internationally.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: That's great. Thank you very much.

How much time is left, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You have 3.3.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay, that's great. Thank you.

I'll move my next questions to JP from the Ontario Public Service Employees Union. Thank you for being here. I must say, I don't agree with a lot of what you said, but that's fair. I do agree with you in terms of Ontario being in a better fiscal position today. Five years ago, when we inherited government, we had the largest sub-sovereign debt in the entire western world. We have now managed to be able to get close to balance on that—with a \$206-billion budget, I might add, so it has not been austerity. We've done targeted tax cuts which have increased revenues. We may disagree on how some of that is spent, but I think we are getting in a better fiscal space and I think that's particularly important given the increase in interest rates we've seen over the last couple years here. So I do agree with you on that.

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In terms of public transit, I do agree that we need to invest in that. We've put in \$70.5 billion over the next decade, which is the largest investment in Canada's history, in terms of subways—I hope you support that—roads, infrastructure. What we're seeing in Ontario today is incredible population growth. I'm sure we all agree on that; those are facts.

Ontario is the fastest growing jurisdiction in North America. We are bringing more people into Ontario on a yearly basis than Texas or Florida are seeing, and they have much bigger populations. With that population growth, it creates challenges, obviously: infrastructure, medical, health care, education. It's a good problem to have, but these are the challenges.

There's a reason people are coming to Ontario. The reason people are coming to Ontario from other provinces, from other jurisdictions around the world, is because Ontario is a place where people want to work and raise a family. Now, having said that, as I mentioned, there are challenges and we want to work together to oversee those challenges.

So my question to you is, with that population growth that we're witnessing in Ontario today, do you feel that immigration at current levels is something that the province should be more involved in, in terms of having a bit of a say with the federal government? Obviously, the federal government controls immigration, but should we, perhaps have more of a say vis-à-vis the federal government in terms of what type of workers or what type of tradespeople, to help the needs of Ontarians? Because I agree with you: Clearly there are shortages in nurses, in doctors and in a lot of professions. We want to make sure that we get people coming to the province such that it doesn't put overwhelming pressure on our housing and health care, but also helps fill the needs to where we need it.

So I just want to get your thoughts on how Ontario and Canada, the federal government—

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: —can collaborate on immigration and what we can do on that side.

President JP Hornick: In short, no. I don't believe that the province should have a greater say in what's happening in federal immigration. My background is as a labour historian. Canada is a country that is built on immigration, certainly, but the individual needs of the province need to be balanced against the needs of the country.

What I've seen in terms of this particular government is investment in stuff—roads, infrastructure, beds—but not the people who actually work in them or require them. The refugee crisis is higher than it has been, and there is not an adequate provincial investment in the front-line services to support those folks who we're pulling into Ontario. I do believe—

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay, okay. That's fine. I appreciate that. So you don't support that.

In terms of investment, I think it's critically important we do get medical professionals—and actually this question could go to Heidi. With the Learn and Stay program—

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

We will now go back to the official opposition. MPP West.

MPP Jamie West: I'll continue with JP and the conversation we had. I had the opportunity to join JP last night. We met with some OPSEU/SEFPO members, and one of the themes there—there were a lot of them—had to do with the workers' desire to do really good work, but not feeling like there's direction from the Conservative government. These announcements are made, but they don't know the road map of what's happening there. I think that and the desire to have fair compensation were the two of them. Did I get that correct?

President JP Hornick: Absolutely, MPP West. When we're looking at the conversation that we had last night, it was a story we heard again and again. We look at it in Bill 135 and the dissolution of the local health integration networks, without a plan that actually gives the workers or the employers a sense of where we're headed and the ability to respond in a way that makes sure those jobs are protected and that communities are serviced appropriately.

We see it in the case of the fire rangers, where what they need is to be reclassified as firefighters so that we're not losing those folks to the municipal firefighting, but rather building a province-wide ability to respond to the increased pressures of climate change.

We see it at Cecil Facer right here in Sudbury, where there is an announcement to shut down, really, the only youth corrections facility and send youth down to Toronto, where they will be schooled in entirely new ways of being removed from their communities and removed from their supports.

With all of these workers, what they have in common is an incredibly strong desire to serve their communities and to serve the people in their communities. But you cannot feed your family on passionate dedication to your job. You need to make sure that that job is secure, that it's well paid and that those services are invested in, so we

make sure that these are generational problems that we're solving versus creating.

MPP Jamie West: Yes. I think that leads to the next thing I wanted to raise. The other thing I heard was these workers are exiting these critical roles. You talked about the wildland firefighters, the conservation officers and corrections who are exiting because of the situation that's here. I know that my—members from the Conservative Party talked about the criticism, but sometimes it's important to hear the criticism to make good decisions. Do you just want to talk about these valuable workers with skills choosing to absolutely leave the departments they care about?

President JP Hornick: Yes, absolutely. The one thing that I would say these workers have in common is an incredible willingness, despite these pressures, to continue to work with government to find creative solutions. What we don't see is a reciprocal relationship in government's willingness to talk to workers to find out what these alternatives could look like.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Gélinas?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you. My first question will go to Heidi. You made that clear: It is the responsibility of the provincial government to fund supervised consumption sites for a \$1.3-million investment. That \$1.3 million is a lot of money to you and me; to a health care budget of \$58 billion, it is not even a rounding error. For \$1.3 million, we will save dozens of lives in my community.

I want the members, all of us, to realize this is a very small investment. This is the responsibility of the provincial government. If the provincial government does not take their responsibility to fund this \$1.3 million, dozens and dozens of people in my community will die.

You were there when my nephew died of a drug overdose here in Sudbury. His mom is a nurse. He was a good kid who could not gain access to the programs and services to help him, and he's not with us anymore. That happens to many, many families.

It's \$1.3 million, guys. It has been on the books since 2021. What are we waiting for? The city funded it for a year. Now, they rely on donations to stay open. This is something that needs to be fixed. It needs to be fixed right now.

Heidi, do you agree?

Ms. Amber Fritz: Yes.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Oh, sorry. Sorry, Amber.

Ms. Amber Fritz: That's okay. Yes, I absolutely agree. We do recognize that there is a provincial review of consumption sites happening in this province. I believe I read a quote from Associate Minister Tibollo that it was going to conclude within the next couple of months. That's wonderful. For the next couple of months—people are dying today; people are dying tomorrow. We need our site open. We need our site funded.

What it's doing to people who access this service is causing a lot of fear. It's causing a lot of uncertainty. If we do end up shutting down, even if we reopen, that damages trust that we have worked very hard to build with people

who don't often trust the health care system because they're not treated very well. If you're someone who uses drugs, especially a racialized person who uses drugs, you're not really getting the best level of care that you should be receiving. This is something that we hear over and over and over, to the point where people lose fingers, legs, heart infections, you name it, because they don't want to go to hospital because they're treated so poorly.

Harm reduction programs, which accept people who use drugs for the beautiful human beings that they are, act as that point of connection. We act as that point of support to say, "Your leg looks like it's about to fall off. We're going to get you to the hospital, and we're going to sit with you, or we'll facilitate someone to advocate alongside you, so you're treated with the dignity you deserve."

It happens. The stories we receive are daily on how poorly people are treated just because they're someone who uses drugs. We have people say one of the reasons why they enjoy coming to the site so often is because they're treated like a human being. Why are they not being treated like a human being elsewhere? So if we can kind of say, "Hey, come to us. We'll help you. We'll support you. We accept you for exactly where you're at in your life in this moment, and we will work alongside you"—

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

Ms. Amber Fritz: That is where we get the best results, not coercive treatment, not forcing people to do this or telling people what they should do. We walk alongside people. It's a very holistic approach, and it is proven to work.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you.

Nadia, if I can go to you very quickly, there are hundreds of abandoned mines in my riding in Nickel Belt. There are hundreds of abandoned mines in the north, and many of them don't have tailings as big. Tailings basically are mine waste, and that waste is very damaging to the environment, to the people, to our community.

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They are about to change this. The technology they are inventing right here in Sudbury will be life-changing forever. Mines will be respectful of the environment, respectful of the people. Am I pushing this too far?

Dr. Nadia Mykytczuk: Not at all. I think mining and the industry is on the brink of a transformation for necessity. We have a huge demand for critical minerals globally—

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

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

MPP Andrea Hazell: Good morning, everyone. I hope we're still in morning—yes, good morning. Thank you for coming in and presenting today. All of you have presented very detailed presentations, so I really thank you for that.

I want to start with JP. I hear you loud and clear. We've been around Ontario listening to these pre-budget consultations. Everything you've said in your budget is what a lot of—health care, schools, lack of housing. It's like music to my ears. I know this government just spoke about the investment they have done in Ontario. Well, there has

got to be something that is not working with that investment because the entire health care system in Ontario is broken. There's lack of housing. Patients are in crisis. We're facing numerous emergencies' doors closing. And then we look at what we're getting into with our universities: We are lacking investments to help our next generation that is going to be needing that education. They can become the next Prime Minister. They can be our next doctors.

Can you share what you're hearing from your members—because they're all being impacted.

President JP Hornick: Yes, absolutely. One of the things that I think is crucial, when we talk about funding public services adequately, is that it is a form of investment. It's an investment in the collective good. It's an investment in the services that the folks who actually have to do the building of infrastructure require. They need public education for their children. They need public health care when their bodies start to break down. They need to make sure the public services are there as in the story that MPP Gélinas just shared around supports for folks who are struggling with addictions, struggling with mental health issues. These are the wraparound investments that we require to build an Ontario that is better for all of us. These are the very stories we hear from our members, our workers, about what they want to give back to their community. Thank you very much for that question.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Yes. I wanted to extend a bit further. What is your strategy if you're still facing the lack of funding for your members? What is your strategy for 2024 and 2025?

President JP Hornick: There are a couple of strategies. One is organizing very deliberately and strategically with the communities who are directly affected to make sure that their voices are uplifted and the front-line workers' voices are uplifted. It is one thing for me as a president of a union to sit here, but the people I represent, those are the voices that need to be at these tables and front and centre in these discussions.

When we are talking to fire rangers who are remarking upon the fact—there was a guy that I was talking to last night, who is 45 seasons in, and he is telling us about the trajectory of when they started, forty-five years ago, they were making three times minimum wage. In this time, over the past 20 years, they are making less than \$6 more than minimum wage, and they top out at less than twice as much. So you can no longer build a career in northern Ontario on something that is protecting lives and millions of dollars in property.

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

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you for saying that for the record.

I'm going to quickly go to Amber. Amber, I hear your stories and I feel your pain. I really do feel your pain. Thank you for coming in and representing those vulnerable individuals. They are our vulnerable individuals. We should not be ignoring them. We should be investing and uplifting them and changing lives as well. They are a very important part of our community.

So your funding has run out. I guess the temporary government has run out. Where does this leave you? And if you're going to shut your doors, then where are those people going to go?

Ms. Amber Fritz: Exactly. We are kind of in a place of limbo right now. We were very, very fortunate to receive a \$75,000 donation from Vale Base Metals, which kept us open for the month of January. We received anonymous donations that are keeping us open for the month of February—

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

We will now go to the government. MPP Ghamari.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you everyone for being here.

I have a couple of quick questions for President Hornick. How are you doing today?

President JP Hornick: Fantastic. How are you?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Good, thank you.

You mentioned in your presentation that OPSEU represents everyone, regardless of religion, race, creed or gender. Correct?

President JP Hornick: Mhm.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Okay, thank you.

I just want to read this National Post article from January 24. The headline says, “OPSEU Silent as Members Raise Alarm Over Union Banner at Anti-Israel, Pro-Houthi Protest.”

It says, “Some members of Ontario’s public workers’ union are calling on leaders to distance the union from recent anti-Israel demonstrations where the union’s flags were prominently on display, but they say their concerns are so far being ignored.

“Last week, several Jewish and non-Jewish members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union ... wrote to president JP Hornick. The members urged Hornick to explain OPSEU’s participation at a Toronto anti-Israel protest on Jan. 14. Video of the event showed marchers chanting in support of the Iranian-backed Houthis, a terrorist group whose motto is ‘curse the Jews’”—

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Chair, a point of order?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Point of order: MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Chair, respectfully, are we discussing the budget of the province of Ontario with this question?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I’m discussing a—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): No debate. It’s not a point of order.

We’ll go back to the member. We all know what we’re discussing.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you.

“Video of the event showed marchers chanting in support of the Iranian-backed Houthis, a terrorist group whose motto is ‘curse the Jews.’ They also asked Hornick to clarify the union’s support for Jewish members....

“After sending the letter on Jan. 15, the members say they have received no response. OPSEU officials did not respond to questions from National Post.

“Jewish members are shocked about this, alarmed about this,’ said Serena Lee-Segal, a front-line health care worker who lives in Toronto. As a Jew, she said those protestors supporting anti-Semitic terrorists are ‘calling for my death.’”

My comment to you is: Do you plan on responding to the letter of January 15 from your OPSEU members to explain why there was an OPSEU banner at a protest that supported terrorists saying “curse the Jews”?

President JP Hornick: Yes, I really appreciate that question, though it’s not part of my budget submission. I actually spoke directly with—

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: But you did mention that OPSEU is—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Order. I was just calling the member to order.

Answer.

President JP Hornick: Thank you.

I did actually speak directly with that member, and every member who has written in has had a direct conversation, either with me or one of my staff. We have literally hundreds and hundreds of OPSEU flags that are around this province. We have nearly 200,000 members. I receive, daily, dozens of letters on all sides of this issue, to be frank. Our organization has not had a board or convention direction, and our convention is our highest law of our land, so we do not have an official position in relation to this, nor have we issued one.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: But you would agree that attending a rally in support of a group that says “curse the Jews” is probably not a good idea.

President JP Hornick: What I will say is that we, as an organization, have and will continue to stand up against anti-Semitism, against Islamophobia, against racism, wherever it rears its head. We are committed to that as an organization, and greater minds than I have been trying to solve the problem in the Middle East for a lot longer than I’ve been alive.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you very much.

No further questions from me. MPP Anand?

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Three point four.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you so much. My question is to the mining industry, but before that I want to welcome each one of you for taking time and presenting here for the people of Ontario.

I did my undergraduate in chemical engineering. I said that the last time when I was here—so congratulations. On the leap compared to last time, I’m glad that your government has supported your important research through the Ontario Centre of Innovation, OCI, grant, funded by the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. A quick few things: You said this is going to be the first in Canada, but have there been similar examples across the globe anywhere else?

Dr. Nadia Mykytczuk: Absolutely. Bioleaching technologies and remediation technologies have been around for over 40 years. They’ve remained a niche technology that’s not part of traditional mineral resource develop-

ment. Companies are now coming to us as experts in this area to start addressing an issue in reprocessing and valorizing their waste, because it was deemed to be too low-value a problem; better to keep it contained. With the critical minerals demand and the need to have zero-footprint mining, we now have to start looking at that issue, and biotechnologies are one of the only ways to do that effectively and economically.

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Mr. Deepak Anand: Have you put together a cost-benefit analysis for this?

Dr. Nadia Mykytczuk: Absolutely. Every mine site is different. The cost of extracting 100 million tonnes versus 10 million tonnes is very unique to the site and the operator. Right now, capex and opex, you have 30 times to 40 times savings over a traditional reprocessing route with a smelter or even a hydromet processing plant.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Okay. Can you pass on those costs and benefits based on the site, so that maybe you could start on a side-by-side basis rather than going all in one?

Another thing I wanted to say: You did mention the Skills Development Fund Capital Stream. I just want to caution you, because I'm from that ministry: That fund is technically for training.

Dr. Nadia Mykytczuk: We work in training. We are a research arm of Laurentian University, and the Skills Development Fund and the centre that we built has clear training opportunities for four different streams, from engineers to fabricators to chemical engineers to microbiologists, all working in different processing areas along development of these types of flowsheets.

Mr. Deepak Anand: The concept of the Skills Development Fund is technically a vicious cycle: The government takes money from you as a taxpayer and invests back into the training centres, and the training centres help people to get the required skills to get employability, so that they can pay back to the government as the taxpayer and go back into the circle.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: I have to apologize—I want to move to you, ma'am, on the site. You did talk about how generally there were 302 visits in 29 days. In terms of the number of people, rather than the number of visits, how many people visited that month?

Ms. Amber Fritz: Off the top of my head, I cannot recall, but we do have over 300 unique individuals that access the site.

I would like to point out that we are not in an ideal location. We are one kilometre from the downtown core, which unfortunately affects the number of individuals that access this service.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I'm not trying to gauge the cost and benefit here; I'm trying to gauge the number of people affected, the number of people who would get the support and help. That's the reason.

You did talk about Minister Tibollo, who has been on a champion on this. He has done a PhD in mental health and addiction. The whole thing is under review—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time you had, and that concludes also the time for this panel. I want to thank all three members for a great job of presenting your presentations and for taking that time to prepare those presentations. Thank you very much.

CITY OF GREATER SUDBURY
 SUDBURY BETTER BEGINNINGS,
 BETTER FUTURES
 CAPREOL NURSE
 PRACTITIONER-LED CLINIC

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Now, as we are moving to this table, we will call forward the city of Greater Sudbury; Sudbury Better Beginnings, Better Futures; and the Capreol Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic. As we are coming to the table, we will remind you again that it is seven minutes for presentations. At one minute, I will say, "One minute." That does not ask you to stop talking, because that's the most valuable minute of your presentation coming up. At seven minutes, I will say, "Thank you very much for your presentation," and, as you have noticed, that means it's over.

With that, we will start with the city of Greater Sudbury.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Bonjour, tout le monde. Merci d'être venus en comité ici à la ville du Grand Sudbury. It's a great pleasure to have you here.

Before I say my remarks, bear with me. You may have heard that one of my councillors has not been brought home yet. We've been struggling with that in the last few days, so as I do this presentation, just bear with me. Thank you.

Good morning, MPPs and attendees. I really want to thank the committee for being here today. As the mayor of Greater Sudbury, I have had the opportunity to work with residents, staff, community groups, businesses, municipalities and other levels of governments toward our shared goals. I have seen the positive outcomes when we work in the spirit of collaboration to achieve joint outcomes for the betterment of all residents.

Today, I will share requests for your consideration in the 2024 provincial budget that not only reflect key priorities of Greater Sudbury, but that also, I believe, enable the province to make significant progress on its goals related to managing the cost of living for residents, housing and social services that are so important for community and personal well-being.

Both federal and provincial priorities can only be achieved if municipalities assist with delivering services that contribute to important societal outcomes through our programs and services. To do so, senior government financial support is vital. This is the only way municipalities can afford much-needed capital infrastructure investments. It is also the only way we can respond to increased demands and evolving service needs, such as local mental health and addictions programs arising from the opioid

crisis and the ongoing long-term effects of the pandemic. Municipalities have limited means of generating revenue to pay for these increased demands. Property tax is neither a sufficient nor an appropriate revenue stream for achieving broad societal outcomes. We need intergovernmental collaboration.

I support the AMO call for a social and economic prosperity review so we can jointly review municipal finances and find sustainable plans for funding the province's infrastructure and service delivery needs. While the north faces additional challenges because of smaller tax bases and larger service areas, we want to work in partnership with our peers in the province. Northerners are resilient, and we know how important our contributions are to support the province's efforts at building an integrated electric vehicle supply chain. We punch above our weight in contributing globally significant know-how and raw materials that support Ontario's Critical Minerals Strategy. When you make investments in the north, the whole province benefits.

With respect to housing, the Ontario government has committed to getting 1.5 million homes built over the next 10 years. I am optimistic that we are on a good path to collectively address our housing needs. We know the province is serious about building more homes; so are we. Through our draft housing supply strategy, Greater Sudbury is doing its part and is well on its way to meeting provincial housing targets. While single family detached homes dominate in our community, we also have a very high demand for rent-geared-to-income housing and affordable rental units.

The private sector cannot be expected to address this part of the housing continuum. Increased operating and capital funding from the province for supportive and affordable housing will ensure that nobody gets left behind. We have a wait-list of around 1,000 folks for varying sizes of housing. That is 1,000 individuals and families who need our help. I ask the province to significantly increase support for rent-geared-to-income and affordable rental units. For context, we just invested \$12 million for 40 units of transitional housing with the support of CMHC.

We have also taken many steps to improve the development process. For example, our new future-ready development services subcommittee ensures open and ongoing dialogue with our development community.

We now need the province to invest in the infrastructure needed to build our communities and allow us to fund this growth properly and responsibly. With more homes comes more need to invest in water and waste water, roads, culverts, recreational facilities and more. We simply cannot afford to do this alone. We ask the province to restore municipalities' ability to finance growth costs.

The province recently granted the city \$1.75 million through the Streamline Development Approval Fund, and I want to thank them for that. We used this to speed up the construction of housing by introducing e-permitting, a policy review and digitization projects. In return, we ask that you streamline the environmental assessment review

and approval process which will expedite approvals and help get more homes built faster.

As the world evolves to a low-carbon future, we must ensure that our skilled mining and manufacturing jobs remain in Ontario but also in the north. As a key player in the mining industry, Greater Sudbury is poised to support the province's Critical Minerals Strategy and help drive the economic prosperity of our province. To achieve our shared vision, we request that the province contribute to infrastructure projects to grow firms in the critical minerals, battery and electric vehicles, and renewable energy sectors.

We strongly urge you, as well, to consider adjusting the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund funding formula to ensure the needs identified in municipal asset management plans and the variables of geography, climate condition and solar conditions on construction costs can be properly addressed. Specifically, I ask that you remove the cap that limits OCIF funding in three municipalities in Ontario: Greater Sudbury, Chatham-Kent and Thunder Bay.

With respect to social services and health and education, like other communities, we are being challenged with finding solutions to the complex mental health and addictions crisis. We continue to use property taxes to address health-related issues, including \$1.7 million in operating costs for wraparound support services for residents in transitional housing. Additional operating funds would go a long way in helping municipalities to support those with complex mental health needs through supportive housing, community outreach, low-barrier drop-in services and supervised consumption sites.

Our community is waiting on a decision by the province for operating funds to keep our temporary supervised consumption site open. If we don't hear back, it appears it may close. City council invested in the original building, the equipment and the staffing needed to open the site by providing operating funds for the first year. It was done on a temporary basis in the belief that the province would be funding it. Now we need the province to fulfill its responsibility for providing this important public health service and keep this operational with operating funds of \$1.4 million a year.

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Furthermore, our residents would be helped by increases in allocation to the provincial Homelessness Prevention Program and the creation of a needs-based shelter fund to address local urgent needs. This would require provincial funding of an additional \$2.5 million each year.

When it comes to social services, additional provincial investment is also required to support our hospital, Health Sciences North, which serves a diverse population of patients, of which 25% to 30% actually come from outside Greater Sudbury. HSN experiences some of the most significant overcrowding and occupancy issues in Ontario. I ask the province to continue to support the capital re-development of HSN, including enhancements to space and staffing for the emergency room, which directly

impacts municipal emergency service efforts and contributes to ambulance off-load delays.

Finally, Greater Sudbury's two colleges and universities play a pivotal role in the economy and labour market. To maintain the financial sustainability of these institutions, we request the province work collaboratively with other levels of government—

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

Mr. Paul Lefebvre:—and provide funding to support domestic enrolment. This is ever more urgent with the federal government's recent cap on international students.

In conclusion, when developing the 2024 budget, I urge you to consider how funding towards Greater Sudbury's priorities and municipalities' across the province can help us achieve shared housing, economic infrastructure and social services objectives. Through partnership, we can make things happen.

Now is also the time to support an economic prosperity review. The time is right to review how municipalities earn revenue and fund their services. Together, we can ensure public services remain affordable and financially sustainable.

We are thankful for your continued investment in and collaboration with Greater Sudbury and I look forward to working together to achieve our collective goals for a strong and healthy Ontario. Thank you so much. Merci beaucoup. Meegwetch.

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

We now will hear from Sudbury Better Beginnings, Better Futures.

Ms. Angele Young: Hello and thank you for your time today. I am from Sudbury Better Beginnings, Better Futures, and today I am representing the Student Nutrition Program across the Sudbury and Manitoulin districts.

Sudbury Better Beginnings, Better Futures is one of 14 lead agencies—transfer payment agencies—across the province that offers funding from the province, tagged with other funding sources through various foundations or corporations or the people themselves giving donations. Locally, we offer programming to approximately 108 schools in our district.

Over the last 25 or more years, the province has been supporting student nutrition programs, but we are at a point today that we are seeing greater need in these programs. I will explain a little bit more about that in a couple of minutes. Many programs are at risk of not being able to offer food to their students for the entire school year.

In order to provide these programs, we have four full-time staff that work at continuously trying to bulk buy, reduce cost for schools so that they can stretch their budgets as far as possible. For the funding we receive for food, we also receive equal amounts in those other donations. However, the budgets are currently stretched.

Just to give you a picture of what things look like in the Sudbury and Manitoulin districts, we are working with 90 schools that offer 110 programs. We are currently serving just shy of three million meals per year. When we consider

what these three million meals per year look like, it's costing us approximately 40 cents—this is how schools are stretching their dollars: They are operating on 40 cents a meal in our area. However, we know that a breakfast program which is three groups is actually \$2.25. So how are they doing this? They are limiting, at times, food. They are making various choices to reduce costs and stretch those dollars.

We've been very innovative at trying to find ways to get those budgets going to the end of the year, but more and more, for the first time in the 25 years that I've been working in student nutrition programs, schools are calling, and they are already out of money. We are trying to access emergency dollars. We are trying to get them to be able to operate for the remainder of their year. They are pleading to their families—those who can afford it—to help pay for the foods for these families.

When we consider the current picture of the province, provincially, the dollars that come to us are to operate, to ensure accountability of the funds and to ensure that schools are purchasing food. The dollars are currently for food only, so these schools are operating on volunteers. Prior to COVID, there were tons of volunteers in the schools helping—parents, families and so on. After COVID, those families were no longer there and it's been very difficult to get them to come back. So the responsibility of feeding 200 to 300 kids a day in a school is now lying on EAs, teachers and principals. That is taking away from their school day to where they are volunteering at their own job and taking away from their education hours, in some cases, or adding those education hours to the end of their day because in the mornings, they're running to get food.

Locally, we have a food hub, which is not funded, and we operate it using vouchers and bulk buying and we get product donations. And we are only able to do that because we have the space available to us and the fridge space available to us to be able to, in turn, offer those donations to schools.

These hubs—there are many across the province and we are one of them—are in need of additional support. The financial kickback to supporting these food hubs is that the schools themselves will reap the benefits of the bulk buying and of the donated product. When I consider bulk buying, if a school wants to have food delivered to them, many distributors have a minimum. If you're a smaller school, to hit that minimum amount that's required for them—they just cannot. So then they're relying on—how are they going to go and get that food? They're going to go to the grocery store and they're going to get the food. Who's doing it? How long is it going to be in that car between the grocery store and the school, to unload it and to ensure that that food is available every day for our young minds?

We are looking at four different areas. We are hoping that the province would consider lifting the food-only portion of the budget, because schools need help with other things on top of food, but we also need more money for food as well. Food inflation: The cost of food has risen

immensely. The usage of our programs, comparing 2019 to today, is over double, with basically the same amount of food and the same amount of money. It's been well over a decade since there has been an increase for student nutrition programs, and although we are stretching as much as we can, we fear that many schools by May, by June, will stop offering their programs. What happens to those children who are dependent on these programs, who need that food in the morning? The food in the morning will help them stay healthy—

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

Ms. Angele Young:—will help them continue to learn.

Lastly, another big component is emergency dollars for infrastructure such as fridges, freezers and so on. If a fridge goes down in a school, we don't have time to wait for two months for an application to go through for a fridge. They need that fridge today so that they can get the food back in those bellies tomorrow.

Thank you very much to the province for your ongoing support, and have a great day.

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

We now go to Capreol Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic.

Ms. Amanda Rainville: Thank you for having me here today. The Capreol Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic is requesting an investment in team-based primary care, including increased funding for our clinic. NPLCs provide comprehensive, team-based care to unattached patients. There are currently 25 NPLCs across the province. Many of these clinics are in underserved areas and provide care for complex patients who have not had access to any services for many years.

Our community is unique. Capreol is in northeastern Ontario, now part of the city of Greater Sudbury. It's approximately 35 kilometres north of downtown Sudbury and home to about 2,900 residents. It takes about 40 minutes to drive there by car.

We are a vulnerable population, based on the social determinants of health. The average total income of households is approximately \$92,000, or \$23,000 less than the provincial average. The average total income of economic families in Sudbury is about \$28,000 less than the provincial average.

We have limited services and networks in Capreol. There are no other primary care providers besides the Capreol Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic. There are no walk-in clinics in Capreol or in surrounding areas. The nearest walk-in clinic is in Sudbury, and there are no other mental health services in Capreol or the surrounding area. Our nearest medical imaging location is in Sudbury.

Transportation is challenging for many of our residents as they do not drive. Public transportation is limited to bus and is available but is very difficult for elderly individuals and those with impaired mobility. Bus transportation from Capreol to downtown Sudbury takes just over an hour. This does not include transfer time if a client needs to attend the hospital for urgent care, testing or appointments.

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Currently, our team consists of administrative—we have three admin positions. We have an executive director, myself, who's also a nurse practitioner. We have three other nurse practitioners, a full-time registered nurse, a full-time registered practical nurse, one full-time social worker and one part-time dietitian. We provide comprehensive primary care to approximately 3,200 patients from Capreol and surrounding area. We are at full capacity and are unable to intake any new patients with our current funding.

Our social worker cares for approximately 50 clients, and she has a wait-list of another 50 clients. It's approximately a one-year wait to see her for counselling within our clinic. We do offer same-day appointments, Monday to Friday, and one after-hours clinic per week on Tuesday evenings. There are no other walk-in clinics in our area, and we're struggling with same-day access. Until last week, you were able to contact our clinic and book a same-day appointment for any issue that you had. As of February, we will be limiting our same-day appointments to acute illnesses so that we're able to increase access for those who need it most. There is a very high demand for these same-day appointments.

Sudbury does not have an urgent care clinic. Many people present to our local hospital with non-urgent issues. This is taxing our health care resources. Our hospital is not in a position to care for non-urgent cases. They've been operating at above 100% occupancy for years. We strive to provide same-day access to our patients so that we can reduce the number of emergency visits, reduce the number of crisis intervention visits and reduce walk-in clinic visits.

Over the last two years, we've had a huge increase in new intakes. There have been two physicians who have closed their practice in the surrounding areas of Valley East and Hanmer and one physician who passed away unexpectedly last year. We currently have approximately 600 intake applications. According to the city of Sudbury, 19% of our family physicians will be at an age where they can retire within the next few years. Many older physicians have large patient rosters and this will leave thousands of patients unattached.

We provide primary care services as well as some additional services, such as lesion removals and cortisone injections. We do IED insertions and removals, medical abortions and gender-affirming care.

In summary, we are requesting investment in team-based care. We're asking for an increase in our base funding and expansion funding. NPLCs have not received any increase to their base funding since their conception in 2007. We have been in operation since 2011, and we had a permanent budget reduction of \$44,000 in 2009, despite inflation in essential operational costs, such as office supplies, medical supplies, utilities, insurance and our IT support. Staff in primary care have not received any increases in their salary since April 2020.

Eckler released a health compensation market research study that revealed that all of our positions we are funded for are approximately 15% to 30% below market value.

Our dietitian position was vacant for approximately one and a half years because we couldn't compete with physicians that were offering salaries 30% higher than our funding allotment, and we were only funded for a part-time position. We have had three experienced nurse practitioners resign within the last three months for higher-paying positions in other sectors that are closer to their homes.

We submitted an EOI in June 2023 requesting an increase in our HR budget to expand our clinic to include a physiotherapist—

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

Ms. Amanda Rainville:—a registered practical nurse, two full-time nurse practitioners and one full-time social worker. An additional social worker would allow us to increase access to mental health services and would drastically reduce or eliminate our wait-list for services. Additional NPs would allow us to increase our same-day access, offer additional after-hours appointments, intake an extra 800 unattached patients per NP and decrease unnecessary ER visits.

Investing in primary care improves patient outcomes and decreases ER visits and hospital admissions. We respectfully request that you consider our request to increase our base operational funding and increase our human resources funding so that we are able to compensate staff equitably and expand team-based primary care, both existing and new teams, across Ontario.

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

We will now start the rounds of questioning with the independent. MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you all for being here today. I want to start with the city of Sudbury. But before I do that, I just want to talk about the overall situation in our province. You're an example of that.

First of all, under this government we've actually added \$80 billion, at least, to our net debt. It's the highest operating budget ever in history, and yet from what I hear and see in my riding and across the province and in all of these hearings, every file is on fire. Whether it's health care, education, food security, housing, the opioid crisis: They're all on fire.

I'd like you to give us the big picture around how you're feeling as a mayor, as a city, as a council in terms of the overall prospects that you feel for both your financial health and the overall well-being of your residents.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you for the question. It's a very large question to address. The challenges that we face—and I tried to sum it up in my presentation—are on the economic side as well as on the social services side. Basically, we are very challenged. At the forefront when it comes to our social issues that we have, we have a lack of housing. Being the main city in the northeast, a lot of other communities require us to assist them, certainly on the social services.

In the last budget, we had a 5.9% tax increase, of which 3.5% is actually just going to infrastructure needs. Our pipes, our roads are old. It's been a challenge to fund that

line item over the last decades. And 2% is actually for 911 services. Police, firefighting and paramedics, we had to increase.

The challenge that I see, certainly—there are so many layers. One is, basically, when it comes to—and I mentioned this. We have paramedics going to a call for somebody who is very challenged, often in an opioid crisis, and after that, they don't feel safe. They call for backup with the police, so then I have police that need to service that call. So I'll have an ambulance with two paramedics and a police car with two police officers going to the emergency and they can't unload because the emergency is full. There's one, there's two, there's three—sometimes there are three or four ambulances waiting to unload, and we have three or four police cruisers waiting there to unload as well. That is extremely challenging because we need them to be providing these services. That is limiting us.

Again, that's Sudbury, but I'm hearing from other mayors that it's not only here; it's across the—

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: It's everywhere.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Because the needs are more and more, and I think the pandemic exacerbated the situation that we are faced with.

How do we compensate for that as a municipality? There are only so many tools in our tool box. That's why we rely on the province to assist us, certainly on the social services side, because we are limited in what we can do.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you, Mayor. It feels like it's a challenge every day to meet the needs of your citizens, and I just want to thank you for that work.

Amanda, I will come to you now. I know that you were here last year as well in the budget hearings. I just wanted to ask if you got that extra funding that you needed—

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I think it was about \$300,000 that you were asking for to have another nurse and to, again, meet the needs in your community. Just very quickly, please.

Ms. Amanda Rainville: We did not receive the funding and we did submit the EOI again in June when there was a call for expressions of interest.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Okay. Thank you. It's very important. These are great clinics. It's a great model, and I certainly would like to see more of them in the province. They're not just needed in rural communities now; they're needed everywhere.

Angele, I wanted to come to you, just very quickly. Thank you for your work. I know we have some other presentations today talking about lunch programs and feeding families in need. I just want to thank you for that and commend you and encourage you to continue because I know that it's well needed and I know that you're doing really good work.

Any closing comments?

Ms. Angele Young: No, thank you very much.

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The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): We now go to MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank all the presenters for being here today.

I'd like to start with Mayor Lefebvre. Thank you so much for being here. I had a question for you. In your presentation, you noted that you'd like to see further investment in homelessness support, the Homelessness Prevention Program. You're asking for provincial funding of an additional \$2.5 million each year. In the past budget, for 2023, the province had increased across the board Homelessness Prevention Program funding. Would you be able to share with us how much Sudbury had received as part of that increase?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Right around \$300,000.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: So \$300,000 in total?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Do you happen to know, percentage-wise, how much that would have been?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I don't have that in front of me, sorry. I'd have to ask my finance group to tell me what it is.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Okay. Thank you very much for that.

I had another question about the Canadian infrastructure fund. You mentioned the cap. I believe, and correct me if I'm wrong, it's there's a \$10-million cap—

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: That's exactly right.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: —which is a fixed \$10-million cap, so no one can go above that. As Sudbury is making it submissions, it's coming to a total above \$10 million, and that's the reason—

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: We are at around \$18 million.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Okay. So it's not that you're targeted as a municipality specifically, saying, "Hey, only these three." It's just that, when you reach the \$10-million threshold, OCIF says, "Okay, that's it."

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you very much for that.

I wanted to explore a little bit about—you mentioned earlier in your presentation about AMO's call for the social and economic prosperity review and property tax. And then you've got—you've put a great map out and delivered it to the committee. I really enjoy this, where it shows your footprint as a municipality compared to a lot of other southern Ontario cities, but with a population that is just truly a fraction of what we have in the south. It really tells the story of how you've got a lot of infrastructure to maintain and not a significant population base in which to pull from. So that senior government support, I know, is something that you would value very much.

On the way that the system works today: I'm wondering if you could share, what are you able to do as a municipality in terms of the infrastructure piece and the service piece? What do you think is within the sphere of what you can do? What would you feel you could do more that other municipalities are able to do today that you're not able to do because of your population density?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you for the question. That's a great question. Basically, it's addressing our infrastructure need. We have a gap—which you got a report

back in November. Our asset deferred or [*inaudible*] behind—we're over \$1 billion of a gap with respect to our asset renewal that we need to address. This is for roads, water and waste water into our recreational facilities and our municipal facilities as well. And that's decades in the making. We can't be punting this down the road. We need to deal with it.

Again, that's why the OCIF funding and taking out the cap—which would basically only affect three communities: Greater Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Chatham. What's unique about Sudbury is that we would not be an amalgamated city, because again, the amalgamation was 25 years ago. The province forced the city to amalgamate, and we would actually be getting more OCIF funding because the city would be maxed and then the other outlying communities would also be able to get that funding. But because we're amalgamated, we're punished, which is not fair because the whole premise of amalgamation was that we were supposed to have savings. It was supposed to make a lot more sense for us to share those expenses. But when the provincial funding is limited and the massive size—that's why I showed you the map, and thank you for having looked at it—it really limits us in what we can do.

The limited infrastructure limits us in our housing capacity as well—where we can build, how we can build, and that we want to build more. There are actually lots of jobs here right now. There are over 2,000 jobs available in Sudbury. One of the things, when we talk to the businesses that have them, is finding housing. Basically, the rental market is at 1.7% availability, which is extremely low. I know it's across the province; it's not just here. But we're in a tough spot because of that.

So lifting the cap—\$8 million for us, which we think that we should get—would actually either reduce our taxes or allow us to invest that money right into infrastructure.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Okay. Chair, how much time left?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Two point four.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Okay, thank you.

Mayor, I'd like to continue with you. In December, the government passed the Affordable Homes and Good Jobs Act, which really continued the evolution in trying to incent the housing supply that we don't currently have. I know cities like Sudbury—actually, I've got a lot of classmates from university who live here in Sudbury. My former roommate from university lives in Sudbury as well. It's a great place to live, by all accounts, and even more Ontarians should have an opportunity to experience life in Sudbury.

So I'm wondering if you might be able to share with us your perspective on the recent changes from the Affordable Homes and Good Jobs Act. Is it going to pave the way to facilitate more housing starts in Sudbury, to help address the supply issues that we know exist across the province?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: We certainly hope so. I think it's a good start. I know the government was looking at that and trying to address that.

The challenge that we find here on the affordable housing builds is we don't have a lot of contractors that want

to play in that space. In southern Ontario, where there are a lot of builders, a lot of developers, it's much easier, but in northern Ontario and certainly in Sudbury, they are building private, to-market housing. Somebody that wants to build affordable housing, at affordable rents, basically, they need to be subsidized. There's no doubt about it, because nobody's in the business of losing money when they're building. So these programs, we're hoping, will incentivize these builders to go ahead and create.

We actually have a great project in Coniston, where it's a not-for-profit housing corporation that has built that.

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

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: We're seeing it's full, and now there's a group in Lively that is looking at doing the same thing. So we're hoping that the funding that will be allocated to this program will incentivize folks—certainly on the not-for-profit side—to be able to get a contractor that wants to step forward and to build those affordable homes. We're hopeful that this will turn it around.

Like I said in my opening remarks, there's a big, big need in Sudbury for rent-geared-to-income as well as affordable homes, and we're focused on that. The city is not building those. We want to participate by providing land to potential not-for-profits to go ahead. So we're working on different solutions, and that's why any support is very much welcome.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I'll leave it there.

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

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

MPP Jamie West: I'll continue with Mayor Lefebvre. I think this map is very helpful. People in Sudbury recognize this but, if you look, there are 14 southern cities, including Toronto. So when you have a tax base that is a lot smaller than those 14 cities, and then infrastructure—just for my friends on the government side, you have to recognize that we don't have the tax base to cover any downloading of services. The amalgamation, for example: The city took on the infrastructure between all these small towns and their funding. The developer fees are being waived and our city is taking those on. So when people are frustrated with potholes or snow plows or property taxes going up or anything else, they need to recognize it's a provincial government solution that's raising these taxes, right?

The other thing I want to highlight on this, as well, is that when you have a conversation with our police force, the GSPS, Sudbury has become, because of our location, the crossroads between north and south, east and west. We're a hub for criminal activity, for human trafficking and drug trafficking, so we need to have the funding for that as well.

I know this is a bit of a soapbox, but I think I'm echoing what you'd say anyway, Paul. One of the things that I wanted to ask you, though, because they asked about the homelessness funding, and then there was also a conversation about housing: One of the things that concerns me is that OW is slightly less than \$1,000 and ODSP slightly more than \$1,000, and market rent, if you're lucky, is

about a thousand bucks for a place to live. So do you believe that increasing the funding for OW and ODSP would help with the homelessness situation and we'd have fewer of those tent cities that are starting to pop up around town?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you for the question, MPP West. Yes, most definitely. We've seen a rise in the cost of rents in the city to a level that we've never seen before, and so quickly, during the pandemic and where we are now. So the fact is that the rents are high, and basically there's precarious housing. These folks are precariously housed. They're getting their ODSP cheques and their OW cheques and they're not able to meet that, and that's creating this cycle of what we call homelessness.

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How do we break that? Well, it's ensuring that if those fees or those amounts go up, to be able to put properly—they don't get the housing that they need. And the other thing: That's one side of the spectrum, and then if you even go to transitional housing, it's even more, because these folks don't have an address. How are they getting their cheques? That's why, for us, getting the supportive housing, the wraparound housing, is key, and we're funding that right now as a city. We're paying the hospital to provide those wraparound services, and I have to tell you, the success rates of the folks who were precariously housed, who were on the street, who wanted to be housed and we are providing the services—they're actually graduating, if I can use that word, to more regular affordable housing through Sudbury housing. So we're seeing a direct impact of how, when we have that supportive housing, we're actually stopping that vicious cycle of homelessness.

MPP Jamie West: Just because of time, I'm going to move on to Angele, but I do want to recognize the good work that city council is doing and the support. You mentioned Councillor Vagnini. The support from the community has been just overwhelming in helping to locate him, and I think that's a reflection of the good work that the council and you have been doing in the city.

Angele, I want to thank you for the food for the kids. Better Beginnings does so many great things in Sudbury. We could probably talk all day about all the stuff you provide. One of the things that stands out to me—I got elected in 2018 and the Food Ontario report said that for the first time ever, the number of workers accessing food banks had reached an all-time high and continues every single year.

My concern is that—I love that you're helping to feed children, but I think that number growing, like you had said earlier, may be related to the fact people who are working full-time are unable to feed themselves or their families as well. The reason I'm highlighting that is to sort of echo how important this is to our kids. If you want to break that cycle of poverty, kids need to be able to access food so they can stay focused, they can learn and be successful at school. Is that something you'd agree with?

Ms. Angele Young: I definitely agree with that. We have 19,000 children out of 25,000 in this area who access our programs every day. The impact that that has on their

own health—because we are looking at ensuring that the produce is there. If you look at a general child who does not eat fruit or vegetables but when it's in front of them at the school level, that's highly impactful and it helps relieve a lot of the stresses from those families at home.

MPP Jamie West: France?

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you. My first questions will go to Amanda, Nurse Rainville, from Capreol. I want people to realize that Capreol, although it is part of the city of Greater Sudbury, it is an isolated community. This is one of the rural communities where you have one road in and you take the same road out. Like, you go to Capreol, you're at the end of the road. They are part of Nickel Belt. Nickel Belt has 89,000 people and 40,000 of us do not have access to primary care. We do not have family physicians; we do not have a nurse practitioner—part of the 2.2 million.

They are able to change this right now. They are able to give thousands of people access to primary care. They have been asking for money to do this for years and years. Ms. Rainville came and presented last year. They have sent submissions and yet nothing gets done. Some 2.2 million Ontarians don't have access to primary care, 40,000 of them in Nickel Belt. She can help thousands of people if only the government would give her the few hundred thousand dollars that she is asking for.

Am I pretty much on track with this?

Ms. Amanda Rainville: Yes. I think I've been pretty vocal and, France, I am so lucky to have you in my court. I have presented to her and come to her. I know members of our community have called you because we're not able to accept them at this time because we are at full capacity. As much as we want to intake more patients—

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

Ms. Amanda Rainville: —we can't with our current staffing and funding.

M^{me} France Gélinas: We know we have a shortage of family physicians. Would you be able to recruit more nurse practitioners?

Ms. Amanda Rainville: Yes. We have students all the time, nurse-practitioner students. They come to our clinic and they like working full scope as students, so they'd be more than willing to come and work for us. We've also had three nurse practitioners that I mentioned who have left us recently, and we have been able to recruit to replace two of the positions. The third position—he gave his resignation about two weeks ago, so we're in the process of hiring someone right now. So I'm confident we could recruit people to come work with us.

M^{me} France Gélinas: This is a solution that works. We have underemployed nurse practitioners right now who would take on those patients who don't have access. I don't understand why we have to wait years and years and years to even get a reply to the submissions that they have sent.

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

We'll now go to the government side—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): No, we're going to the independent. MPP Hazell.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you so much for coming in and presenting to us today. I want to start off with the mayor for the city of Greater Sudbury. Thank you for taking care of the people in Sudbury. In today's living experience, every city across Ontario is facing budget pressures.

I want to go back to your presentation on the section of social services, health and education. I always believe you can have a community, but if your community or your city is not healthy, it's going to impact the economy. You talked about how, like other communities, you're being challenged with funding solutions to the complex mental health and addiction crisis. I just want you to expand on that. The reason I'm asking you to do that is because you also mentioned that you're using property taxes to address health-related issues, including \$1.7 million in operating costs for your wraparound support services. Are able to keep up this funding model?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you for the question. Certainly, it's a priority for us to try to help with that, but any support from the province would be greatly appreciated, because it is health care and it is social services, which municipalities should not be funding. However, that being said, we saw an opportunity. We have a hotel right now, I think there are about 12 rooms, and we are funding that. We're funding the hospital to provide those wraparound services. These are folks that were homeless and that wanted to be housed, but we knew that in their cycle—they've been housed before and they didn't have the mental capabilities and the capacity to stay there, because they were alone. Basically, they couldn't provide rent, they were not well and they were back on the street. So that's a location—we have around 12 rooms and the success rate has been very high.

We have another project; we call it the Lorraine Street project. It's transitional housing. We'll be going up to 40 rooms at that location. Again, it's supportive housing and wraparound services. So that demand is actually going to increase. We're going from around 12 rooms to 40 rooms. But again, that project has to be successful. We need to have success. That means that folks that want to be housed, that want to be helped are there, and then after that, once they get better, we're able to provide them with another apartment or another space in our Sudbury housing continuum of care that we have.

But again, that is the municipality funding this. I think it's a solution to the cycle of homelessness that we have seen, because if they're not supported, it just keeps happening and happening. Therefore, that's why we're saying that we need to do this. It's a model that is working and we're hoping that the province can step forward and assist us in dealing with that.

MPP Andrea Hazell: What are you asking for the province to step forward and help you with in this crisis?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: The funding, basically. Again, we're funding the hospital to assist us. The number that

we're paying right now is \$1.7 million; \$2.5 million to \$3 million as this expands, and we're hoping to have more transitional spaces.

Again, Sudbury is a regional hub. It's not just residents of Sudbury that are using these services. Often, when you have people with mental health crises in small communities, they don't have the capacity.

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

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: We are therefore the de facto provider, and the Sudbury taxpayers are the ones footing the bill for this. We have a very, very generous community. They step up, and it's amazing what we're able to do, but as a municipality, with the property tax base that we have, which is limited—and we talked about that, the constraints that we have. You would think that a mining community, with nine operating mines within the city—which is the only place in the world—would be a very rich community; we're not. It's just the way that the taxes work on the mining side. So that is a challenge for us.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you for sharing that. I was detailing that for you to add that to the record. It's not a comfortable situation to hear.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: No, exactly.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I hope next year when you come back, we hear better news.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I want to move to Amanda. Your services are unique because there are no doctors. Can you share some stories on your unique services?

1150

Ms. Amanda Rainville: Sure. I can. About five years ago—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): If only there were time.

MPP Kanapathi.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you for all the presentations and thank you for being here. It's a good feeling to be in Sudbury. Thank you, all the members and all the staff, for coming all the way from Toronto. It's a good engagement with the stakeholders in Sudbury.

I'll start with the mayor. Your Worship, our government has promised to build 1.5 million homes over 10 years. I know we are in the middle of a housing crisis. Last fall, our government introduced the Affordable Homes and Good Jobs Act, which will make it cheaper and easier to build affordable homes. In my previous life as a municipal councillor for the city of Markham, I noticed it's a process that costs money. It's a costly process to build more houses. The red tape is one bureaucracy that is big time in southern Ontario.

You mentioned you are very interested in building more affordable housing and rent-geared-to-income housing in Sudbury. What are the challenges you are facing when it comes to building more houses or going through the zoning process or going to the OP and getting zoning amendments or putting the shovels in the ground? What are the uphill battles you are facing in a city like Sudbury?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you for the question—a lot of layers there, a lot of things to respond to. Certainly, on

our side, when it comes to a municipality offering or giving out permits and then basically working with the developers to make sure that the process is all streamlined on our side, there are a lot of efforts going on there.

Actually, one of the first things I did when I was elected is start what I call the future-readiness committee. Because we know there's growth happening in our community, we want to be ready for it—so to take care of that so-called red tape, to reduce the times and the challenges that we're seeing. We're on that path and we're getting ready. That report is going to be coming in the next few weeks or few months. But we're hearing from the people on the ground as well as the developers that even in the past year and a half to two years, it's getting easier to do business with the city. We want to continue down that path.

Now, on the affordable homes side, as I mentioned before, our challenge is that we don't have a lot of builders in the community to start off with that have the capacity to build a 30-, 40-, 50-unit apartment building, number one. Number two: If they will, usually it's market rent that they want to charge. It's basically not affordable rent, so that's why that subsidy is key to make it happen. That's why these programs—sometimes there are some capital incentives that can be provided and sometimes there's also an ongoing cost of having these affordable homes to make sure that they remain affordable as well to pay the ongoing costs of these operations.

For us, the city is not in the business of building affordable homes. I talked about transitional housing; those are people who are precariously housed, who are on the streets, who we're going to help. But then, on the affordable homes side, either they're working but they can't afford the market rent, or they're on ODSP or on OW and they're challenged. There may be two of them in an apartment who are able to afford it, so how do we address that? The gap is getting bigger and bigger and bigger. The needs are getting more and more grim.

That's why any programs that are out there that we can work with—we are prepared to provide land. The city has some land that is available, but we're going to provide land where we want to make sure that the benefits to the community are great and addressing a very, very important need. Again, the rent-geared-to-income is key as well as the affordable housing. Right now, “affordable” is still expensive for a lot of folks, so it's more and more of a challenge. For us, reducing the red tape, offering the land and working as a partner with the developers and not-for-profit corporations is what we are willing to do.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: You also mentioned about over 1,000 people are waiting on the list to find a roof over their heads. How do you—

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Well, I want to make that clear: They have a roof over their heads, but sometimes they're looking for a two-bedroom or a three-bedroom. The needs are a bit different.

We do have a by-names list for our homeless population that we're trying to identify and assist where we can. That list was around 177, I believe, the last I heard. But the 1,000 is people who are asking for a bigger apartment

or a different space in our community, and the list is long. But, again, we are a very welcoming community. We try to help everybody that does come here with the services that we're able to provide. There's amazing groups. We have two groups here with me and you're going to hear from those groups throughout the day that are trying to help out and do their part to assist our community in addressing those very challenging needs.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you.

My question is to Angele Young. Thank you for all the great work that you do with the nutritional program for the children. I have had in my ministry, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, and also the Ministry of Education, a lengthy consultation meeting on nutrition programs with the school boards across Ontario a couple of months ago. You mentioned, in your area of Sudbury, you are feeding over 300 kids a day through the school board. Could you tell me, other than provincial funding, are you getting any help from federal funding or some other agency funding to feed the children?

Ms. Angele Young: We are feeding 19,000 children a day in the Sudbury-Manitoulin district and we do not currently receive any federal funding. There is a lot of work being done through committees that I am on and also many other partners who are involved with student nutrition—

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

Ms. Angele Young: —across Ontario that are working with that.

With the municipality, we do receive, from time to time—for example, this year, we received one-time grants from “children count,” which is through the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board. However, we currently do not receive any other municipal funding at this time.

Our partners tend to be foundations such as the Grocery Foundation and Breakfast Club of Canada. Locally, there are other charities and third-party fundraisers that are happening on behalf of students, such as Childhood-Enfance and so on. We have many different sources of funds. We collect about half of the food money that way and the other half of the food money through the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: So you are looking after 19,000 students?

Ms. Angele Young: Yes, 19,000 students a day are accessing our programs.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: So what is your operating budget annually—

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

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Actually, if you could answer that question, that would be helpful. That was going to be my question. How much money do you have now to feed 19,000 kids and how much would you need to be able to meet the ever-growing needs, as you explained?

Ms. Angele Young: We currently have a \$1.2-million budget. In that \$1.2-million budget, \$1 million is for food, and all of that money tends to be restricted for food, which really makes it very difficult for us to offer volunteer

support and so on and extra infrastructure dollars. Twenty years ago, we received funds from the province to get fridges in schools. Well, that was 20 years ago; those fridges are breaking, and we need more infrastructure to replace those. And then new schools coming on board need infrastructure dollars as well.

I would say, recently, there was a \$5-million investment provincially, which equalled \$130,000 here in Sudbury. It helped us just get through the school year, so I would say that we would definitely need at least \$500,000 more.

M^{me} France Gélinas: So you get \$1 million from the province right now and you would like to get \$1.5 million?

Ms. Angele Young: We get \$750,000 from the province right now: \$250,000 is for admin and staffing, transportation etc.; \$500,000 of that is for food. We would need another \$500,000 for food and program support, whether that be food, infrastructure or volunteer support to help those volunteers possibly go collect food. When they go to the grocery store, they just do it on their own dime—which is fantastic; however, we have been very innovative to stretch every possible dollar all throughout the years.

Like I said before, this is the very first year—actually, it started last April—the very first time in the 26 years that I've been working in student nutrition that schools are calling and saying, “We are out of money and we're not going to make it.”

1200

M^{me} France Gélinas: Very sad.

Mayor Lefebvre, for a few seconds: You put Highway 69 as a priority. Could you explain to the good people of southern Ontario why we need four-laning of Highway 69?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: It's about safety. It's the safety of our residents. That's obviously our main thoroughfare to get to down south. You use it, MPP West would use it, and a lot of residents of northern Ontario use that, not just Sudbury. It is so important to get that piece. It's also an economic driver as well to make it easier to access and to trade goods.

We're on the cusp. I'm hoping that this will happen. It's been decades in the making, so the more advocacy that we can have from all levels and all parties to say that this should be a priority and it should get done as fast as possible—there's funding from the feds. There's funding from the province, I'm told. We're hoping that it gets to the next steps. Again, it's safety and an economic driver.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Agreed.

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

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

I'd like to begin with Mayor Lefebvre. One thing this committee has heard time and again—and I want to thank you for also bringing that message—is that housing is health care. It's often said that there's one taxpayer, and yet tax dollars aren't being used to provide adequate services, as this committee has heard, nor are those tax dollars being used to pay people properly who are actually providing those services.

I want to thank you as well for talking about the importance of wraparound supports. Can you touch on the financial impacts of what happens when individuals don't have adequate housing and what other agencies have to step up in order to make sure that those people are looked after?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you for that question. Certainly, the costs are staggering. There's a ratio; I won't say it, because I don't have it off the top of my head, but we know that it's a small investment to ensure that people are properly housed—the cost savings to the system, from a safety perspective to our health system as well. That's why we have decided as a city to get into that space and to do that, because we know the long-term benefits to the whole system. We're actually saving money for the province by doing this. We know that the benefits are great, the fact that we're able to take people off the street, and that's why there's reduced demand on services. If we can get them to a better spot in their lives, to not use as many services, yes, it's a savings on the tax side, but it's also just better for the community. Then we're able to help those that are really greatly in need.

It's very challenging. All municipalities are at the forefront right now. The opioid crisis has just staggered. I recall eight years ago we were talking about more alcohol on the streets, and now, in the last four years, it's opioids. We don't know how to deal with it. It's a challenge at all levels. That's why the fact that we're able to talk to you here, across all parties, I think is very important to be able to address it and fund it properly.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I want to thank you for that important proactive work, and also for your comments that the private sector cannot be expected to address the missing part of the housing continuum, the RGI. They're not going to do it on their own.

I'd like to move over to Angele. Angele, Feed Ontario, as I'm sure you have already heard, released their Hunger Report. It exposed the struggle: that many families are accessing food banks for the first time and that many agencies are even on the brink of collapse due to just the overwhelming need.

I wanted to ask: How do investments in programs like these—investing in children—divert health care, justice and social assistance needs?

Ms. Angele Young: Throughout the years, there has been much research done. We can show that food in schools keeps kids in schools. Kids who stay in school graduate. Those kids get jobs. We don't have the research that says that this is true for every child, that they would not have graduated without the food there; however, being universal—

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

Ms. Angele Young: These programs are offered in a non-stigmatizing way. The students are having healthier options than they may have had, because families may or may not have the knowledge on how to properly cook at home, and that is a result of all the prepackaged foods that are just available out there. We want fresh foods that increase health, and that will also ripple effect onto our health care system and our future graduates.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you.

And Amanda, just quickly: You mentioned you have a social worker who sees 50 patients, which is outrageous considering that typically the roster is about 30. I want to thank you for advocating for additional supports and for all the people who will benefit from having an additional one. Can you explain how important and what impacts that will have for you folks?

Ms. Amanda Rainville: Mental health has really become more on the forefront recently. Many more of our patients are asking for services. The pandemic has increased—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. They keep doing that to you; they just don't give you time to answer the question. But that does conclude the time for that question and the panel.

I want to thank all three panellists for a great job and for taking the time to prepare your presentation and to present it to us today. It will be of great assistance as we move forward.

With that, thank you very much. We are now recessed for lunch until 1 o'clock.

The committee recessed from 1205 to 1303.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Welcome back. We will now resume considerations of public hearings on pre-budget consultation 2024.

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

CANADA NICKEL CO.

SERVICES DE SANTÉ CHAPLEAU
HEALTH SERVICES

YMCA OF NORTHEASTERN ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): With that, we'll introduce the first panel. The first panel is the Canada Nickel Co., the Chapleau Health Services and the YMCA of Northeastern Ontario. I believe the Canada Nickel Co. and the Chapleau Health Services are virtual, so they'll be on the screen.

As I said, the presentations will be seven minutes for each candidate. At six minutes, I will let you know that there is one minute left. Don't stop; your magic moment is from six to seven minutes, when I say, "Thank you," and you're done speaking.

With that, we will start with the Canada Nickel Co.

Mr. Mark Selby: Thank you to the members of the committee for the opportunity to present to you today. My name is Mark Selby. I am CEO of Canada Nickel Co.

I'd like to take a few minutes just to introduce the company and our project, located just outside of Timmins

in what we're calling the broader Timmins nickel district. Our flagship project is the Crawford nickel-cobalt mine. It is a feasibility-study-stage project, which we hope, in 17 months, will receive both federal and provincial permits, which will allow us to begin construction and be in operation before the end of 2027.

Right now, we're focused on our project development activities. Since we began our exploration at Crawford, we have delineated the second-largest nickel sulphide deposit in the world. We finished a bankable feasibility study that ranks Crawford as the third-largest nickel sulphide operation globally, and delivers significantly robust returns.

Crawford will also produce a range of critical minerals in addition to nickel: cobalt; we'll be the sole North American producer of chromium, used in a range of specialty and stainless steels; as well as platinum group metals.

In addition, the company has also developed a proprietary process, which we call IPT carbonation, which takes advantage of the spontaneous natural process of the rocks that house our material to store CO₂. It effectively allows us to utilize our tailings as a large CO₂ storage facility. We'll be able to store, when our mine is fully ramped up, over 1.5 million tonnes of CO₂ annually, which would make us one of Canada's largest carbon-storage facilities in addition to being a very large nickel producer.

The combination of this carbon storage capacity and ability to produce nickel will allow us to not only produce a negative-carbon-footprint nickel product, but will also allow us to partner with people to look at processing our products further and to produce those products with a negative CO₂ footprint as well. What we're developing in Timmins is really, we believe, the foundation for a zero-carbon industrial cluster.

What I would like to do in terms of talking about recommendations is really focus on critical minerals project development as one of the leading projects out there. Over its 40-year mine life, we will generate over \$1.5 billion of revenue, while increasing Ontario's total mineral production value by 15%. We'll generate \$9.5 billion in taxes for both the federal and provincial government. We'll invest, initially, \$2 billion in capital and over \$5 billion over the project life, and as I said, it would make us one of the largest nickel sulphide operations in the world.

For the region, we'll have over 1,000 full-time roles when the mine starts up, in addition to several thousand jobs during the construction phase—so a very, very significant project for northeast Ontario.

In terms of our first recommendation, we'd like to ask the government to increase funding for the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund and work closely with exploration and development-stage companies to ensure investments are targeted where the critical mineral sector needs them most.

Ontario has a strong role to play in advancing the critical minerals needed in the supply chain. Accelerating through thoughtful investments will be critical to ensure projects are developed to meet increasing market demands. Mining has significant costs associated with each phase, and investment within Canadian companies at

earlier stages will have significant impact for not only years, but decades to come.

We thank the government of Ontario's work to provide opportunities for industry to access funding. We've been able to take advantage of some of the programs that have been available. We recommend that there is greater flexibility around the criteria in order to meet the broader set of industry needs. Again, we're quite appreciative of Ontario's 2022-27 Critical Minerals Strategy and its emphasis on the importance of nickel. The commitment of \$400 million over four years provides opportunities for industry, and a continued commitment to support and exceed this amount will further support Ontario's mining industry.

We thank the government for the funding possible under the Critical Minerals Strategy and the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund. Moving forward—

Failure of sound system.

Mr. Mark Selby: —to ensure investment targets are made where industry needs them most.

1310

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

Mr. Mark Selby: Oh, our second recommendation—sorry about that. We look to the government to increase funding and policy support for junior mining companies where they're considered what's called, in the mining development story, in the "valley of death." Mining exploration development companies, if successful, will come to a point where their blue-sky exploration potential has reached its peak and the reality of project development and the time and effort required to advance the project really begin. Companies typically can come under pressure, and in the development path of the mine cycle that we refer to as the Lassonde curve, companies enter the valley of death when the original speculators have left the company and new investors are yet to enter the story.

Blue-sky exploration doesn't matter to public markets when people are funding studies, project engineering, permitting and so forth. Unfortunately, this is a period where the flow-through programs the government offers are less lucrative, and there is little government support for this space. Perversely, this is the period where we basically turn resources in the ground into a project which can create investment jobs and future economic benefits.

There is an added complication when the cyclical nature of markets is also turned against companies and makes it difficult to continue to advance projects. This is a place where we believe government assistance to continue to advance projects—

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

Mr. Mark Selby: —during this phase would really benefit from additional funding and policy support from the government, to make sure that we maintain our leadership position in the critical minerals space. As well, this is an area where increased funding for First Nations communities can provide capacity-building and an additional capacity to engage with mining companies, but also provide substantial benefits.

I would like to use my last 30 seconds here to talk about a third recommendation around incorporating all expenditures to receive the same benefits as exploration. Flow-through CEE has been a very valuable tool for mining companies to raise capital. We would like to see those extended to the development expenditures that I outlined above, to be able to allow mining companies to have a better chance of raising capital during that—

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

We will now go to Chapleau Health Services.

Ms. Dawn Morissette: Good morning. My name is Dawn. I'm the CEO at Chapleau Health Services. Also, I'd like to acknowledge that my board chairman, Monsieur Luc Tessier, is in the room with you today. Ironically, I'm coming to you from Toronto. I was supposed to be there myself today, but I'm here because I have to access health care for a very close family member that is not available up north. In fact, we've been here for a week, so it hits close to home. I know that health care funding is a really hot topic.

I want to start by acknowledging the very difficult work the government has to do in making funding decisions. I don't envy you the final decision, but I'm here to help you justify why you might consider northern, small and rural hospitals as a special pocket in your funding decision-making. We're essential. Small, rural and northern hospitals are essential to the economy. There can be no economic development if there isn't health care in place to properly take care of exploration, mining, lumber mills, logging, the MNR, CP rail, tourism and cottaging. All those things are in Chapleau, but couldn't be possible without having adequate health care in place.

Small, rural and northern health care, done correctly, allows us to make sure that we're not adding stress to our urban counterparts. If we are funded correctly and we are able to do our job well, we are not adding to the system; we're taking away from it.

Small, rural and northern hospitals are not just hospitals. That's the other thing. There's a thought that they're just a hospital, but in fact, for example, in Chapleau, we have 41 different programs, ranging from mental health, long-term care, primary care, family health team, mental health and addictions, home and community care—not to mention the emergency department.

We're lean. We're extremely efficient. Your dollars are well spent: 73 full-time staff deliver those 41 programs. They are assisted by 60 more folks who are either part-time or casual. We partner with the only health care delivery agencies that are left, and that is public health, ambulance and social services. Everything else in small, northern and rural communities is delivered by the hospitals. So it's not just a hospital; it's a health service. There was a perception amongst some of my government colleagues that dollars given to hospitals would be dollars taken away from other funders or other responsibilities, and that's just not the case.

Our next issue is EldCap. EldCap is the Elderly Capital Assistance Program. It was a way of making sure that

long-term care was available in small communities where it just didn't make sense to build a 96- or 108-bed facility. Hospitals were already delivering a multitude of health care, and so it just made sense that these beds would be appended to the hospital so that we could share a back office, such as audit and finance and HR, as well as housekeeping, kitchen, infection prevention and control.

Because all of those facilities were already in place, EldCap licences were given out. These licenses, unfortunately, have not been increased in terms of the funding attached like the long-term care has been throughout the pandemic and what has followed and what we've learned in the pandemic. There's only about 300 of these licences across Ontario, but they're being forgotten. In Chapleau in particular, we have 18 licences that are funded and a 19th licence that we're operating on our own. We would really like it if there could be a way to make sure that all 19 of our beds are funded. We're asking for one bed to have licence funding. That's about 35 grand a year.

These are not big asks, but it is through these small community-minded approaches that we have managed to integrate health care in the way that OHTs and other endeavours have tried to do before. We're a fully integrated health hub. We do it all. We do it by combining roles, and we do it by being efficient.

Those are our main points. Remember that small, rural, northern needs to be treated differently, that we need to be funded adequately, and that if we all work together, we can continue to deliver an extreme amount of value for dollar, and we're here to help you do that. We can do it collaboratively, and we can do it by working together and coming up with really neat solutions.

Hospital CEOs across the province are ready to do new and innovative things, and so we need to be part of the conversation and part of the solution. We are committed to high-quality health care, and we are committed to making sure that it happens with value for dollar. Thank you.

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

We will now go to the YMCA of Northeastern Ontario.

Ms. Lorrie Turnbull: Good afternoon, MPPs and community partners. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Lorrie Turnbull, and I'm the president and CEO of the YMCA of Northeastern Ontario. Our charity's been active in the northeast region for close to 90 years. Our programs and services cover eight locations across Sudbury, Manitoulin, Parry Sound, Nipissing, North Bay, Timmins, Elliot Lake and Espanola.

Tens of thousands of Ontarians access Y programs and services, such as licensed and unlicensed child care; health, wellness and aquatic programs; employment and immigration programs; day camp and overnight camp; and youth development. We help people of all ages and backgrounds to lead healthy, active lives by providing them with access to these programs that contribute to their livelihood and well-being. We also work alongside a collective network of YMCAs across Ontario and Canada.

Our experience as front-line service providers in communities like Sudbury and the surrounding area gives

us a window into how Ontarians are doing and what they need to thrive. What we are seeing and hearing is that the past few challenging years have led to more struggles and increased need today. The Y is here in our communities, both big and small, in northern Ontario to respond, and while ensuring that we can support people in our communities where and how we can, we can only deliver with the capacity that we have.

Right now, we are concerned about child care. As you have likely heard from my colleagues throughout these consultations, YMCAs in Ontario are the largest provider of licensed child care in the province. We have over 76,000 licensed spaces and deliver almost 20% of all licensed child care in the province of Ontario. YMCA child care in northeastern Ontario takes place at full-day centres, stand-alone programs and licensed homes. Actually, home-based child care is a very useful model in a vast geographic region like the northeast. Travel to and from child care centres can be difficult, and smaller communities may not have enough children to make a full-day centre viable.

At the Y of Northeastern Ontario, we have 1,546 licensed child care spaces available, yet 62% of these spaces are sitting vacant. Workforce shortages are hindering our ability to fill vacancies, but the need is there, and our waitlist is double what I just said.

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We employ 183 staff; 45 of those are actually involved in the RNIP program and are immigrants to our country. As we consider expanding into other communities and districts, the availability of trained labour greatly hinders any option to expand in the future.

We were very pleased, however, to see recent commitments from the Ministry of Education to enhance pay for our registered early child care educators, but we would also like to see similar investments for early childhood educator assistants, who were excluded from the recent pay enhancements and who we rely on greatly to run our programs.

We do remain committed to working together with the federal and provincial governments to deliver on our commitments for a \$10-a-day system. Making child care affordable and accessible will help families to manage household costs, and it will get more parents, particularly women, back into the workforce. We were pleased to see the fees come down for families by 50% last year.

As with most sectors, the operational cost burden has grown. Without a model that reflects full cost recovery, operators are left exposed to potential funding shortfalls. We froze our fees when we first signed onto the new system. We are now primarily reliant on government funding rather than parent fees to cover our costs. What we are finding is that the province's current approach to funding is not covering the true cost of program delivery. It's leaving us with funding shortfalls and creates an uncertainty going forward.

That is why, as part of budget 2024, we urge the province to deliver on your commitment to develop a new child care funding formula, one that is built on full cost

recovery and takes the feedback from operators like us into consideration so that we can continue to serve the families that rely on us. We've been working together with the province on the development of a long-term funding formula. We urge the province to move forward to release it as soon as possible in order to bring certainty for us and to others that are operating in this sector.

Thank you very much for your attention. I appreciate this opportunity to share our recommendations with you today.

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

We'll start the first round of questions with the government. MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the presenters for being here today. It's great to be in Sudbury.

My question is for the Canada Nickel Co. I caught what you were talking about in terms of your potential investments right here in Ontario and I wanted to get an understanding if your company has had obstacles in terms of raising capital in Canada. I've had a lot of people in the industry approach me with concerns about raising venture capital in Canada right now, that sometimes it's difficult and there are, in some cases, unscrupulous actors that are actively taking advantage of our capital markets here and making it very difficult for companies to get their stock prices to where they should be able to raise capital. Can you touch on that side of the equation for me, please?

Mr. Mark Selby: Our company has been relatively fortunate in terms of being able to get the capital, but many, many other players in this space have found it exceedingly challenging to raise that capital. There's been some structural changes in the investment industry. There was a great chart that was floating around on social media looking at the amount of capital that resource investment funds had 12 years ago versus today, and literally the amount of capital that's available is only one third of what it was 12 years ago. And so with a lot fewer funds and a lot less capital, it makes it harder for some of that money to get down to the exploration and development stage companies, where we get the most leverage for that money.

The unfortunate part—the scenario where you described about unscrupulous actors—is that when you end up in a situation where you have primarily retail investors in a stock, there's a lot of program trading that basically will sell a stock down, knowing that retail investors will eventually capitulate, and then they can buy that stock very, very cheaply. What it does is, anytime you release good news, there's a chance that these trading programs will sell you down and make it difficult to eventually move your share price higher. Again, if your share price is moving higher, it makes it difficult to attract new retail investors. That's where the existing flow-through programs that help provide additional incentive for investors to come into the stock are very, very helpful.

We would just like to see all of those incentives that are available to exploration-stage companies also be extended into the development stage, which is where we turn

resources in the ground into an actual project that can generate economic value.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: So you would like to see the flow-through program enhanced such that capital would be able to come in at a later stage in a company's development?

Mr. Mark Selby: Yes. There are two categories now, but the second category, for the development stage, isn't as comprehensive and has lower tax benefits associated with it than the exploration stage.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: You touched on how there was one third less money available today in the resource sector. Yet it seems to me—and I'd like to get your perspective on this—the actual demand for critical minerals, such as your company is involved in, is actually only going to be growing. The electric-vehicle manufacturing revolution and other demands globally, in my view, will put even more demand on some of these materials. Yet there doesn't seem to be as much money going into that space.

Could you highlight where you see the demand? You did touch on electric vehicle batteries, but I'm sure there are other areas where these commodities are needed, and the underinvestment is actually problematic to areas like Sudbury and northern Ontario.

Mr. Mark Selby: For sure. I wish it was one third less; we only have one third of the capital that we did in 2010, so it's been two thirds less in terms of the amount of money that is available.

Yes, every three or four decades you get this once-in-a-generational economic shift. Right now, with what is happening with the EV cycle, Ontario is one of the unique jurisdictions in the world where we both make cars and mine minerals, have a lot of resource potential and can have a completely vertically integrated value chain that will last and generate economic benefits for many, many decades to come.

The government has done a great job of enticing a number of those key parts of the value chain to set up in Ontario. The challenge is, like you said, nickel demands, as an example—I worked at Inco 20 years ago and demand in North America is at about the same amount as it was back in 2001 and 2002. By the early 2030s, just with the battery plants that are under construction in the United States and in Canada, we'll need to double or most likely triple the amount of nickel that needs to be produced.

There are very few places in the world that can do it. Northern Ontario, with what we have in Timmins and what we have, historically, in Sudbury, can be one of the few sources of clean, green nickel.

There have been a number of stories about the fact that the one place where supply is growing as in Indonesia, where there is little regard for the environment. They discharge significant amounts of sediment in the stream. They basically just push people out of the way to set up their operations and they've had a number of safety and labour incidents over the last few weeks.

We've got an opportunity to produce a lot of clean, green minerals—done responsibly, done with the right environmental impact—in northern Ontario. Again, there's a

window here. If we're able to take advantage of it, it will create benefits for decades.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: That is absolutely correct. I agree with what you're saying. In Ontario, as an example, on the Bloomberg survey just a couple of years ago, Canada—and when I say "Canada," it's almost all Ontario, where the EV battery plants and the industry are going to be, so it's really Ontario—did not even rank in the top 10 in terms of jurisdictions in the electric-vehicle manufacturing production line.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Now we've moved up to number two with all the investments here.

A lot of the reason that these companies are coming to Ontario is good business environment, number one, but number two is access to these critical minerals. In the very short time that we have left, could you highlight if there is anything more that the government of Ontario can do to get quick, clean mining done in the province of Ontario and get that reactivated to the benefit of northern and Indigenous communities and communities like Sudbury?

Mr. Mark Selby: Again, I think the financing support through that development stage would be critical. That's the piece that can take a lot of time and make funding the most challenging. To the extent that funding support can help us get through that as quickly as possible, that would be great.

The second piece, at that point, you've got First Nations communities that need to be involved in the process and it's important that we do that—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. We'll have to catch the rest on the turnaround.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: My first series of questions will be for CEO Morissette from Services de santé Chapleau Health Services. You made a very good presentation to explain that small, remote, rural hospitals are very much more than a hospital; they are the only access to health services to the people of the north who live in small, rural communities. You've talked about needing funding for one EldCap that you operate and have a licence for, but never got the money for.

I was just wondering: Budget-wise, hospitals are not allowed to do a deficit. How does this year look? Are you going to be able to balance your budget with the money you have?

Ms. Dawn Morissette: Thank you, Madame Gélinas. Unfortunately, as with almost every single hospital in Ontario, we will not be balancing our budget this year. We are currently forecasting a \$750,000 deficit. This deficit is almost entirely due to the need to maintain our services and to use agency overtime and sick time. It is all human resources related. We will be able to control these costs if we can grow our own nurses and if we can get to a point where we can recruit and replace all of those agencies with adequate personnel.

We need two things to be able to do that. We need to have the right to use our funds to be able to encourage our

staff to go back to school, because homegrown staff stays home. So we need a little bit of flexibility there.

The second thing we need is the government's help through the short term. Right now, we are sitting in a complete state of absolute anxiety. There is no word from the government as to whether or not they're going to help hospitals get through this time and what that might look like. We do acknowledge that the government has given some interim help and did what they had to do during the COVID years, but not knowing where we're going to be in two months' time is anxiety across the board for most CEOs in most hospitals.

So this year, now it's a deficit and we will, of course, as with most hospitals in Ontario, not be meeting our health accountability agreement obligations.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Has the amount of money that you have to pay staffing agencies changed over the years? Is it more? Is it less? Is it the same?

Ms. Dawn Morissette: It is significantly more over the last two years. I don't know if I'm allowed to share my screen, but if I am, I have a graph that could quickly answer that question.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes, you are allowed to share your screen.

Ms. Dawn Morissette: Okay. I don't know if you can see this, but—

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes, we can.

Ms. Dawn Morissette: Agencies are not new to northern Ontario, nor will it go away. We do need some agency to help us through—that's just simply the nature of the business—but as you can see, we don't need as much. We used a lot in 2011 and 2012, because at that time we sped up our own education program to get people to become RPNs. As you can see in the following years, that was very successful. Then we got ourselves into COVID and, as you can see there, of course, COVID was a challenge.

We are now coming out of COVID, and what happened in 2024 is that baby boomers turned 60. In 2024, baby boomers are between 60 and 80 years old. That means two things: That means people are retiring like crazy, and it means that the pressure on health care for our older adults is increasing at a rate we have never seen before.

We appreciate the government has spent more on health care than it ever has before. Unfortunately, it's not keeping up with the needs of the population. The needs are probably twice as much as it ever was before and, of course, the funding has not followed.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you.

Quick, quick questions for Lorrie: I have been a member of the YMCA for 41 years. I love you guys and I want you to continue to be there. You gave two numbers: 1,546 spots and 62 of them vacant. Did I get that right?

Ms. Lorrie Turnbull: Per cent.

M^{me} France Gélinas: —62% of them are vacant because you can't recruit and retain staff.

Ms. Lorrie Turnbull: Correct.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The main reason is salary?

Ms. Lorrie Turnbull: Yes, I would say it's salary. A trained workforce—of course, attracting people to the

sector is challenging because of the salary. I was in the child care on Durham Street, in Sudbury, today, which is where my office is. I had to work out of the child care centre. It's an 80-child licensed spot; it has 13 children registered in it right now. I asked the director; I said, "What's going on?" She said, "I can't find any staff." So we do have capacity. We have huge wait-lists and no staff to deliver the program.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to our presenters here in person as well as those virtually.

I'd like to begin with Dawn. First, I just wanted to say I hope your family member is doing well and that they recover well. It really underscores the disparity between services that are available in the north as opposed to the south.

You touched on the province's recent development of issuing waivers to allow hospitals to carry debt. Some have resorted to taking out high-interest loans in the wake of government underfunding. Specifically, looking at what is available with Chapleau Health Services, you touched on a number of different health care disciplines. I wanted to know if you could speak about wage parity and if there is disparity among different roles within your organization.

Ms. Dawn Morissette: In terms of parity with the different roles, there's a disparity between agency pay and regular staff pay. The regular—

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

Ms. Dawn Morissette: Bill 124, of course, took care of a lot of these things, and the last negotiations went well. If there is disparity, it would be between PSWs or RPNs that are working in community, in primary care or in hospital. Making those all the same will be helpful, and I do believe that there's a lot of work on that front. But the biggest disparity is between agency and regular hired staff.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Understood. When a nurse is working alongside an agency nurse, what does that do for staff morale?

Ms. Dawn Morissette: It kills it. How would you like that if you knew that the person you were working next to was doing less because they can't possibly be trained to the same amount as a full-time staffer can be, has less responsibility because they get to walk away at the end of the day, has no connection to the community, and they're making three times your wage and housing and travel? It doesn't work.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: What about continuity of care?

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

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to our presenters. Mark, I will start with you, with Canadian Nickel Co. I certainly appreciate the value of the mining sector in Ontario and in Canada and certainly as we move to a green transition. We heard earlier today from a not-for-profit that is researching how to take the waste from the mines and turn that into productive minerals.

Two questions for you: One is, could you talk a little bit about what you might be doing in that space, or how you're partnering with those kinds of organizations? Secondly, if you could talk a little bit about how Ontario compares to other jurisdictions, both in Canada—specifically, let's say Quebec—and the rest of the world in terms of government investment in the mining sector.

Mr. Mark Selby: Sure. In terms of the first question, our IPT carbonation process—basically, one step before we discharge our tailings into the tailings facility, that's where we inject the CO₂ into the material and effectively use our tailings to store that carbon. That being said, our tailings are considered non-deleterious minerals. Unlike some of the old mines in Sudbury and so forth that had to be contained in very special situations, our tailings are non-deleterious, and we're actually starting to look at a whole range of ways to be able to reuse them in terms of—they have cementitious properties and there might be abilities to use them in place of certain amounts of cement and that type of thing.

We're very open to working with—we're already involved with one research project that's being run, actually, out of the United States and then open to working with a range of organizations to be able to take advantage of that material that's there. Because if we can reuse it again, that just makes it that much better.

In terms of government funding, the second part of the question, Ontario has—again, the current government and current ministers have been extremely supportive of the sector. In terms of how we rank specifically, I have spent most of my time here in Ontario. I'm not as familiar with some of the other support situations in some of the other jurisdictions, so unfortunately, I can't comment as much in terms of where we sit relatively.

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Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Okay. Thank you.

I will turn now to Lorrie. Lorrie, as you mentioned, we've heard from several Ys across the province in these hearings. We heard the same story last year, the challenge around hiring and retaining workers, both ECEs and assistants. As you said, having sufficient spaces staffed is really what enables families to be able to have a parent return to work and add to the economy etc. So I appreciate the dire situation you're in.

I would think what's new this year in terms of what we're hearing is that you're still waiting for that funding formula—Ontario's model for how they're rolling this out, how they're partnering and working with organizations. I'm certainly hearing in my riding as well, in Don Valley West, that people are anxious. They're not sure how this is going to affect them. As you say, they can't recover their costs, so that's driving closures—

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Could you just talk about some stories that you hear from families about what this has meant for them in terms of, again, being on a wait-list and not being able to get a spot in a daycare under the new \$10-a-day program?

Ms. Lorrie Turnbull: Well, the numbers do speak for themselves. I know there's an infant wait-list at the Sudbury location here of 250 parents, and the room is sitting empty right now because we cannot staff it. So we have existing capacity that could take up a significant amount of families that are looking for care.

I think parents are having to get creative with their care options. Certainly, there's lots of care options, but trained early childhood educators really do truly work with the most vulnerable in our society, and those children are getting ready to go to school. It's the developmental milestones they're receiving in licensed child care. That's what those educators are trained for.

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

We'll now go to MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I just want to acknowledge by saying thank you to each one of you for coming and for your valuable presentations.

I want to start with the mining company. I was looking at the data, and I just wanted to know what the biggest mining companies are in Canada. And, surprise, surprise, it's not in Ontario; it's actually in Newfoundland. Number one and number two are there; number three is in the Sudbury area; number four is in Ontario. Why is there such a huge difference in production? Is it that they have a better system or better deposits? What is the reason why the Voisey's Bay mine and the Raglan mine are pumping 40,000 tonnes and Sudbury is only at 15,000?

Mr. Mark Selby: In terms of the operations, Voisey's Bay is a newer discovery. It came online in 2005. The Raglan deposit has continued to be expanded by the current owner, Glencore. Unfortunately, the now Vale mines in Sudbury, from when I was at Inco in 2006, production has fallen by more than half. We just haven't seen that level of investment that's required to sustain production in the Sudbury basin, unfortunately. Our project in Timmins, on its own, will produce more nickel than what is currently being produced by all of Vale's operations in the Sudbury basin, and we think we have got the potential for additional deposits in the area as well.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Is there anything the government can do to help you make it more valuable for the people of Ontario?

Mr. Mark Selby: Again, investment—we'll be investing US\$2 billion, C\$2.5 billion, in the first phase of the project. That's comparable to what you're seeing with some of the battery and automobile-type investments. Again, anything they can do that makes it easier to track more private capital into investing would be helpful for that kind of industrial development. We'll have at least a 40-year mine life—potentially much longer than that. So whatever financing support the government can have to help us fund that initial construction would be helpful.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Do you live in the area? Are you from Sudbury or around?

Mr. Mark Selby: No, I grew up in Scarborough.

Mr. Deepak Anand: What is the benefit to the people here? What can you do for the people here? What's the—

Mr. Mark Selby: So our first phase of operation will have over 1,000 jobs at the project site itself. We'll have more jobs than that during the construction phase. We'll be investing \$5 billion and that money will all be invested in northern Ontario. We'll be generating nearly \$50 billion worth of revenue.

A lot of the suppliers, a lot of the spinoff benefits, in those communities, will have lasting, multigenerational impact. We're working with the local mayors in terms of starting to get housing ready to be able to house the workers that are there, and again, that obviously has benefits well beyond the project.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you so much. I just wanted to make sure that at the end of the day, the people who actually belong to the north should get the benefit of their fair share as well, so thank you for that.

Chair, for the rest of the two presenters here: When I come to Sudbury, the north, or anywhere else other than southern Ontario, I actually would say you guys live in heaven. It's an amazing place. It does come at a cost, I understand. One of the costs is the challenges that you face in terms of, for example, recruitment.

I actually have the opposite problem. My riding is Mississauga–Malton. We have 11% of the people in my riding come every year and look for a job. So my question to you is, can we complement each other? You need people. I have lots of people. How can we work together? What can you offer to the people? When I go back and talk to them, they come to me and say, "I'm looking for a job." I say, "I just came from heaven, a wonderful place. Why don't you go help them? Why don't you go serve them?" What kind of culturally sensitive—what kind of programs do you have? If I am your advocate, what would you do when they come here? That's to both of you.

Ms. Lorrie Turnbull: Well, I would say that if they need child care, it might be a little bit of a chicken-and-egg there. If we're asking people to relocate to the north, we want to make sure that we have child care to be able to provide those families, certainly.

But I would say that the wages right now are probably something that needs to be considered. It's expensive to live anywhere, particularly to relocate somewhere. Then, of course, there's naturally a belonging in your community, and you have to have those amenities and resources at your fingertips to feel like you can settle in as a family. So it's the whole full spectrum—

Mr. Deepak Anand: So should they come here or not?

Ms. Lorrie Turnbull: To Sudbury?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Can I go back and tell them that there is another good alternative?

Ms. Lorrie Turnbull: Yes, please do. Our mayor has ambitious growth plans for Sudbury, so yes.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): One point five.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Okay. Can I ask the other presenter from the health services the same question? Again, the same issue that I have is that we have a lot of people looking for a job, and out here you're looking for people.

Ms. Dawn Morissette: Let's chat, because if you want to come and work in Chapleau, we have come up with all kinds of different programs. For example, we have our own sort of agency thing going where we will help with housing. We will help with travel costs. They can come up, work for a while, check it out and see if it's for them. If it's not for them, then we appreciate it. We can do short-term contract. We can do long-term contract. We can do any contract. We have jobs in housekeeping. We have jobs in the kitchen. We have jobs as PSWs. We'll help them get their PSW certification. We have RPN jobs, RN jobs. We have dietary aide jobs. We have every vacant job.

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

Ms. Dawn Morissette: Come to the north. You can tell them you've found heaven, and you can give them my name personally. We are desperate to hire folks who want to make a life in the north.

Housing is an issue, and I will agree with my colleague that child care is also challenging, but if the government wanted to work with northern hospitals on a program that would help and facilitate the relocation of folks to come to the north and to help us with our transit, for example—

Mr. Deepak Anand: My apologies. I have to cut in between. The Chair is going to cut me off soon. Have you used the SDF, the Skills Development Fund?

Ms. Dawn Morissette: We have done some of that. We have—

Mr. Deepak Anand: What's your opinion about the SDF?

Ms. Dawn Morissette: It's challenging in terms of bureaucracy.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Should we have more SDF or less SDF?

Ms. Dawn Morissette: You know what? I can't answer that. My HR team is the one that deals with that, but I'll get back to you—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You don't have to answer. The time is up.

So we now will go to the official opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

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Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to continue my questions with Dawn. Dawn, in your comments, you mentioned being in a state of absolute anxiety based on the current funding pressures, but also, you've introduced a lot of measures indicating how you can help control costs.

I want to congratulate you on your exemplary standing from Accreditation Canada. It's certainly a high honour. In your strategic planning document on the website, you highlight that some of your goals include continuously improving care and services and ensuring sustainable operations. How does the inadequate funding from the province that you're currently receiving hinder you from attaining these goals, and do you worry about that exemplary standing being lost?

Ms. Dawn Morissette: I think it's absolutely in jeopardy. I also think that if we cannot sustain the level of staffing that we need to do the work that we can do, we can't report on the good work that we're doing. The

burden of reporting in terms of providing the government the variety of—in fact, most of health care is reporting. It's less patient care now than it ever has been.

So the state of anxiety comes from not having enough staff to do the work that needs to be done. If we get any leaner, I will have—the place that we cut is in our administrative staff and we already have done that with some dire consequences to patient care. If we cut any deeper or any further, all of the reporting doesn't go away. Somebody needs to do that work. It is important work. So it falls on the hands of the RNs or RPNs or direct care staff to do reporting work as opposed to provide care. The burden of the work that needs to be done and the burnout that is happening because of the inability to get everything done on a shift adds to that anxiety, adds to sick time, adds to the need to backfill, adds to the cost.

How do we solve that? Fund us adequately. The same hospital, same size, same type of services, in the north and in the south—\$3 million straight up less in the north. Funding formulas are not consistent. They're not based on a fair measure. They are not based on any sort of formula that can be applied or scaled based on your rurality. It is just on a whim. We need consistency, collaboration and parity.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you very much.

Unfortunately, I've run out of time, but I just want to thank you, Lorrie, for presenting here today. I wish I had time to question you.

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

MPP Jamie West: Yes. I'm going to continue with Dawn since her mike is on and everything. Previously, you talked about agency nursing staff and the deficit that's going to run because of that. I'm trying to understand, not just for your hospital or your health care centre but for hospitals in general, for long-term care, why has there been this boom of nursing agency staff as compared to just being able to attract full-time workers? Is there something that the government can help with that?

Ms. Dawn Morissette: Because it's 2024. We knew—all of us here today age one year every year. All of us here knew 10 years ago that we would be hitting this thing in 2024.

In addition to all the baby boomers now, today, being between the ages of 80 and 60, we also had the pandemic, and so anybody who was eligible to retire, had good HOOPP, good pension, was eligible to retire, retired early. They left.

What happened is that we cut spaces in nursing programs, so we graduated less nurses. Now we need to graduate more nurses, graduate more staff. We need to get them excited about health care and then we get them—but it's going to take two to four years, depending on all the different programs, to get staff qualified and ready to work for us. So there's no surprise. There's absolutely no surprise that this was happening. The surprise is that COVID stacked on top of what we already knew would be a crunch because of population age.

MPP Jamie West: Okay. And then just because I'll be tight on time, I wanted to thank you for saying these are

not big asks. I think it's something that will resonate with my colleagues from different parties, because they also represent small rural areas, and I think reminding them—or reminding all of us—that these are not big asks when you're talking about health care and how important health care is, especially publicly funded health care, to Ontarians is a good reminder.

As well, that connection with these northern rural hospitals and similar with the southern rural hospitals—that connection to local industry. You cannot have economic drivers, you can't have industry without access to health care. People just won't move their families. They'll choose somewhere else. So I appreciate that as well.

I want to talk to Lorrie from the YMCA. One, I want to echo what Madame Gélinas said: We love the Y. Locally, in Sudbury, it's "our Y." You hear that all the time. I want to thank you—I've said it at Queen's Park as well, so has Madame Gélinas—for everything you did, especially during the pandemic. Just to refresh my colleagues: You were the warming centre for people who were homeless. You accessed the Internet for them—child care for essential workers at a time where one of your main sources of income is the gym and pool and they weren't being used. So thank you so much for weathering the storm. I would advocate constantly for the need to provide funding for the Y to be successful going forward because of what you did for our entire community—not just locally the Y, but Ys in general.

A lot of times—and I'm guilty of this as well—before I was elected, I saw the Y primarily as the gym. All the other services that's provided—the child care, immigration, youth services, employment services, all of that stuff.

Just focusing on the child care: 62% are vacant in child care. Jenny in my office is currently off on mat leave with twins, having an incredibly hard time finding child care. They planned to look for child care before they planned to have kids. That's the reality for people across Ontario.

I appreciate you advocating for the child care workers, the child care assistants. If you could just talk about the need for increased funding, increased pay for these important roles—we've heard it before, but to hear from you as well.

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

Ms. Lorrie Turnbull: Yes, absolutely. I mean, that's when we talk about the assistants that are in the classrooms that are not eligible for the wage enhancements. They are critical. They are part of our ratio in delivering services. We greatly rely on them.

Secondly, to all of that, I would just have to say that the funding formula—we need certainty in the funding formula going forward so we can actually plan for expansion and ensure that we have program quality, right? So that funding formula has evaded us for a couple of years now.

We've been very patient. We're kind of building the airplane while we're flying it—like, truly. We're there arm in arm, but it's getting a little old now and it's time to lock that down.

MPP Jamie West: Yes, and that child care is the cornerstone to economic movement, right? If I didn't have child care, I wouldn't be going to work at Inco.

Ms. Lorrie Turnbull: Well, you won't get those mining families in here if you can't provide the kids with child care. Child care in a hospital, too, is critical for attracting nurses and has been proven to help with retention of health care workers.

MPP Jamie West: And one of the things I hear often—

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

We'll go to the independent. MPP Hazell.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Dawn, Lorrie and Mark, thank you for coming in and thank you for your presentation.

Dawn, I know we've been asking you a lot of questions, and we can't run out of the questions because we know what is happening to health care in Ontario. But I was listening to your presentation and I want to key in on something you said because that means a lot to me. You said you want to be part of the conversation and part of the solution. Can you elaborate on that?

And also, while you are on the floor, can you detail your bottom line for your budget pressures to keep your door open and for you to be able to sustain your key services in the long-term-care strategy? You mentioned 19 beds to be funded. One bed is \$35,000 per year. If you don't have that, what happens to our most vulnerable population?

Ms. Dawn Morissette: If we don't fund it, we have to close it. In terms of collaboration, that means sitting down with our funders and having an honest conversation about what services, what reporting, what standards, what collaboration, what integration makes sense.

As an example, Chapleau Health was the provider of the home and community care coordinator. Our discharge planner was half a person. Our home and community care planner was half a person. So when she sent herself referrals, she did not turn herself down. We had one of the most integrated ways of ensuring a smooth flow from primary care to in-hospital to out-of-hospital to home, and we kept our patients home for longest time so that they didn't come back as ALC—as you have probably heard in the news, it's very expensive—and then we delay their entry into long-term care.

Home and community care is an independent organization and determined that they should take that 0.4 of a person contract. And so, now the flow is disrupted.

So it's sitting together before making decisions like taking a contract away like that to say, "Hey, in Chapleau or one of the smaller communities that are in the same boat as I am, how can we further integrate? How can we make sure that we create full-time jobs that make sense, that work together and that keep the patient at home: the right care, right place, right time, all the time?"

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And so, if we're not at the table when those decisions are made about which contracts—yes, I know, it's a different contract; nobody else has one like that, or maybe one other in the whole province. So it's saying that, you know what, exceptions are okay. Local solutions are good.

Let's work together, but let's keep you accountable. Let's make sure that it makes sense. Let's make sure that we report on the dollars that we're given. Absolutely, we need to know where the dollars are going. People need to understand where their tax dollars and their health care dollars are being spent and how. But let's make sure we spend them smartly.

Now, our care coordinator comes from Wawa—it's a two-hour drive—comes to Chapleau, sees one patient, turns around and drives back. Does that make sense to you? It certainly doesn't make sense to us.

So how can we keep our doors open? We're going to need \$750,000 to arrive on our doorstep before March 31. We're going to need the government's support to train our own nurses so that we can keep them in community and grow them in community. We need to increase our ability to—

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

Ms. Dawn Morissette: —be part of the table for the discussion.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you so much. That's very detailed and thank you for putting that on the record.

My next question, very quickly, is to Mark. Mark, the government spoke about advancing mining in the Ring of Fire—I'm pretty sure you're aware of that—where there is hardly any infrastructure. Your project is located near Timmins, where mining is already better supported. Does it make sense for this government to invest in projects like yours at this point in time?

Mr. Mark Selby: Yes. We're literally located next to a highway; we have all the major infrastructure in place. We're on lands that have already been logged multiple times, so it's already been impacted. And so, again, to the extent that we can reuse existing sites to create additional economic value, I think that makes a lot of sense and is one of the big selling points for our projects with the community, for sure.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Yes, and thank you for sharing—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time, not only for this question, but that concludes the time for this whole panel.

I want to thank everyone on this panel for the great job of preparing for being here and presenting in such a way that will be very helpful as we move forward with the 2024 budget.

ASSOCIATION DES DIRECTIONS
ET DIRECTIONS ADJOINTES DES ÉCOLES
FRANCO-ONTARIENNES
SCIENCE NORTH
STUDENT NUTRITION ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): With that, as we're changing the front table, we are going to be hearing from the Franco-Ontarian school principals and vice-principals' association, the Francophone Assembly of Ontario and Science North—no, I was wrong on that one.

The second one is Science North and the third one is Student Nutrition Ontario.

As they're coming forward, we want to advise, again, that you'll have seven minutes to make the presentation. Arriving at six minutes, I will say, "One minute." Don't quit speaking because you still have the best minute of the presentation left. When we get to the end of that one minute, I will say, "Thank you very much," and it will be completed.

Before we start, we also ask that each presenter introduce themselves for Hansard before they start. For the committee, there is an additional presenter for the first group. Benoît Dussault will be virtual and for those that require translation, you can use the device provided. Channel 1 is the floor sound; channel 2 is the interpretation.

With that, we will turn the floor over to the Franco-Ontarian schools principals and vice-principals' association.

Ms. Stéphanie Sampson: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Stéphanie Sampson. I am the president of l'Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes. I am pleased to speak with you on behalf of over 680 members today. My presentation will mostly be in French; however, I will answer questions in both official languages. I don't believe my colleague has joined us yet, but it is possible that our executive director, Benoît Dussault, will join me.

Comme direction d'école au palier élémentaire ici à Sudbury, c'est un plaisir de pouvoir vous partager nos perspectives aujourd'hui au nom de l'ADFO.

L'éducation en langue française en contexte minoritaire est unique en raison de sa mission d'appuyer la vitalité de nos communautés. Le rôle de nos membres et leur responsabilité envers cette mission sont tout aussi uniques. Toutefois, si nous sommes uniques, nous ne sommes pas seuls. Nous oeuvrons en collaboration avec d'autres organismes éducatifs franco-ontariens et nous sommes solidaires avec nos collègues du Ontario Principals' Council et du Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario. Ensemble, c'est près de 9 000 directions et directions adjointes qui se prononcent.

Alors que nous célébrons 30 ans de gestion scolaire par et pour les francophones, rappelons-nous que la crise de pénurie de personnel dans laquelle nous sommes ne définit pas l'éducation en langue française. Nos élèves continuent de réussir au-delà de la moyenne provinciale. Notre réseau scolaire n'a jamais été aussi répandu. Nos écoles sont reconnues pour la qualité de l'enseignement et de l'expérience étudiante, et les directions et directions adjointes sont dévouées à créer les meilleures conditions pour le personnel scolaire afin qu'ils puissent exercer leur fonction à la hauteur de leur talent et de leur dévouement.

In other words, for all of the attention being put on the challenges in our system, we must not lose sight of the fact that it remains world-class and that across our schools, every single day, students can rely on a school community dedicated to making their learning journey fulfilling, joyful and impactful. This is why we must sustain our efforts to promote education professions, solve this staff-

ing shortage in the medium term and seek immediate measures to support our dedicated staff currently working in our schools.

Comme directions et directions adjointes, les élèves sont, sans équivoque, au coeur de nos décisions, d'où l'importance de porter une attention particulière aux bien-être de nos membres. Comme dans une urgence d'avion, on nous dit de mettre notre masque avant de pouvoir aider les autres. Présentement, nous avons l'impression que nous avons oublié cette étape et que nos membres manquent d'oxygène.

La bonne nouvelle est qu'il y a un consensus parmi les organisations éducatives et le ministère de l'Éducation que la pénurie de la main-d'oeuvre semble être la source de la majorité de ces défis auxquels nous sommes confrontés. Cette pénurie veut dire que nos membres passent plus de temps dans la salle de classe, éloignés de leurs travaux de direction. Ça veut dire qu'ils ont moins de temps à appuyer les enseignantes et les enseignants. Ça veut dire qu'ils se peinent à accueillir un nombre élevé de personnel non qualifié—de les appuyer, de les encadrer. Et ça veut dire qu'ils n'arrivent pas à accéder à la formation dont ils ont besoin afin de gérer les changements importants en matière de curriculum et d'initiatives de justice sociale qui prennent de plus en plus de place dans nos écoles.

Au-delà des défis de recrutement de personnel qualifié dans les écoles, le climat scolaire actuel et l'imposition de tâches additionnelles affectent la rétention et l'assiduité de nos membres. Si nos membres exercent leurs fonctions avec rigueur, détermination et passion, les conditions actuelles conduisent à la démoralisation, car ils ont moins de temps à consacrer à l'accomplissement de leurs tâches à la hauteur de leur capacité.

Puisque les directions sont un maillon important dans la réussite de la mise en oeuvre d'initiatives ministérielles, l'ADFO recommande au ministère de l'Éducation de prolonger le temps de mise en oeuvre des nouvelles initiatives pour que les leaders scolaires puissent mieux gérer le changement et assurer une meilleure mise en oeuvre.

Nous sommes encouragés de constater que le ministère de l'Éducation recherche des mesures à long terme pour remédier à la pénurie des enseignants—du personnel de façon générale aussi, pardon.

De même, nous sommes encouragés par la volonté de répondre aux préoccupations immédiates concernant le système de langue française en maximisant le financement fédéral. Pour notre association, cela signifie soutenir le développement professionnel ciblé pour les nouvelles directions et directions adjointes. Ça veut dire d'encadrer les fonctions de gestion et d'administration. Ça veut aussi dire de veiller à ce que nos membres aient accès aux possibilités de formations qui répondent à leurs préoccupations immédiates.

L'ADFO recommande que l'Ontario continue de travailler avec le secteur d'éducation en langue française pour obtenir le maximum de fonds disponibles dans le cadre de l'entente Canada-Ontario pour les langues officielles en éducation.

We also join our fellow associations of principals and vice principals in recommending several key measures to address chronic staff shortages.

L'ADFO recommande à ce que le ministère de l'Éducation accélère la mise en oeuvre des moyens pour pallier la pénurie du personnel. Particulièrement, nous demandons que le ministère considère vivement l'élimination de la deuxième année de formation du baccalauréat en éducation. Nous recommandons également à ce que le ministère de l'Éducation travaille avec les universités pour concevoir des parcours accélérés pour le personnel non-qualifié qui enseigne présentement dans nos écoles et qui répond évidemment aux critères d'évaluation spécifiques.

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Comme j'ai fait allusion tantôt, nous recommandons à ce que le gouvernement de l'Ontario—

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

M^{me} Stéphanie Sampson: —et le secteur d'éducation collaborent pour valoriser les professions du système éducatif afin d'intéresser plus de gens à choisir diverses carrières.

Mesdames et messieurs les députés, il est urgent d'agir afin de protéger l'intégrité de notre système et notre capacité de contribuer pleinement à une éducation axée sur ce qui est essentiel pour notre économie, pour la santé de notre démocratie et pour notre bien-être collectif.

C'est pour cela que notre dernière recommandation est d'assurer que les soutiens de santé mentale soient disponibles dans toutes nos écoles et que le ministère de l'Éducation considère aussi des mesures en collaboration avec les associations professionnelles pour appuyer la santé mentale et le bien-être des directions et des directions adjointes, et pour encourager une relation saine entre le public et les établissements scolaires. Merci beaucoup.

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

We will now hear from Science North.

Ms. Céline Roy: My name is Céline Roy, and it is my privilege to be here on behalf of Science North today. Joining me online is one of my colleagues, Kylene Byne, our senior manager of grants. We're really grateful to have this opportunity to speak to you today as a former recipient of NOHFC funding.

To kick off the presentation, I will pass it on to my colleague online just to provide an overview of some key highlights and successes we've encountered to date with the support of NOHFC.

Ms. Kylene Byne: Thank you, Céline.

First of all, I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to speak today. Science North has a strong history of working with the ministry, with NOHFC and with the province, as we are uniquely positioned to recognize the unique circumstances that face northern Ontario. Our mandate is to serve the entire 800,000-square-kilometre region with very unique programs, projects and services to serve each community's very unique needs. We strive for inclusiveness in everything that we do, working with multiple First Nations communities with the goal of advancing truth and reconciliation in all of our operations

and programming, and share similar goals to drive innovation and commercialization of products and services that really showcase how incredible and diverse northern Ontario-made products are on a global stage and to drive partnerships and collaboration in the region.

Because of our partnership with NOHFC, NOHFC has made a significant impact in northern Ontario through Science North. The projects that we have been able to execute—and these are just ones that we've done since 2020—have had a combined budget of \$26.9 million. NOHFC has invested \$7.4 million in those projects, and these projects would not have been possible without that funding support. Together, these projects have driven \$23.5 million in direct and value-added benefits to the province and have created more than 138 full-time equivalent positions in addition to direct employment created at Science North and across northern Ontario.

Ms. Céline Roy: As a recipient of NOHFC funding, what we did is we took a look at NOHFC's current priorities that most align with Science North and took a look at what's working well and some opportunities for your consideration as well.

One of the priorities with NOHFC currently is to attract, retain and develop northern Ontario's workforce. I can't think of a single employer who does not have that same priority as well. We all know the current challenges on the labour market. Some constraints, however, with the current program and the review that happened in most recent years is that an employer such as Science North historically could have up to five to seven interns; we're now limited to two interns as well. There are other streams available. However, they don't necessarily align directly with the tourism industry that we work within. Some current opportunities, of course, would be to increase the amount of internship opportunities available, but also to rethink and relook at different ways of attracting talent and retaining talent already in northern Ontario.

Specifically, within one of the priorities to enable Indigenous employment is a strong priority for NOHFC and Science North. What we've found is the traditional internship model does not necessarily work for this group. In reviewing some of our successes, we have had over 38 NOHFC interns since 2005, all of which have either found employment with Science North, within their field, or have gone for greater education—not to mention the current positions they now hold, many of which are within executive leadership positions within northern Ontario.

Another thing we were challenged with is actually retaining and attracting Indigenous youth within our workforce. We were very fortunate to work with our Indigenous advisory committees to find an alternative way. What we found is that the typical internship model did not necessarily work for this group, and we found a different way of doing it that both supported the interns, providing them mentorship, but also gave them opportunities for different types of exposure throughout an organization while also working within their community—so looking at how to fund and attract that in a different model. This does have a direct impact on northern Ontario in

meeting the province's overall goals, and not only that, but creating strong leadership in the future as well.

The second priority we assessed is to support projects and initiatives that lead to innovative products and services. Again, tourism within northern Ontario is a really important economic driver, generating about \$1.6 billion annually. Most impressively is that over 90% of those economic benefits of tourism stay in the region, so money we invest in the region stays in the region.

Current constraints are that with the recent changes in the program, the amount of funding available has been limited, and the programs that typically were to fund some very successful projects we've had are no longer available. Those ones currently in place have limited the amounts there. Again, some opportunities are to reassess the funding threshold based on overall project budget and to find some funding mechanisms outside of the standard programs. The reality is that you can have a program that fits so well within the province and northern Ontario's mandate; however, it does not fit within the standard programs that they have—so having a mechanism for those unique opportunities that the province would certainly be interested in investing in.

Again, we've seen proven successes with this funding as well. At Science North, what we look at is—we are a tourism attraction across all of northern Ontario and we have permanent attractions across northern Ontario. We've also been able to provide exhibits to these locations which otherwise would not have them. Those combined value-added benefits totalled over \$8.1 million. We've also engaged with more than 90,000 people across northern Ontario, and because of those permanent exhibits, that number continues to grow. More importantly, it allows us to build, maintain and grow a very strong network of partners across northern Ontario within the tourism industry who may not have the same resources as Science North.

Finally, the third priority we looked at is enhancing programs and services to improve recovery to build a strong economy. Again, no organization in Ontario or northern Ontario has not been faced with some financial challenges, including inflation. Some constraints with the type of funding that is currently available through NOHFC and the amounts do make it challenging to have some big impactful projects move forward.

Again, the current opportunities within this are to expand eligible expenditures to include salaries and certain other types of expenses such as pre-construction, but also to leverage what others are doing, including project management best practices, with funding applications to have some level of variability within the funding agreement and the delivery of it. It's really focusing on the impacts northern Ontario can have. Science North is fortunate as a medium-sized organization that we have staff and resources available to help support change orders, for example. It is a lengthy and administratively heavy task to do that could certainly burden somebody's impact—

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

We will now go to Student Nutrition Ontario.

Ms. Viviane Dégagné: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Viviane Dégagné and I am the manager of Student Nutrition Ontario network.

Student Nutrition Ontario is made up of 14 lead representatives that administer provincial grant funds. These funds help to develop and implement healthy breakfast, snack and lunch programs across the province. Our mission is to collaborate and provide a unified voice for student nutrition across the province, ensuring every child has equal opportunity to eat, learn and succeed.

SNO supports and serves 4,668 school and community-based nutrition programs across the province. We serve over 764,000 students on a daily basis and more than 133 million meals per year. Funding comes from government of Ontario national and provincial partners, community donors, parental contributions and others.

We see four pillars of needs for student nutrition. Student nutrition base funding for food has not increased in over a decade. This means that we're not able to serve the amount of food needed to cover the three food groups for breakfast or the two food groups that represent a snack that are in our nutritional guidelines. In many cases, only one or two food groups are being served and even there, the portion size is often inadequate to serve a child or a student. Soaring food inflation has played havoc on student nutrition across the province as the funding is too little to purchase a variety of foods in the amount and portion size required to feed a student. Add to this the increased participation of students in our programs due to the effects of COVID, soaring inflation for families and the number of new immigrants across our province, and we now have a perfect storm.

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The second pillar is food hubs and delivery logistics. Currently, we have approximately 62 food hubs across the province. Large hubs receive, store and facilitate school pickup; however, this is probably only a handful across the province. Small hubs are temporary storage for donated food, often given in-kind by some of our local grocers or other small organizations. Distributor hubs are small spaces that are provided by distributors to house large orders and donations until they can be delivered. Existing food hubs are inadequate, again, to meet our needs. It is clear that infrastructure and last-mile delivery are needed to achieve growth in this area. Significant savings is realized when leveraging purchasing power across the province. And we have it; we just can't use it.

Our third pillar is equipment and infrastructure. We have not had any funding for equipment or infrastructure since 2008-09 when we had a one-time grant to fund these needs for our current schools. In 2011-12, a second grant was given but only to onboard new schools. Since then, what we're doing is working to repair and replace equipment with available funds, often through fundraised dollars or other partners.

Essential equipment also needed is commercial refrigeration, freezers, convention ovens, lockable storage cabinets and small wares. All of this is needed in order to

meet the Food Premises Act regulations. There's an estimated need of about \$15 million to enhance that equipment and do the upgrades that are necessary.

The fourth pillar is SNO funding. Student Nutrition Ontario funding in the amount of \$250,000 was granted for a three-year project that happened between the years of 2016 and 2019. Much work was completed during this time, and the ministry agreed to continue to fund us at \$125,000 per year in the last four years.

Our work at SNO continues in development and maintenance partnerships, which includes things like school visits, presentations, meetings with those partners, discussions, reporting and so on and so forth. We also meet on a monthly basis, the 14 lead agencies, to share best practices and resources, and move some of these projects forward. Financial support for the host agency is part of that \$125,000 in coordination and advocacy.

SNO recommendations are to increase our annual provincial base funding to 20% of \$2.50 meal costs for existing programs; provide new base funding to onboard critically needed programs, approximately 100 programs with about 300 students participating in each of those schools, at a 20% cost of the \$2.50 meal cost; provide \$5 million per year for the next three years for equipment and infrastructure replacement and upgrades; increase funding to support food hubs and pay for delivery of food in that last-mile delivery; and finally, to restore SNO funding to the 2016 to 2019 levels of \$250,000 annually.

Thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

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

We will now start the questions. We'll start with the official opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to our presenters who have arrived here today. I'd like to start off with Stéphanie. I want to thank you for your presentation about the importance of students learning in their birth language. I wondered if you wanted to speak about that and the importance of the language of instruction and making sure that that protected right continues in Ontario.

Ms. Stéphanie Sampson: As I said at the beginning, we have an important mission in ensuring the vitality of our francophone communities and our culture, and we have an opportunity to have access to extra funding in order to ensure that. I think that's an advantage that we have in the French-language system. Because we are much smaller, we have to take advantage of all the funds we have access to in order to ensure that our services and our resources are at par with the anglophone system.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: You'd also mentioned that there are unqualified individuals filling educational roles. Do you know what proportion happens on—like, what would happen on a daily basis or an annual basis?

Ms. Stéphanie Sampson: It is happening daily. Unfortunately, it was my colleague that had those statistics. I won't be able to share them with you at this time. But it used to be a more francophone issue; now it has flowed

into the English system as well. We've been talking about a crisis situation for some time now.

We're lucky that people have stepped up to support the education system. However, the increased demands and responsibilities and extra duties make it difficult for principals to support these non-qualified individuals, and it's crucial that they be there by their side in order to ensure quality education. So that's why we are recommending an accelerated process in qualifying these non-qualified teachers.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Absolutely. I think best intentions are great, but qualifications are also important.

Ms. Stéphanie Sampson: Absolutely.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you very much also for advocating for proper social services within schools, as is the province's responsibility.

I'd like to next move over to Viviane. You spoke about the importance of nutrition on education. I wanted to know: Have you studied schools in other jurisdictions who provide proper nutrition for their students daily?

Ms. Viviane Dégagné: There have been a few studies done. We did a study, actually, here in Ontario in the Toronto area, I want to say, back in 2010, around there. What we saw was children that had a healthy, nutritious breakfast attended school more often. There were decreased behaviours in the school and their capacity to focus on learning was better. And therefore, your marks at the end of the day or at the end of the year increased.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Understood. It's often been said that water is life, but food is love. When the school is providing for students and making sure that they are well looked after, it has tremendous impacts, both educationally but socially and for the long-term. So thank you for advocating for that.

I wanted to also ask, with your lead agencies, have you looked at the availability of infrastructure within faith-based locations like churches that have commercial kitchens?

Ms. Viviane Dégagné: In the beginning of student nutrition, there were some community-based programs. However, we feel that it's more accessible if those programs are in school. Kids go to school. They start their day off with a healthy breakfast right there in the school, and so it makes it much easier for the whole logistics of it than going to maybe a faith-based organization, a church, whatever it may be, and then having to walk to school from there or transport to school from there. If they can arrive at school and breakfast is served for them at the school, it's much better.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Absolutely.

Céline, I just want to thank you for your presentation. Unfortunately, I'm running a little bit short on time. It must be a little nerve-racking for Science North, given the way the provincial government has jumped all over the science centre in Toronto. You have 30 seconds. Did you have anything from your presentation that you wanted to finish?

Ms. Céline Roy: I just wanted to highlight that it certainly is a challenging time. I think we can all learn from

one another as well, but I also think there's some significant opportunities as well to provide some mechanisms so that we don't repeat those steps either. I think we're all ultimately trying to achieve the same thing. We all want to have successful projects, and I think there's some learning to be had there as well.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Excellent presentation. Thank you.

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

MPP Jamie West: To continue with Viviane: Viviane, you said a couple of times about the intern program and Science North having a slightly different model or recommendations for it. I didn't fully understand. What are the differences that you'd be looking for?

Ms. Céline Roy: Traditionally, the intern model is one where you hire a recent graduate and have them within your organization for up to a year. What we found—and we're really fortunate to have an external group to help us with our Indigenous advisory committee—is that there are barriers for Indigenous youth to just come to an employer, especially alone as well. So we pivoted a program, with the support of this group, and essentially we had a group of interns come in; that group also had the opportunity for more than one role. Again, the traditional internship program, you'd do one role for the extent of that year. These ones here rotated through not only the organization; they had the chance to go into partner organizations as well and also go back and run a program within their community as well. That was a success, having the group. Also, having a strong mentor in place to help them overcome some of the challenges to working in a new environment was a key success there.

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And finally, the last success I would say was just, again, their ability to be hybrid within their community as well—

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

MPP Jamie West: I apologize. For Viviane—that's what happens when you're thinking ahead to the next question. Sorry, Céline. Viviane, I'll have to come back in the next round. But something I heard early on was that there was a breakfast program in Sudbury that was a homework program. The idea is you would come get help with homework and you could have breakfast while you're there. Over the last 10 years, maybe a little bit longer, it has transitioned to that you come to school to eat because there isn't food at home and perhaps do homework.

Is that what you're seeing in organizations as well?

Ms. Viviane Dégagné: The 14 lead agencies are very different across the province. We really rely on those lead agencies to have their finger on the pulse of their communities and be able to provide what is needed in their communities. So there is a variety of models across the province all looking at what the communities' needs are. Certainly, that is one of the models, but there are many others.

MPP Jamie West: Are you seeing the need for student—

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

The independent: MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our presenters for being here.

I will start with Student Nutrition Ontario. Thank you, Viviane, for your presentation. You talked about the ask around 20% of the \$2.50 cost per meal, and that's for across the province, correct?

Ms. Viviane Dégagné: Correct.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Could you just remind me or repeat the total dollar value of that ask in terms of the impact to your budget?

Ms. Viviane Dégagné: Currently, we are being funded at about 15% of—I'm going to say between \$1.50 and \$1.80, so there's a big difference. That \$2.50 was derived before COVID. We did a study of what the food cost was, and to provide a healthy breakfast, three food groups, at a portion size that was adequate for a student, you were looking at \$2.50. So we are grossly underfunded at this point and trying to make ends meet. Therefore, in order to make sure that children are getting something, they may be getting half of a tangerine and a stick of cheese as opposed to what they should be getting, which would be a whole fruit, a cheese and a grain product.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I recall hearing from one of your member agencies in Cambridge that the funding that the province provides is only about a third, in her agency's case, anyway. Is that relatively consistent across the various agencies, versus donor funding and other contributions in kind etc.?

Ms. Viviane Dégagné: I would say fairly consistent. Again, across the province, it differs. Some regions have a lot of opportunity to do fundraising at a bigger level because they have more manufacturers and so on that they can pull from, while other agencies, just because of where they are, don't have that availability, but it's probably very close to that.

We do work very closely with national and provincial partners to bring on additional funding in order to substitute what the government is able to give us. Not that we're not grateful for what we get; certainly, it's base funding, and that's what it's meant for. It was seed funding, and we were to go out and fundraise for the rest, which we do. But that seed funding is getting to be smaller and smaller and smaller.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Great, thank you.

Alors, Stéphanie, je vais essayer en français. Est-ce que vous pouvez parler un peu plus des bénéfices d'éliminer la deuxième année du programme d'éducation pour le système francophone?

M^{me} Stéphanie Sampson: Absolument. C'est correct si je parle en français?

M^{me} Stephanie Bowman: Oui.

M^{me} Stéphanie Sampson: Le défi en français, c'est qu'en plus d'ajouter une deuxième année, ils ont aussi éliminé des places francophones à la faculté d'éducation. Donc, pour nous, ça a eu un impact vraiment dévastateur en éducation.

Au minimum, on a absolument besoin qu'on ajoute de nombreuses places. On aimerait voir, au minimum, de dou-

bler, mais même à ça, avec les retraites qui s'en viennent—j'ai écouté tantôt; c'est le cas dans tous les secteurs qu'on a des retraites, une vague de retraites incroyable qui approche—on est à l'aube, vraiment, de départs dévastateurs au niveau du personnel, pas seulement enseignant. Donc le fait de nous redonner ces places-là et aussi de nous donner une double cohorte présentement, au court terme, ça serait incroyablement puissant.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Merci.

And, Céline, I recall reading that, again, many institutions like yours have faced challenges recovering from COVID across the tourism sector. You are both kind of tourism and education. Could you talk a little bit about what you're doing, the efforts you're making to rebuild the audience, the numbers that you had prior to the pandemic?

Ms. Céline Roy: Absolutely. So I think coming out of the pandemic, we've had to rethink everything that we do, including the lines of programming we have as well. So part of the tourism industry is to have people—you also want them to come back as well—and in order to do that, you need to sort of invest in capital and make sure the experience is changing. So really making sure we have the right things driving people to our sites is what's important. Also looking at the inventory of what we do, if you will, and re-looking at how it aligns with our mandate. So it is coming back to the point now that we can't necessarily—

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

We'll now go to MPP Dowie.

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

J'aimerais commencer avec Stéphanie. Merci beaucoup pour votre présentation. J'ai deux neveux qui sont dans le système francophone catholique, dans la région Windsor-Essex, comme leur oncle et leur père. Nous sommes tous une famille—malgré le fait que nous sommes anglophones, dans les années 1980, nous étions accueillis par la communauté. Alors j'apprécie bien que la communauté nous permette de nous présenter comme étudiants.

Alors, ce que tu as expliqué avec les défis avec les profs et de trouver les profs, je connais bien ça. Ça semble qu'on doit chercher les profs des autres continents. Quand moi j'étais à l'école, on ne cherchait pas seulement au Québec, mais au Nouveau-Brunswick et partout. Et maintenant, on doit aller en Afrique, aux Caraïbes. Ça semble qu'on n'a pas, comme tu avais dit, la main-d'oeuvre pour travailler dans ces positions.

Je voulais juste vérifier. Je pense que tu as bien expliqué le pourquoi : parce qu'on a moins d'espace dans les écoles, ainsi qu'un programme de deux ans au lieu d'une année, comme ça l'est ailleurs. Est-ce que tu peux partager avec nous c'est quoi le trajet, tout de suite, entre les positions qui existent et le nombre d'employés qui peuvent remplir les positions? À quel point est-ce qu'on—est-ce que c'est immédiat et que ça va prendre deux, trois années pour trouver les positions? Ou est-ce que ça va durer plus longtemps que ça si on fait ce changement tout de suite?

M^{me} Stéphanie Sampson: Donc, si j'ai bien compris, vous voulez comprendre quelle est la durée de temps que nos enseignants seront dans les postes permanents. Est-ce que c'est ça que vous voulez savoir?

M. Andrew Dowie: En effet, oui. Si on fait les changements que tu avais expliqués, si on rapetisse puis on réduit la durée de temps pour l'éducation à une année, ainsi que d'ajouter des sièges à l'université, quelle durée est-ce que ça serait pour qu'on reprenne une position plus confortable où on va pouvoir trouver les profs qui puissent travailler ces positions?

M^{me} Stéphanie Sampson: Donc, malheureusement, la diminution—un retour à un programme d'un an, ainsi que le doublement des places disponibles en français, ce montant-là ne nous permet pas de répondre aux départs, que ce soit des départs hâtifs, donc des gens qui ne se rendent pas à la retraite, mais qui choisissent d'aller vers d'autres professions, ainsi que la vague de retraites des baby-boomers. Ce sont des moyens pour réduire le besoin, mais nous voyons que ce n'est pas satisfaisant.

Donc, c'est la raison pour laquelle nous encourageons la poursuite de dialogue. Nous avons des tables d'action présentement qui se penchent sur la question de recrutement, de rétention. On aimerait que ces discussions-là et ces stratégies et pratiques se fassent plus rapidement. Cependant, nous avons encore beaucoup de travail afin de répondre à cette pénurie-là. Ce n'est pas quelque chose qui va se régler dans les prochaines années à moins qu'un plan très robuste soit mis en place.

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M. Andrew Dowie: Et est-ce que ton organisation a une position sur le défi constitutionnel qu'un monsieur de Penetanguishene a lancé qui voulait rapetisser la population d'étudiants francophones? C'était en 2019. Le gouvernement fédéral a financé ce cas dans les cours. Le but, c'était de rapetisser ou de réduire le nombre d'étudiants anglophones—par exemple, comme moi—qui peut rentrer dans le système, parce qu'il avait de la misère : il pensait qu'on n'avait pas la capacité d'offrir un service francophone si on continuait d'admettre les étudiants anglophones. Est-ce que tu as un avis sur ça, ou est-ce que c'est un bon effort, pas un bon effort?

M^{me} Stéphanie Sampson: Bien, je pense que vous êtes un exemple parfait de la richesse que la francophonie peut apporter à une famille. Je n'en ai pas parlé longuement tantôt, mais nous avons la capacité d'accueillir des familles francophiles, des familles qui veulent, si je peux dire, s'approprier la culture franco-ontarienne. Nous voyons présentement que le système est en mesure d'apporter les élèves, d'appuyer les élèves dans leur parcours à un taux qui est au-delà de la norme provinciale. Donc, de dire que le système n'a pas la capacité, je ne serais pas nécessairement d'accord avec ce commentaire-là. Mais je ne suis pas non plus familière avec le cas dont vous parlez, donc, je ne pourrais pas critiquer directement cette opinion ou cette position.

M. Andrew Dowie: OK, merci beaucoup.

Chair, how much time do we have left?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Two point four.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I'd like to move to Science North. I just want to say, I'd like to first give a shout-out to Jim Marchbank, your former CEO. We had the opportunity to share some time at Destination Ontario. What a wonderful gentleman he was. He spoke very proudly of Science North. Actually, I took his advice and went to visit. I tasted my first fried insect and went down to Dynamic Earth. What a great venue it is.

So I wanted to touch upon that because I think the facility has a lot of potential to attract even more tourism and tourism dollars. I wonder if you might be able to share some barriers that you are seeing to getting the word out on Science North that you think the province could help with.

Ms. Céline Roy: Thank you so much. I'm really glad you've had the opportunity to see both of our attractions, as they are quite unique and not like anything else you would see elsewhere.

There are certainly a few things. In order to attract people to our locations, we certainly need to invest in that as well. I think that potential goes outside of the province and outside of the country as well. So there is quite the data and the appetite for people to come, but we need to also let them know that we're there.

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

Ms. Céline Roy: So that would be a crucial one, as well: investing in the marketing in order to bring them in. And then, secondly, making sure our infrastructure, both capital infrastructure and our exhibits, are continually maintained and up to date so that—we want them to come back and go back and also let them know how great we were.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: On that, I know we only have a few seconds left, how do you see the future of the facility being? Do you see a replacement being needed in the near future or you're staying home for quite a long time?

Ms. Céline Roy: We certainly have our challenges with infrastructure, as with any not-for-profit agency. We certainly look to be innovative and attack those priorities first-hand as well. So we do see a long future ahead of us, but we need to continue to champion funding and key projects in order to—

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

We'll now go to the official opposition.

MPP Jamie West: Merci, M. Hardeman.

Stéphanie, je m'excuse pour—je parle français. Dans ma ville et en Ontario, il y a plusieurs immigrants qui parlent premièrement français. Et je pense que c'est une trend qui va continuer avec les personnes qui parlent premièrement français, et aussi l'importance d'étudier en français, dans leur première langue.

Votre présentation parle de l'importance des professeurs, des enseignants qui—I almost said “teaché”—qui enseignent ces étudiants. Maintenant à l'Université Laurentienne, les cours pour les enseignants, il n'a pas un programme postsecondaire pour les classes, je pense, peut-être de 10^e, mais de 11^e et 12^e. Les étudiants qui vont à

l'Université Laurentienne cannot fill those spots. Is that something you're advocating for as well?

Ms. Stéphanie Sampson: It's definitely a challenge. We've seen the—le cycle supérieur. You're referring to teachers that are specialized for teaching grade 11 and grade 12, if I understood correctly—

MPP Jamie West: Yes.

Ms. Stéphanie Sampson: They have eliminated cet échelon-là, ce cycle-là, à l'Université Laurentienne. So that is a very big challenge in filling those positions. We're seeing more and more of a need to have qualified teachers in specific subject matter.

The addition of the skilled trades programs in grades 9 and 10 is also a concern for us. We have been having discussions with the ministry about that because of the concern for having qualified teachers to fill those positions. So moving from specialized courses more in grades 10, 11 and 12 and now adding that requirement in grades 9 and 10 is a concern. We can talk about infrastructure but also the human resources needed to be able to give those courses. So we have been in discussion with the ministry in order to ensure that the curriculum is flexible enough for the current workforce being able to fill that need.

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

Mme France Gélinas: Merci. Je vais commencer avec la troisième recommandation : soutien en santé mentale dans toutes les écoles. Ça, est-ce que tu parles spécifiquement pour les directions d'écoles et les directions adjointes ou est-ce que tu parles pour les étudiants, les enseignants et les directions?

Mme Stéphanie Sampson: Nous parlons pour tous les échelons, vraiment. Pour qu'un système soit sain, on doit s'attarder au bien-être de toutes les personnes impliquées. Donc, oui, notre recommandation est à la fois pour des programmes pour les élèves, mais aussi pour tous les membres du personnel et plus particulièrement nos membres, qui sont confrontés par des défis quand même assez importants à tous les jours.

Mme France Gélinas: Est-ce que vous avez un montant spécifique pour cette recommandation?

Mme Stéphanie Sampson: Non, présentement, nous n'avons pas un montant spécifique. C'est de s'assurer du maintien des programmes qui sont disponibles pour les élèves. Nous sommes aussi à aborder les discussions au niveau des négociations des conditions de travail des directions et des directions adjointes, et nous voulons nous assurer qu'il y aurait des discussions vraiment collaboratives au niveau de la programmation et le financement disponible pour appuyer nos membres.

Mme France Gélinas: OK. Recommandation numéro 2 : pour aider ceux qui travaillent déjà dans le système, mais qui n'ont pas les qualifications. Il y a un programme qui existe dans le nord de l'Ontario en ce moment où tu peux prendre la formation en ligne, etc. Est-ce que c'est de ça que l'on parle?

Mme Stéphanie Sampson: Oui, le défi est au niveau du temps et aussi au niveau de la charge de travail. Donc, quand on demande à quelqu'un de prendre un programme accéléré quand ils sont à la fois dans un rôle professionnel,

ça peut être difficile. On a aussi vu l'impact financier sur ces gens-là—s'ils doivent se retirer d'un poste, particulièrement. On a vu du financement fédéral dernièrement afin d'appuyer les gens qui veulent aller se qualifier. Donc, on croit que c'est un pas dans la bonne direction. On aimerait voir aussi du financement pour encourager davantage, à la fois, au niveau du personnel enseignant, mais aussi dans les autres postes du système.

M^{me} France Gélinas: OK. Puis, recommandation numéro 1 : est-ce que, dans les autres provinces, c'est un cours universitaire de deux ans ou d'un an pour avoir ton bac en éducation?

M^{me} Stéphanie Sampson: Nous voyons les deux modèles. Présentement, nous avons aussi d'autres groupes de travail qui travaillent là-dessus. Justement, ce matin, j'étais en rencontre avec Re-imagining Initial Teacher Education. Donc, nous participons à l'analyse, à l'étude de l'efficacité de ce programme-là. Nous devons faire attention que nos réactions ne sont pas biaisées par la pénurie actuelle, mais que nous sommes vraiment en train de critiquer, d'analyser, de développer un programme qui est un modèle qui est soutenable à long terme. Donc, nous sommes à étudier ce qui se passe ailleurs au pays, mais aussi ailleurs dans le monde afin de s'assurer qu'on est en train de développer, vraiment, le meilleur programme pour nos étudiants et donc pour les enfants de la province.

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M^{me} France Gélinas: Viviane, I'd like to come back to you. There's a big difference between the money that you get—you put it at \$1.50—versus the money that is needed to feed our kids, at \$2.20, even \$2.50. What will happen if no money goes your way? What will happen if the decade of flat financing for you keeps on for the other two years that this government is in power?

Ms. Viviane Dégagné: We'll continue to do what we're doing.

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

Ms. Viviane Dégagné: We still serve something, and something is better than nothing, and that's how we see it. We will continue to work with partners and try to develop new partnerships that will help us with that gap in financing.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay, but when we talk about school nutrition—increased attendance, decreased behaviour, increased marks, increased graduation—are we putting all of that at risk?

Ms. Viviane Dégagné: Absolutely. I believe we are, yes.

M^{me} France Gélinas: And Céline, just quickly, you asked for a lot of changes at NOHFC. Can you give us an example as to how things would be better for you if those changes are implemented?

Ms. Céline Roy: I think it would just increase our ability to meet our mandate and serve northern Ontario. It would also help improve our ability to work with the network we've built across northern Ontario. We are facing a challenge right now where it's difficult to sustain—

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

We'll now go to MPP Hazell.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you, Céline, Viviane and Stéphanie. I hope I got the names right—I didn't get you, online. But thank you to everyone for coming in and presenting to us.

I'm going to go to Sudbury's science centre. What I want to get at right now is the sustainability part of your centre, because we're going through this particular situation in Toronto with our Ontario Science Centre. The government decided that Ontario Science Centre was outdated and needed to be demolished. Do you anticipate that this is what's going to be happening with your Science North? How do you feel about that, because it can happen to you too—

Ms. Céline Roy: It certainly can. We have faced decades, if you will, of underfunding within our capital infrastructure, so it certainly is a risk that we're aware of. We are working as much as we can to get better access to information, better funding. I think one of the things we do well is when we do look for funding, we look to leverage it both municipally, federally and provincially, so looking at diversifying our investments, including the private sector. But we certainly just can't rely on the traditional means anymore. We know that we have to continue to innovate and collaborate and have strong partnerships in order to make sure we have a building that sustains itself.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you for sharing that. I want to go to another point. The Auditor General discovered costs of the science centre modernization tripled from \$5 million to \$15 million. Does this affect the sustainability of all of the programs that you serve right now?

Ms. Céline Roy: The increased costs as well—yes, absolutely. Those were some pre-pandemic to post-pandemic costs, so inflationary pressures on one particular capital project. That certainly had that too. So we're certainly seeing that across everything. Our cost of goods, our cost of labour—there are pressures everywhere. So it does sort of push us to that brink, if you will, if these costs continue to increase while revenues stay status quo, either to find new revenues, and if that doesn't work, we do need to look at what we're doing and possibly reducing the scope.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Well, I hope you do all of that, because you can be faced with the same situation as we are facing with the Ontario Science Centre.

I'm going to go to Student Nutrition Ontario. Viviane—very quickly; my time is limited—I hear you. We hear so many presentations coming forward and stating the same pressures to their budget, the same experiences that they're experiencing. You are looking after our most vulnerable population. It is sad and sickening when a student can go into school with a hungry belly. We know what part of our health care system will be impacted.

I want you to take my last minute or so and really detail what you want to leave this government with today.

Ms. Viviane Dégagné: I think I want to leave the government with the fact that there is proof in the pudding. If we feed those children, they will come to class, they will do better, they will graduate and they will become—

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

Ms. Viviane Dégagné: —members of our society. Not only that, if at an early age they learn to make healthier choices when it comes to food, it means that later on in life, hopefully, that will be less taxing on our health care system, because they are learning to eat well. We do have a nutritious, balanced meal for them, but we need the money in order to serve that and to serve it adequately. And we need kitchens that are safe that we can do that in, that we can prepare that food in, that we could serve that food in. Without it, it's not possible.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you. Time?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Twenty-six seconds.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Stéphanie, the French language and francophones are so important to all Canadians. I just want to tell you to just keep it going. It should be all through high school and mandatory in all universities in Canada, not just Ontario.

Ms. Stéphanie Sampson: Well, thank you. I would have to agree.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Oh, and time to spare: five seconds.

We'll now go to MPP Ghamari.

M^{me} Goldie Ghamari: Merci beaucoup. C'était un plaisir. Je voudrais dire que, moi, je pense que le français est vraiment important.

Un petit peu about myself: moi, je ne suis pas francophone; je suis francophile, I guess. Mes parents, ils sont venus au Canada en 1986, et ils habitaient à Montréal. Et parce que mon père ne pouvait pas parler français, il ne pouvait pas trouver du travail, alors ils sont venus à Toronto. Mais ils ont connu l'importance d'être bilingue et c'est pour cette raison que, moi et ma petite soeur, nous sommes allées à l'école d'immersion française. Mais mes parents ne peuvent pas le parler. Mon français est comme ci, comme ça; je dois le pratiquer, mais je peux le comprendre mieux que je peux le pratiquer.

Je connais l'importance d'être bilingue et maintenant, aujourd'hui, parce que je suis une députée et je peux parler les deux langues, c'est vraiment important. Je pense aussi que c'est une importante—it's an important part of our history, avec les Franco-Ontariens.

So je suis désolée if I can't conjugate properly or the nouns—« le table, la chaise »—or is it « la chaise » or « la table »? I can't remember—

M^{me} Viviane Dégagné: La chaise.

M^{me} Goldie Ghamari: La chaise, la table—there we go.

Mais je voudrais poser une question : qu'est-ce que nous pouvons faire pour encourager plus de personnes qui—peut-être, comme moi, leurs parents ne peuvent pas parler français, mais ils veulent que leurs enfants parlent français. Qu'est-ce que tu penses que notre gouvernement peut faire?

M^{me} Stéphanie Sampson: Donc, notre système permet présentement l'accès à l'éducation francophone aux non-ayants droit.

Une voix.

M^{me} Stéphanie Sampson: Oui, justement. Donc, on demande simplement, vraiment, un engagement envers la culture. On passe par des entrevues d'accueil, et ce processus-là existe présentement afin d'accueillir des non-ayants droit au sein du système.

Je crois que les gens ont une richesse à apporter, mais nous avons aussi une richesse à partager, et nous voyons beaucoup de succès quand on voit un engagement de la part de la famille. Quand on s'entoure de ressources francophones pour appuyer l'apprenant de la langue, nous avons de grands succès à appuyer ces apprenants de la langue-là.

Donc, c'est absolument une possibilité. Il s'agit d'assurer que la communauté soutienne ces familles-là. J'ai parlé tantôt d'une relation saine entre familles ou parents et communautés scolaires. Quand on se rassemble—puis, je crois que c'est une force que nous avons au sein de la communauté francophone. Quand on se rassemble, je crois qu'on peut appuyer ce cheminement dans la langue française.

Donc, c'est évidemment de continuer ces appuis-là. Nous avons du travail à faire au niveau de la pénurie afin d'assurer que les places soient disponibles pour ces gens-là.

M^{me} Goldie Ghamari: And est-ce que tu penses—or, peut-être, as-tu des idées pour comment les écoles peuvent aider les parents qui ne peuvent pas parler le français, mais qui veulent que leurs enfants parlent français? Parce que, peut-être, les dictées ou la conjugaison—ça, ce n'est pas quelque chose que les parents peuvent aider les étudiants avec, parce qu'ils ne peuvent pas parler français. So do you have any ideas, des idées, ou quelque chose qui peut aider les parents pour les encourager d'utiliser l'opportunité pour que leurs enfants puissent parler français?

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M^{me} Stéphanie Sampson: Donc, présentement, il y a du financement pour des soutiens au sein de l'école, mais aussi d'autres organismes qui appuient l'actualisation en français. Il est important que ces soutiens-là soient maintenus, parce que, comme j'ai dit tantôt, il y a beaucoup de soutien qui est nécessaire afin d'assurer ce cheminement-là d'un apprenant de la langue. Donc, évidemment, le soutien financier, c'est soutenu afin de fournir des programmes au sein de l'école, mais aussi des soutiens externes afin d'appuyer les familles qui veulent poursuivre cet apprentissage-là.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Okay, thank you. How much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Two point four.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Okay. I don't have any further questions. If anyone has questions—if not, then we can—do you have questions?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Always. Always.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Chair. It's always a pleasure.

I want to ask Science North, and I want to start with saying that, about seven or eight years back, I had an opportunity to visit Science North. We actually came—my

wife, my son and daughter came to Sudbury especially, for a week, and it was really enjoyable to see Science North.

You briefly touched upon not having enough people working in Science North, so about the recruitment and not being able to recruit and sustain them. Have you applied for the Skills Development Fund? Are you aware of the first year?

Ms. Céline Roy: Sorry, what was the last part of your question?

Mr. Deepak Anand: So the government of Ontario has initiated a program called the Skills Development Fund. Like a vicious cycle, what we do is we basically take the money from the taxpayers, invest into the people, and people get jobs and then they start paying back. Have you considered that?

Ms. Céline Roy: Yes, absolutely. We've applied to the Skills Development Fund several times and we were successful twice as well.

Part of what Science North also does is we do reach out to the high school demographic. One of the programs we were able to—

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

Ms. Céline Roy: One of the programs we were able to move forward, only because of the skills development funding, is the SHSM program, so getting the high-skill majors program and getting high school students involved for that next-level opportunity too. We are working to grow that employment path from every angle possible, and that was an extremely important fund for us.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you. And would you suggest, especially—my colleague next to me is from the Ministry of Finance. Would you suggest we should continue doing the Skills Development Fund? Is it beneficial?

Ms. Céline Roy: I think it's a beneficial fund to the recipient organizations and those who are able to come to the program. I think it reaches a very wide range of individuals as well—those returning to the career, those in high school—so it is absolutely an extremely impactful fund.

Mr. Deepak Anand: And to keep doing?

Ms. Céline Roy: And keep doing it.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time, not only for that question but for this panel. I want to say thank you to all the panellists for all the time you took to prepare and the great job you did of presenting it here today. I'm sure all that information will be quite valuable going forward into developing a great budget for 2024.

ASSEMBLÉE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE
DE L'ONTARIO
CONCEIVABLE DREAMS
ONTARIO CONFEDERATION OF
UNIVERSITY FACULTY ASSOCIATIONS

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): With that, as we're, shall we say, clearing the deck for the next table, the next group will be the francophonie assembly of Ontario,

Conceivable Dreams and Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations. I think we have some coming to the table.

As we get ready for the first presentation, I want to remind the presenters that you will have seven minutes to make your presentation. At six minutes, I will give notice that there is one minute left, the most important minute of your presentation, so don't stop. Wait until I say, "Thank you for that great one minute."

We also ask each presenter to start by introducing themselves. If there's anyone else during the presentation that also speaks, we ask that they also introduce themselves to make sure all the comments are attributed to the right person in Hansard.

With that, welcome, and we will start with the francophonie assembly of Ontario.

M. Fabien Hébert: Bonjour. Fabien Hébert, président de l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario. Merci, monsieur le Président.

Dear members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, bonjour.

J'aimerais remercier les membres de ce comité de m'avoir invité à vous présenter quelques idées franco-ontariennes en vue du prochain budget. J'avais d'ailleurs demandé à comparaître à Sudbury dans le cadre de votre tournée, car plusieurs des recommandations contenues dans ce rapport touchent directement les Franco-Ontariens et les Franco-Ontariennes de Sudbury et du nord de notre belle province.

Au cours des prochaines minutes, je parlerai de santé, des organismes sans but lucratif franco-ontariens, du post-secondaire et de deux de nos infrastructures artistiques et culturelles.

Dans un mémoire qui a été partagé au comité et au ministre des Finances, l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario propose deux initiatives visant à soutenir le milieu sans but lucratif.

First, we recommend that the government extend over several years the Francophone Community Grants Program and increase its funding from \$2 million to \$5 million per year. Two key factors influencing our request for an increase in this funding envelope are inflation, of course, and a surge in demand for services offered by many of our organizations. Furthermore, since one of the goals of the program is to support the promotion, recruitment and training of bilingual staff, a significant investment in this regard will address challenges related to the shortage of French-speaking and bilingual workers.

Toujours au sujet des organismes sans but lucratif, nous recommandons au gouvernement d'accorder la responsabilité du secteur sans but lucratif à un espace précis au gouvernement. Cette demande est également demandée par le Ontario Nonprofit Network, qui représente le milieu sans but lucratif de la province et avec qui l'AFO collabore de très près à l'amélioration de la situation dans ce secteur.

Présentement en Ontario, le dossier des affaires francophones à un espace au sein du gouvernement. Ce dossier a été attribué à un office et ensuite, finalement, à un ministère. Cette décision a eu des effets plus que positifs sur la

communication entre la communauté franco-ontarienne et son gouvernement.

Currently, the non-profit sector does not have a home within the government. This sector is crucial to the Ontario economy, contributing \$65 billion to the province's economy and employing nearly 850,000 people. Nous croyons que ce secteur mérite son propre foyer, sa résidence au sein du gouvernement, et que cela se traduira par des bénéfices à l'ensemble de la population ontarienne.

Notre mémoire réitère deux demandes de longue date de la communauté franco-ontarienne et que nous espérons voir progresser dans le cadre du prochain budget.

La première concerne la captation de la variable linguistique sur la carte Santé. Le manque de données probantes au niveau de la langue est un frein majeur à une planification efficace et efficiente des soins de santé à la population de langue française en Ontario. L'AFO est heureuse que le ministère de la Santé ait entrepris une étude l'été dernier visant à optimiser la planification des services de santé en français. La question de la collecte de données y a été abordée. L'AFO y fait la même recommandation qu'elle fait devant vous aujourd'hui. Le gouvernement de l'Ontario doit s'assurer que le prochain budget ait les fonds nécessaires à la mise en oeuvre d'une telle initiative si elle devait aller de l'avant. Ça fait trop longtemps que la communauté attend après cette initiative.

L'autre demande de longue date visant directement le coeur francophone de Sudbury : The AFO will continue to work as necessary that the government must recognize the University of Sudbury as a public university and fund it accordingly. La communauté franco-ontarienne le demande. Mais tout aussi important, on vient d'apprendre, la Commission d'évaluation de la qualité de l'éducation postsecondaire dit que l'institution a ce qu'il faut pour livrer la marchandise.

L'Université de Sudbury a fait un parcours sans faute dans son évaluation organisationnelle indépendante commandée par le ministère des Collèges et Universités de l'Ontario et faite avec l'aide financière du gouvernement du Canada. According to experts who led the assessment of the University of Sudbury, l'Université de Sudbury should be viewed as a start-up whose success truly depends on public investment and funding availability.

Le gouvernement doit ouvrir un dialogue avec l'Université de Sudbury pour trouver des solutions à la réouverture de cette institution ayant accueilli le premier lever de l'histoire du drapeau franco-ontarien.

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Avant de conclure, j'aimerais prendre une dernière minute pour parler de nos infrastructures culturelles. D'ailleurs, M. Jean-Gilles Pelletier, le directeur général de la Place des Arts du Grand Sudbury est ici dans la salle avec moi cet après-midi. Nos centres culturels jouent un rôle crucial dans la transmission de notre culture et dans une panoplie de services à la population qui se font souvent au nom du gouvernement de l'Ontario.

Two of our cultural centres, the Mouvement d'implication francophone d'Orléans, known by the acronym MIFO, and the Place des Arts du Grand Sudbury need

financial support from the province. In the case of MIFO, the organization requires \$10 million from the Ontario government to replace its existing facilities. Let it be known: The roof could literally fall on their heads. If you are familiar with Asterix, the cartoon series, you would know that it's the greatest fear of the French that the sky falls on their head. Let it not become the greatest fear of the Franco-Ontarians. We need the investment, and, joking aside, there is a real and pressing need for the existing space to be rebuilt.

D'autre part, la Place des Arts du Grand Sudbury a besoin d'un appui financier de 325 000 \$ pour faciliter sa transition dans son nouveau modèle d'affaires. Construite et ouverte en pleine pandémie, l'organisme souffre d'un manque à gagner budgétaire cette année—

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

M. Fabien Hébert: —qui remet en question sa croissance. Cette situation urgente doit être réglée.

La Place des Arts finalise présentement un nouveau plan d'affaires. Les plans initiaux, conçus avant la pandémie, ne pouvaient prévoir la hausse des coûts et le contexte socioéconomique propre au centre-ville. L'appui financier de la province est requis pour la Place des Arts, qui lui permettra de prendre sa place.

L'AFO a pleinement confiance dans la capacité du conseil d'administration et la direction de la Place des Arts. Ils ont déjà pris plusieurs décisions difficiles afin de revoir l'offre et la coordination des services.

Nous espérons vraiment que le gouvernement de l'Ontario pourra donner l'aide nécessaire à cette organisation pour Sudbury. Donc, je vous remercie pour votre écoute et il me fera plaisir de répondre à vos questions au cours des prochaines minutes.

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

Our next presenter will be Conceivable Dreams.

Ms. Renee Higgins: Good afternoon. My name is Renee Higgins and I am on the board of directors with Conceivable Dreams. I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to provide input into the 2024 budget.

Conceivable Dreams is a volunteer-run non-profit organization that advocates for equitable access to fertility care in Ontario. Today, I will be providing information on current challenges and the recommendation we are proposing to address these pressing issues.

According to the World Health Organization, one in six people will experience infertility in their lifetime. However, the true number of people is even higher when considering those who may not meet the traditional definition of infertility but still require fertility treatment, such as LGBTQ+ couples, prospective single parents, people who are genetic carriers of certain conditions, people who require surrogacy, those who pursue egg freezing and those who require fertility preservation before cancer treatment.

I will speak about specific access barriers for northern Ontarians, but I would like to begin by recognizing the province-wide challenges that exist today. In Ontario, a cycle of IVF costs \$15,000 to \$30,000 with medications.

The Ontario Fertility Program provides funding towards one IVF cycle per lifetime, which is a significant step forward in improving access. However, IVF cycles only have an average success rate of 35% to 40% so most patients still need to pay for additional cycles to achieve their live birth.

Some patients tell us they cannot afford the upfront cost of medications, which are not covered by the program and can exceed \$10,000 per cycle. Surrogacy and donor eggs or sperm are also not covered and can cost over \$50,000 per attempt. Additionally, patients can wait years for the funded cycle because there is an annual cap on spending for the treatment of infertility in Ontario. This places patients in a difficult decision when deciding whether to wait for funding, because the age of the person providing eggs for treatment is directly correlated with the success rates.

Fertility treatments and their associated costs are financially burdensome for most and are placing immense strain on patients and their families. According to a fertility patient survey launched by Conceivable Dreams last year, nearly half of respondents had already spent more than \$20,000 out of pocket and over 40% needed access to a loan or line of credit to build their family.

There are additional burdens for Ontarians who live in rural, remote or northern communities. The farthest north that somebody could get an IVF egg retrieval or embryo transfer is in Markham. During treatment, clinics may need to see patients every couple of days. For those who battle infertility for years, the amount of travel required can add up significantly. In fact, as residents of Greater Sudbury, my husband and I have had to make nearly 50 trips to southern Ontario to access fertility treatment. These appointments are often on short notice, which makes commitments difficult and significantly impacts our personal lives. I actually wasn't sure if I was going to be able to be here today as we have been back and forth to Markham a few times in the past few weeks and have an appointment again there tomorrow.

As the woman providing eggs for our IVF cycles, I am the one who has to travel and take time away from work for these appointments. Most often, I wake up at 3 a.m. to drive to Markham, attend my appointment around 8 a.m., and then spend the four hours driving back to Sudbury, all to save on hotel costs. Despite this, I have still spent over \$15,000 on travel costs alone. All of my applications for the Northern Health Travel Grant have been denied because IVF is not covered by OHIP. Some of these drives take place in very dangerous winter driving conditions, after I have had very little sleep. Others in Ontario live so far north that they have to fly in for treatment.

Patients have also discovered that, because there are no standardized fees, some of the procedures that happen to be available in northern Ontario are actually significantly cheaper to access in southern Ontario. For instance, we paid \$30,000 for our first IVF cycle, with an option to do some blood work and ultrasounds in Sudbury. However, we later discovered we could save \$15,000 if we were willing to make a few extra trips to a clinic in southern

Ontario. We remortgaged our home to cover \$125,000 for treatments—but I can consider myself one of the lucky ones. I was privileged in being able to afford this chance at parenthood that so many in Ontario cannot right now.

The World Health Organization recently classified infertility as a disease, which has helped to raise the profile of infertility and has resulted in numerous comparable governments across the world expanding public funding for fertility treatments.

To improve access to treatment, reduce the financial burden on families and support women's health, Conceivable Dreams is urging the Ontario government to introduce a fertility tax credit that would provide up to \$8,000 per year back into the pockets of Ontarians trying to build their families. This is in alignment with the tax credit program in Nova Scotia and the one which was actually recently doubled in Manitoba. Implementing a tax credit in addition to the Ontario Fertility Program is the right solution and has already received strong support from MPPs. Not only would it provide the benefit of assisting with the medication, testing and travel costs required to pursue IVF, but it would also provide an inclusive solution that covers all of the reasons that someone may require fertility treatment.

As a final point, patients often battle infertility silently. The lack of awareness, understanding and discussion of the challenges surrounding infertility—

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

Ms. Renee Higgins:—are the main reason that policies, programs and funding can leave infertility care behind. We are ready to work with the government to successfully implement a tax credit that addresses the pressing needs of Ontarians and fosters a more inclusive and supportive society while driving population and economic growth.

On behalf of Conceivable Dreams, we appreciate your consideration. Merci.

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

We will now hear from the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations. Oh, don't mess with the button. It will come on by itself. Very good.

Dr. Darrel Manitowabi: Aanii, boozhoo, greetings. Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to present to finance committee pre-budget consultations today. I am Darrel Manitowabi. I am an associate professor and Hannah Chair of Indigenous health and Indigenous traditional medicine at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine University. I am also the president of our faculty association, and we are an affiliate of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations. I will be joined by Jenny Ahn, executive director.

I want to begin by emphasizing that the presence of universities in communities has a significant economic and cultural impact, particularly in northern Ontario. Universities play a vital driving economic growth and development in their respective regions. Firstly, universities generate employment opportunities for faculty, staff, students and support personnel. These positions not only

provide income for individuals, but also contribute to the overall economic stability of the community.

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Secondly, students attending universities in northern Ontario also contribute to the local economy through their expenditure on housing, groceries, transportation, and other goods and services. This spending not only supports local businesses, but also stimulates economic activity in the region.

Furthermore, universities in northern Ontario actively engage in research and innovation. We collaborate with local industries, government organizations and community partners to develop new technologies, products and services. These advancements have the potential to attract investment, create job opportunities and foster economic growth.

Northern Ontario universities prioritize community engagement. We actively participate in outreach programs, form partnerships and initiate social initiatives that benefit the local community. These efforts contribute to the overall well-being and development of the region. They also help high school students to stay, attend their local universities and give back to their communities.

Thank you for your time. I would now like to turn it over to the executive director, Jenny Ahn. Off to you, Jenny.

Ms. Jenny Ahn: Thank you, Dr. Manitowabi, and thank you to the committee as well for the opportunity to present before you today.

As mentioned, my name is Jenny Ahn, and I'm the executive director of OCUFA. We represent 18,000 university faculty, academic librarians and academic professionals across Ontario, including, of course, in northern Ontario and directly in Sudbury, as well. Our members teach; they mentor the next generation of leaders, who are educators, doctors, engineer, politicians, architects, teachers, midwives, nurses, social workers, artists and so much more than these.

I want to start by highlighting how and why Ontario's public institutions are worthy of public investment. Universities are key contributors to growth. The Conference Board of Canada estimates that public investment in university education boosts Ontario's GDP by approximately \$96 billion a year. In fact, the Conference Board of Canada estimates that for every dollar invested in post-secondary education, it generates a positive economic return of \$1.36, a nearly 40% return on the investment.

We know that universities prepare graduates to be nimble workers, as well as being more engaged citizens. University graduates possess the skills and knowledge that help them adapt to a changing economy and society. As a result, they earn more. With that, they contribute to the local economy, and they are proven to be more resilient to economic shocks as well. The benefits of universities are far too many to name in this short amount of time that I have with you. These are just a few examples.

What is unfortunate is that despite these well-established benefits, Ontario universities are in a crisis today. Per-domestic-student funding in Ontario is at the lowest of all in Canada, far behind all the other provinces. The province

also caps the number of domestic students that the government will fund at each university, so if a university would like to enrol more domestic students beyond this cap, the government actually provides zero extra dollars for more domestic students. This is a punitive measure for universities, and we are the only province that has this disincentive to include more domestic student spaces.

This is troubling, especially since we know from Stats Canada that we will have 85,000 more 18-to-24-year-olds in the next few years, and this number of young people will continue to grow for at least the next 10 years to come. We need a plan now for the increase in the domestic student demand. We should not be turning away spaces to our domestic students. They should not have to leave our province or Canada in pursuit of higher education dreams. Currently, this simply means that Ontario universities won't—but could—accommodate the expected demand for domestic students. With the current funding formula, it's just not possible.

Then, on the flip side of this, Ontario universities have treated international students like ATMs to make up for the shortfall in provincial funding. They have faced this for over a decade and have relied on their high tuition fees to an alarming and exploitative rate. Now, with the federal cap on international student visas, this will likely result in almost a 50% drop in Ontario's international student population. The time is now for the province to support our Ontario universities with a meaningful increase in provincial funding.

Fortunately, OCUFA has a blueprint for addressing the woes of the university sector and for revitalizing Ontario's public universities. We've done the math. We are calling to increase the provincial funding by 11.75% for a period of five years.

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

Ms. Jenny Ahn: This would just bring Ontario's level of per-student funding to the Canadian average. It would not only account for the sudden 50% drop in international students at Ontario's universities, but it would significantly improve our financial prospects. When we bring Ontario's universities in line with the Canadian average, it is a modest ask. It will benefit students, faculty and other stakeholders, as well as have ripple effects throughout the economies throughout the entire province as universities reach into almost community and every riding throughout Ontario.

We are in a time of crisis for Ontario universities. Now is the time for leadership, and we're happy to work with the Ontario government to revitalize and protect Ontario's publicly funded universities. Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for that presentation. That concludes the three presenters.

We will now start with the questions, and we start the first round of questions with the independent. MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you all for being here and for your informative presentations.

I will start with the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario. Fabien? Yes, thank you. It's interesting to hear about the investments required both from an operating standpoint, a capital standpoint, a cultural standpoint. I'm an anglophone, I have studied French and I think that many of us know that the value of our bilingual nation and our culture is one of the things that differentiates Canada and makes it an attractive place for immigrants and others.

Could you talk a little bit about that in terms of the impact in terms of attracting new Canadians, new Ontarians to Ontario whose first language might be French or, again, want to have their families study in French?

Mr. Fabien Hébert: Well, definitely. I'm originally from Hearst, and actually that's where I live, and I think that we in Hearst would be a great example of what you're asking as a question. The university in Hearst opened its doors to the international students. The Université de Hearst is a French institution, so it delivers its education in French, and because of the availability of the spaces within our university, we were able to attract—I think it's about to the level of 300 new international students a year that now call northern Ontario their home.

The reality of the shortage of workforce that we have—immigration and francophone immigration is definitely a key to helping with that situation. So investing into the promotion of the culture and the language would definitely allow us to move forward with attracting new people to the province and definitely help them establish themselves as francophones in our beautiful province.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Great, thank you.

I will turn to the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations. I said earlier today that it feels like every file is in crisis right now, and I don't think I mentioned in those examples post-secondary education but, of course, it is one of those files in crisis as well. We read about it in the papers daily, the number of universities facing financial challenges, potentially bankruptcy—all kinds of troubles.

I think I heard you say, Jenny, that an 11% increase for the next five years is the request just to get us to be on par with other Canadian provinces. Is that correct?

Ms. Jenny Ahn: Yes. First off, I just want to thank you for recognizing that we are in this crisis with the public universities. As I mentioned, we did our number-crunching, and what we're asking for is 11.75% over a period of five years to get us to that Canadian average. Ontario is in last place, unfortunately, in the per-student funding, and we're so far away from the second-lowest province, Nova Scotia, in per-student funding for domestic students. In fact, we're almost \$5,000 per domestic student—

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

Ms. Jenny Ahn:—away from the second-lowest provincial funding number.

So we just want to be average. It's not even that we're trying to get Ontario to be the best—even though we're all very proud of being Ontarians here. We just need to at least get to that average, and that average will actually help us, despite this call of the federal government for capping international students. We know that, in fact, if we can get

to the Canadian average of per-domestic-student funding, we'll be on safe footing financially if we can just meet that average.

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Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you. I certainly would want to, with you, try to convince the government to pay attention to this file. We know, again, that post-secondary education, as you said, whether in the trades or in universities, is critical. While I absolutely want us to invest in the trades, I want us to make sure we're investing in Ontario universities as well.

Renee, I don't have enough time. I just want to thank you for sharing your personal story. I think, again, that bringing up a proactive solution around a tax credit is really helpful. Thank you.

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

We now go to the government. MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you to all presenters for being here.

I'll start with Renee. Thank you very much for telling your story. I think it's a story that in my community of Windsor–Tecumseh we know very well. In 2015, the province started authorizing spaces for IVF. Our community was given four of those spaces, and so the distribution appeared to be an imbalance under the previous government's program. I was delighted, shortly after I was elected, to help announce that our local funding was now going to be 135 local families who will be funded for in vitro fertilization. I'd like to point to investments like that to show the government's commitment to helping Ontarians like yourself realize dreams for their families and trying to assist.

I wanted to get a better understanding from you as to—you mentioned the tax credit, and I'm hoping to understand the concept a bit better in terms of what kinds of expenditures would be, in effect, written off under the tax credit. Or are you speaking more so for those that do not get one of the subsidized spaces? Is that the goal for the tax credit?

Ms. Renee Higgins: Absolutely. I can provide more information on the tax credit. I just want to reiterate how grateful we are for the Ontario Fertility Program. It does help to bring the step forward for a lot of people that wouldn't otherwise have the means.

The fertility tax credit, though, would be an additional piece on top of that to help the people who are left out from the Ontario Fertility Program or require additional support. The tax credit would allow them to deduct expenses they've paid out of pocket at a rate of 40%, up to \$8,000 per year, which is what Manitoba's program was before they recently doubled it. We're asking for 40% of costs, up to \$8,000 per year as a cap.

The treatments that we're proposing would be eligible for the tax credit are extensive. We want this to be a fully inclusive solution. The Ontario Fertility Program is great for the couples who require one IVF cycle, but the fertility program tax credit would allow everybody to have it. So medication, frozen embryo transfers, surrogacy, testing,

travel—all those other costs would be part of this. We have provided and worked very closely with the Ministry of Finance to develop the tax credit.

M. Andrew Dowie: Thank you so much for that.

Ma prochaine question est pour Fabien. Merci d'être venu, encore une fois. Tu as mentionné, en effet, les variables linguistiques pour les cartes. Alors, la province a fait des changements. Est-ce que tu penses que c'est uniquement la responsabilité de notre province d'inclure cette variable linguistique sur notre carte Santé, ou est-ce que tu penses qu'il y a d'autres pistes qu'on peut suivre pour renforcer le patrimoine francophone? Quelle autre carte ou quel autre document devrait changer pour être inclusif de notre patrimoine francophone?

M. Fabien Hébert: Merci pour la question.

Premièrement, la carte Santé et la santé, c'est un sujet provincial. Ça appartient à la province, et puis je pense qu'il y a vraiment une grande importance de capter la variable linguistique sur la carte santé parce que c'est ça qui va nous permettre d'avoir les données probantes qui vont nous donner la capacité de capturer l'information dont on a besoin pour savoir comment bien planifier nos services de santé.

Actually, I think I will finish my answer in English just to make sure that everybody understands this really well. Capturing the language and linguistic variables on a health card is a provincial jurisdiction. It is crucial because that will allow us to capture the data appropriately in order to understand where the needs are and where they're coming from. The linguistic variables should be included in every data capture that the province of Ontario does. Whether it's ServiceOntario or whether it's under your driver's licence or anywhere else, the linguistic variables should be included.

Now, with health, I think that you do have the possibility, with your bilateral accord with the federal government, to access funding through them, because I think other jurisdictions in Canada have done so. One of the examples that come to mind is Prince Edward Island, which has actually got funding from the feds to adapt their system to capture the linguistic variables within their cards. So I think that this is something that the province of Ontario could base their request on, based on what other provinces have done.

At the end of the day, if you're able to capture the linguistic variables, your health outcomes will be better. It has a direct impact on the end result with the patient because from the onset, when the patient shows up to the door, you know he's French and you know that the interaction with that person has to be adapted culturally and linguistically.

You know, we had a little joke before about Asterix—but in French, if we say, "J'ai mal au coeur," it doesn't mean that my heart hurts; it means that I'm going to be sick to my stomach, right? So that's the difference and that's why understanding the needs of the client at the beginning of the interaction definitely impacts the outcome, and in a great fashion.

M. Andrew Dowie: Merci beaucoup, Fabien. J'ai une autre question pour toi.

En septembre, le gouvernement de l'Ontario a annoncé 110 espaces qui seront ajoutés pour les professeurs franco-phones. On vient tout juste d'entendre, à 14 h, de M^{lle} Sampson et les gens—

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

M. Andrew Dowie: —de l'Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes, qui avait dit que c'est très important qu'on développe cette capacité pour avoir des enseignants qui parlent français et qui peuvent servir aux conseils.

Qu'est-ce que tu penses de cet investissement-là? Est-ce que ça—

M. Fabien Hébert: Pour moi, je crois que c'est un investissement très important. On se doit d'investir dans notre capacité de bien former des enseignants, parce que la demande est là. On sait que les conseils scolaires franco-phones en Ontario ont 3 000 postes vacants. Il y a 3 000 enseignants présentement qui ne sont pas formés, qui n'ont pas leur formation pédagogique pour pouvoir livrer la marchandise. Ils enseignent sur des lettres de permission, ce qui leur permet d'enseigner mais en sachant qu'ils n'ont pas la formation.

Par contre, on a certainement des grands défis, parce que même si on donne 110 places, c'est quand même limité lorsqu'on sait qu'il y a 3 000 enseignants. Donc, je pense que c'est un bon premier pas—

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

And now, MPP West, you can go.

MPP Jamie West: I want to start with the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario. I'm going to start in English just because I want to share with my colleagues. Fabien, during your presentation, you talked about Place des Arts. It's a francophone cultural centre that we're all very proud of. At a glance, for people who are outside of Sudbury, you might think that is just for the French community. To share with my colleagues, there is a portion on one wall where there are members of the Italian community who donated to it. We recently had celebrated the 75th anniversary of the Caruso Club, which from the outside looks Italian, and the Italian community is incredibly proud of it, but all of our community has had graduations, weddings—I mean, it's a cultural centre for everybody that also celebrates the local, like the Italian community, as well. I just want to make that connection for my friends here.

You also spoke about the Université de Sudbury, et je pense peut-être—est-ce que vous pouvez expliquer à mes collègues l'importance d'une université par, pour et avec les Franco-Ontariens pour les citoyens, premièrement, dans le nord de l'Ontario, mais aussi pour tous les citoyens dans notre province?

M. Fabien Hébert: Merci pour la question. Vous savez, l'importance du « par et pour », ça se traduit relativement facilement. On a besoin de comprendre que lorsqu'on n'est pas en charge de notre destinée et que c'est quelqu'un d'autre qui prend les décisions pour nous, souvent, on se fait laisser de côté. Puis, l'exemple parfait, c'est la Laurentienne, qui a coupé des programmes francophones de long

en large. Ça a été dévastateur pour la communauté francophone.

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Donc, quand on parle d'une université à Sudbury par et pour les francophones, c'est qu'on parle d'une université qui va répondre—qui est premièrement gouvernée par des francophones, donc qui va prendre des décisions qui sont adaptées à la communauté. On parle qu'on va être capable d'adapter notre programmation au besoin de la communauté, de livrer la marchandise pour les besoins de la communauté francophone. Mais, par contre, c'est sûr que lorsqu'on les livre pour la communauté francophone, ça veut dire qu'on les livre aussi pour l'Ontario.

On sait qu'on est en pénurie de main-d'oeuvre. On a besoin de former de la main-d'oeuvre qualifiée qui est capable de travailler dans un milieu bilingue. Donc, une université francophone répondrait définitivement à ces besoins-là pour la région de Sudbury et pour toute la province.

MPP Jamie West: Tied into that, maybe Jenny or Darrel would be able to answer this. Jenny, you talked about Nova Scotia as the second lowest, and the one-minute warning came out so I don't know what the gap is in between Nova Scotia. Recently, there was a blue-ribbon panel that came out with recommendations. Are there any recommendations you believe the government can support and implement on that blue-ribbon panel? Does that make sense?

Ms. Jenny Ahn: Thank you for your question, and absolutely. So we are just under a \$5,000 difference in Nova Scotia's funding to Ontario's funding. Ontario funds \$9,890 per domestic student; Nova Scotia is at \$14,778. So you can see there is a vast difference from being in last place and even in second last with Nova Scotia.

In terms of the blue-ribbon panel, we welcome that the government wanted to create this panel. We have not heard where the government is on moving ahead with the blue-ribbon panel's recommendations or not. We seem to be going in the same place, that we know that the university system here is in a crisis that needs immediate funding; not five years down the road, 10 years down the road, but today, immediately. So we support and we are in the same view as the blue-ribbon panel to put funding in. Where we differ is just a slight difference: The blue-ribbon panel calls for 10%, and we call for 11.75%.

Again, why did we ask for 11.75%, that little bit more? We just want to be at the Canadian average in terms of those funding levels. You cannot cut student tuition fees by 10%, as the government did during the pandemic, and then freeze the tuition fees and then ask universities to do the exact same thing—do more with, actually, less of a revenue stream. So we know that this does not work. This has no common sense at all in terms of asking universities to still conduct the same way that they have been with losing funding, with freezing funding, with not having a revenue stream.

We know now we're going to have pressure with the federal caps on international students. But we have a performance-based model of funding here in our province.

And through that, there are 10 categories with performance-based funding that universities are funded with, and there are 10 categories that universities have no control, no influence—but we use this funding model for our university system.

So we need to have immediate provincial funding. We need to scrap the performance-based funding model that universities are given funds through. We need to look at domestic tuition. We need to have more student assistance—converting loans into grants, which is really important. And we need to ensure that the government is ready and prepared with the funding formula, and this looks at the corridor model of funding that looks at this domestic student growth. It's a fact that we are going to have more young people in our province. How do we ensure that our young people get to attend Ontario universities and that the province actually puts funding towards them, and not look at international students as ATMs? So these are some of the things that we think that can be done.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you, Jenny. I just want to give time for députée Gélinas.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Fabien, j'aimerais te demander qu'est-ce que tu as pensé du rapport de la CEQEP par rapport à l'Université de Sudbury.

M. Fabien Hébert: J'ai pris connaissance du rapport à la fin de la semaine passée, au début de cette semaine. Le rapport est phénoménal. L'Université de Sudbury a des A++ dans tous les domaines qui ont été évalués au niveau des exigences du panel.

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

M. Fabien Hébert: Donc, pour moi, c'est une carte blanche pour permettre au gouvernement de dire : « On a une organisation qui est compétente. Allons-y. On sait qu'ils vont être capables de réussir parce que l'évaluation était excellente. »

M^{me} France Gélinas: Comment peut-on expliquer l'annonce du vendredi avant la fête du Canada quand on a un rapport comme ça?

M. Fabien Hébert: Ça ne s'explique pas. Ça s'explique mal. C'est à n'y rien comprendre. On a un rapport qui dit que c'est une solution parfaite pour la communauté francophone, et le gouvernement ferme la porte sur une opportunité en or pour eux d'avoir une réussite à Sudbury.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Je suis bien d'accord. Pour moi, pour les gens que je représente, c'est des centaines de jeunes qui sont assis à la maison, qui ne seront jamais capables de finir leurs cours universitaires et qui ont des dettes de 30 000 \$ à repayer. Tout ça pourrait changer comme ça si le gouvernement prêtait un petit peu plus d'attention à ce qui se passe dans le nord de l'Ontario, dans l'Ontario français—

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

We'll go to the independent. MPP Hazell.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you all for coming in and presenting to us.

My question will go to the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations. My question is around

the recommendation that you have received from the blue-ribbon panel. Are there any recommendations that you believe the government can support and implement now, considering their lack of response to the blue-ribbon panel and its recommendations? I'm pretty sure you're aware of that.

Dr. Michael Savage: Hello. I'm Michael Savage from the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, and I'll be answering this one.

With the news of the international student cap, we can't pretend, and we need to manage this [*inaudible*] sooner rather than later, and that will require direct intervention from the government.

We see the immediate push here is for funding. Our 11.75% ask over five years as a total funding increase is designed to bring us up to the Canadian average. Both us and the blue-ribbon panel immediately recognize that more funding is urgently needed.

In the longer term, we do urge the Ontario government to commit to a funding review and to revise performance-based funding, which, as my colleague Jenny has noted, contains many categories over which Ontario universities themselves have no control over. But I think, regardless of the stakeholders in our sector, everyone will agree that more funding is needed urgently.

Ms. Jenny Ahn: Just to add to that, the other thing that the government recognized during the pandemic was to stop using strategic mandate agreements through the estimates that we calculate metrics and whatnot, because they realized during the pandemic that the universities don't control certain things. The way we were funded, for example, they will look at a graduate student, see where that person is working, the kind of wages that they earn afterwards, and tie the funding to that university based on the graduate and the job and their earnings afterwards.

But as we saw during the pandemic, universities cannot control what happens in the economy, and so the government was correct in holding back on using these strategic mandate agreements, these performance-based models, and yet they will likely bring that back in again. But again, these are things that don't work in terms of how you decide to give funding to a university when it's out of the control of a university. It's out of control where a student may decide to work, at the end of the day. All jobs of all graduates are very important, regardless of necessarily just their wage earnings.

But there are these models in our system of how universities are funded that universities don't have control over, and it just doesn't make sense. We need to ensure that our students—domestic students, all students—have an opportunity to have an accessible public university system, and for us, again, to have 11.75% so that we can just be the Canadian average for our funding levels, for our students, for this generation and the next generations to come.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you for stating that.

I want to go to Fabien and Bryan. You want to see an increase in French-language health care, supports for French-language schools and universities and for im-

proved literacy amounts to the francophone community, which I think is detrimental for this culture to survive. So what is your model for success in this area?

1550

Mr. Fabien Hébert: We need to invest in education because that is definitely where we will be able to ensure that the community tries, right? So we need, from the beginning, from daycare spaces in French right through to the university—because that's where it starts. If there are no daycare spaces, then that child is going to go to an English daycare and then learn English as a first language and will go to school in English. And then, you know, then we lose that person.

We know for a fact that we are losing 30% of our students from high school and university. They don't make the transition into a French-speaking post-secondary—

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

We will now go to MPP Kanapathi.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you for all the presentations.

I will start with Renee and Conceivable Dreams. Thank you for sharing your story. It's a very, very important issue affecting many families in Ontario, including my riding. I'm from Markham–Thornhill.

Tell me, through the Ontario Fertility Program, our government invests over \$70 million each year to provide 13,000 patients and families with an IVF program, an AI program, an IUI program, a free fertility preservation service—the list goes on and on. How does your organization see the impact of this type of investment? Please elaborate on that.

Ms. Renee Higgins: We have seen some significant impacts. We have seen tons of babies being born. The program is designed to get as many babies as possible for your money.

The problem is when someone is unsuccessful. So, for example, doctors have said that IVF success rates are only 35% to 40% for one attempt. So that leaves a significant amount of people who go the IVF route having to pay for a second or third cycle to eventually get their baby. In my case, we're up to seven IVF cycles, so it can be a huge financial burden for the people who require more treatment.

However, the Ontario Fertility Program is wonderful. There are lots of people that will do an IUI and get pregnant. Lots of people who do that first IVF and happen to be the lucky ones who get pregnant.

The fertility program we're proposing in addition to that is to address the gap, especially for the people who are having to remortgage their houses, take out loans, which our survey found was about 40% of fertility patients in Ontario. So this would help them get some money back to put back on their house, back on their loans, get back on their feet while they're building the family of their dreams.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you. I understand there is a supporting clinic here in Sudbury. Could you speak to the impact of this type of clinic and success you have had in this neighbourhood?

Ms. Renee Higgins: Absolutely. Satellite monitoring clinics are really important and, I think, part of the solution of how we can improve access to rural, remote and northern communities. The blood work and ultrasounds that are required as part of an IVF cycle are required, sometimes, every day or two.

However, the clinic in Sudbury has very limited capacity to help all of northern Ontario. They're only open on weekdays. They're not open on stat holidays. Unfortunately, that's not how the body works. Oftentimes, these patients are still having to drive to Toronto.

In our case, we were not able to afford the \$30,000 that we were quoted through that clinic. We did do it for our first couple of cycles and then we were able to find significantly cheaper options by fully travelling and seeing a clinic in southern Ontario.

So it does help, and I think it's part of the solution. There are just some gaps that we would need to address to fully get there and the tax credit would provide a great interim solution by allowing patients such as myself to deduct our travel costs as part of the credit.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you.

MPP Rae, do you have a question? Deepak?

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: That's all I have.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay. We'll then go to the official opposition. MPP Gélinas.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Bonjour, Fabien. Je reviens à toi. Une des recommandations que tu nous fais, ce sont les centres culturels. Ici à Sudbury, on parle de la Place des Arts. On a attendu des décennies pour avoir notre Place des Arts à Sudbury. La construction s'est faite en milieu d'une pandémie. L'ouverture s'est faite pendant la construction de la route juste devant—qu'on ne pouvait pas se rendre, etc. Qu'est-ce que ça va vouloir dire si le gouvernement provincial ne vient pas à la table?

M. Fabien Hébert: Ça pourrait vouloir dire aussi loin que la fermeture de la place ou une réduction significative des services et des options qu'il pourrait y avoir à la Place des Arts. Donc, je pense que ce n'est pas ça qu'on veut voir. La communauté de Sudbury, on a investi des sommes d'argent incroyables dans la construction d'une place des arts qui est superbe, avec un bienfait culturel pour toute la communauté.

On a entendu parler que ce n'est pas juste au bénéfice de la communauté francophone; c'est au bénéfice de toute la communauté de Sudbury. On verrait cet investissement-là déperir et ne pas être utilisé à sa juste valeur. Ça, c'est vraiment déplorable.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Est-ce que je suis pas mal en ligne si je dis que, si le gouvernement provincial donne 100 000 \$ à la Place des Arts, ils vont être capable d'aller chercher des montants significatifs à d'autres niveaux de gouvernement?

M. Fabien Hébert: Oui, c'est possible qu'il y ait d'autres sources de financement qui viennent s'ajouter. Souvent, dans des programmes bilatéraux—par exemple, au fédéral avec patrimoine Canada—on nous demande d'avoir un « matching » de la province ou on nous demande

d'avoir une contribution pour être capable d'aller chercher les autres argents. Donc, c'est clairement possible.

M^{me} France Gélinas: OK. Le temps presse. On parle de l'exercice en cours, c'est-à-dire l'exercice qui se finit le 31 mars?

M. Fabien Hébert: Oui, c'est ça. On a vraiment besoin des fonds pour nous permettre de boucler l'année et puis de ne pas nous retrouver à commencer une nouvelle année fiscale avec déjà un manque à gagner qui va venir juste rempirer la situation.

M^{me} France Gélinas: OK. Je peux te dire que, pour nous, les francophones de Sudbury, la Place des Arts c'est une place de joie totale. Les activités qu'ils font, les choses qu'ils nous présentent, on en a rêvé pendant longtemps, longtemps. Là, c'est comme un rêve qui devient réalité. C'est vraiment, vraiment plaisant. Juste de penser que c'est en danger, ça me trouble.

On parle d'un petit montant, 100 000 \$, dans un budget de—on est rendu à un budget de quoi, 202 milliards de dollars? Donc 100 000 \$, il me semble que ce n'est pas beaucoup.

M. Fabien Hébert: C'est une très petite contribution pour un grand résultat.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Oui—bien d'accord avec toi.

Quand on vient à la variable linguistique sur la carte Santé, c'est quelque chose qui m'intéresse. C'est quelque chose sur laquelle j'ai travaillé moi aussi. Est-ce que tu es confiant que le gouvernement va mettre ça en place, ou si on a besoin de pousser encore beaucoup?

M. Fabien Hébert: Si je ne l'avais pas faite—la recommandation—I'an passé, je pourrais te dire que je serais confiant que ça va avancer, mais peut-être qu'on a besoin de pousser encore un peu plus et d'avoir un message très clair. Parce que ça fait depuis 2015 que le gouvernement nous dit et qu'il parle d'inclure la variable linguistique sur la carte Santé. On est en 2024. Ça ne s'est pas réalisé encore.

Je pense vraiment aujourd'hui qu'on a besoin de mettre un point à la ligne et dire : « Écoutez, c'est le temps qu'il faut que ça arrive. On a besoin de ça pour livrer la marchandise, pour une meilleure planification et donner les services où ils sont demandés. » Donc, pour moi, c'est un non négociable. On a besoin de la variable linguistique sur la carte Santé, puis on en a besoin hier.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Je suis parfaitement d'accord.

If I can go to you, Dr. Manitowabi—

Interjection.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Oh, sorry. My time is up.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to all our presenters. My first questions will be for OCUFA. I wanted to ask: We are the richest province here in Ontario. We have a government that is sitting on a \$5.4-billion slush fund, and it's the government's job to properly fund education, yet they have neglected the sector year after year for quite some time. It seems like they are happy with their own inadequacy and underperformance.

What would Ontario need to invest if we wanted to be above average?

Dr. Darrel Maniwabi: Maybe I could begin answering the question and then I'll defer to my colleagues. I could just maybe emphasize that universities are the foundation for the future. They are spaces of innovation and research, and so they represent an investment in the future. An investment in education is an investment in Ontario's future social and economic development and growth.

I'll just pass it on to my colleagues to add to that response.

Dr. Michael Savage: Sure. Thank you, Darrel. It's Michael Savage again from OCUFA.

Quite frankly, we have been calling for an 11.75% annual increase in total institutional funding for a period of five years. That would be slightly below the average, but one thing that would take us above the average is actually a sixth year of that level of funding increase. The problem is that dire, and we are that far behind the Canadian average.

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Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Understood. It's deeply concerning that here you are providing economic opportunity, providing people with a life-changing enterprise, which is education, and you're having to fight simply to get to an average when Ontario is so rich.

But I want to thank you for your presentation. I wanted to also ask, what contributions do post-secondary institutions make to the community and towards local economies?

Dr. Darrel Maniwabi: So I can begin a response by saying that it's an investment in the community. It's an investment in jobs—job creation. It brings in revenue to communities. It increases spending in local communities.

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

Dr. Darrel Maniwabi: It also increases infrastructure and capacity building in communities. And so, it has a social and economic impact to those local communities and it offers a local option for students who wish to study locally rather than travel to the south.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Is there—

Ms. Jenny Ahn: Oh, and just to add, we've seen—I spoke to the Conference Board of Canada that looks at Ontario's GDP—that it's a nearly 40% investment for every dollar spent in post-secondary education. But we can also see, right there in Sudbury, the devastation when Laurentian University went through CCAA protection and the ripple effect it had, not just in the university itself—and of course, we see the AFO presenting here as well and the importance around the francophone language and francophone programs to bring people into the community. But there are jobs at the smaller businesses, medium-sized businesses, students who also work through the university, not just faculty and the staff that are running on the campus, that absolutely make that difference and that ripple effect that I talked to—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question and concludes the time for this panel. I want to thank all the presenters, both virtually and at the table, for the time they took to prepare and the great way they presented the case

today. We look forward to using that information to create a great 2024 budget for the province of Ontario.

FOOD ALLERGY CANADA
TAYKWA TAGAMOU NATION
MEDICAL LABORATORY
PROFESSIONALS' ASSOCIATION
OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): So with that, as we're changing the panel, we will ask Food Allergy Canada, Taykwa Tagamou Nation and Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario board of directors—we only have one at the table and we have the other two virtual, I believe.

As we did with the other panels, we will say that every presenter gets seven minutes to make the presentation. At six minutes, I will say, "One minute," and that will leave the magic moment till seven minutes, when I say, "Thank you very much for the presentation."

We do ask each participant to introduce yourself at the start of your presentation to make sure we can attribute the comments to the right Hansard presentation.

With that, we will start with Food Allergy Canada.

Ms. Laura Atkinson: Thank you. It is an honour to be here virtually. My name is Laura Atkinson, registered dietitian with Ontario Dietitians in Public Health in collaboration with Food Allergy Canada.

Imagine having a baby diagnosed with a food allergy and the only way to nourish this baby is to purchase a specialized infant formula that costs up to \$9,000 per year, four times more than the standard infant formula, and imagine that goes on for two years. Now, consider this in the context of an average family of four's annual grocery bill being about \$16,000 per year, based on Canada's Food Price Report 2023. More than half would be going to this one life-sustaining product. With many families struggling already with the cost of living, this is a grossly unfair burden on families with an infant who has a potentially life-threatening food allergy.

Food Allergy Canada along with Ontario Dietitians in Public Health are therefore asking the province to provide basic nutrition coverage, through an expansion of the Ontario Drug Benefit Program, to cover children zero to 24 months requiring specialized infant formula because of the medical diagnosis of food allergies where there is no alternative feeding product available.

This significant cost barrier is a reality for some families in Ontario. And while the need for specialized infant formula because of a food allergy diagnosis may not be a widespread issue, its impact on families who are affected runs deep. It can severely impact a family's financial ability to obtain basic necessities and have negative implications on their emotional well-being.

As noted, these specialized infant formulas can cost about \$9,000 per year. Keep in mind, the increase in infant formula costs from November 2022, year over year, based

on StatsCan, has been about 20%, and we don't expect this cost to decrease.

As a registered dietitian working with vulnerable, higher-risk clients, I have seen too many times the incredible stress families endure to have their baby get basic nutrition. They are unable to afford other household needs, and they put off important savings goals such as education savings for their child's future. This is unjust for parents not to be able to provide for their family because of a medical diagnosis. These formulas are not optional for their children; they are a necessity to manage a potentially life-threatening medical condition.

Specialized infant formulas are a way to nourish a child who has a health condition that necessitates strict avoidance of certain food allergens. These formulas are essential for their growth and development. Sadly, in response to the extreme cost of these specialized formulas, families may turn to unsafe practices like making homemade infant formula or watering down the formula, which can cause severe malnutrition and potentially fatal illness.

The national infant formula shortage over the past year and a half has further amplified the importance of access to safe infant formula. Adequate nutrition intake during the first two years of life is critical as it has a profound impact on healthy growth and development. We know it is a critical period for brain development, including the development of language, sensory pathways for vision and hearing and the development of higher cognitive functions.

There are other provinces that do provide this specialized infant formula coverage. Without this expanded ODB coverage, we increase the risk of short-term consequences of malnutrition, which can lead to impaired growth, increased morbidity and mortality and delayed motor, cognitive and social-emotional development. This impacts future academic achievement and mental health. Long term, it can lead to various chronic diseases, reduced work capacity and future earning potential and overall quality of life.

These potential impacts can be reduced by a change to the current ODB coverage. The overall cost estimate to this expanded coverage is a commitment to less than \$17 million a year. I'd like to be very clear with this: The benefits to our health care system, our economy and our collective well-being will outweigh the costs of providing infants with a potentially life-threatening allergy the nourishment they require.

The provincial government states that the health care system should be guided by a commitment to equity and to promote equitable health outcomes. The current state, where families must pay for the medical management of their child's diagnosis, does not allow for equitable access to basic nutrition, it's discriminatory to our most vulnerable population, it's a form of infant food insecurity and it puts families at a financial disadvantage.

Providing this ODB coverage will reduce health care costs, both short and long-term, and allow for fair access to the basic needs associated with a medical condition, as has been done in other provinces. With respect to basic

nutrition coverage and the ODB program, Ontario can do better for the province's 5,000-plus children affected with this medical condition.

To all whose attention I have at this moment, this is about feeding babies.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): One minute.

Ms. Laura Atkinson: Thank you for your attention with this important need for the residents of this great province.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): Thank you for your presentation.

Next, we have the chief from Taykwa Tagamou Nation. Over to you, sir. Please start with your name so we can record it for Hansard.

Chief Bruce Archibald: Bruce Archibald, chief, Taykwa Tagamou Nation.

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The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): Go ahead, sir. You can start your presentation. You have seven minutes.

Chief Bruce Archibald: Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Bruce Archibald. I am the chief of Taykwa Tagamou Nation, a community with over 700 members, with 140 living in the community near Cochrane, Ontario. Our community has a lot of recent experience working with government to meet our needs and to further the infrastructure and economic interests of the province. We are ready and motivated to take the lead on projects that will benefit our community and Ontario at large.

One of the most promising potential projects is the development of a 260-kilometre, 230-kilovolt transmission line connecting Wawa to Porcupine. The ministry has identified this line as a priority. We believe it's an opportunity for Ontario to make a serious statement about economic reconciliation. The new line will link the Wawa and Porcupine transformer stations, addressing the growing electricity needs for northern Ontario.

Our proposal, the Transmission Infrastructure Partnerships 9, which includes communities who will be most impacted by the development of the line, allows us to be leaders in the project. Unlike in previous agreements, we would not be sidelined or as an afterthought. Our coalition of First Nations—including Taykwa Tagamou Nation, Michipicoten First Nation, Chapleau Cree First Nation and Missanabie Cree First Nation—and infrastructure partners bring capital, expertise in the energy sector and the crucial support for Indigenous communities necessary to complete this project on time and on budget.

This project is more than just power lines. It's about increasing First Nations' participation in major projects, enhancing our workforce and closing the socio-economic gaps. We have constructively worked with the province as it moves toward a decision on who will build this transmission line. I believe that First Nations ownership and partnership in critical infrastructure is Ontario's best hope for economic development within northern Ontario.

The government has stated one of its most top priorities is developing northern Ontario's crucial resources. This is a goal shared with Indigenous communities in the north. Taykwa Tagamou Nation has a proven track record in

energy projects, collaborating with major players like Canada Nickel Co., Ontario Power Generation and Agnico Eagle Mines. We're talking about everything from mining metals to hydroelectric power needed to operate machinery.

Ownership matters. It's crucial that any proposed project in our traditional territories respect and reflect the legal and treaty rights. This is key to doing business in northern Ontario.

Building mines and power lines or hydroelectric dams is not enough on its own. Our communities must have the infrastructure to support this development. Sometimes that means roads. For Taykwa Tagamou right now, that means water and waste water infrastructure.

Our system right now is set up for 200 fewer users than are currently on the system. As we move to build a full-scale industrial park to accommodate the growth that is currently planned for our territories, the demand on our system will push the existing infrastructure past a breaking point. It will need to be replaced in the very near term in order to help us boost further growth. We will need provincial partnerships for that. We cannot have a community or an economy without water and waste water systems to support it.

The province has started to procure electricity again. This year, Ontario stated it intends to build more solar, more storage, more nuclear and more hydro. We share Ontario's objectives when it comes to the Moose River basin, and Taykwa Tagamou has already entered into a co-planning arrangement with Moose Cree First Nation to determine how the essential hydroelectric resource can best be developed. Any development along the Moose River basin must have the full buy-in of the affected communities.

We look forward to working with government to ensure that we get the best results for the communities and for Ontario. First Nation communities in the province want Ontario to continue to succeed. The 2024 budget is a crucial opportunity to make meaningful changes that will have a lasting impact on the relations between the Ontario government and First Nations communities. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand): Thanks for your presentation.

At this moment, I would like to request the chair for the Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario. You have seven minutes. Please start with your name for Hansard.

Ms. Jessie Clelland: Hi there, my name is Jessie Clelland. I'm the chair of the board of directors for the Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario. Thank you for having me here this afternoon. As I mentioned, I'm the chair of the board of directors for the MLPAO. We are a not-for-profit health professional organization that advocates on behalf of medical laboratory technologists and medical laboratory assistants and technicians.

You may recognize us if you visit a lab to have blood work done or if you're in the emergency department and you have blood work done; any of that is done by a lab professional. The person who is taking your blood is

usually a medical laboratory assistant. From there, the blood will travel to the laboratory, and a technologist will perform the testing and interpret the results to give to the clinician. That's an MLT, the difference there. I'm a medical laboratory technologist, so I do help provide results to your clinicians so that they can help diagnose and treat you.

We process over 280 million lab tests per year, and each test—varying degrees of work that is involved in them, but over a variety of disciplines. We test everything for cancers, autoimmune disease, genetic disease testing, fertility testing, newborn screening—all of that is performed by laboratory professionals. You may not know it, but we are the fourth-largest health professional group in Ontario. We come after doctors, nurses and pharmacists. We work in all medical laboratories across the province, including hospital labs, community labs and public health labs.

I currently work as a laboratory supervisor at Georgian Bay General Hospital, and as mentioned, I am a medical laboratory technologist. I am born and raised in Sudbury, so it is nice for me to be here to speak today.

I wanted to start by thanking the Ontario government for the expansion of the Learn and Stay grant to include medical laboratory science programs at Cambrian College and St. Clair College. Cambrian College directly supplies all of the northern, rural and remote communities.

Ontario currently has a shortage of approximately 400-plus MLTs, and it's imperative that the province make immediate investments to address this labour shortage.

Let me provide some history on how we got here. In the early 1990s, the government at the time closed seven of the 12 MLT programs across the province. The expectation was that new instrumentation or machines in the lab would replace people. Instrumentation has come a long way, but we still require people, technologists, to interpret the testing and to maintain those instruments.

The population of Ontario has grown tremendously, and there's a significant testing demand due to an aging population, expansion of preventative medicine and new pathogens. We don't have enough MLTs to handle the number of tests that are coming into our labs. You may not know this, but 70% to 80% of all medical decisions rely on lab results. That means that doctors and nurses need the lab results in order to diagnose and treat patients. Without us, health care would not exist.

Not only do we have the shortage issue, but we are also dealing with retirement. As of January this year, 38% of practising MLTs will be eligible to retire within two to four years, and this vastly exceeds the 250 to 300 new professionals ready to be licensed per year and the registrant MLTs from other jurisdictions, which is predicted to be about 30 in 2024. This is a very low number when we consider the current vacancies. Furthermore, the as-of-right rules have made it for health professionals from other Canadian jurisdictions to work in Ontario, but to this date, it has not recruited enough MLTs to address the staffing shortages in the labs across the province.

Lab professionals are disgruntled. We're tired. COVID was hard on everyone, but it was particularly hard on the

labs. We had all of these new testing demands that we had to meet: testing demands for instruments and tests that also did not exist at the time. What a lot of people don't know is that we can't just open a box and perform a test; we have to validate it first. There's a lot of work that goes into making sure that the testing equipment and reagents are performing as they should so that we can provide accurate results. Even after the tests are validated, we still have to maintain those analyzers, run the tests and interpret the tests.

We were there for the province. We stepped up. We got the jobs done. There were times where people couldn't take vacations. There were times where people couldn't see their families because we had to work so much. We did this while working short-staffed, without any recognition. We did not receive any COVID pay, unlike many of our health care counterparts, and as mentioned, we couldn't take vacations or see our families. We were drawing blood from these COVID-positive patients daily and also handling COVID-positive specimens. Before the rapid antigen tests were developed, no one would have even known if they had COVID if it wasn't for the lab.

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Due to the stress of working long hours while short-staffed, they're also seeing technologists who are leaving the profession early: 73% of MLTs would leave the profession if they could. That's a staggering number. We're losing technologists who have years of experience because they cannot continue to work in these conditions, and we are losing new graduates shortly after joining the workforce because they see the conditions that we're working in and they do not want to have that stressful work life.

We're not getting enough MLTs into our labs to support the health care needs. There's a lot more complicated cancer cases that are taking longer to diagnose. This impacts the people of Ontario.

I'm here before you today asking that the provincial health human resource plan needs to address training, recruitment and retention of medical laboratory professionals so Ontarians can receive timely access to tests and results that impact their care. We have a few bottlenecks that could be addressed. Employers have expressed a desire to train new MLTs but are currently unable to do so while they're understaffed. This limits the placement sites, restricting seats in the MLT programs, which, in turn, reduces the number of practising MLTs, which intensifies the staffing shortage.

Laboratory automation will expedite the pace at which tests can be processed, but it does not replace MLTs interpreting the results. Each instrument will still require maintenance of the equipment, and we still require the technologists to interpret the test results.

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

Ms. Jessie Clelland: The Ontario government can help by creating a plan for medical lab professionals that includes funding for a laboratory extern program and preceptors to support clinical placements, such as recently retired MLTs to support the students in the preceptor role;

funding for a scaffolding program that will enable publicly funded academic institutions and hospital systems to up-scale MLATs and general MLTs; and expanding the Learn and Stay grant to more MLT programs, including those at Conestoga, St. Lawrence and Ontario Tech University, as those techs will directly feed into the north.

It's imperative that the province makes immediate investments to address the labour shortage to include everyone in the rural, remote and northern communities to ensure that they have timely access to results.

Once again, we're grateful for the government's support in helping medical laboratory professionals. Thank you for the opportunity to share our essential funding needs.

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

We now will start the questions with the government. MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to all the presenters. It's great to be here in Sudbury.

This past fall, the government of Ontario announced an additional \$5 million in the Student Nutrition Program, which provides more than 600,000 students, school-aged children and youth with healthy meals and snacks. We've also partnered with a number of organizations to launch Healthy Students Brighter Ontario, which is also supporting students with healthy snacks and meals.

So nutrition is something that the government of Ontario takes very seriously, which leads into my question to Food Allergy Canada to hear a little bit more about the issue you're talking about with nutrition for infants who have severe allergies. I wanted first to get a question to you in terms of numbers: What was the number of infants in Ontario that you suggested were affected by this particular allergy?

Ms. Laura Atkinson: We estimated that there would be 5,125 individuals that would be affected by this.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. And that's generally, on average, about two years? Is that correct?

Ms. Laura Atkinson: Pardon? Sorry—

Mr. Stephen Crawford: About two years on average that they would be taking this formula?

Ms. Laura Atkinson: Yes. The unique needs for under 24 months can't be overstated.

Essentially, those who do not have a medical diagnosis requiring strict avoidance of both cow's milk and soy protein, at around 12 months of age, not before nine months, based on our current national feeding guidance by Health Canada, the Canadian Paediatric Society and Dietitians of Canada—children at that point would either continue to breastfeed or consume either a full-fat cow's milk or a soy formula, up to 24 months. Once a child is 24 months, there is a wider variety of milk options, as the caloric and fat needs from milk sources are different compared to those under 24 months of age, and solid food at that point takes into account a greater source of a child's nutrient intake. So for those who have to avoid both cow's milk protein and soy protein, under the age of 24 months, if they are not breastfed, the only option is the specialized infant formula.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. And you mentioned, if I understood correctly, that other provinces had supported this particular program. Could you mention the names of those provinces?

Ms. Laura Atkinson: Absolutely, certainly. One I would note, specifically, would be Quebec. They offer assistance for the purchasing of infant formula to a parent receiving benefits under the Quebec Social Assistance Program or the Social Solidarity Program. This coverage is in place for specialized infant formula in the public plan, with a mandatory requirement that private plans match the provincial plan, therefore transferring the costs to private insurers and ensuring the coverage is there for all impacted infants.

There are a number of other provinces, and their programs are varying. Alberta, Manitoba, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia all provide some coverage for infant formula in this context.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. You did touch on private insurance companies. I'm just curious: Is this something that even in Ontario today in some cases is covered by private insurance companies, or not at all?

Ms. Laura Atkinson: No, to our knowledge, we are not aware of any coverage of these specialized infant formulas through private insurance plans. We are not aware of this, specifically in this context, for specialized formula.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. I appreciate that. This is important, obviously.

Just one final question, in terms of your submission, just to get a fuller understanding: I think you mentioned it be part of the health ministry's program. Is this something that you would see going to all individuals with these needs, or means-tested to individuals who really are not maybe in as good a financial position? What are your thoughts on that?

Ms. Laura Atkinson: You might perhaps be referring to special diet allowances under the Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program. We are actually seeking for the full Ontario Drug Benefit Program, so beyond those who receive social assistance. The reason for that is because this issue does impact more than those who qualify for social assistance. I think it would be fair to say that most Ontario residents, outside, perhaps, the highest income brackets, have been affected by increased costs for food and other necessities due to inflation, climate change and other factors.

Public health units across Ontario do monitor for food affordability annually, and we know that one in four children already live in a household that experiences food insecurity. Add the financial cost of a specialized infant formula to a household budget and we have a scenario that would impact household budgets well beyond those receiving social assistance.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

How much time left, Chair?

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I'll just move my final two minutes to the medical laboratory technicians. Thank you for being here as well. You touched on the Learn and Stay program, but it sounded like you had some suggestions to improve that program. I know that program is definitely having a positive effect in northern communities and we want to continue to look at how we can improve that. Could you just touch on how you feel that program can further be improved?

Ms. Jessie Clelland: Of course. Currently, it's available at Cambrian College and St. Clair College, which is fantastic. Cambrian provides a lot of help to the northern areas. However, they aren't the sole educators that provide technologists to those areas. They pull from everywhere, from every program. If we expanded it to include Conestoga College, St. Lawrence and Ontario Tech University, then we would help furthermore eastern, northern and southwestern Ontario to retain technologists in those areas.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Is that also an issue in those areas as well?

Ms. Jessie Clelland: Definitely. It's Ontario-wide.

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

Ms. Jessie Clelland: The north is really bad. As you can imagine, not many people want to go north, but because they don't have a school up there to begin with, it's really hard to get technologists up there.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: We need to get them up here, obviously. As my colleague mentioned earlier, it's heaven up here. It's a beautiful area to live. We've just got to get more people to come up here.

Is there anything beyond that we can do to encourage people into the sector?

Ms. Jessie Clelland: Yes. We've been trying to work with high schools and whatnot to get notice of what we do. We're a very hidden profession; no one knows about us. Really, just helping to enhance recruitment and retention strategies for the profession would be good. It's kind of hard to pinpoint exactly the fix for that, except for getting promoted, to know this is who we are and this is what we do. I myself did not—

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

We will now go to the opposition. MPP West.

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MPP Jamie West: Jessie, did you just want to finish your thought?

Ms. Jessie Clelland: Yes. I was just going to say that I didn't even know the program existed until I got to college. I took pre-health sciences at Cambrian and then that's how I found out about it. It's been my dream job.

MPP Jamie West: I want to thank you for advocating, and also welcome home—

Ms. Jessie Clelland: Thank you.

MPP Jamie West: You mentioned being from Sudbury originally.

I want to thank you for your advocacy. I was one of the people who overlooked the medical lab techs during the pandemic. Fortunately, my neighbour Hilary is a lab tech and was very vocal about that sort of being "out of sight,

out of mind.” So not only are people not aware when they’re choosing careers that it could be a rewarding career, but also not aware of the important work you do.

I don’t have much time, but when you think of the time during the pandemic where we had no idea what we were facing and how it was transmitted and the number of tests and work that you were doing on top of all the other lab tests—just thank you as well. I know my colleagues share that compliment as well.

The Chair had given your one-minute warning when you had a couple of recommendations, and you kind of auctioneer-speed went through them. Can you just repeat them? I think they’re valuable, but I have a hard time recalling them and I wasn’t fast enough to write them down.

Ms. Jessie Clelland: We actually have a total of five recommendations. I’ll go through the three that I rhymed off quickly:

- funding for a laboratory externship program and preceptors to support clinical placements for students and to hire additional staff, such as recently retired MLTs, to support students in a preceptor role, kind of like what was done with nursing—it worked very well with nursing and we think that it would work very well with labs;

- funding for a scaffolding program that will enable publicly funded academic institutions in hospital systems to up-scale medical laboratory assistant technicians and general MLTs; and

- to expand the Learn and Stay grant to include other colleges such as Conestoga, St. Lawrence and Ontario Tech U to help with all the other areas.

On top of that, we had:

- enhance the recruitment and retention strategies for lab professionals, so helping with some targeted recruitment retention strategies that have worked for other health professionals that can be extended to us, including access to mental health and addiction support to provide this workforce with the necessary tools and resources to foster mental wellness; and

- funding for an Ontario simulation lab.

It’s really hard to get placement sites for all five of our disciplines because of the microbiology and the pathology sections that are becoming specialized to only certain laboratories. My lab, for instance, is a core lab; we have hematology, chemistry and coagulation. We don’t have pathology or microbiology, so if we have a student come to us, they have to come to us for our three disciplines and go somewhere else for the other two. It makes it really hard for the students’ funding as well, because they’re paying tuition, as well as moving across to different labs to complete this education.

MPP Jamie West: Okay, thank you very much.

Laura, I want to thank you for your presentation. You kind of had me at hello: (1) it’s babies; and (2) my sister had nearly 100 different allergies as a kid. She wasn’t affected in this way, but I’ve had way too much creamed corn as a child as a result of the allergies and what she was able to eat. A lot of our side dishes ended up being creamed corn.

I’m curious about what happens after 24 months. Why is the need only until 24 months?

Ms. Laura Atkinson: It’s certainly a valid question, and it leads to the question I had spoken about earlier about why we are asking for this ODB amendment up to 24 months. Essentially, once a child is 24 months of age, there is a much wider availability of products as a milk source. We have plant-based beverages. The thing is, under 24 months, young children require higher fat needs and higher caloric needs, and when we’re looking at a lot of these other products out on the market that might be plant-based, they simply don’t provide the nutrition in adequate amounts to be something that a child could have in place of infant formula, again, if they’re not breastfeeding.

MPP Jamie West: I appreciate that. The answer was staring me in the face. I was just thinking in my head, what happens at two years that magically—so I appreciate that.

And then, just because of my limited time, Chief Archibald: One of the comments you said, and if you could expand on it, is that you talked about the importance of First Nations partnerships being important to the success of any proposed projects in your treaty territories. Could you just remind us all, as leaders in our communities, why that is such an important role for the success of projects that would happen in First Nations territories?

Chief Bruce Archibald: For sure. Thank you for that.

Just going back to the original agreement that we had in 1905 when we signed the treaty with Ontario and Canada on how we would share the resources within our territories—as probably everybody knows, that hasn’t happened over the last 100 years. I think, by doing so, we’ll create prosperity within the First Nation communities. But not only the community itself; it will create more prosperity within Ontario, where everybody benefits from the resource extraction that is happening as we speak.

MPP Jamie West: I would imagine, too, in your areas—I grew up in Sudbury. I know Sudbury really well and I would imagine, in your area, you would understand the land and the area and the pros and cons and the resources, and be able to attract employment, which could be difficult to find sometimes, especially when these remote projects are starting off. Does that make sense?

Chief Bruce Archibald: Yes, for sure, it does, because a lot of the communities are remote in northern Ontario. Not only the communities, but even the little towns such as Cochrane, Iroquois Falls and Smooth Rock that need those employment opportunities. Because some of these major projects that are happening within the territory here last for two or three, maybe five years sometimes.

I think that’s a big boost of the economy when it comes to northern Ontario. I think it will also attract more people to live in northern Ontario, because it is a beautiful area.

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

MPP Jamie West: One of the comments that you said as well was, “This is about more than power lines.” Do you want to expand on that and what you meant by that?

Chief Bruce Archibald: For sure. I think, when I say that it’s more than power lines, it’s opportunities that come from these major projects that happen in our territories. As

you probably know, we don't get enough government funding to the First Nations. By allowing us to look at and participate in these major projects in our territory, it fills in the gaps that are much needed here in northern Ontario.

MPP Jamie West: I want to wish you success moving forward on it.

I think I have a couple of seconds, so I'll just cede the rest of the time.

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

With that, we will go to the independent. MPP Bowman.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you all for being here.

Jessie, I'll start with you, the Medical Laboratory Professionals' Association of Ontario. First of all, thank you to you and your colleagues for your work during the pandemic. I just want to highlight my colleague Dr. Adil Shamji, who has gone to great efforts to actually talk about that it's not just the nurses and the doctors, it's all of the paraprofessionals that work in the hospitals and in the labs and in the clinics that really got us through that. So thank you.

I wanted to ask whether or not Bill 124 has been a factor in the—you used the word “disgruntled,” I think. Has that been a factor?

Ms. Jessie Clelland: One hundred per cent. We were working through all of those conditions without getting pay raises of any sort—well, we had our 1%, which is not much in the end. A lot of staff were really upset about that. Adding Bill 124 on top of being left out of the pandemic pay bonuses and all of that thing made for most lab professionals to feel very underappreciated and not recognized, even though we were the backbone of the pandemic. So, still, to this day, even though it's been kind of settled through some of our unions, there's still a lot of anger and tension regarding those subjects if you talk to lab professionals about it.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Okay, thank you. I just want to again point out that the government is continuing to appeal that legislation, even though it's been deemed unconstitutional. They have not shared—even though I've asked the Minister of Finance directly—what that appeal is costing. I think their attention would be much better served by actually negotiating fairly with workers like yourself to move forward and help, maybe, to actually retain some of those people that you're talking about. Because certainly you've made the case for how desperate the situation is, how they're leaving the profession—like nurses—in droves, it sounds like. That is actually very worrying for all of us who need health care. So I will leave that for the government to think about.

Chief Archibald, I wanted to talk to you. Thank you for your presentation. It was very well thought out and, I thought, quite hopeful in the sense that you talked about the opportunity for jobs, for training, for participation in the economic prosperity that this kind of project, the transmission lines, could bring.

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I would love to hear maybe some personal stories about some of the things that your community and others along

the lines are dreaming about in terms of those opportunities, some specifics about, “Oh, well, we could do this if we had those transmission lines.”

Chief Bruce Archibald: Yes, for sure. Thank you for that. Some of the visions that we have as a community here in Taykwa Tagamou Nation would be self-reliance within our own territory. By doing that, we have to participate in major projects, such as power lines or hydroelectric or even mining. That's something that our community has been focused on moving forward: to participate. We're not just sitting here with our hands out asking for something. We're actually bringing something to the table, and what we're bringing is new investments to Ontario, such as real cash from partners that we have.

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

Chief Bruce Archibald: That's what our goal is: to be self-sufficient, to build capacity within our community to be able to operate and own these projects, such as transmission lines and hydroelectric stations. It's things like that, because we are already involved—we've been involved in hydroelectric for the last 25 years.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Very good.

Chief Bruce Archibald: What we want to do now is expand some of the capacity that we've learned over the last 25 years, because we're very much involved in hydroelectric, and mining and forestry. So we want to expand that into transmission and whatever else—any other kinds of opportunity that comes within our territories over here. I think that's what the main focus is with our council—

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

We will now go to MPP Ghamari.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you, everyone, for your presentations today.

Chief Archibald, I just want to continue that conversation with you as well. Thank you for being here today and for your presentation. I just wanted to get a better understanding of in what ways our government can continue to support the Taykwa Tagamou Nation and continue to grow the region economically. How do you envision economic growth?

Chief Bruce Archibald: I envision economic growth through having communities involved right from the beginning. I think that's something that we have to start practising.

I want to give you a good example: The Canada Nickel Co., in the very early stages when they started exploration, had actually reached out to our community and started the consultation and accommodation process. I think that's something that we have to do with government. If there's an idea out there or if there's something that they want to look at within the territories, early engagement is probably the best, because that's all we're asking for.

Usually, in the past, people would come to us at the eleventh hour and say, “This is what we're doing in your backyard,” and that doesn't give us an opportunity to bring something to the table, such as our knowledge of the land, certain historical areas that might be affected, or even traplines within our territories. It's things like that that I

think we have to work on, and I feel right now that with the government we have in place, it's starting to get to that point now. I think we just have to collaborate and communicate a lot more.

I think that's the key to moving forward: to have that co-operation from both sides, not just the government but from the First Nations side also. I truly believe that once we get to that point, build that trust, build that relationship—because that's what it's all about. To become a partner, you have to build a relationship first, and then the relationship builds trust. Once we get to that point, then there's nothing stopping us moving forward after that.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you so much for the answer, Chief.

What advice would you give to government as we look to continue to support northern Ontario and First Nations and to build it up even stronger? What advice would you have for us, moving forward?

Chief Bruce Archibald: I think investing more into northern Ontario when it comes to infrastructure because the infrastructure is going to provide much-needed power or energy for the projects that are coming, because right now we're in a stage where critical minerals are really the showcase right now, because critical minerals will also help the environment and climate change. I think that's something that we have to really focus on. If you know the Timmins and Cochrane region, you know we have a lot of these critical minerals that we in Ontario or even worldwide need to try and bring down this climate that everybody's kind of nervous about moving forward. I think that's something where Ontario has to make that investment into northern Ontario to attract—

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Could you expand on that a little bit? Sorry, could you expand on how—because I'm very interested to know and I think this is a very good point: You said investing in critical minerals would help the environment and, I'm assuming, reduce our carbon emissions. Can you just expand on that in a practical sense, like how that would work?

Chief Bruce Archibald: For sure. I can give you an example with the Canada Nickel mine that we're working with right now. The rock that's going to be extracted out of the ground will actually help absorb carbon. It's things like that where we need to be more innovative on how we can revive or assist climate change within Ontario. I think that's one good example on how to do that, to be more innovative on how we do mining within northern Ontario.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Absolutely. Would you also agree that Ontario being more self-reliant and investing in its own infrastructure and critical minerals as opposed to relying on imports from other countries would also reduce the carbon footprint? Because we're relying less on industries where we cannot regulate the carbon emissions, but if we're investing in ourselves in Ontario, that would also help, correct?

Chief Bruce Archibald: Correct. That's totally right on the money there when you talk about that because some of the resources that are imported—it's not very environmentally safe how they extract some of these resources

from their areas. Within Ontario, and especially northern Ontario, we are able to regulate and make sure that we're environmentally safe, extracting these minerals out of the ground in a sustainable way.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Absolutely. I think of another example in the agriculture industry: tomatoes. Tomatoes imported from Mexico, for example, have a much higher carbon footprint than tomatoes grown in Ontario. So that's a very, very good point, and I appreciate that. I definitely made note of that.

What you've said today—would you say that your thoughts and your presentation are shared by the rest of the northern First Nations communities?

Chief Bruce Archibald: Yes, I truly believe so. Yes.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Okay. That's really promising to hear. So I guess what you're really asking for is to continue building that relationship that you said has improved between First Nations communities and our government—

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: —in order to work together. In the final 60 seconds: You also mentioned investing in infrastructure. What would be some of your top priorities or the top priorities for the First Nations communities up north?

Chief Bruce Archibald: For sure. I think the priorities for our community are water and sewer. We need infrastructure so we can build more housing for the community members. We have a housing shortage here in northern Ontario, but especially within the First Nation communities. We have a housing list of probably 200 people that want to live in the community, and right now, they're struggling to find housing within even the town of Cochrane or the surrounding area. I think that's something that we have to look at in regard to—

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: No, it's definitely, definitely, definitely an issue and a concern for everyone. One of the challenges I know we face as a—

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

We'll now go to the opposition. MPP Gélinas.

Mme France Gélinas: Well, Chief, while you're on, I would ask you one more question. I'm a little bit ashamed to ask it because I come from northern Ontario and I should know northern Ontario, but the 260 kilometres, that will be from Wawa to your community?

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Chief Bruce Archibald: To Porcupine, just outside of Timmins, Ontario.

Mme France Gélinas: Okay, to Porcupine. So the water dams would be south of Timmins or in Wawa?

Chief Bruce Archibald: A lot of the energy comes from the Moose River basin, the Abitibi and the Mattagami River system. What we're trying to do is to try and unlock that energy source from the Moose River basin. What we need to do is to invest in new transmission so we can transmit the power to where it's needed.

Mme France Gélinas: That's what I thought, because if you look at Mattagami First Nation, they have power

outages at least, what would you say, twice a week? Maybe three times a week they have power outages. Would this transmission line directly help a community like Mattagami?

Chief Bruce Archibald: Yes, it would. Yes, for sure.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Oh, I see—so the 260 kilometres is not for a straight line. It's also for the transmission to the different communities and work sites and everything else that needs the electricity.

Chief Bruce Archibald: That's correct, yes.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Very smart. Sorry, I did not get that when you first explained it, but it all makes sense.

You named, I think, five other First Nations—Missanabie, Chapleau—who are on board with the project. You did not name Mattagami, but I take it that if you go through their traditional territory, they have been contacted.

Chief Bruce Archibald: Yes. Every community along that line would be part of this transmission infrastructure partnership. That's why we call it TIP-9, because I think all nine communities along the line—once we get this hand-off letter from Ontario in regard to who is going to build this line, all those other communities will obviously be participating and become partners in this project.

M^{me} France Gélinas: So what do you need from the provincial government? Do you have a specific amount you would like to see in the upcoming budget?

Chief Bruce Archibald: In regard to building up capacity and training for the communities to participate and work on these projects, I think that's something that we need desperately here in northern Ontario: to become a training hub to make sure that we're getting ready for the next generation of labourers. Because, as you probably know, a lot of the people that are in the workforce right now are going to be retiring within the next few years, so we have to try and get ready and get our youth ready to work in this industry.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Agreed, agreed—very smart, very well done. Thank you for your comments.

I have limited time. I would like to move to Food Allergy Canada and Laura. I wanted to make sure that what you're asking is really to add the special food allergy formula to the Ontario drug benefit so that everybody who has access to the Ontario drug benefit can gain access. Is this specifically what you're asking for?

Ms. Laura Atkinson: Well, we're asking for the amendment to ODB to have coverage for specific specialized infant formulas when there is the need, the necessity, to avoid both soy protein and cow's milk protein. It's not necessarily just wide-ranging. We would expect that as part of this, there would be some sort of a process of approval with regard to medical diagnosis and a prescription, similar to other medical conditions.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay. So am I right in thinking that, once it's on the Ontario drug benefit, then private plans would cover, and then people who get drug benefits from the government through the ODB would get it covered? And other people—because it's \$9,000—could get it covered through the income threshold?

Ms. Laura Atkinson: Well, with regard to private plans, I can't speak about private plans. But it would be

something that everyone would have access to. It wouldn't be something that would be connected with the special diet allowance; it would be something that would be available to everyone, whether or not the province would decide on how to implement it. But as I mentioned before, we aren't aware of private insurances that actually cover this particular need related to food allergies.

M^{me} France Gélinas: No, me neither. After some of your colleagues had come to see me, I did do a search, and no. But many private drug plans cover everything that is on the ODB, so once a drug is added to the Ontario drug benefit, it becomes automatically added the private plan, mostly for people who are unionized. They will put into their collective agreement that every drug that is covered by the ODB becomes covered by their private plan. I'm assuming this would be considered a drug, if it's on the Ontario drug benefit, for infants zero to 24. Am I stretching that too far?

Ms. Laura Atkinson: No, no. It is one of the nutrition products that is with the—that's where it would live or be. That sounds very similar, then, to what could potentially happen. It's similar to Quebec.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay. Very, very quickly, Jessie, I would like to ask, what you have laid out for us with the shortage—400 short, not producing enough etc.—what will it look like we don't move?

Ms. Jessie Clelland: Wonderful question. Without intervention, it's going to be longer turnaround times, increased hospital stays. Essentially, it could cost taxpayers over \$1.6 billion annually and negatively affect patient health. It can affect everyone—anyone who has a lab test done, which is a lot of people.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Which is a lot of people. And have you costed any of the—the one that interests me the most is to give support for—

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

We will now go to the independent. MPP Hazell.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you, all of you, for coming in and presenting today. My first question is going to go to Food Allergy Canada.

I want to spend a bit of time on the funding model, because what I've seen here, the numbers, if they are correct, it's quite a concern. You're mostly funded by donations. You received \$1.5 million in donations in 2022. You received \$301,000 in government funding that same year, of which \$240,000 is coming from the Ministry of Agriculture and the rest from the Ontario Trillium fund.

Hearing some of the families have to turn to home practices for making their own formula and even watering it down, that's a big concern.

Can you share your current funding model, and are you able to sustain your current funding model if you do not receive any funding from this government through 2024 and 2025?

Ms. Laura Atkinson: So I am with the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health as a consultant, working in collaboration with Food Allergy Canada, so unfortunately, I

would not be able to answer with regards to funding models and the sustainability around it. I don't have an answer to that particular question. Is there perhaps something else you wanted to ask?

MPP Andrea Hazell: I can ask something else. It would have been very good if we had that figure for the record, because you're here and you're being impacted by the funding.

But I want to ask you another question. In your experiences in impacting, I guess, the people that you're supporting—my question to you: Are you able to share any stats of the benefits that you're actually giving to your critical industry?

Ms. Laura Atkinson: Certainly, nutrition, with regard to the impacts of adequate nutrition on infants and young children, is well documented. I don't have a dollar figure, but it's widely regarded and accepted with regard to meeting nutritional needs.

1700

Looping back to why we are looking at under 24 months: When we look at the quantities that an older baby or a young child would be eating, if you've been around a toddler or an older baby, the amount of actual food they eat is quite small; hence the important role that, whether someone is breastfeeding, or if not, then infant formula would play is absolutely critical to help meet their needs. We know that, for example, if a child becomes anemic, if they develop iron-deficiency anemia, this has a direct impact on growth and development. It's one of those nutrients, for example—you need it when you need it; you can't do catch-up at a later date.

A lot of these nutrients, in this age group, where these little ones are growing at such a fast rate—

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

Ms. Laura Atkinson: —it's too important for them to not be in a scenario where parents might find themselves not being able to source safe formula. It's important for it to be accessible to everyone.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you so much for that detailed information.

Ms. Laura Atkinson: You're welcome.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I want to quickly go to Jessie. I know you spoke about lab placement for the students. Can you elaborate on that, and can that help you with the shortages in staff that you're experiencing? Because we all have to look for alternate measures to meet our priorities.

Ms. Jessie Clelland: Yes, definitely. As part of the laboratory technology program, you do an in-school portion, hands-on. You have labs in school and you're also learning all the theory, but then you have to go to an actual laboratory to do your placement site. That's working hands-on—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question and this panel. Again, I want to thank all the presenters for a great job of presentation and thank you for the time you took to prepare for being here today. We look forward to using all the wealth of your information going forward.

With that, as we change the table, we will introduce the next panel.

SUMMERLUNCH+
GOOD ROADS, NORTHERN ZONE
FRONTIER LITHIUM

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): The next panel is Summerlunch+; Good Roads, northern zone; and Frontier Lithium. With that, I will give the same instructions: You will have seven minutes to make a presentation. At six minutes, I will say, "One minute." That doesn't mean stop; it means that in one minute I'm going to say, "Thank you," and we're going to come to a stop.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Kernaghan?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Apologies, Chair. I've had a request from one of the presenters, who would like to remain nameless, that the committee stand up for a moment and take a stretch.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You would like the committee to stand up and stretch?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: One of the presenters has requested that we do so, given that it's been a long afternoon.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): I was going to say, the committee Chair does not have to rule on that. I would just suggest that any member of the committee that wants to stretch, just stand behind your chair and stretch, but I'm giving the instructions as to how we're going forward. Thank you all for stretching, but I had my stretch earlier. Somebody relieved me and I could get my stretch in.

As I said, we do ask each presenter, as they're making their presentation, to start by introducing themselves so we can make sure we can attribute the right comments to the right person.

The reason I didn't stretch is because I'm on a dead timeline. It's nice of the committee to ask us to stretch, but if we don't get done by 6 o'clock, guess who gets blamed?

With that, we will start the presentations with summer-time lunch—or just Summerlunch, no "time."

Ms. Susan Wright: Summerlunch+. Thank you all so much. I feel like I've got the enviable position of being one of the last presenters on a day of seven hours of presenting, so that's why I thought maybe it would be helpful to have a stretch.

I want to thank you all so much for this incredible work and this opportunity to sit before you and talk a bit about these important things for the people of Ontario, the children of Ontario. I'm going to try and give you a bit of a cognitive break and say that I think what I'm talking about is quite straightforward and obvious.

We've heard from a lot of folks today who spoke about student nutrition and the need to invest in funding for this desperately underfunded program that helps over 760,000 kids in Ontario. I'm here to talk about something else, which is the summer period, when all those kids are on

break. I worked in school nutrition for many years, and I was struck by the number of families, teachers, summer camps and others who would ask me repeatedly for help in the summer, because of course, if you're a student and you're food insecure, you're also going to be food insecure in the summer. It doesn't stop.

In 2016, I launched Summerlunch+ to support children from food insecure families by bridging the gap when these school food programs are on pause. Since that time, we've provided over 250,000 meals and delivered over 40,000 hours of food literacy training, reaching thousands of children and youth from underserved communities.

The impact has been profound. For example, when we implemented with SickKids hospital and did a research study in partnership with Toronto Metropolitan University, we showed a significant and enduring impact on learning, cooking and healthy eating, but we could do a lot more with help from the provincial government.

In July of last year, I attended a round table hosted by Minister Parsa and MPP Kanapathi. I was there, among a number of Student Nutrition Program partners, and we spoke about the underfunding and stretched resources that you heard about today, which resulted in a top-up of \$5 million, which brings the province's contribution to school food programs to \$38 million, which is amazing. I'm so grateful that I had the opportunity to attend, although I was the only voice in the room saying, "Don't forget about summer."

I know there's a plan to invest further in school food programs, which I wholeheartedly support, but I would also like to ask that there is a specific and designated stream that is set aside for summer food programming.

I'll give you a few reasons why summer is important. Children who experience food insecurities typically stay on track with their peers during the school year as a result of school nutrition programs, the focus of teachers and the enjoyable atmosphere of school. The summer months is when they fall behind. A break of two months from school results in something called summer learning loss, which drives the academic achievement gap between children of different economic means. When children are away from school, they have reduced opportunities to learn, they miss out on the social environment with friends, and as you can imagine, food and economic insecurity only exacerbates the social stressors, including mental health, loneliness and isolation.

Summer is generally a hard time on families with lower economic resources. Last week, I heard Neil Hetherington of the Daily Bread Food Bank say that there's a common misconception about the highest need for food banks. People often think that it's Thanksgiving or the winter holidays, but it's not true. He said, and I reinforce this, that the greatest need is, of course, summer, when lots of food programs are on break.

This summer will be my ninth year of running programs in Toronto, and with the food insecurity increasing and awareness of the need for summer programs over summer, I will be expanding into Ottawa and Orangeville through funded programs from donors. I have also had requests

from Kitchener, Waterloo, Windsor and Hamilton, which I currently cannot fund.

Before you—I think you all have a copy of my printed resources—is a request that I would like to make for an urgent need this summer. There are two. The first is a request for \$1.73 million over the next three years to reach children across the province in the summer months with our Summerlunch+ programming. The second request is for an immediate grant or support of \$90,000, which would be used to undertake a scoping project that would look across the province to see who else is supporting summer food programming, what else is being done and how we could best reach even more children through partnerships and programming.

We at Summerlunch+ have been able to do a lot on our own for kids, but with a small investment, we can meet the needs of children in other parts of the province who are facing this urgent food insecurity need during the summer.

I think my time is up. In any case, that's all for me, and I look forward to lots of questions.

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

We now will hear from Good Roads, northern zone.

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: Thank you for having us. My name is Paul Schoppmann. I'm the director and the immediate past president of Good Roads for the northern zone. I'm also a full-time farmer.

1710

As you all know, Good Roads has represented the transportation and infrastructure interests of municipalities since 1894. We currently represent 426 municipalities and 19 First Nations that are actually Good Roads members. Our focus of the request is to seek a partnership between the Ontario government, Good Roads and its municipal First Nations members.

We've been proactively addressing preventable accidents on rural and northern Ontario roads. The road safety statistics in 2020 show that 55% of fatalities in Ontario occurred on rural and northern Ontario roads. Those statistics also show that, disproportionately, only 17% of the population resides in these areas. And so, as you very well know, what's happening with the roads is it's no longer horse-and-buggy, as when the roads were designed. Everything has gotten bigger up in the rural roads, and even up here now with the farm machinery, we've all gotten wider, longer, with heavier weights, and it is causing issues for us.

The impact on the society when we have all of these accidents: In the 2020 study, we had 4,200 hospitalizations because of the roadway accidents, which equates to almost 43,000 days of hospital stays. And we know that the rural and northern roads are inherently more dangerous, just like I had mentioned before, from all the sizes of everything expanding, and in northern Ontario, we know that it's expanding more, not just with agriculture, but even now with the minerals and all the mining that's going on.

Global examples and solutions that we have found are that other jurisdictions are prioritizing road safety: for example, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Germany,

the United Kingdom and Ireland. They have proven cost-effective solutions, such as guiderails, crash cushions, lining and signage.

Our current approach is that we always seem to wait: “Oh, let’s wait until there’s an accident and then we’ll do something and we’ll fix it.” Our proposal is that, no, it doesn’t need to be that way. Once we do some road safety audits, we’ll know where the problems are, and let’s fix them at a low cost.

Our proposal is for about a \$168-million program over three years, which is \$33.6 million per year. It equates to \$400,000 per municipality, which is \$80,000 per year for five years. What we’re looking for is a partnership with the province on this. That will help the province and also address where we’re having a lot of municipal insurance-premium cost increases, joint and several liability programs, and also the health care costs. If we can prevent the accidents, it will reduce health care costs and save lives.

Good Roads has always invested in road safety. Just this last fall, we have trained the first 50 road safety auditors in Ontario. We had one course down south and we had one in Sault Ste. Marie, and out of those, we have 10 road safety auditors for the north now. The people that are giving those courses are from New Zealand and they have done this in those other countries that I have mentioned already.

We know that there is an urgent need to work on this, to treat and diagnose road safety issues. It will save lives and there are significant cost savings on it. Good Roads is committed to moving forward, just like we did with the training already. The training that took place in Sault Ste. Marie was at no charge for everybody, but that was through a grant that we had received from the government—thank you—for doing training.

Just in closing, for the road safety: We would like to thank you for the 2+1 project the government has started with that, which is very good, and for the resource-sharing program that we have for northern Ontario. It definitely helps all the municipalities.

That’s all I have. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Okay, thank you very much.

We now will go to Frontier Lithium.

Mr. David Ewing: Thank you to the standing committee for the opportunity to speak this evening. As mentioned, my name is David Ewing. I’m the vice-president of sustainability and external affairs at Frontier Lithium. My comments will focus on critical minerals, particularly lithium, but may also be relevant to mineral explorers, miners and ore processors and others involved in the natural resources sectors.

Frontier Lithium is based in Sudbury, Ontario, and has internationally important lithium deposits we’d like to bring into production. Frontier is a late-stage preproduction business with the objective of operating a lithium mine and a processing facility to supply battery-grade lithium salts to the growing electric vehicle and energy storage markets in North America.

Foundational to its objective is Frontier’s PAK Lithium Project, located 175 kilometres north of Red Lake. It’s accessed by winter road or by plane. It contains North America’s highest-grade and one of North America’s largest-quantity lithium resource and will have a 24-year mine life based on only a third of the deposit when in operation. Important to the province, it is the only deposit capable of self-supplying a processing facility to make lithium salts.

The province of Ontario is blessed with an abundance of critical minerals, renewable energy, manufacturing infrastructure and industrial know-how. Recognizing it has a once-in-a-generation, time-bound opportunity to establish a regional EV supply chain, the government of Ontario has done significant work to capitalize on this opportunity. Ontario’s Critical Minerals Strategy has been published, funding allocated, and billions of dollars in downstream investments from EV battery and EV manufacturers have been announced, with some manufacturers expressing their desire to begin production in 2025.

With the downstream critical minerals supply chain established, the focus needs to shift upstream to the mines, mills, mineral processors and battery materials producers that supply the inputs like lithium salts required by EV battery and EV manufacturers. While these inputs can be purchased overseas, heightened geopolitical, economic security and sustainability risks all point to the urgent need for Ontario to expedite the build-out of its upstream supply chain.

In the case of lithium supply, there is currently no commercial production of lithium concentrate from mines and no production of lithium hydroxide needed by EV battery and EV manufacturers. There is urgency here, and the time to move is now.

Strong partnerships between the provincial government, industry and Aboriginal peoples and targeted resourcing are needed to expedite the build-out of the upstream critical minerals supply chains, greater economic opportunities and inclusion for aspiring Aboriginal communities, and strengthened economic outcomes and ties between northern Ontario, the mining and processing hubs, and southern Ontario, the manufacturing hubs.

With this vision in mind, Frontier suggests targeted resourcing in the following three areas: industry programs, infrastructure and economic inclusion for Aboriginal communities, and ministry programs.

Frontier believes that sustained programmatic funding targeted at the achievement of the Critical Minerals Strategy is important. This will require the coordinated effort of multiple ministries beyond the Ministry of Mines to achieve. Other contributing ministries include the Ministries of Indigenous Affairs, Natural Resources and Forestry, Environment, Conservation and Parks, Northern Development, Energy and Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. Targeted staff resourcing and the resourcing of funding programs, such as the Aboriginal Participation Fund of the Ministry of Mines, will help enable the advancement of projects through the regulatory

process and will expedite the build-out of the upstream supply chain.

The Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. is a good example of an organization that has programs achieving multiple objectives. Frontier was a recipient of NOHFC funding focusing on mining and refining technologies. The grants, matched with our own funding, have and will help us to complete key milestones in advance of commercial lithium production. The funding programs help secure economic growth, job creation and skills development in northern Ontario, an area of the province often under-represented economically. Used strategically and in a targeted manner, these types of programs can lead to multi-faceted benefits, furthering government objectives across ministries.

Infrastructure: Ontario is a vast province requiring infrastructure in key areas to capitalize on its natural resource wealth. Critical mineral deposits are often remote, with little or no infrastructure to support mining or processing. Frontier encourages funds to be made available for the construction of all-season roads, electricity infrastructure load and for critical minerals processing on a targeted basis.

Funding for all-season roads would enable late-stage mine developers to access strategic deposits and enable mining. Infrastructure investments, particularly all-season roads, would benefit remote First Nation communities reliant on winter roads or aircraft for access to their communities and for the transportation of fuel, food and housing materials. Investments in electricity infrastructure load to meet growth in key areas of northern Ontario, like the economic engines of Red Lake and Thunder Bay, should be prioritized. Projects can take years to plan and build and can cost companies hundreds of millions of dollars in upfront costs, bringing into question project viability. It also forces companies to consider high-emission alternatives, rather than prioritizing grid connection. Finally, supporting the metal processing on priority projects would also help expedite the build-out of the upstream supply chain for critical minerals required urgently by downstream EV battery manufacturers and EV manufacturers.

1720

Finally, economic inclusion of Aboriginal communities: Options for economic inclusion of Aboriginal communities in the critical minerals projects are important. They can be used to build positive relationships, community support to expedite projects, show partnerships and inclusion, build capacity and provide economic and social benefits to communities. A few options are of particular interest to Frontier: resource revenue sharing and an Aboriginal fund.

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

Mr. David Ewing: Resource revenue sharing is an agreement whereby government shares a portion of the mining, forestry and aggregates tax revenues with Aboriginal communities on whose traditional lands the projects occur. Ontario has a successful pilot in this space and we would hope it would continue to invest there.

Frontier also encourages the government to set up an investment fund for Aboriginal communities wishing to invest in critical mineral projects. This would provide Aboriginal communities opportunities based on their own aspirations in this area and this sector.

It is Frontier's belief that the funding actions in these areas will help expedite the build-out of the critical mineral supply chain consistent with the strategy, expedite mining projects and, importantly, bring the provincial government together in partnership with industry and Aboriginal people while providing overall economic, social and environmental benefits to Ontarians.

Thank you for your time.

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

We'll start the first round of questions with the official opposition. MPP Kernaghan.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to our presenters. Thank you, Susan, for having us get up and have a stretch.

My first questions will be for Summerlunch+, for Susan. I wanted to ask, how much does each meal cost that you currently provide with the program?

Ms. Susan Wright: We don't do a meal, so I'm glad you asked this question. Our program is a little bit different because what we do in the summer—we don't have this access to kids who are sitting around at school every day. Our program has been built around—and we changed it during COVID—providing the families with a meal kit. Then we have an eight-week learning program. We do live cooking classes. We have recipes on our website. What we do is we send this meal kit home with children, who feel very special about getting it, and then it becomes a cooking and learning program for them.

It's not unlike what you might imagine with a HelloFresh kind of a program. It's a basketful of fresh fruits, vegetables, grains and dairy. We are a vegetarian program and we're halal so that we can meet the needs of kids everywhere. We also follow the school food guidelines so that there are no allergens or anything like that in the food.

What we've discovered in the process of redesigning our program is that when kids cook at home with their family, they eat with their family, and what we've done is we've supplemented their grocery bill for the week. There are programs all over the US, the UK and some other countries around the world. In the US, they supplement programs like this to the tune of about \$12 billion and families tend to get around \$375 for the summer for their families. What we do is—\$40 a week is a meal kit. Everything goes to the family and that's about \$320 for a family for the summer.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Excellent. It's a wonderful program. It sounds fascinating. Actually, there was something in my community. Life*Spin did a community food program, which was something that actually happened as a result of COVID for all the kids who were out of school and suffering from food insecurity. It's wonderful to see what you've done on this scale.

Ms. Susan Wright: Thank you.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I wanted to ask, can you highlight how many families you currently serve with the program?

Ms. Susan Wright: Yes. We are operating in Toronto now only. However, as I mentioned, we're going to be expanding outside of Toronto this summer for the first time, which is great. Right now we reach about 500 to 600 kids in the summers. The demand is higher. It's just been a little bit hard. During COVID, when the federal government was providing a lot of food-security funding, we were reaching about 1,000 kids each summer. Our funding has just gone down a little bit recently because that funding for food security kind of went away. Of course, now I'm turning to the provincial government to try to support in this regard.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Understood. With the additional \$1.73 million over three years, how many more families would you be able to serve with that?

Ms. Susan Wright: So, it's funny; I don't have that—I think it's in there. It's around 14,000. So we would be able to reach children and their families, to around 14,000. It's not like the numbers you would see with school nutrition, because we're doing this with the whole family. It's quite a substantial program.

Angele, who was here earlier with “better beginnings, better students,” I think—something like that—who I knew 10 years ago when I worked in school food—she was saying that kids can count on getting a half a tangerine and a cheese string, which is really so insufficient. What we do is we provide full meals that children have with their families and, if they want, they can stretch that out over a week of small meals, or they can have a big sit-down dinner with their family.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Wonderful. Thank you.

I would like to move over to Good Roads now, with Paul. Recently—I wanted to give you the floor if—recently there was a survey of 600 Ontario truck drivers and I wanted to know if you wanted to speak to that, if you'd had a chance to look over that survey.

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: So I've just seen the highlights of it. There's no doubt we see how often Highway 11 is closed and the 17. They're also complaining big time that there are not enough rest areas, and we know that. Drivers are not qualified as well as they could be and—what was the other one? I forget what the other one was. Three main ones, and they were all over 70%, and they were very consistent on it. There's no doubt. I'm from the area here and I've driven Highways 11 and 17, and yes, they don't have the rest areas.

And since I'm involved with farming, I know the feedlots down south have been complaining this past winter again, like, “Hey, my trucks are stopped.” You know? They had unloaded already in Thunder Bay to rest the calves and then they come further and all of a sudden, they're stopped again. It created stress on everybody—not just the driver, but the cattle also. So, yes, it's a priority that—why we're not four-laning across the country, I don't know.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: You know, your comments about how roads were designed for horse-and-buggy made me think of a friend of mine who talks about roads in Ireland and how some of them are no better than a donkey track.

But you're right that with that survey, it isolated a lot of really important issues: the lack of safe passing areas for trucks; the rest areas, as you mentioned; the training for truck drivers. And some of their solutions were not only just the training, but oversight of trucking fleets and washroom access as well. That is something that is incredibly important. I think it also identified that roads are like truckers' offices, so a safe road is like a safe workplace for them, and it impacts everyone.

I wanted to know if you could speak more—

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: One minute left? Oh, gosh.

I wanted to—if you wanted to speak a little bit more about the cost benefits of the \$168 million over three years?

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: That's over five years.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Oh, five years. Pardon me.

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: Well, obviously, if we can prevent an accident, you don't have insurance costs that will go up or hospitalizations; you don't have to call out the police; you don't have to call out the paramedics, fire department. And what we're after is—that's why we're doing the road safety auditing, to have qualified people to go into the municipalities here. This is an area that needs to be fixed—should be fixed. It will help.

So prevent the accidents before they happen. We figure it's about \$150 per metre, cost-wise. That's what they've gathered on research. So it's very minimal.

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

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the presenters for being here. I will start with Susan. Susan, first of all, thank you for all your good work. I know that your program offers your food kits in Thorncliffe Park, which is in my riding of Don Valley West. Certainly, when I'm in the riding or in the community near the end of the school year, I've had people reach out to me and say, “Hey, when do we get the kits?” Or they'll send emails: “How do I get the kits this year?” So, it's well known, and it's meeting a need.

1730

I just want to also give you a chance to talk about how—you've described your program well in terms of the training and the opportunity to eat together, to teach children about good nutrition. That sounds to me like an investment and not a handout. Could you talk a little bit more about why your program is an investment that should be considered in this budget, and it's not just a handout?

Ms. Susan Wright: Excellent question. In the very early days of Summerlunch+, I had someone—a potential big donor—say to me, “Why would I give you funding today when kids are going to be hungry tomorrow?” It caused me to think about how to structure the program so

that it wasn't just giving food. So what we've created is this learning program so that kids, over a couple of years, will know how to shop, how to cook, how to consume and eat food in a healthy way.

We feel as though it's only the sort of thing that you would do for a couple of years, so children will be a part of our program for a couple of years; then, they can join our alumni network, where they're still provided with new recipes and opportunities to do some good work, and then we reward them with gift cards—again, here and there. But mostly, what we want to do is create good cooks; good, healthy kids who don't need to be a part of our program forever. It's not meant to be something which is a handout forever. It's a program that lifts them up and teaches them how to be healthy, sustained and affordably cooking for themselves.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: That's great, thank you. I just want to, again, commend you for the idea of leveraging your program into other parts of the province. Again, that might create some opportunities for economy of scale and, again, taking a program that's working, leveraging that elsewhere instead of having to start from scratch in those communities. I think that's great news.

I will turn to Paul, quickly, before I go to David. Just quickly, Paul, I'm sure you know that a couple of years ago, the government, against the Ministry of Transportation's recommendations, cancelled the twinning of the northern highways, and that funding was diverted to Highway 413, which we don't know the cost of. It's probably at least \$10 billion. You're asking for \$108 million, so a very small portion of that.

Just talk again about the importance of road safety and saving lives for the twinning of those highways—just 30 seconds, please, or take one minute.

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: Yes, the twinning of highways or—I've also sat on the board of FONOM, and we've pushed the 2+1 big time. The 2+1 program was brought the very first time at our Good Roads conference. The same thing: That's something that they had over in Europe. The first step has started, the two just north of North Bay, but let's continue the system quicker. In Australia, it's a continuous system.

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

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: They do the environmental, and then next, they're at the next step. Then, they do the next further step, start the environmental there, construction—there's always one step being done. So they're doing it in stages. That would be one way of doing it at a lower cost.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I appreciate that. Thank you.

David, quickly over to you, mining is certainly a big part of the economy in Canada and Ontario. I think the TMX includes 40% of global mining companies or mining companies that operate around the world, so we are a hub; we are a base for that here in Canada. But we've also heard today about how the northern community, in particular the greater Sudbury area, has a very low tax base, given the number of square kilometres and the number of citizens. Talk about how your organization can help to build up the

economy and bring the wealth from the mining sector here to the greater Sudbury area.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): You'll have to wait with the answer until the next round, because the time is up.

With that, we'll go to the government side. MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: First of all, I'd like to say thank you to each one of you for coming. What diverse presenters: We have a miner who is going to bring prosperity; we have the Good Roads organization making sure, when we reach toward your prosperity, people are safe; and then, our future is covered through the nutrition program. Amazing.

I'm going to start with Summerlunch+. You and I share one thing. I had a similar thought many, many years back when COVID hit, and I said, "Wait a second. We said hungry kids are angry kids. They need to be fed." Thanks to the government program through the YMCA, in my local community there's a breakfast program for the children. And then I thought, what happens when the summer break happens? So then I reached out to the local food bank and, thankfully, as per them, I was communicated—and I'm just going to read it out: "According to the 2021 Hunger Report, 91% of the food banks in the Feed Ontario network provide programs and services beyond emergency food services." They actually support the summer break program. So, thankfully, they're doing the job.

Quick question to you: Is this a new invention or can you work with them? Is there a better efficiency rather than—they believe that 91% is already served, so what is the difference?

Ms. Susan Wright: I didn't fully understand. They believe that 91% of their people are already being met—their needs are being met in the summer?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Ninety-one per cent of the food banks, the people they are serving—they're actually supporting those people during the summer as well. Knights Table, for example, is another example in my community who is serving it as well. So what is different with you?

Ms. Susan Wright: Absolutely. I think that I tried to make that point clear, and I may have not done so, but Neil Hetherington from the Daily Bread Food Bank, which is the largest one in Ontario, said that summer is the time of greatest need in food banks, but food banks are often unable to meet that need as well. What I would say is that food banks provide a certain support, which is basic food needs and, often, not necessarily nutritious—or they don't provide full meals and ways which one can learn to eat healthy. What we do is a very different program. It's providing this support, education, cooking skills, shopping skills—everything—to kids directly, but we often do so in partnership with food banks.

So in Thorncliffe Park, where Ms. Bowman works, we work with the food bank. We work in conjunction with them to source food and deliver it to kids and families. In Ottawa, where we're going to be expanding this summer, we're working with the Gloucester Emergency Food

Cupboard, because they, again, feel like they can't meet all the needs but, more importantly, they feel like the part that's missing is the education. They're one of the largest food banks to address children specifically.

You can give families some fresh fruits and vegetables, some starches. What you end up with sometimes is things like pasta sauces and dried pasta, but it's not really a full meal, and we're not helping fix this problem where kids are eating more processed food than ever before. Kids don't know how to cook anymore because we've lost courses like home economics. The curriculum is great because it's including nutrition literacy in it, but it doesn't give kids the practical hands-on work that we do. I think what we do is we're complementary to those programs.

Mr. Deepak Anand: You said you served about 500 to 600 children this year. How much was the total spend on this?

Ms. Susan Wright: So I can't do the math right now. We also have program expenses, so we hire students to help us through the summer. We've had some grants for summer employment with kids. But the direct cost would be \$320 per kid—or per family, I should say, because we go into the family and we meet the needs of many kids in a family. For example, 30 kids times 320 is around \$10,000. So for every 30 kids—30 families; I've got to say that properly. As I say, we have a child who's a participant in the household, but they reach the whole household. So for every 30 households, it's around \$10,000.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Per summer?

Ms. Susan Wright: Well, it's \$320 for one family—

Mr. Deepak Anand: Per summer?

Ms. Susan Wright: Per summer, yes.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Okay. And you want to reach out to 14,000 children now?

Ms. Susan Wright: Fourteen thousand children and their families.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Okay. Thank you so much. That helps.

Lithium—I was just looking at the data, and Australia, Chile, China, Argentina and Brazil come way ahead of us. In Canada, we only produce 0.36% compared to Australia, who's taking the market share—47%; Chile, 30% market share. But on the contrast, when we talk about the deposits, we have 4% of deposits. In deposits, we are fifth. In production, we are eighth. Well, none of the lithium is being produced in Ontario right now, both are outside Ontario.

What can we do to make it more competitive? What can we do to help the lithium companies in this case? And is there a business sense and business case to begin with to produce lithium or explore lithium here in Ontario?

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Mr. David Ewing: I think there's an excellent business case to produce lithium in Ontario. As mentioned, we've got the highest-quality and second-largest deposit in North America. We understand that there are a bunch of reasons why we want to regionalize EV battery manufacturing here—critical minerals—and that's a geopolitical risk, it's an economic risk etc.

Some of the barriers are very complex regulations, infrastructure. Regulatory-wise, I think we're going to need permits and approvals. We're probably going to need between 40 and 60 different permits to get this mine up and running. We work on a winter road right now. We will be needing an all-season road into that area. So there's really lots of barriers, and one of those barriers is time.

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

Mr. David Ewing: To get it up and running in this country, in this province, you're often looking at a 10-year period of time. So we have to find ways of expediting the timelines to get this urgent-need mineral to market.

Mr. Deepak Anand: So in your words, how would you rate the government making an investment in the Ring of Fire infrastructure? How important is it for you and, do you believe, for the province of Ontario?

Mr. David Ewing: This infrastructure is actually to the west of Ring of Fire. It is infrastructure that can be up and running and permitted predominantly through the provincial permitting process. Investments in this area and efforts by this government have been enormous. They need to focus on the upstream and move the upstream versus the downstream right now.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

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

MPP Gélinas.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Mr. Ewing, you've used the word "urgency" a couple of times, and I would like you to define it a little bit more. What do you mean? What do you need?

Mr. David Ewing: Well, I think that our government of Ontario has a Critical Minerals Strategy. The strategy lays out the process with which we can get a critical mineral supply chain up and running to support electric vehicles.

Multiple countries, including the United States, have come out and expressed the need to regionalize critical mineral production. In the case of lithium, between 80% and 90% of all lithium comes out of Asia, predominantly China.

The reality is that if we can't get lithium markets up and running here and critical minerals markets up and running to support EV battery manufacturers, of which there's north of \$30 billion in announced investments, then we run the risk of the entire supply chain collapsing, unless we can get these minerals. At any moment, you can have the international interest which stops the supply of critical minerals to these manufacturers.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay. I understand.

Going to you, Paul: I have heard about this ask of \$80,000 per year per municipality to do an inventory of how dangerous their roads are. I represent a northern riding where lots of it has no municipalities. Highway 144 from Sudbury to the next municipality in Timmins, there's 320 kilometres. Who would be responsible for doing the danger assessment outside of the boundaries of a municipality?

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: I think that would fall to the province, the government, because it's unorganized townships. That has always been an issue with FONOM. We've brought that up often. It's unorganized. Good Roads itself does not represent unorganized townships.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay. I just wanted to be sure.

I like your comments as to how it could be that the minute you come to the Ontario-Manitoba border, you are on a four-lane highway, all the way to British Columbia, but the minute you enter Ontario, not only are you on a really poor road, but it is also very poorly maintained. How could it be?

In my riding, on the corner of Highway 144 at Marina Road—I have presented thousands of petitions that said, "This is a dangerous corner. It has to be addressed." When I started presenting the petition, we had had six deaths. We now have had seven more. How many people need to die at Marina Road on Highway 144 before something happens? I don't know.

But we know better. We know that some of the northern highways are really, really dangerous and need to be looked at, but so far, there hasn't been any appetite from the Ford government to do anything about northern roads.

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: We are hoping, with this road safety auditing that the municipalities will be doing, we'd invite the MTO to come: "Hey, this is how we look at the situations." And maybe they can see it through a different lens. It's an opportunity.

Yes, we do have fatalities, and that's why we're here now for this ask, that the municipalities—you know, small fixes. Sometimes it's just a small fix that needs to be done to prevent an accident from happening.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I agree. You said that we have 50 road safety auditors trained in Ontario. Is that enough?

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: No. So there's more courses. We just started it last fall. We're doing two more courses again this spring, one down south and one in eastern Ontario. So we just started. The instructors are coming back again from Australia to do it. There's about 25 that you take per class, so there will be another 50 again trained for it.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay. And how many do you figure we would need for your project—\$158 million, five years, \$80,000 per municipality etc. How much do we need?

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: You mean for road safety auditors?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes.

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: Two hundred would be good, and we do know the issue will be northern Ontario because we are so far spread out. That's the thing. That's why I was really glad that we finally brought the course—the first time we ever had Good Roads doing courses in the north. We had it in Sault Ste. Marie, and at the same time, we did a road safety auditing course.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay. And this \$80,000 you say, is for municipalities, but some of it would be for First Nations communities also?

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: Yes. We have—

M^{me} France Gélinas: Nineteen First Nations.

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: Yes.

M^{me} France Gélinas: They would be included?

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: They would be included, yes. Good Roads is actually doing some training in First Nations. We just did a contract course with Dokis reserve for equipment training.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Oh, wow.

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: Yes. We're really going at it.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Very cool. Dokis is in my riding.

Ms. Wright, about your Summerlunch+: What would it take for some of this to come up north?

Ms. Susan Wright: Just a bit of funding. I would love to come up to the north. We did a program with SickKids hospital, and we specifically worked with children who had type 1 diabetes. That's how we have a lot of our data and results, because we partnered with Toronto Metropolitan University to really research and evaluate the program. We looked at it, post-implementation, three months out and six months out, and we saw these great impacts on health and cooking and all kinds of other things. We know that diabetes is a big issue with many communities in the north. Children are increasingly obese and consuming ultra-processed foods at high rates in the north, where fresh food is hard to access.

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

Ms. Susan Wright: We would really like to do this kind of educational programming that gets more fresh, healthy food, cooking skills and shopping and all of the other stuff in the north. I would love that.

Angele, today, said that they did programming in the summer during COVID, and they would love to do more of it. The problem is just that these programs are either not funded or underfunded.

M^{me} France Gélinas: With the \$1.73 million and the 14,000 kids and their families, it's for Windsor West, Kitchener Centre, Hamilton Centre, Dufferin-Caledon, Ottawa-Vanier. Those are—

Ms. Susan Wright: That's only in the first year. By the time we get into the third year, we would love to be working in communities all over Ontario, and we could do that in partnership with the government to decide where the highest priority is. There's a map that shows food insecurity by riding that's produced by Feed Ontario, and there's a riding in the north which is highly food insecure, and I would love to be doing that kind of programming up north.

M^{me} France Gélinas: We would love to see you come.

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

We now go to the independent. MPP Bowman?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: My colleague has graciously agreed to share her time.

David, if you could just answer my earlier question. There's lots of capital in the mining sector. We want that; we want capital to be flowing. How do we make sure that the north gets its share of the wealth in terms of the opportunities and the taxes for the local community?

Mr. David Ewing: Starting up north, obviously, with us, you've got First Nations communities that could benefit. Infrastructure is key, and ease of infrastructure and ease of entry—for example, for processing plants—is really important; ensuring that we have the proper load, the proper infrastructure—natural gas, if it's needed—going into certain areas; and essentially being as close to shovel-ready for companies as you can get—having industrial land, if you're doing refineries.

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Mining is difficult in that you really have to go where the deposit is, so that's a little bit of a different question. But assuming that infrastructure is in place and there's a deposit close by, I think there are tremendous opportunities for nearby communities, whether they be First Nation communities or others.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you.

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

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you, everyone, for coming in and presenting to us. You're the last leg, but thank you for hanging in there and having the energy. I'm putting up my energy now.

Susan, thank you so much for your advocacy, for supporting our most vulnerable population. They are our future generation. You must have had a lot of success in Thorncliffe Park; that's why you want to expand your program. Can you share some successes from Thorncliffe Park? But also, take my time and summarize the need for the meal kits, because I hear it from my constituency in Scarborough and Scarborough-Guildwood. Summarize it and take it home to the government.

Ms. Susan Wright: Thank you, Andrea. I'm not sure how to make this super punchy, but I will say that we have families in Thorncliffe Park who've been a part of our program—one family in particular—I had a little video ready, but I know that I don't have time to present it. One family in particular has been a part of the program for all eight years. They're a family that has five children. In that family, it is a little bit harder to make ends meet. When that school food program is out, that's a lot of mouths to feed, so we give our food kit every year when we have this opportunity.

Last year, the one boy who was six when he started the program with us nine years ago was a staff member with us at Summerlunch+. It's meant so much to him that he wanted to work with us for the summer and continue to give back to his community.

One of the other staff, she's been a staff member now with us for five years, and she said that when she's walking through Thorncliffe Park, people will stop her and say, "You're the Summerlunch+ person. I recognize you. I love the food program. It's been amazing."

We've seen this incredible demand, this incredible impact. We now have this—oh, am I done?

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): No, one minute.

Ms. Susan Wright: I wish that I could say more, but what we want to do is we want to get kids away from eating ultra-processed foods and eating fresh, healthy foods, learning how to cook and eating Ontario-grown

foods. We do work with urban farmers in local communities. We try to buy, wherever we can, from farmers and local grocers. Our food is, as I mentioned, all halal, it's as fresh as possible, and that's what our kids need. Because if they're eating ultra-processed foods, they're putting chemicals in their body; that doesn't help them grow, run, play, enjoy summer and then learn with our program so that they're ready to get back to school in September and achieve the way we want them to.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Talk about your budget ask.

Ms. Susan Wright: My budget ask is \$1.73 million over three years. We're going to reach a ton of kids with that amount of money. We can work with the government to decide which ridings and where, and where we can have the biggest impact. Is there anything else that I'm missing? We could do so much. It will be really great. Summer, summer, summer—

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much, but no time left to do it here. Thank you.

We now go to the government. MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank all the presenters for being here this late in the day. I'd like to start with David from Frontier Lithium—quite excited to hear about all the work that your company is doing because all politics is local. My community relies heavily on the automotive manufacturing sector, particularly as the site of the new NextStar Energy EV battery plant. I wanted to understand a little bit of what additional investments or this nature of investment means to companies like yours.

Mr. David Ewing: Investments in terms of some of the things I mentioned or—

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Call it more the indirect investments, where a manufacturer who is destined to use your product is—

Mr. David Ewing: Absolutely. Thank you for that. I guess we look at this as that we're trying through our project to be able to connect northern Ontario and southern Ontario. For us, what does it mean? It means that we have instant demand next door. It means that instead of shipping critical minerals from Chile to China for processing in China back to Ontario to service southern Ontario we can actually create jobs in the north, employ First Nation community members who are near the project. They could live at home and actually work on our site. We would be shipping down south, north of Lake Superior. We haven't told anybody where the refinery is going to be, but we have a location pretty close to being able to be public. And then from there we would manufacture the lithium salts, lithium hydroxide, lithium oxide and move it to southern Ontario for processing into those plants.

Demand, GHGs, local jobs—it's a great story. It fills a lot of boxes in terms of objectives for Ontario's processing plants in Ontario rather than shipping processing elsewhere. It's a great story.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you very much for that. It's certainly music to my ears as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. That circular, homegrown, domestic economy

within the province of Ontario is certainly the end goal of our Driving Prosperity strategy, so thank you for that.

I was hoping to move to Paul from Good Roads. Thank you for your submission today and identifying, really, a heightened awareness of the lack of—call it “available” funds for infrastructure. I know, even in the south, we’ve got lots of demand, lots of capacity we know we need to satisfy, but there’s not enough money in the world.

I’m wanting to explore a little bit. The government recently announced the Ontario Infrastructure Bank, which would leverage pension plans and other investors to provide that advance funding where you could access the funding, build and then pay them back over time. That way you would get the infrastructure that you need when you need it and then have the users pay for it as you go without being completely leveraged at the government level. I’m wanting to understand if Good Roads has any thoughts on the infrastructure bank or if you see that as being a tool that could be used here in the north.

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: Are you mentioning, for the infrastructure bank, that the municipality would tap into that?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Yes.

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: I was mayor for 12 years also, from 2010 to 2022. As a municipality, we’re not allowed to run a deficit, so we only have so much borrowing capacity. That is our big issue: municipalities’ borrowing capacity is limited. So, yes, you can give us all the funds there to go and borrow, but we don’t have the capacity because our tax base is too small. In northern Ontario, it really hits a lot of us big time, and down south also, in certain sections. So that’s the issue. It’s nice, but for individual municipalities, smaller municipalities, I do not believe that they could tap into the investment bank, because we do have Infrastructure Ontario that we can—and we have good rates on it. For myself, when I was mayor of a small municipality, there was enough there for us to borrow.

I think we’d have to look at a whole different envelope on it. If you want to do great big projects, maybe there has to be a greater share of a partnership between the province and the municipality so we don’t have to borrow as much, so it would be more of a grant for us. That’s a holdback on the municipalities.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Okay. Just on that assumption, if indeed there were a—call it a transfer that occurred and the costs recessed back to northerners, what kind of impact would that have? If we were to, in a perfect world, find those funds and then tax them back so that they’re in the banks and we’re not running debts all the time, running deficits all the time, what kind of impact would that have on affordability in the north?

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: I’m not sure, because every municipality is different. The northwest is totally different than this area. It always depends, in the municipality, on if you have a commercial tax base—that’s the other thing—if we have a huge amount of money. I’m not a financial expert. At the farming end, I know all the financials, but at that end, I couldn’t give you a straight answer on that. I’m not sure.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you for that. Thank you for all your work with Good Roads. I was a Good Roads member for many years until being elected and it’s a phenomenal organization. I appreciate all that you do.

Mr. Paul Schoppmann: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes the questions, and it concludes the time for this table. We thank all the presenters for the great job of preparing your presentation and an excellent job of delivering it. I’m sure it will be of great assistance as we move forward in preparing the 2024 budget.

With that, that also concludes the activities for today. The committee is now adjourned until 10 a.m. on Wednesday, January 31, 2024, when we will resume public hearings in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

The committee adjourned at 1801.

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