

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

JP-50

Journal des débats (Hansard)

JP-50

Standing Committee on Justice Policy

Comité permanent de la justice

Estimates

Ministry of the Solicitor General

Budget des dépenses

Ministère du Solliciteur général

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Wednesday 18 September 2024

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Mercredi 18 septembre 2024

Chair: Lorne Coe
Clerk: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Président : Lorne Coe
Greffière : Thushitha Kobikrishna

Hansard on the Internet

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

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

Index inquiries

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

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

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

Renseignements sur l'index

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

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



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

CONTENTS

Wednesday 18 September 2024

Estimates	JP-1157
Ministry of the Solicitor General	JP-1157
L'hon. Michael S. Kerzner	
Ms. Karen Ellis	
Ms. Sarah Caldwell	
Mr. Thomas Carrique	
Mr. Jon Pegg	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

COMITÉ PERMANENT DE LA JUSTICE

Wednesday 18 September 2024

Mercredi 18 septembre 2024

The committee met at 1401 in committee room 2.

ESTIMATES

MINISTRY OF THE SOLICITOR GENERAL

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on Justice Policy will now come to order.

The committee will now begin consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of the Solicitor General for a total of two hours. Are there any questions from members before we start, please?

Seeing none, Clerk, I'm now required to call vote 2601, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement of not more than 20 minutes from the Solicitor General.

Minister, if you need a time check so you're not rushing at the end to try to get through your 20 minutes, just ask me for a time check and I'm happy to provide that, sir. The floor is yours.

L'hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Pour moi, il n'y a rien de plus important que la sécurité de notre province. Dans notre ministère, nous croyons que tous ont le droit de se sentir en sécurité chez eux et dans leur collectivité. De plus, chaque personne mérite d'être traitée avec dignité et respect.

Et c'est grâce aux héros, les premiers intervenants, que cette province demeure sûre et forte. Voilà pourquoi je suis fier de soutenir nos policiers, nos pompiers, nos agents de services correctionnels et tous ceux qui assurent la sécurité de l'Ontario tous les jours. Ce sont des gens formidables qui nous protègent au quotidien.

Un Ontario avec un sens de sécurité est un Ontario fort. Nous n'arrêterons pas de poursuivre les criminels tant qu'ils n'arrêtent pas de nous nuire, parce que les Ontariens travaillent trop fort pour se faire menacer leur sécurité. Et pour moi en tant que solliciteur général, et pour le premier ministre de l'Ontario, c'est personnel. Le soutien de notre gouvernement aux premiers intervenants est absolu et sans relâche.

Mr. Chairman, it's a great honour to be here before the committee, to be joined today at the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, on behalf of the Ministry of the Solicitor General—and how our government is protecting public safety, supporting our heroic first responders, combatting crime and more.

I'm delighted to be joined here at the table by the Deputy Solicitor General, la sous-solliciteure générale, Karen Ellis, and the acting deputy minister for public safety, Sarah Caldwell, together with some esteemed people behind me.

I'm honoured that my ministry has been able to play an essential role in advancing these government priorities.

We also have a number of talented, knowledgeable individuals who will bring their insight, as required, to the conversation.

I'd like to also acknowledge my colleague, our Associate Minister of Auto Theft and Bail Reform, Graham McGregor, who unfortunately was unable to join us today.

Since we last met, the Ministry of the Solicitor General has continued to make exponential headway on a number of public safety initiatives. I look forward to highlighting the important work we've been doing and telling you about the tremendous progress we are making on a number of important files.

First, I'd like to thank Premier Ford for entrusting me with this portfolio, and for his leadership in prioritizing how important public safety is in our province.

I'd also like to thank the great team in the ministry and the minister's office for their hard work, professionalism, expertise, and their dedication to public service, on behalf of the people of Ontario. It's thanks to tireless efforts throughout the ministry that we've been able to deliver on our mandate, including landmark legislation, major capital projects, and delivering meaningful support to police and firefighter partners across the province.

Above all, I'd like to thank all our law enforcement and first responder partners: the personnel, the chiefs, the associations—the heroes who put their lives on the line to keep us safe every day. As I've travelled the province, which has been the honour of a lifetime, I've had the opportunity to meet and speak with many of them. Their dedication to our communities and their unflinching professionalism astound me every day.

The role of the Ministry of the Solicitor General is to ensure that Ontario's communities have the legislative framework in place to ensure that they're supported and protected by law enforcement, and that our public safety system is safe, effective and accountable. We recognize that the safety and vitality of our communities and our province depend on a wide range of law enforcement measures. We will never apologize for making sure that our inherent right to live safely in our own homes and

communities—to see our kids off to school, to check in on our seniors and loved ones, to go to work, to shop, and to pray—is protected. We will always have the backs of law enforcement.

In carrying out these solemn duties, the ministry connects directly with tens of thousands of people every year. Whether they are individuals and families who are in immediate need of supports and services, or those who find themselves as justice system participants, it's an enormous task, but it is a challenge that ministry staff are living up to, and they take great pride in fulfilling this. And it's a task that connects some of Ontario's most respected and longest-serving institutions, including the Ontario Provincial Police and the Office of the Fire Marshal.

Please let me acknowledge Commissioner Thomas Carrique, who is here.

Please let me acknowledge our fire marshal, Jon Pegg, who is here.

And from the Office of the Chief Coroner, please let me acknowledge Dr. Michael Pollanen.

The Ontario Forensic Pathology Service is also part of this connection, as is adult correctional services. It also includes new programs resulting from our government's major legislation, bills that have been passed into law—which is where I'd like to begin today.

The Community Safety and Policing Act came into force on April 1, 2024. This piece of legislation was a major accomplishment for our government, thanks to the incredible hard work by our ministry staff, including by my predecessor. I'd like to acknowledge our Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, Sylvia Jones, who worked tirelessly, who envisioned it, who brought it to where it was—so it allowed our current period as a government to see it to fruition. I want to thank the chiefs and the associations and the community members who helped us bring in this new era of policing that will have a direct, positive impact on Ontario communities for decades to come. When it comes to the creation of the Inspectorate of Policing and the role of the inspector general, whose role is to seek to enhance the performance of policing in Ontario and ensure compliance with the act province-wide—this is another example.

1410

I'd like to talk about animal welfare services. This is part of my portfolio, as Solicitor General. This government is proud to be a champion in this space. We passed the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, the strongest animal welfare legislation in the country. Again, I thank my predecessor for the work she did on this file during her time as Solicitor General. With animal welfare services, Ontario is the first jurisdiction in Canada to have enforcement of animal welfare legislation led by the province.

We cherish our pets and companions. We cherish them a lot. We rely on service animals, like guide dogs, for their skills and care. And we will not tolerate cruelty or mistreatment of any animals.

Since January 1, 2020, animal welfare services has conducted over 93,400 inspections and investigations, resulting in over 12,200 orders to correct non-compliance

violations, over 1,100 charges, and the removal of over 8,800 animals from situations that were deemed to be in distress conditions.

I'd also like to mention the Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, the PUPS Act. Ontario is also the first jurisdiction in Canada to pass legislation that introduces penalties specific to puppy mills, to help these unethical dog-breeding factories be identified and be put out of business. I'm proud to share that the PUPS Act, passed in the Ontario Legislature early this year, is another example of how seriously our government takes animal welfare. The PUPS Act prohibits inhumane breeding practices that are the signature of unethical breeders. Ontario has some of the strongest penalties of any Canadian province or territory for animal welfare violations, and the PUPS Act creates a new minimum penalty of \$10,000 for operating a puppy mill, and \$25,000 if the commission of that offence results in the death of a dog. Individuals who may not directly operate a puppy mill but who benefit from assisting puppy mill operators will also face a minimum penalty of \$10,000.

As you can see, Mr. Chair, the Ministry of the Solicitor General continues to break ground in finding ways to better connect the people of Ontario with justice. The challenges of supporting justice in Ontario are always changing. We cannot depend on yesterday's tools to fight tomorrow's battles. My ministry is very confident in adapting to meet those challenges—serving today while building for tomorrow. Public safety is not a static issue. Every day, we see instances that require our system to be able to adapt in new ways—and I'm proud to say we're doing just that. In 2024 alone, we are making progress against an unprecedented increase in auto theft. We're working to keep our streets safe by responding to the threat of violent criminals who are out on bail—this is totally unacceptable. We're building and upgrading infrastructure to better support those in the ministry's custody. And we're investing in new tools to better protect society and Ontario's way of life.

I want to talk about strengthening bail compliance for dangerous offenders. Violent criminal acts that are committed by individuals while out on bail is one of the most frustrating issues facing Ontario's justice system. It's frustrating that we continue to see repeat and violent offenders breaking bail conditions. Time and time again, we see the news stories where individuals who have been released on bail are released and again committing crime. This revolving door is totally unacceptable.

This government, led by Premier Ford, has been a strong advocate for bail reform—including participating in not one but two letters signed by all 13 Premiers and territorial leaders to advocate for strong and meaningful bail reform.

Ontario is a leader in this space, and we will not stop until every criminal is held accountable. Ontario is doing its part. Last year, we announced a \$112-million investment in bail compliance—a compliance measure to ensure that high-risk and repeat violent offenders comply with their bail conditions. This includes establishing dedicated

bail compliance and warrant apprehension teams amongst the OPP, municipal and First Nations police services.

New technology will also play a critical role in connecting police services for the success of the bail compliance strategy, with the creation of a provincial Bail Compliance Dashboard. I want to give a special acknowledgement to the Toronto Police Service and Durham police service, who piloted this forward so that we could adopt it province-wide. I look forward to sharing more details on this dashboard in the coming months.

I also want to talk about creating a new joint air support unit. Organized criminals are becoming more sophisticated, but so are we. New technologies and tools will play an expanded role in our government's support of the local law enforcement response. That's exactly why our government came forward and provided \$134 million to create the joint air support unit that will acquire five new police helicopters to fight auto theft and organized crime in the greater Toronto area and in the Ottawa region. These helicopters will be equipped with the latest crime prevention and detection technologies, to help keep highways and roadways safe from violent carjackings, auto theft, street racing and impaired driving. Police helicopters are an agile rapid-response and crime-fighting tool that will support police activities on the ground in densely populated urban areas and across rural communities. They are sometimes referred to by the police services that deploy them as resource multipliers, because they can be on-site faster, increase the speed and efficiency of investigations, and provide better support for officers on the ground—this is especially true in pursuit situations.

The bottom line is that we are ensuring law enforcement has the tools necessary to combat crime and to keep Ontario communities safe.

I want to talk about combatting auto theft. While we're on the subject, I'd again like to update this committee on progress the province is making to specifically combat the rising number of auto thefts.

In Ontario, a car is stolen every 14 minutes. According to Criminal Intelligence Service Ontario, the number of criminal organizations involved in auto theft has increased every year since 2019. This is unacceptable. Auto theft is putting tens of millions of dollars in the pockets of organized crime, while having residual impacts on our communities and driving up the costs for Ontario drivers—this is especially true for those who drive the most commonly stolen vehicles. These thefts are largely driven by organized crime, and as mentioned, these criminals are sophisticated.

Our government has invested \$51 million in new measures to help police identify and dismantle organized crime networks and put thieves behind bars, where they belong. One measure includes the creation of a rapid-response Organized Crime Towing and Auto Theft Team led by the OPP, which is bringing charges against those responsible for serious vehicle crimes, including violence within the tow truck industry. Another measure is the Preventing Auto Thefts Grant—this is an announcement that we made last year. The successful recipients of this grant were

announced last year and were provided with \$18 million of funding to support 21 police projects aimed at preventing and combatting auto theft. These projects include new measures focused on detection, analysis and enforcement. We've also created a new Major Auto Theft Prosecution Response Team. These initiatives and others are having a positive impact on public safety by holding criminals to account.

According to the Équité Association, auto theft in Ontario has fallen by 14% in the first half of 2024, compared to the same period last year. Let me be clear: The number is still way too high. But it shows that the government and our partners, including local law enforcement, are on the right path and are disrupting organized vehicle theft and the flow of funds to organized crime. We will build on this progress with the assistance of our new associate minister.

I'd like to talk about modernizing our correctional services.

While most people are familiar with the community safety side of our Ministry of the Solicitor General, we also have the other side, which is corrections. I really want to acknowledge the amazing, hard work that our Deputy Solicitor General, Karen Ellis, has done.

I want to shout out to all the amazing correctional officers across the province—and the support staff—who play a vital role in keeping communities safe. While many may not have seen them out in their communities, they are an integral pillar to supporting our public safety system. Since 2022, I've been working diligently to ensure that corrections has the ability to support that system. This includes overseeing infrastructure projects to get more facilities built and providing funding to support the system. An example of this would be the Thunder Bay Correctional Complex. Earlier this week, I was very pleased to tour the facility myself, to see that the 345 beds that will be added to the system—will be a state-of-the-art facility. I know everyone here today is looking forward to the grand opening of that facility.

1420

As announced in June 2024, just a few months ago, we will also be adding 430 beds by renovating and reopening the Toronto Intermittent Centre, which we call the TIC, which will add 320 beds, and the London Regional Intermittent Centre, which we call the RIC—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Minister, you have one minute left.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you—that will add 110 beds.

Mr. Chairman, at the end of the day, Ontarians have spoken. Ontarians have said that we all have an equal right to live safely in our own homes and communities. Our government, led by Premier Ford, takes this clarion call with amazing seriousness. We have acted, and we will continue to act, morning, noon and night.

And one thing else, Mr. Chairman—we will always have the backs of everyone who keeps Ontario safe. That is our promise to them. Thank you. Merci beaucoup.

Le Président (Mr. Lorne Coe): Merci beaucoup, avocat général. Thank you, Minister.

As a reminder, I will allow members to ask a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee. However, it must be noted that the onus is on the members asking the questions to make sure the question is relevant to the estimates under consideration.

The ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. If you wish, you may, at the end of your appearance, verify the questions and issues being tracked with the research officer to my left, Mr. McNaught.

For any staff appearing today: When you're called on to speak, please give your name and your title so that we may accurately record in Hansard who we have.

We will now begin questions and answers in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent member of the committee, and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee, for the remainder of the allotted time.

Please raise your hand, members, so I can acknowledge you.

I will start with the official opposition for 20 minutes of questions. MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you, Minister, and to the entire team who's here with us today in estimates. I'm looking forward to the answers to the questions.

Upon looking at the estimates, the FAO analysis reveals something that I think is worth noting, and that's specifically that there's a 15% cut, or a \$191-million cut, to correctional services, to that budget line. Yet, we know that we are not seeing 15% less people or population, and it's not necessarily that there's 15% less people in custody compared to last year.

What we're hearing is that the jails are routinely over capacity. The data from the ministry shows us, as reported also through the Canadian Press, that in 2023 alone, Ontario jails were at 113% capacity. So that leads us to an understanding that there's overcapacity; there isn't the right proportion of staff as well as those who are inmates. Surely this would be a situation that would call for more staffing, more resources, and not less. Looking into that specific area of required spending to keep people safe—those who are working in the facilities, but also keeping the inmates safe—rightsizing, and keeping the communities safe, as we all know, is critically important.

What is this new normal that we're seeing? Is it a new normal of understaffing? What is the ministry's actual staffing goal?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I appreciate the question.

That's why we've hired over new 2,200 correctional officers. That's why we're bringing new capacity online. That's why, during my visit to Thunder Bay, I saw for myself the new 345-bed facility, a \$1.2-billion investment. That's exactly why we want to reopen the 430 beds to accommodate minimum- and medium-risk inmates—110 in the Regional Intermittent Centre in London, the RIC, and the 320 beds in the Toronto Intermittent Centre. That's exactly why we made an announcement that we'll be

adding new beds in the Quinte Detention Centre. And that's why we'll be doubling the capacity in the Brockville Correctional Complex.

These unprecedented investments will allow us to add new capacity over time to make sure that we can keep Ontario safe.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm interested in understanding the experience of the corrections workers who are working in the facilities, under very challenging circumstances. We've heard quite extensively about how the facilities are overcrowded and they are understaffed. It's leading to some very difficult work situations.

Is the ministry aware that there are staff shortages? Is the minister aware that retention has become a problem? Is the minister aware that it is becoming very difficult to hire new staff and then bring them on in a timely fashion? Has the minister sat down with the union that represents these workers to fully understand what the challenges are?

After the disastrous rollout of Bill 124, it has been a really difficult grind for the workers, and I think they'd be very interested in knowing whether or not the minister has a full grasp of the crisis that's in the jails right now.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Chair, through you: As Solicitor General, I have toured the province; I've toured many of our facilities. I've been very active this summer. And I make a point at every opportunity to sit with the OPSEU local representatives in the institutions so that I can listen to them, so that I can offer my appreciation for the incredible hard work, and so that I can carry a message—that's another reason. That's why we've hired over 2,200 new correctional officers. And I might add, Mr. Chairman, that's why we've made an investment of over a half a billion dollars, \$500 million, so that we can improve the infrastructure upgrades in our facilities. By all measure, listening to the OPSEU locals is very important, and I'm going to continue to do just that.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: What exactly is the ministry's staffing goal? You've said you've hired 2,200 new people. Are they full-time? Are they part-time? Is it union work? Is it permanent work? And how many staff do you need in order for you to right-size the operations here?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Again, since July 2020, we've hired 2,200 new correctional officers, recruits. I've had a chance to meet some of the new recruits who have come in there. We're also enhancing the occupational health and wellness by providing them with unparalleled training, with resiliency training for front-line staff, and improving managerial awareness of mental health issues through the training.

We're always going to appreciate and acknowledge the hard work that the correctional officers do.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I just note that the minister did not answer my question specifically, which was, how many staff is the actual goal of the ministry? We don't have an answer for whether or not these are full-time placements, if these are part-time, if this is contract work, if this is unionized work. I don't know.

I'm going to go on, just because I don't have a lot of time and I want to make sure I get the next question in.

I have heard from families who have reached out to my office, raising an alarm bell about the way their loved ones are being treated while incarcerated. They have raised issues of overcrowding, violence, frequent lockdowns and the lack of services that these individuals have received. And now there is a \$1.5-billion lawsuit that has been initiated over this issue.

1430

One mother, Diana, reached out to my office, and she talked about these frequent lockdowns. She can't speak to her adult son. She has not been able to have any communication with him. She doesn't know when his court appearances are, and she's forced to go in every Friday, hoping that her son will appear.

Do the minister and the ministry track the percentages of lockdowns in Ontario jails, and are they directly attributed to the low staffing levels that we are seeing?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Mr. Chairman: Let me remind the committee why people are in our correctional facilities: number one, because they have committed an act of criminality and are waiting to appear in front of the court, and the second reason they're there is they've been sentenced to two years less a day. Our role and responsibilities in the ministry are to fulfill the decision of the court. That's why people are in our facilities.

In our facilities, we provide a number of programming initiatives. We have chaplaincies. Just earlier this week, I met with a Native Inmate Liaison Officer in Thunder Bay. There are a number of programming measures while our inmates are in our facility.

But make no mistake; the priority of this government to prioritize our public safety looks to the correctional system as being a pillar of ensuring that we have public safety. This is something that we're not going to compromise on.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Again, the minister did not answer my question; I want that to be noted.

My question regarding the overcrowding in the jails, the leading of violence, including violence that's inflicted on workers there, the high number of lockdowns and those who are put into solitary confinement—these are alarming reports that are coming out of our facilities.

I think that the minister and the ministry have a responsibility to ensure that everyone is safe, absolutely. Absolutely, it's important. But the minister has not answered my question about the high percentage of lockdowns that we're hearing take place in the jails, and he has not acknowledged that this is even attributed to the low staffing levels, which of course is—my first question was, what is the right staffing level?

I'm going to move on, because I don't have a lot of time, I believe.

May I ask for a time check, sir?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): The time check is 10 minutes and 44 seconds.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you. I'm going to turn my time over to my colleague here, and I'll come back through the independent time slot.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Stevens.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Chair, through you to the minister and his team: Thank you for your time today and answering all these questions.

Earlier in the summer, Ontario's correctional officers, represented by OPSEU, hosted this heartbreaking petition that was circulated about suicide in their profession. Since October 2021, at least 10 of our correctional bargaining unit members have lost their lives to suicide. This is awful. As of last month, they had said goodbye to one of their own. This can be prevented, and they are asking the Solicitor General to step in for action.

Who has the ministry consulted with about what correctional officers are calling a crisis?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Our thoughts are with the families who have lost loved ones. It is tragic beyond any measure that we could ever fathom. It's something that when I speak to Chad Oldfield and I become aware of it—it is heartbreaking. That's exactly why our ministry has an employee wellness strategy under way, in collaboration with the Ontario public service union—OPSEU—that educates and raises awareness for correctional officers experiencing occupational stress injuries, mental health challenges and more.

I would like, with your permission, to ask the Deputy Solicitor General to add further to the efforts that are being made for the mental wellness rehabilitation of the correctional officers.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Deputy, your name and branch of the ministry, please.

Ms. Karen Ellis: My name is Karen Ellis. I'm the Deputy Solicitor General for correctional services in the Ministry of the Solicitor General.

Thank you very much for the question.

I would just like to build on what the minister has said. Any kind of death of any member of our staff, and of course of any inmate in custody, is really, really tragic, and we care very deeply about that.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Absolutely.

Ms. Karen Ellis: We do have quite a robust employee wellness and mental health series of programs that we've been building over the last four or five years, and we do work through our governance tables under the collective agreement with the union on those issues. Together, there's lots of discussion, and their input and advice help shape what we do—

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Through you, Chair—sorry to interrupt: What is the current estimate budget allocated for the mental health support or the wellness support that you're stating they're already in training for? I believe you're saying that they're already getting this. Am I correct?

Ms. Karen Ellis: We do have some programs already starting to work, such as our peer support program, which is peer-to-peer support for any kind of traumatic or difficult incident that could happen in a day. That's getting very positive feedback from our front-line people. But I would have to get back to you on the entire set of initiatives. I can take that back. There certainly is a serious investment in care on those pieces.

Also, the government did announce what we call our mental health collaborative tables. We have one for different groups of first responders, whether that's the fire service or whether that's policing—there's also a separate table for corrections.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: That's fair.

How often is mental health training provided to the correctional staff?

Ms. Karen Ellis: Well, for example, I can give you a good illustration in that whenever we have a new cohort coming in to get their basic training to become correctional officers, there will be elements in their training of mental health, and we integrate into other types of mandatory training. We have a cycle of what we call "block training," so that there's a constant refresh over the years that brings in new research, new important pieces that they need to learn about as they do their jobs, so they're thinking about the inmates and how to work with the inmates, but also about self-care and wellness and reaching out the resources that are there to support them when they are having difficulty.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: When I was speaking with some correctional officers—just in the recent future, actually—I've had several conversations because of what this petition has brought to the forefront. My understanding and my personal opinion is that mental health training to correctional officers who are right now in the correctional facilities is not being held to them or given to them—am I under that correct understanding? If it's new recruits, that's one thing, but if it's correctional officers who have been on the job for more than, I don't know, even seven months, that's a little bit much—they should have continual mental health. Are they receiving this?

Ms. Karen Ellis: They do get mental health training in what I referred to as block training. It is a regular cycle of training that existing officers will get on a regular basis, on a regular cycle, and we build into that certain mandatory pieces, and we update that with research that our teams do who work on the wellness programs.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Chairman, if I may—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Yes, please.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'm proud that when I, as Solicitor General, have gone to our correctional facilities, I meet with the local representatives; I sit with them so that we can have a two-way dialogue—that they can be assured that their concerns are being discussed directly with the minister. And I have to tell you that in many cases, they look to this meeting in a positive way—that their concerns are being heard. And the fact that I have a very, very fluid dialogue with their president, Chad Oldfield—I'm proud of that.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Talking is one thing; putting money towards mental health is another. We've lost 10 since 2021, and I think it's very important that current estimate budget allocation for mental health support services for correctional workers must be put in place. In saying that, I'm going to go on.

1440

The Ontario Association of Paramedic Chiefs psychological health and wellness table chair actually works in Niagara, and I represent the riding of St. Catharines, which is in Niagara. She has highlighted to me how effective before-operational-stress programs are for all front-line workers, especially paramedics. In Niagara, we spend \$3 million to \$5 million on WSIB, just on mental stress injuries alone, in a \$40-million budget. This is not a lot. If more prevention work was mandated, individuals could receive the mental health support before they are completely in a crisis—this, then, creates major hiring and retention issues. In Niagara, I'm hearing that the amount of applicants to become a paramedic has lowered drastically since COVID—in the past three years, we have seen this lowered more. The fact is, police services has \$20,000 allocated for psychological health, while EMS only has \$2,000 to \$3,000. The rate of return to investing and providing support proactively would be completely huge; we would see it.

So how much is the government going to be allocating on before-operational-stress programs for our front-line workers—paramedics and ambulance workers, especially? Given the estimated cost of \$3 million to \$5 million for mental stress injuries within the WSIB framework, what has this government conducted in studies, reports or consultations with municipalities to assess ways to improve proactive mental health services, to mitigate these costs for our paramedics?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Again, I can't comment on the paramedics—which is part of the Ministry of Health.

We recognize that there are unique challenges of working in the correctional system, and corrections employees see and experience—and we know this. They're exposed to situations on a regular basis that can have serious and long-standing impacts on their mental health and well-being. That's exactly why the ministry has implemented an employee wellness strategy through the Corrections Employee Wellness Unit, in collaboration with OPSEU. The strategy spans a range of initiatives specifically for correctional staff, such as the resiliency training for front-line staff, mental health training for leaders, a province-wide peer-support program, and, I might add—this is important too—a targeted family day program to support staff and their families.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, Minister.

You should know you only have 22 seconds left, and you might want to consider posing that question in the next round.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you. I do want to comment, though, in my 22 seconds, that I believe paramedics are front-line staff workers. I know it falls under the Ministry of Health, but the Ministry of the Solicitor General should also take into consideration that they are front-line staff as well—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Excuse me, MPP Stevens. That concludes the opposition's time.

We're now going to move over to the government members. MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you, Minister, for your remarks earlier today.

I want to ask you a little bit more about auto theft. I know that you addressed that in your opening remarks. I'm from Burlington, Ontario, part of Halton region, and my area has been particularly hard hit with an increasing number of auto thefts over the years—although I understand the numbers are starting to go down this year, so there is some positive news. But we're getting news about stolen vehicles across Ontario every week; specifically, in the GTA. Earlier this month, Halton police laid 55 charges in an alleged auto theft ring.

Maybe you can tell us why auto thefts are so prevalent and what your ministry is doing to help keep Ontarians' property safe.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: To my colleague: People stealing our cars are becoming so bold and relentless. It's something that we have never seen like this—we've never seen it before.

Our government came forward last year, thanks to Premier Ford's leadership, in announcing the \$51-million auto theft grant. We made the announcement in Halton region. We made it there because we wanted to show Ontario and the GTHA how seriously we take this issue. The funds are already flowing, the \$18 million—because it was \$51 million over three years, so the first \$18 million is out. It's going to police services to provide them with the tools and the additional personnel they need. It is absolutely paying dividends—because we haven't just looked at it through only the eyes of the grant, but we've looked at it with how else we can deter people from stealing our cars. That's why the Ministry of Transportation, through the Minister of Transportation, came forward with a bold announcement, again, in the spring that deters people from stealing cars, because you could lose your licence for a very long time; you could lose your licence forever. So our efforts are paying dividends here.

To the member, Mr. Chairman—we're doing more. We are advocating morning, noon and night to the federal government that they have a responsibility as well, and we're working collaboratively with them. When I attended the national auto theft summit, we had a perfect opportunity, which we utilized, to tell the federal government, "You have to step it up at the borders. You have to step it up at the Port of Montreal. You have to step it up at the intermodals and rail yards. You have to treat the outbound cargo with the same level of scrutiny that you're looking at the inbound cargo." I believe our co-operation with the federal government will help us continue on our trend of reducing auto theft.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you. I'll pass it on to my colleague.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thanks for the opportunity.

Minister, I would like to start by conveying my heartfelt thank you for your support to the front-line officers. You've been at Peel Regional Police events multiple times. I know that for you it is not just a job—it is your

passion and commitment to the service. So I just wanted to start by saying thank you.

And thank you for making those wonderful various investments. Whether it is \$267 million in community safety and policing, \$24 million in bail compliance, \$125 million in court security, \$48 million in children from sexual abuse and exploitation on the Internet grant—all these investments are vital for our community.

Where I really want to touch base is about the small businesses. As you know, Minister, small businesses are the backbone of our communities, offering vital products and services that cater to the unique needs of local residents. These people are not multi-millionaires, rich people; these are people who make ends meet.

I'll give you a small example: Right at Derry Road and Goreway, one of my residents owns a cellphone shop. In one of those incidents, two people saw him carrying his product from the car, bringing it inside. They saw how he was doing it, so they were capturing that. One of them came in and asked about different phones while the other was trying to make sure that once this guy was distracted—and he took away his car. After that, the shop owner called me. He was very excited. He said, "I have an opportunity to help and support the community. I have all the videos, the faces, everything of those two thieves." The police came, and the first thing the police said was, "Oh, this guy. He's actually on bail." That's where the problem is, Minister.

I know after pressure from Canada's Premiers, the federal government finally made amendments to the Criminal Code in regard to bail. Still, we continue hearing stories about these criminals walking free. So, my question to you is, how can I go back and assure those residents? What is this government doing to make sure that this does not happen?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank my colleague from Mississauga–Malton.

I've said this before: I don't recall, I've never seen a government other than our government, led by Premier Ford, that has prioritized our public safety to the extent that we have.

1450

We came forward last year with a very bold announcement that the \$112 million to get these violent and repeat offenders off our streets, through the Bail Compliance and Warrant Apprehension Grant, would pay dividends. Again, we're turning to our law enforcement partners, our OPP, our great municipal services, and your police service that just celebrated 50 years—Peel Regional Police is a great example. We're sending a message that we will find these people who violate our bail and court-ordered conditions, and we're going to lock them up where they belong. It's unacceptable that you should have any constituent or any business in your community that feels threatened—that they're under attack by a violent and repeat offender. So what we're doing is, we're saying that the \$112 million in new funding will enhance efforts to prevent violent and repeat offenders from endangering our communities.

Again, I turn to the Premier's appointment of our Associate Minister of Auto Theft and Bail Reform, Minister McGregor, who will be diving into the issues with greater scrutiny to ensure that Ontario will always be able to advocate for meaningful bail reform.

What the Premier's leadership did, when he coalesced our Premiers from other provinces and territorial leaders to pen a letter to the Prime Minister, I believe, was singularly so important for the federal government to move forward with the bail reform changes that they did. We're not where we need to be, but it's a good first step.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you, Minister, for your presentation today.

I want to talk a little about my constituents in Ajax. We have people who reach out to our office very regularly about policing and police being in our communities and a substantial amount of police who are not only available on the force but are actually available to police or communities—to be visible. We talk about community policing.

My question to you is, how are we as a government addressing that shortage—of seeing policing in our communities?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Mr. Chair, to my colleague from Ajax: Again, we've had limited abilities until today to put more boots on the ground. Through the visionary approach by Premier Ford, where we looked at our Ontario Police College and we looked—how we can move it forward? How can we get more boots on the ground? We looked at the obstacles and barriers to entry—and that was a bill that somebody would have to pay to go there. Today's bill would be about \$17,000. So the first thing we did is, we wiped out the tuition. The second thing we did is, we wiped out impediments, barriers to entry, that would have to compel somebody to have a post-secondary degree or diploma—finding out, as we know, that almost 95% of the people do, but we wanted to remove the barriers of entry. We wanted to send a positive message that you can become a police officer and it can be a great passion; it can be a great career. We will always have the backs of everyone who keeps Ontario safe, and we've said it.

Through the changes that we made at the Ontario Police College, instead of graduating, when I became minister, about 1,400 cadets/recruits a year, we're now well over 2,000—we're 2,100; and we're going to go even higher. The demand is unprecedented. Whether it's to the riding of MPP Pierre, in Halton regional police, or whether it's your riding, in Durham—Halton Regional Police Service, Durham Regional Police Service, Peel Regional Police, York Regional Police and the others will have greater opportunity to send those who want to become police officers to the college, to help keep their communities safe.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you, Minister and deputies, for appearing today.

Thank you, also, to our fearless leaders in our community who help to carry out this portfolio. Thank you for your attendance and all your hard work.

Minister, I'd like to ask you about the evolution of the Community Safety and Policing Act. As a former mayor of the town of Collingwood, I was a member of our police services board when this legislation was first brought forward. I know that this government has continued that evolution and continued to work on making sure that our police force and the constables on the ground represent the communities they work in. And I thank you for your answer about the changes you've made to the recruitment and training of OPP officers.

I know there's a number of significant grants that are being made, like the Community Safety and Policing Grant of over \$267 million over the next three years.

I'm wondering if you can explain to the committee how those investments are going to improve our community policing service and protect Ontarians, wherever they live in this province.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I very much appreciate the question from my colleague.

When we look, as an example, at the CCTV grant—I've seen first-hand, most recently in Guelph, the impact that that grant has, by allowing Guelph Police Service to have greater focus and clarity on what's going on in their communities, through CCTVs. That's one example.

We can talk about, as well, the mobile crisis response teams grants. We know how impactful those can be in the communities. The grants are essential, but the grants are inclusionary. It allows police services throughout Ontario—municipal, OPP and First Nations police services—to apply for grants, to have programs that will be best suited in their communities to help them.

I think of the victim services grant of over \$4 million that is very, very important throughout Ontario.

I'm so pleased that when we see grant applications be announced, it helps.

I think of the NG911 grant that has allowed municipalities throughout Ontario to prepare for the future. We're actually doing amazing with this because, as I've toured Ontario and gone to call centres—and I want to give a shout-out to those amazing telecommunicators, those 911 call operators, the people who are never seen but are heard when we need them the most.

These grants are having an impact every single day.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I just want to follow up in sharing a story that happened this week in my community of Collingwood. We had a very, I would say, heroic, proactive measure by our OPP detachment, wherein a former CCI student who is 18 years of age was tracked down when a student approached our former student resource officer in the community to advise that this individual had made threats against the school and, at that point in time, was actually headed to the school with banned firearms and ammunition. He was apprehended with another individual one block from the school—tremendous work that prevented a very devastating event.

I'm wondering if you can speak to us about how important it is that our community policing has that connection to the community and interacts with our student population, interacts with our younger students. What type

of programs are we implementing or supporting across the province to make this happen?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: One of the most important things is the Safer and Vital Communities Grant, and the theme is exactly what the member spoke of: preventing hate-motivated crimes through community collaboration. I can't help but say, as I've had the privilege of attending so many police services in Ontario, that almost every municipal police service I've had the privilege of visiting—this collaboration with community is absolutely essential. The member is totally right. That's why this grant will be very important.

I think it goes to what I said at the march past last week. I had the honour of marching again past the most recent class. I said to them that each recruit, each cadet, has the power to make a difference in their communities' life each and every day. When I went earlier this week up to NAPS, Nishnawbe Aski Police Service, I met with the latest class, cohort, of recruits. One young recruit said to me, "The reason I wanted to join was to make a difference in my community. I wanted to wear the uniform to show the community that I am there to help them feel safe." And it was a tremendous experience.

1500

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Minister, thank you for those answers. We were talking about the bail reforms, and you gave us an assurance that you would continue to keep fighting for it. Thank you for that assurance. I know you'll be working on it.

What we're saying is, considering the number of repeat violent offenders who should be behind bars—so, on one side, we're saying we want to do that, but then the other side is the capacity issue. The capacity of correctional facilities has to increase to ensure that those who are making these offences are kept there.

Looking at that capacity issue, my question is very simple: What is the government doing? What is the strategy to achieve that capacity issue?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: To my colleague from Mississauga–Malton: We made an announcement earlier this year, and I think it's worth restating why was this so important. We are going to reopen the 110 beds at the Regional Intermittent Centre in London. We are going to open the 320 beds at the Toronto Intermittent Centre. We are going to build the extension in Quinte. We are going to build double the capacity in Brockville. And we're going to continue to look at other opportunities that we have. It's absolutely essential that we continue to do so.

The greatest example is what I just saw this past Monday, when I went to Thunder Bay and I saw for myself the state of construction of our new \$1.2-billion, 345-bed facility in the lands of the Thunder Bay Correctional Complex. It's a state-of-the-art complex, and it augments the most recent modular build that we have there—50-plus beds, a similar-type facility in Kenora.

So the government recognizes that this is just a continuance of making sure that we have the capacity to keep our communities safe—and that's exactly what our commun-

ity wants. Our community wants to feel safe. Our community wants violent and repeat offenders to be locked up and to be put behind bars, so they can feel safe. Our government will spare no expense when it comes to maintaining our inherent rights that are fulfilled—to keep our communities safe.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Anand, you have 42 seconds, sir.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you again for giving me the opportunity.

Minister, I do not have any further questions, but I would like to conclude by making this statement: Thank you for providing the support to Ontario's correctional services, with the capacity, tools and resources needed to keep our communities safe and maintain the security and the safety of staff and individuals in custody. Thank you for supporting police services and all the front-line officers to dismantle organized crime, crack down on auto theft, and keep repeat and violent offenders off the street. Thank you again for all your service, and thank you for everything you, along with your team—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, MPP Anand.

We're back to the official opposition, please. MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you, Chair, and through you to the minister: Understaffing levels in Ontario jails mean that we're seeing more individuals placed in solitary confinement. This is a form of protective custody. They may be individuals who are targeted by other inmates, and they are maybe suicidal, but they're there, largely placed for their own safety. But it oftentimes ends up eroding their mental health, being placed in solitary, especially for those who haven't broken any rules.

Minister, there have been broad commitments from this government as well as the federal government to end solitary confinement, to end that practice, which is seen as a form of torture by international law and agencies. But I'm interested, Minister, in what allocations your government has put aside to make sure that situations such as solitary confinement used to deal with the understaffing no longer happen in the future.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: There are circumstances where separating individuals from the general inmate population for short periods can be necessary for health, safety or other security reasons.

As a result of the excellent work done by our correctional staff, we continue to see substantial reductions in the length of time that inmates experience segregation conditions. Most segregation placements are for one day, with the medium length also being as short as possible.

That's exactly why we're investing over half a billion dollars to transform the correctional services, through new hires and infrastructure improvements. We are also adding correctional officers, social workers, nurse practitioners, mental health nurses and addiction counsellors, as well as other staff, who will help support individuals with mental health and addiction issues. These enhancements support Ontario's obligation regarding the use of segregation within the correctional facility, and we will—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Minister, I'm going to excuse you. There's a supplementary from MPP Wong-Tam, please, on the same topic.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm interested in knowing how this practice will eventually end—and not necessarily looking at the exception to the rule, when there are outliers.

I'm going to also note that the minister didn't answer my question once again.

I am going to move on to a situation that we are all quite familiar with, and this is the death of Soleiman Faqiri. All members of this committee will remember that this was a young man who died while he was in an Ontario jail. He was also living with a mental health crisis. His death has been marked as a tragedy and entirely preventable, through the coroner's inquest. Mr. Faqiri was in deep crisis. He had been diagnosed with a schizoaffective disorder. His family as well as workers who were inside the jails were begging for him to be taken to the hospital, and repeated requests had been denied. Instead, Mr. Faqiri was pepper-sprayed, shackled, and he had his face covered in a spit hood. His death has remained this horrible and difficult stain on the ministry's history here, and I know that no one in this room would want to see anything like that repeated ever again.

My question to the minister is, what is the budget line for supporting individuals in mental health crisis in correctional facilities, and how can you determine that it is enough to meet the actual need in the facilities?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Any death is too many, and our hearts always are with the families of the loved ones.

What I can say is that our ministry takes this very, very, very seriously, and that's why we believe that we've moved in the right direction by hiring 2,200 new correctional officers, by investing the half a billion dollars in infrastructure improvements, by putting more staff in place—and I spoke about it in the member's last question—to hire more nurses, to hire chaplains, to have the Native Inmate Liaison Officers, to make sure that we have the staff in our facilities to absolutely reduce deaths in our facilities.

It's a tragedy beyond measure.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Minister, I am very interested in knowing how the spending of this ministry has changed since 2016, which is when Mr. Faqiri died in government custody, and whether or not your ministry has acted on the proportionate number of 57 recommendations from the coroner's report.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Yes, we have acted on the vast majority of the recommendations in the report. The purpose of the report is to reduce future deaths in custody. That's exactly why, again, we've hired 2,200 new correctional officers.

Mr. Chairman, unfortunately, this passing happened under another government's watch, when the prior government, previous to our government, starved the correctional system, brought it to its knees, did not invest in the required programs, did not contemplate how we would expand facilities like we have.

That's why we're building our new facility in Thunder Bay. That's why we're going to reopen the London intermittent centre and the Toronto Intermittent Centre. That's why we're taking these steps. We've come a long, long way since 2016-17 and before that—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you, Minister. MPP Wong-Tam, please.

1510

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: This brings me back to my original question about the ministry levelling a \$191-million underspending, as well as the 15% spending cut. I know that the minister hasn't quite given me the answer that I'm looking for with respect to the spending differentiation. There's a suggestion that there has been more spending and not less.

I'm going to move on since I didn't get the answer to that question.

I want to speak about the justice system, because we are here at the justice committee. I certainly recognize, and legal observers and practitioners of the law recognize that there's a significant backlog in the courts. We are seeing this across every single court and tribunal component, which I know is under the Ministry of the Attorney General—but I think we can all recognize that's what the thinking person will see. When you have the courts that are backed up, you're going to have more people who are waiting for trial. Some of those individuals are waiting in custody for their trial date, and those trial dates are now—my goodness, it's not just a few months anymore; it's now years. And we're seeing serious cases—criminal investigations that have taken a lot of time and energy to research, to investigate, to prosecute—all being tossed out.

I'm curious to know whether or not the Solicitor General has spoken to the Attorney General to address how clearing up the court backlog can also alleviate the overcrowding and horrible conditions that are now in the corrections facilities.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Chairman, through you: That's a question of court matters that are a question for the Attorney General.

What I can say is, that's exactly why we've moved in the right direction. That's exactly why we've hired over 2,200 new correctional officers. That's exactly why we believe in building the new capacity in Thunder Bay. That's why we're building the new—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: The minister has very clearly stated the recent hires. I didn't get the disaggregated breakdown of that, but that's not what I'm drilling down on. I'm drilling down on the fact that we need to have two ministries working together, because not only are the courts backlogged, but we are now seeing significant overcrowding in corrections facilities. There has to be coordination between the two—and if the ministers can't see that each one affects the other one, I think that we're going to see this increasing crisis in the justice system and in the corrections system continue to spiral.

So I'm interested in knowing, Minister, if you have spoken to the Attorney General about the challenges that are in the court system that are affecting your ministry and if there is going to be a coordinated effort to address the two crises.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, I think, Mr. Chairman, the government's priority on taking public safety so seriously is really what is important—that people in our communities have to feel safe.

Interjection.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Specifically to what makes up the population in our correctional facilities—and I spoke about it—it's people who have committed an act of criminality or are awaiting trial, or somebody who has been sentenced to two years less a day. That's why we are continuing to expand our capacity, in London, in Toronto, in Brockville, in Quinte, in Thunder Bay, in Kenora, as examples—to make sure that we continue to have the capacity to do that.

I might add, Mr. Chair—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): No, I'm going to stop you there, sir. Thank you very much.

MPP Wong-Tam, I want to add that the minister does need a length of time to respond. I'm timing the responses and I'm timing the questions, and I'm trying to find a balance, as we talked about at the very beginning of the meeting.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Chair, I want to say thank you for the work that you're doing. I recognize that it's not easy to define that balance.

I want to just summarize for the minister—he did not answer my question. I asked whether or not the two ministers, the Solicitor General and the Attorney General, have been working together in collaboration, understanding that the two ministries have to work together in order for us to alleviate the overcrowding in the jails as well as—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Saunderson, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Yes, I do, Mr. Chair. This is an estimates hearing, and the opposition is entitled to ask the minister about his expenditures forecasted for the upcoming year. It's not a policy convention. And certainly, inter-ministerial discussions that don't impact the estimates or the financing, I think, are outside the scope of this question.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): All right. I take that view, and I land on it.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you, Chair. I think that's exactly why—because the two ministries have not been talking, have not been coordinating—we don't see anything in the estimates to that effect.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Point of order, please.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Just because the question is out of scope doesn't mean she's entitled to speculate on whether or not those discussions have happened. This is a questioning about the estimates and the proposed budget for the upcoming year.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for that.

I'd like to remind all the honourable members that their remarks should be kept relevant to the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of the Solicitor General. With this in mind, I would ask all members to focus their comments on the matter currently before this committee. That's why, in my introductory remarks, I included that paragraph—I asked my Clerk to include it earlier this morning, just to minimize what is occurring at the present time. So I would just ask that you just reflect on that a little bit. I think the committee meeting has been moving along reasonably well thus far. I'd like it to continue in that vein, please.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much, Chair. Continuing in the vein of the estimates and wanting to make sure that we see those allocations put into the budget, so that we all know where the money is coming from to ensure that all the expenses that are anticipated for the year are there—that's why I'm asking these questions. If ministries don't talk to each other, oh, dear, we are in trouble.

My next question is from a mother. Her name is Anna. She has contacted my office on multiple occasions regarding her son, who is in Toronto South Detention Centre. Her son has now been awaiting a trial. He's on remand for mischief, and if convicted, he will only have to serve for 30 days. He is already in custody for much longer than 30 days. Anna gets almost no communication from Toronto South Detention Centre. She often wonders whether or not her son is safe inside the facility while he awaits his trial.

The number of Ontarians on remand—and just a reminder to the minister that these are not convicted individuals, and they are presumed innocent—in this province has stubbornly increased from 70% to 72% of those who are in custody for too long, and this number keeps increasing. Has the ministry done a cost analysis, an estimate of what it costs to keep this cohort in the province's facilities?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, Mr. Chair, please let me repeat again why a person is in our facility, for the record: A person is in our facility because they have committed an act of criminality and have been sentenced to two years less a day or are awaiting trial.

Our priority of our government is to keep our communities safe. Some of the people who are being held on remand are violent and repeat offenders. Our community has spoken. We don't want to have anyone in our communities feeling unsafe. I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that when I go in my own community—I'm the proud MPP of a north Toronto riding. This is a priority for our government—to make sure that our communities are safe.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Minister, I'll remind you that 82% of those individuals who are currently in custody are actually waiting for trial. They have not been found guilty—and their custody time is now longer than the actual time that they would serve if convicted of a guilty charge.

I didn't hear the answer from the minister—whether or not he has been able to do tracking, an understanding, a cost analysis of how much it's costing the ministry to keep

that cohort of remand inmates in custody while they await trial.

I'm going to move on. I think community safety is something that we all care very deeply about. In my conversations with my local police division—they are struggling to stay ahead of the curve. There are lots of challenges for them, and they have oftentimes and cited the challenges in the court system and the bail supervision system. Oftentimes, this label of “catch-and-release”—they're doing their job, which is the heavy and difficult work of front-line policing, but they're very, very frustrated that people are going in and then coming out, and worse than that, they've cited that there's a lack of resources for bail supervision and bail enforcement.

So I'm very interested in knowing the allocations put into this budget, specifically, that will meet the real need of bail supervision for Ontario, and whether or not the minister plans to spend adequately the money needed to have proper bail supervision teams out there to keep Ontarians safe.

1520

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, Mr. Chair, when it comes to the seriousness that our government takes bail compliance—I just look to my colleague, our new associate minister, whose task will be with great scrutiny to see what more can we do. I'd look to the \$112 million—the Bail Compliance and Warrant Apprehension Grant. I also want to mention the \$48 million that we used to double the size of the OPP-led Repeat Offender Parole Enforcement Squad from five to 10. There are measures that we're taking that at the end of the day will undoubtedly reduce the number of violent and repeat offenders on our streets.

We don't want to see the revolving door. We don't want to see somebody who has committed a heinous crime out on our street tomorrow and doing it again. That's why our Premier, Premier Ford, has spoken. People like that do not belong on our streets. They belong in jail, and that's where they need to be.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Recognizing that we all care about community safety, we all care about our front-line workers, including front-line officers—they are doing the work that you and I don't do. I can go to work every single day and not wear a bulletproof vest. I know I'm going to go home safely to my family; they do not.

I think about the tragic murder of OPP Constable Greg Pierzchala, someone who was new on the job and really keen to build a remarkable career in law enforcement but whose life was cut short largely because of the failure of the bail and supervision and enforcement system.

So, here we are at estimates, and I think it's really important for us to understand from the minister what type of programs you are putting in place to ensure that individuals are going to be kept out of communities, for those who are violent offenders—and also making sure that you have the right amount of resources, money allocated in the budget, to ensure that that takes place, because I didn't hear that number.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Minister, you have less than a minute for the response.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you.

I want to also acknowledge the tragedy of Grzegorz “Greg” Pierzchala, who was lost almost two years ago, in December 2022. It was a horrible loss for the OPP, and our thoughts are with his family.

I look to the \$267 million through the Community Safety and Policing Grant. I look to many grants—the Safer and Vital Communities Grant. I look at grants that we have come out with that will help local police services.

The OPP and First Nations police services work towards providing their communities with benefit so that we don't have issues like Greg Pierzchala—a life that was cut short. Our thoughts will always be with his family.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): We're now back to the government, please. MPP Barnes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Minister, I want to build on MPP Wong-Tam's line of questioning in regard to adequately funding police—and we see that's happening right across the province, where a lot of police services are battling for funding to hire officers, and we know that this rests with decisions around police boards and councillors. I just want to give you the opportunity to expand on that a bit, because I think the concern that she has brought up is very valid, around adequately funding our police services and giving them the resources that they need to do their job effectively.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: To my colleague and friend from Ajax: We can't have situations somewhere in Ontario—that a police service board doesn't stand with their police service, that a police service board feels that the police service should be prevented from growing. That's why our government, led by Premier Ford, will never apologize for standing with our public safety personnel morning, noon and night. We have to look to the police service boards for having the same commitment—the same backs of our police officers that we have. And it's incumbent on them to work together with their command leaders, with their chiefs, to make sure that at the time the budget analysis is done—some police services have to go before their councils or municipalities or regions once a year and some don't; some have a multi-year budget. But it's very important that they have a good understanding from the chief how the municipality is growing as example, that would require them to hire more officers.

Your region of Durham is growing, with unprecedented growth, and that will require Durham Regional Police Service to grow along with it.

This is an important point to make: It's incumbent on the police service boards, but the councils as well, the municipalities, to understand that nothing can replicate safe communities, that this is something that will attract business. This will be something that will help us grow our Ontario even stronger, by using and championing our public safety as an exemplar. You can compare us to any other jurisdiction; there's no other jurisdiction anywhere in the world that has taken public safety as seriously as we

have under our leadership of our Premier, and I'm proud of this.

This is why I will always work with our chiefs, with our police service boards very collaboratively and carry a positive message that public safety matters, and we're looking to them and the municipality and the regions to provide the funding that they need. We will be with them, as well, with the government grants that we have that will help augment and provide those extra resources.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Just a follow-up to that: Having been able to connect with police forces across the region, I know there is some innovative programming that is coming forward from policing around social work, around supporting police officers and social workers around mental health and those services. Can you expand on that?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Chair, through you, I'd like to ask our acting deputy minister of public safety to comment.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): For the record, please, your name and your division.

Ms. Sarah Caldwell: I'm Sarah Caldwell. I'm here today as Acting Deputy Solicitor General of community safety.

That's a great question.

One of the things we see most often is the reality of policing and the role that they are playing as part of the health and social system, increasingly. So the mental health collaboration grants really put together social workers, nurses and policing to act as teams in order to address those issues. We're seeing that collaboration across policing, health care—and local design so that it really fits the needs of the community.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Dixon.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Back when I was a crown, particularly in 2016, 2017, 2018, contraband getting into correctional facilities was pretty common, particularly drugs. Back then, it was mostly known as “hooping”; I don't know if there's a new word for it now. A lot of the time, it would be people serving intermittent sentences who would be bringing it into corrections facilities. We also were seeing inmate overdoses, not just from utilizing drugs, but also from the process of smuggling it themselves. We also saw cellphones, weapons—but as a federal crown, I predominantly heard about the drug ones.

I wonder, Minister, if you can comment a little bit more on what we're doing to reduce that contraband. It certainly lessened during COVID, but that's because fewer people were in custody in general.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Mr. Chair: The member from Kitchener South—Hespeler is correct. By reducing the amount of contraband in our facilities, we're keeping the facilities safer, which means we're keeping the correctional officers and our staff safer and we're keeping the inmates safer. We're doing a lot, and I can tell you, as Solicitor General, as I've toured the province, I've seen it for myself. I've seen the ion scanners in our adult correctional facilities that detect and identify trace elements of drugs. I've seen the enhanced screening process through the body scanners. And I've made great

efforts, again, to listen to our correctional officers, to hear it from themselves how much this has benefited—but also that there are other tools that are being used to further reduce the contraband.

1530

We're making a lot of progress. It goes back to the government's hiring of 2,200 new correctional officers. It goes back to the government's investment of over a half a billion dollars and, really, the seriousness with which the government takes public safety.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Hamid.

MPP Zee Hamid: Thank you, Minister, for all your answers and, honestly, for everything you do to keep us safe and for representing our police services so well.

We have the blessing, honestly, and the pleasure of having great front-line officers in this province who do a lot to keep us safe, working long hours and often going as far as risking their own lives to save others.

Tomorrow I have the honour of attending the Halton Police Foundation's gala to show support.

Can you share with the committee what our government is doing to financially support police services in this province?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I say to my colleague and friend from Milton that the government has the backs of everyone who keeps us safe. We do it every day, but we show respect by, firstly, encouraging people to come forward to become police officers, to appreciate the work that they are doing, to make sure that they have the training at the Ontario Police College which is essential for them to go out to their communities and to carry on with additional training in the municipal, First Nations and OPP services.

Mr. Chair, with your permission, I'd like to ask, through the acting deputy, the commissioner of the OPP to address the question.

Ms. Sarah Caldwell: I'd like to turn it over to the commissioner of the OPP, Thomas Carrique.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Commissioner, welcome to the committee once again. Your full name, sir.

Mr. Thomas Carrique: I'm Thomas Carrique, Ontario Provincial Police commissioner.

Yes, there has been lots of support that has been offered to our front line. Thank you to all members of Parliament who have recognized the difficult and dangerous job that our front-line officers do and how essential it is.

I've heard the minister speak to numerous grants, training, tools, technology and the support that's being provided to police services, and those are all essential elements ensuring that our officers do remain safe—because if they don't remain safe, our communities can't be safe.

Thank you for your question.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Hamid.

MPP Zee Hamid: Thank you for your service and that of your officers. Thank you for that answer.

And, Minister, thank you for your leadership in representing our police force.

I was wondering if you would touch base on some of the community safety grants and funding programs that are available for OPP and other front-line officers.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Mr. Chair: The grants are an essential tool that the government is using to augment resources from municipal, OPP and First Nations police services to fight crime even harder. That's represented by the Community Safety and Policing Grant. That's represented by the Preventing Auto Thefts Grant. That's represented by the Proceeds of Crime Front Line Policing Grant. That's represented by the Bail Compliance and Warrant Apprehension Grant, the mobile crisis response team grant, the reduced impaired driving grant—and the list goes on.

The bottom line is that these monies help these services. When you help these services, you help the local communities have the resources, and they make a big difference. The fact that our numbers are going down on the 2024 number of cars being stolen against last year—it's because the grants are paying dividends; it's because of the seriousness with which we're taking it. Grants are essential, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Saunderson.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I just want to follow up on this bail reform and the tragic death of Constable Pierzchala.

I attended two funerals in Barrie—the first was for two South Simcoe Police Service constables, Constable Morgan Russell and Constable Devon Michael Northrup, who were also cut down in their prime. In fact, I think it was Constable Morgan Russell who was staying on beyond his time to mentor young officers and died in the line of duty—and then, of course, the tragic story of Greg Pierzchala.

I just want to back up a little and set the stage. This is, obviously, largely federal jurisdiction. We certainly know that since 2015, Bill C-75 and Bill C-5 have had dramatic impacts on criminal justice across the country. In fact, in 2022 alone, 256 people were murdered by a criminal who was out on release, and violent crime increased by 39% that year alone.

With that being said, I know that this government has made extensive investments—you've outlined some of them, Minister—including the \$24 million on the Bail Compliance and Warrant Apprehension Grant, the \$48 million on the expansion of the OPP repeat offender enforcement squad, and of course, in the Ministry of the Attorney General, \$26 million is being invested to create intensive serious violent crime bail teams, to specialize in this area and try to cut it off right at the JP level.

We also have heard through this committee, with the IPV hearings, about the work being done on the Bail Compliance Dashboard, and I'm wondering if you could explain to us what that entails and how that will assist our front-line officers in enforcing bail compliance.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I think the member is absolutely correct; the bail dashboard is an important tool. It's a piece of technology that will allow police services—municipal, First Nations and the OPP—to talk in real time, so if a person is breaking their bail conditions, there is real

time to help apprehend this person before they create more havoc.

Through the acting deputy minister, I'd like the commissioner of the OPP to address it further.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Deputy?

Ms. Sarah Caldwell: Thank you, Chair. I turn to the commissioner.

Mr. Thomas Carrique: The Bail Compliance Dashboard allows police services right across the province to have access to data that was otherwise siloed.

For example, if I live in Orillia and I attend Toronto on this particular date, I'm arrested, I'm charged, I'm released on bail with conditions and I go back to Orillia, there is no way that a front-line OPP officer working in Orillia would know that I was residing in the Orillia community, unless they had occasion to run my name through CPIC. Now that information is available to every front-line police officer. It shows up on a tablet in their car. It shows up on a smart phone when they get close to the location where that offender is supposed to reside or work, as per their condition. It details the conditions, so it empowers the officer to be able to follow up and ensure that they are adhering to those conditions. We are then able to case-manage that offender and hopefully prevent them from violating their conditions, but take them back into custody if they do.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Saunderson, you have five minutes left for questions.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you for that answer, Commissioner.

I know that when you attended here on the bail reform hearings, you said that Constable Pierzchala's death was preventable. Do you think that with these measures that this government has enacted and the compliance dashboard, we could have prevented Constable Pierzchala's death?

Mr. Thomas Carrique: Through you, Mr. Chair: I do not believe that the Bail Compliance Dashboard would have prevented Constable Pierzchala's death. That was the administration of justice—that resulted in that offender being released into custody. He was known to police. His conditions were known. Police were actively pursuing him. So that would not have prevented his death, but I do believe it will make police officers right across this province amongst the safest in all of Canada.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Just to be clear, then, what you're saying in your answer is that it's a flaw in the criminal justice system that allowed this individual to get back on the streets, that resulted in Constable Pierzchala's death.

Mr. Thomas Carrique: Through you, Mr. Chair: That is what I am saying, yes.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you very much, Commissioner.

To the minister: I know we've got our fire chief here, and I know there has been a lot of work done on that aspect of your ministry, and I'm wondering if you could just take us through—because I think, in your comments, you were sort of cut off just at that point in time. Can you tell us

about the efforts that your ministry is going through to support and shore up our fire prevention operations in the province, and particularly in our northern communities?

1540

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Yes.

I'm delighted to have fire marshal Jon Pegg here, and after I offer some remarks, I'd welcome him, through the acting deputy minister, to address us.

I think it's very important that our government has led by example, by coming forward, by meeting with our stakeholders and by making a substantial investment, an announcement, as we did, in September 2023, of close to \$35 million to specifically acquire 17 new fire trucks and firefighting equipment for northern Ontario, including two new mobile live training units.

I would appreciate if the fire marshal would talk about his dialogue and co-operation with smaller municipalities. He goes to extraordinary efforts to maintain a dialogue of reassurance so that when it comes to training in a specific municipality for a volunteer firefighter, as an example, they learn and are certified to what they need in their municipality. Through the acting deputy minister—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Deputy, please.

Ms. Sarah Caldwell: I turn to the fire marshal, Jon Pegg.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Welcome, Fire Marshal Pegg.

Mr. Jon Pegg: My name is Jon Pegg. I'm the fire marshal of Ontario.

As the minister said, we take meeting with our northern communities and our municipalities very seriously. We constantly look at the challenges that they have.

The government will be well aware of mandatory certification that has come in. We've seen a record number of certification exams. We're now not only training firefighters right across the province, but we're making sure that they take the test to know that they are certified.

The minister mentioned the mobile live fire training units, and I would say that has been an absolute game-changer for firefighters across the province. Before I was in this role, I was a fire chief and in the fire service for many years, and I can tell you that the biggest struggle we had was how to train firefighters and give them real-life experience but keep them safe in doing so. These units provide that training. We take them right to the department. It has been a very big success, in sharing resources. We have First Nations attending training. But for me, as a fire marshal—it allows us to train in a very safe manner. It's theatrical smoke, so if a brand new firefighter panics and they take off their mask, they're not breathing toxins. We can blow the smoke out instantly and make sure that they are safe. We are seeing a record number of firefighters, up to 10,000 firefighters a year, being trained on these units, which is an absolute game-changer in taking the fire service to the next level.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Just my brief follow-up—and I know there's not much time left, so I'll preface my question, Minister, with a thank you from my three fire departments that you visited recently, as well as the two

police stations, OPP detachments, that you visited in my riding.

I know there has been a lot of work and concern about the health of our front-line firefighters and the work they do, and I'm wondering if you can just talk about this government's efforts to expand the presumptive coverage for firefighters battling cancer.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Through you, Mr. Chair: It was a pleasure to visit the Clearview fire service, Wasaga Beach and Collingwood. I want to say how much I appreciated their warm welcome when I stopped the car in those communities.

I think the changes that we've made to presumptive cancers—is to treat our firefighters with respect. This is part of our commitment to work closely with the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs, with the Ontario association of professional firefighters, and it has been a privilege to work alongside these stakeholders.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): We're now going to turn to the official opposition. You'll have 18 minutes and 40 seconds. MPP Stevens, please.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Chair. I'll use the extra 40 seconds and my other 22 to make it a minute.

Through you to the Minister: When the Legislature passed the PUPS Act, time and again, we saw advocates like Donna Power from the Humane Initiative and service providers like Ontario welfare network point out that without more resources for inspectors, the regulatory changes will be for naught.

And 2023, a record year of—animals were taken into shelter. In fact, the FAO analysis of ministry expenditures appears to show a \$16-million reduction to animal welfare services, from \$20.1 million down to only an estimate of \$4 million. This is actually reflected on page 73 of the estimates. Is that right? Can you confirm the numbers for 2023-24 and 2024-25?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank the member for the question.

Firstly, I just want to say that our government's priority of bringing forward one of the toughest animal welfare pieces of legislation—animal “welfare,” that's the word; it's the welfare of the animals that was represented by the PAWS Act.

I want to also acknowledge that, just since January 2020, a staggering almost 91,000 inspections and investigations have taken place, and resulted in over 12,000 orders being issued and over 1,000 charges being laid and almost 9,000 animals removed from situations negatively impacting their welfare.

I can tell the member this: I've had the privilege of seeing our animal welfare inspectors in their training. These are some of the most committed and incredible individuals who have a passion for animal welfare.

I'm proud that our government came forward and then we followed it with the PUPS Act, to get these dog breeders who are breeding dogs improperly, in horrible conditions, and that we've taken a tough line on people who feel it's okay to mistreat our animals—it's not.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Has your ministry conducted any studies on the impact of resource shortages on the ability of AWS inspectors to enforce the PUPS Act effectively? Yes or no?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Our government's public safety is a priority, and that includes animal welfare. That's why, just in the last four years, the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, the PAWS Act, came into being. That is why we have our animal welfare services division in the ministry—that's why each day they're working all in the four corners of Ontario, and that's why, just in the last four years, we've had 91,000 inspections. This is something that we will continue to invest in in the years ahead, because it's important.

I have to tell you, just to look at the seriousness with which our government has taken animal welfare and to see the cadre of individuals who have come forward to be inspectors is very special.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: There are 100 animal welfare inspectors who are responsible for enforcing all animal welfare laws all across Ontario. I just want to ask, how does the ministry plan to address the workload strain? This is an awful lot of work, a large workload, and it could be very straining for just 100 AWS inspectors.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I respectfully disagree with the member's assertion that there are only 100 animal welfare inspectors.

What I can say is that we have inspectors throughout our province who are working very hard. Our legislation is second to none. And the tone and the expectation that we have as a government to make sure that our population feels reassured that we can love and care for our pets—that's great, but if somebody violates the intent of loving and caring for their pets, that's not great and it's not acceptable. That's where animal welfare services will step in and they will issue a compliance order, if required; they will lay a charge, if required; and they will remove the animal for safety reasons, if required.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Are there any plans to hire more inspectors in the upcoming budget? You questioned me on my 100 PAWS inspectors to be able to investigate all the province—and I see an 80% reduction in their operating budget. So will there be any plans to hire more inspectors in this upcoming budget?

1550

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'll turn it over to our acting deputy minister for a response as it relates to the question.

Ms. Sarah Caldwell: Thank you, member, for the question.

Through you, Chair: We take the responsibility of enforcement of the PAWS Act and, when it comes fully into force, all of the components of the PUPS Act, very seriously. There's a constant re-evaluation of what the enforcement needs are and a reminder that we work in partnership with municipalities, with police of jurisdiction in the enforcement of the act, so there is always that multiplier impact in terms of—if somebody reports something, if there are concerns, there is a broader network of responders who are part of that work.

In terms of expenses, things often fluctuate depending on the nature of what inspectors are seeing. Large portions of the budget relate to the kinds of housing, services and other supports that an animal can need, and that can change from year to year.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: How many animal inspectors are there?

Ms. Sarah Caldwell: There are over a hundred.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: How many over a hundred? Two?

Ms. Sarah Caldwell: We can take that away.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you. I'm just wondering how many there are, if there aren't a hundred.

Mr. Chair, how many more minutes do I have?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): You have 11 minutes and 16 seconds.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'm going to need to share my time with my colleague.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much, Chair. Through you, back to the minister: Minister, I'd like to go back to the bail reform conversation, specifically around bail supervision, bail enforcement.

I think we all agree that Ontarians deserve a government that will keep those who are dangerous out of our neighbourhoods and off our streets. We need to ensure that the solutions you spoke about are actually going to be properly funded. That, of course, requires adequate funding for bail supervision and proper enforcement, as well as an overall coordination with the justice ministry, and we're not seeing that.

Minister, as you know, when you speak about investments—what I don't hear you speaking about is community-based programs that would ease the burden on correctional institutions that are now overcrowded and that are putting the health and well-being and safety of those in those facilities, including staff, at risk. It is putting those who are incarcerated and the greater community under more duress.

Can you clarify for us how much money is actually going to community-based programs that have been proven to be effective—programs such as the John Howard Society Bail Verification and Supervision Program?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Let me say to my colleague opposite that successful community reintegration is absolutely essential, and for that, our probation and parole officers play an absolute critical role.

The safety and security of our front-line staff is a top priority.

And what I want to acknowledge is, we know that when people are successfully reintegrated in our community, which is an important component of community reintegration, the levels of recidivism drop dramatically. There are a number of—

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Sorry, Chair—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'd like to take my time back, largely because the minister is not answering my question.

My question, Minister—and if you don't have the answer here, then I'd like to have this answer provided to me back as a written response, and I would say that all my questions that I've been asking today should be coming back to me as a written reply. My question, again: How much money are you putting into community-based programs that have been proven to be effective, such as the bail supervision program from the John Howard Society?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: The John Howard Society and the Fry society and other community organizations receive money from time to time through different grants that we have and different programs that we have. They play a role in safely reintegrating the population back to a safe community and making it safe for everyone.

At the end of the day, our priority as a government is public safety. It's making sure that we don't have the repeat and violent offenders on our streets and—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): All right. Thank you, Minister.

I think the minister is sometimes leading to the answer you're seeking, and sometimes there's more time required for that, so I would ask that we just bear that in mind, please.

To your next question.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you. That's why I'm making a formal request that for all the answers that were not provided today—please bring them back to this committee in writing.

Recognizing that you don't have the immediate quantum that relates to investments in community-based programs—that's fine; you'll send it along to us a little bit later on. But, Minister, would you not agree that these community-based programs are a very effective, low-cost alternative to having individual Ontarians in remand?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Chairman, through you: The community-based programs have a role to play. When we look at some of the programs that exist in our correctional facilities, where our inmates learn different trades and have a pathway through the probation-and-parole process to come back to community—there's a volunteer program I saw just in Thunder Bay, an agricultural program. There are skills they learn, when they volunteer in the kitchens, that allow them to attain the skills that allow them to look at having a career in food operations.

In Monteith, where I had the privilege of touring as the Solicitor General, I saw first-hand where they learn the trades—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Wong-Tam, please.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much, Chair. I think you might agree with me that that was a good answer to a question I did not ask.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Well, I would say that the minister took less than a minute to respond. In terms of the structure of the question and the response, it has been pretty even.

Your next question, please.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: We may disagree on this one, Chair. We agree on so many things, but this one, we're going to disagree on.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): All right. Thank you.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Minister, I do find it rather disappointing that you very proudly cite that the Premier has written a letter, has initiated some bail reform discussion; you cite some grant investments which, of course, are periodic—they're not sustained; they're not permanent. I recognize that you've done that—but I'm very disappointed that you couldn't necessarily answer a question as simple as community-based programs.

You did talk about training, and I appreciate the efforts made in making sure that some training is provided to those who are incarcerated or simply in custody. The John Howard Society of Ontario has repeatedly stated how important it is that community-based programs get the actual funding they deserve, because it actually helps reduce that rate of recidivism, which we all are looking for. It actually allows for better integration back into the community, and overall, it's significantly, significantly cheaper than further incarceration and overcrowding in the facilities.

What we've heard from the John Howard Society is that prisoners' work opportunities in jails oftentimes are very uneven, and specifically, they cite that prisoners do not get paid for their labour.

Your estimates briefing mentions that you implement "cost-effective inmate work programs"—this is on page 104.

Can you clarify as to whether or not there's any funding to compensate incarcerated individuals in Ontario for these correctional institutions when their labour is not accounted for or compensated for? In particular, Minister, I want to highlight that our facilities—the correctional facilities, jails, detention centres—are overrepresented by Black and Indigenous people, whose labour has now become free labour in these facilities.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: In just a second, I'll call the Deputy Solicitor General to address some of the substance of the question, but let me state again what I stated at the beginning of this hearing—why people are in our facilities: (1) They have been convicted of an act of criminality and sentenced to two years less a day, or (2) they are awaiting trial for an act of criminality that's awaiting trial.

1600
It is important to note that our government's investment has been tremendous since we've taken office—both in the 2,200 people we've hired, both in the new correctional officers we've hired, both in our half-a-billion-dollar investment of infrastructure, and also in the aggressive strategy we have to expand our capacity.

Deputy Solicitor General.

Ms. Karen Ellis: I wanted to give you the first point, which is that inmate participation and programming, including work programs, is entirely voluntary. If the inmates

wish to participate or wish to be part of a work program, that is entirely up to them. I also have toured a number of times in our various facilities and have met people in the work programs—through, for example, our Trilcor licence plate manufacturing and other programs we have. People really seem to find that a productive way to spend their day.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: How much money is actually allocated for the compensation of this so-called free labour—that they’re volunteering their free labour for?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, Mr. Chair, I think the Deputy Solicitor General’s point was very clear: These are voluntary programs.

Let’s go back to why people are in jail. They’ve committed an act of criminality and have been sentenced to two years less a day, or they are awaiting trial for an act of criminality. That’s why they’re there.

The programs that we offer are voluntary, and they provide, in the cases where people participate, valuable skills that allow them to be reintegrated to our communities that much more safely.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): I think the Clerk is telling me that you’ve got 43 seconds left.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much.

Thank you for your time here today, Minister.

I have to remind the minister once again that those who are on remand, who are awaiting trial—it represents 82% of the population that’s in the correction facilities today. So it’s not necessarily that they’re volunteering their time, even though you describe the program as voluntary, and it also doesn’t—

Mr. Brian Saunderson: May I have a point of order?

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Yes, please.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: We’ve gone around the axle on this a number of times. The member opposite is talking about bail compliance, then she’s talking about labour in the institutions.

Let’s be very clear that the bail decisions are made by the justices of the peace, and the conditions they attach to those decisions are beyond the control of the Solicitor General’s office.

So I’m having a really tough time understanding where this line of questioning is going and how it is at all relevant. If you’re asking about reintegration, post, that’s parole, that’s something that’s covered by this. But if you’re asking about bail compliance—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): MPP Saunderson, the committee meeting now is moving into the voting portion of our committee meeting, so I don’t necessarily need to rule on that point of order. Thank you, and my apologies for cutting you off, but I need to move on to the next part of the meeting, sir.

This concludes the committee’s consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of the Solicitor General. Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Yes, MPP Stevens?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I’m just wondering if I could have the minister’s office—for all the questions that were not answered, can we get them back to the committee in writing for my colleague as well as myself? It has been asked, but I thought I would make it a point of order so that I can get it in the record.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): All right—to the Clerk.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): I think the minister already made that commitment.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): In my preamble at the start of the committee, I indicated that if there are particular questions, they can be put to the research officer overall.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Pardon me?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Just for a point of clarity, Mr. McNaught is legislative research—he’s not a ministerial researcher. So I’m not sure how that—

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): To the Clerk.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: There was no commitment provided by the minister; it wasn’t asked for.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): Let the Clerk speak.

The Clerk pro tem (Ms. Vanessa Kattar): For the outstanding questions, anything that the minister has committed to responding—the research officer has noted it. But the minister has to commit to—the rest of the ones that he has committed to, we’ve noted down.

The Chair (Mr. Lorne Coe): All right. Everyone clear? Let’s go to voting.

Again, this concludes the committee’s consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of the Solicitor General. Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are the members ready to vote?

Shall vote 2601, ministry administration, carry? Hands up for those in favour. Hands up for those opposed. It’s carried.

Shall vote 2603, public safety division, carry? All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Shall vote 2604, Ontario Provincial Police, carry? Those in favour? Opposed? It’s carried.

Shall vote 2605, correctional services, carry? Those in favour? Opposed? It’s carried.

Shall vote 2606, justice technology services, carry? Those in favour? Opposed? It’s carried.

Shall vote 2607, agencies, boards and commissions, carry? In favour? Opposed? It’s carried.

Shall vote 2609, emergency planning and management, carry? Those in favour? Opposed? It’s carried.

Shall vote 2610, strategic policy division, carry? Those in favour? Opposed? It’s carried.

Shall vote 2612, inspectorate, carry? Those in favour? Opposed? It’s carried.

Shall vote 2614, emergency services telecommunications, carry? Those in favour? Opposed? It’s carried.

Shall vote 2615, data insights and strategic initiatives, carry? Those in favour? Opposed? It's carried.

Shall vote 2616, health services, carry? Those in favour? Those opposed? It's carried.

Shall vote 2617, infrastructure, carry? In favour? Opposed? It's carried.

Shall the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of the Solicitor General, carry? Those in favour? Opposed? It's carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of the Solicitor General to the House? All those in favour? Opposed? It's carried.

Thank you, members of this committee, for your excellent participation today.

That concludes the business for today. The committee is now adjourned until Monday, September 23, 2024, at 1 o'clock, in committee room 2 of the Ontario Legislature.

The committee adjourned at 1608.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

Chair / Président

Mr. Lorne Coe (Whitby PC)

Vice-Chair / Vice-Président

Mr. Sol Mamakwa (Kiiwetinoong ND)

Mr. Will Bouma (Brantford–Brant PC)

Mr. Lorne Coe (Whitby PC)

Ms. Jess Dixon (Kitchener South–Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud–Hespeler PC)

Ms. Goldie Ghamari (Carleton IND)

Mr. Sol Mamakwa (Kiiwetinoong ND)

Mr. Michael Mantha (Algoma–Manitoulin IND)

Hon. Graham McGregor (Brampton North / Brampton-Nord PC)

Mr. Brian Riddell (Cambridge PC)

Mr. Brian Saunderson (Simcoe–Grey PC)

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam (Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre ND)

Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

Mr. Deepak Anand (Mississauga–Malton PC)

Ms. Patrice Barnes (Ajax PC)

MPP Zee Hamid (Milton PC)

Ms. Natalie Pierre (Burlington PC)

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens (St. Catharines ND)

Clerk pro tem / Greffière par intérim

Ms. Vanessa Kattar

Staff / Personnel

Ms. Heather Conklin, research officer,
Research Services

Mr. Andrew McNaught, research officer,
Research Services