

# PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Colin LaVie

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The Legislature sat at 1:00 p.m.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of  
Guests

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and welcome back to my colleagues, for a hard to believe, our second week of this, I want to call it the spring session even though if it doesn't feel much like spring out there today. Welcome back to my colleagues, those who have joined us via the computer, and also, it's nice to have some people in the gallery.

It's hard to recognize everybody under the masks and I – careful, oh there are even more coming in – but I see, oh, Kent Scales of course, and Quinn Clements is here from the Tourism Industry Association. Kirk Nicholson, John Cudmore, the Holman Grand Hotel, among other properties, and I'm sorry but I can't quite – I think it's Adam, but – yeah, it is Adam MacKenzie under that mask there as well, so welcome to all of you to the gallery today.

I look forward to a time when the recognition of guests is a little easier for all of us in here.

I want to just begin by congratulating the MLA from Charlottetown-West Royalty, who, yesterday, pulled off a very successful Winter Wellness Day. And I know he has been a champion of promoting inclusive and healthy living and he's very much concerned about the mental health of Islanders. I always appreciate in our conversations, he always asks me how I'm doing and if I'm doing enough to stay healthy, both mentally and physically. Even if my answer disappoints you hon. member, some days I am trying my hardest to do so and I'm very appreciative of you asking about that, that does mean a lot.

But I did see, you did get yesterday to West Royalty and to Birchwood and Parkdale and Queen Charlotte and Colonel Gray, I'm really happy to see that. I also haven't seen the footage, but I'm told there's footage of other members in this Legislature who are participating as well. I think it's a great

initiative and I like to see that continue and congratulations to you for starting that.

I also want to say that the disturbing events continue to unfold in the Ukraine and following the recognition that we all gave here last week, I just wanted to say that I'm very proud, as Premier, to recognize how Islanders are responding to this with their support.

I see Leonhard's fundraised \$6,600 from their customers and then topped it up to \$10,000 which is amazing.

Hannah O'Donnell of Two Lupins sold sunflower tote bags and partnering with a Ukrainian graphic designer, and they sold out in under two hours, which is incredible.

Also, Summerside artist Kaitlin Kelly raised some money selling prints. And artist, Emily Howard is in Korea auctioning a piece of art on Instagram, and all of these things are just wonderful gestures and indicative of the kindness of Islanders, and I'm very proud of that and I know we're all proud of that in here.

Just from a provincial government perspective, we have raised the flag at the public building complex in Charlottetown, and the Ukrainian flag is flying high and proudly there.

We will be dressing up the building in the blue and yellow colors of the Ukraine for the next number of days.

On behalf of Islanders, we have been asked to contribute to the Red Cross fund and so we will donate \$50,000 in humanitarian effort toward that cause. I have reached out to my federal counterparts to let them know that if families are coming to Canada from the Ukraine, that PEI would be open and welcome to take in as many as we can here. We would work very, very hard with our NGOs and other partners to facilitate that and just to try to do everything that we can to make life just a little bit easier for those who are impacted.

So, just on behalf of all Islanders, thank them very much for their efforts and let's keep our thoughts and prayers and hopes and wishes with the people of the Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I often do, start up by picking up on what the Premier just said. I want to express my personal gratitude for the government on behalf of all Islanders for making that substantial contribution to the Canadian Red Cross. As most of us know, that will be matched by the federal government, so in a sense that's \$100,000 from Islanders to help Ukrainians.

So, thank you very much for that, Premier and to the government.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Leader of the Opposition:** The Premier mentioned a couple of local individuals and businesses who have contributed to the relief fund for Ukraine in their own way.

Leonhard's and Hannah O'Donnell, I think, were a couple of the folks he mentioned. The Charlottetown Farmers Market, here, Laurie Jaworski, 'Perogy Laurie' made a very generous offer of giving perogies to anybody who wants them, providing they make a donation to the Ukrainian Fund, which will pass on 100%.

Islanders all over the place are stepping up, as Islanders do, both to support the needs here in our local community and around the world and it does, absolutely, make you very proud to be an Islander.

This past weekend the Lieutenant Governor presented the PEI Museum and Heritage Awards and there were many recipients. I want to congratulate all of the individuals and all of the organizations. I'm just going to mention a few of them.

The Benevolent Irish Society is one of them. So much of what we know about Irish culture and, of course, that had an indelible impact on Island culture here and continues to do so. Much of that was learned through the Benevolent Irish Society and through

their offices or their – it's more than an office now, it's a fantastic place there on North River Road. They put on concerts, they have talks there and they now have a library of over 1,700 books.

If you were ever interested in trying find out a little bit more about Irish culture, Irish history, Irish heritage and particularly, how it has impacted our lives here on PEI, it's a fantastic resource. Congratulations to them.

Another recipient was David Stewart. David, of course, chronicled – I mean, he's a fantastic writer and a tremendous gentleman – and he chronicled the lives of Islanders from the gender diverse community. That culminated most recently in the production of a six-part series called Before Grindr: the Secret Social History of Gay and Lesbian PEI. David just describes things in such a beautiful way, and I want to thank him for the work he's done over the decades for that community.

And finally, Richard Pellissier-Lush of Lennox Island. Richard, many of us will know, he's well known for his work in the Mi'kmaq Heritage Actors and he listens to the elders in his community, including his mom, Julie, of course, and expresses what he learns about his tradition and culture and the history of the Mi'kmaq people here on Prince Edward Island through his storytelling, his dance and his music. Congratulations to Richard.

Those are just three of the recipients.

And finally, I'd like to recognize and celebrate the life of a very fine Islander, Ted Grant, who passed away on the weekend. Ted was an extraordinary man. He founded so many things including the Mikinduri Children of Hope which was something, I think he founded it early 2000s and he was the president of that organization for almost 20 years.

He did so much more than that. He contributed to so many efforts, not only in the local community. He lived in Cornwall and through his church but also, around the world. He was recognized for that with the Queen Elizabeth Award medal in 2012 and a national citizenship award in 2008. It was really fitting global recognition of a man who had a huge heart. He had a gaze that

was as wide as the earth on which he lived and that he loved.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure to be back in the Legislature today. I'd like to say hello to all the people back in Evangeline-Miscouche and welcome everyone to the public gallery. I'm not as good as the Premier with math so I won't guess. Welcome everyone.

I'd also like to give kudos to the three colleagues in here that did participate yesterday in the Winter Wellness Day. Our hon. member here from Charlottetown-West Royalty, the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning and also the member from Charlottetown-Winsloe. At the start of the hon. member's video yesterday talking about wellness, he was juggling, and I thought, I could do that. I couldn't have kept up with him the rest of the day, but I could have done the juggling, probably better than he did. But anyway, we'll leave it at that.

I'm very pleased to be able to rise today and congratulate the PEI Special Olympians organization, Olympic organization, that has received the highest distinction as a healthy community through Special Olympics International for the third year in a row. This is an indication of the excellent work that they do, and we are very proud of the association and our Island athletes as they were presented.

I'd also like to acknowledge that March is National Social Worker Month and it is time to celebrate the important contributions that social workers make in PEI every day. They provide essential services to Islanders year-round. Social workers provide very important supports for many, especially during difficult times such as which we are going through right now.

So, with that, I thank you, Mr. Speaker and wish everyone a good day.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

**Ms. Altass:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today and say hello to everyone here, all of my colleagues as well as those who have joined us in the gallery and all of those watching from home from District 23 Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

In particular, I want to recognize Shelly Campbell who has been named PEI Museum and Heritage volunteer of the year. This is something that is well deserved. Shelly has been an incredible volunteer in the community for years and years and she is recognized for her work that she's contributed to the Bideford Parsonage Museum, but that is one part of everything that Shelly does. I just want to say thank you, Shelly, for the incredible work you do for the community. It's a recognition that you have well deserved.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

**Mr. Thompson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome everyone back to the Legislature today. It's great to be here for another week.

I just want to point out that March is Canadian Agriculture Literacy Month. This is one of the programs that Agriculture in the Classroom PEI puts on. Roughly 1,400 students across PEI get to learn more about agriculture and where their food comes from. I want to thank everyone who contributes to this, so our Island students can learn more about agriculture and where their food comes from.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

**Ms. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hello to everyone tuning in from Charlottetown-Victoria Park and across the province and hello to everyone who has

joined us today in the gallery. It's nice to see so many faces. I think this might be a record number so far since the gallery opened again.

I had the pleasure of walking in the Coldest Night of the Year Walk with my team which was Stop the Stigma. I had the pleasure of walking with Tessa Rogers from PEERS Alliance. We had a wonderful chat on our five-kilometre walk and our team raised \$910 towards the \$50,000 –

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bernard:** – thank you. Towards the \$50,000 that was raised in Charlottetown for Harvest House. That is still open, so if you want to make a donation, please do.

Secondly, I'd like to also congratulate the 20 recipients of the PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation awards. It's really incredible. As I was reading through the list, there were a few that stuck out to me, but given my critic roles, I decided I would look at – congratulate all of them, in particular Dave Stewart who continues to preserve the heritage of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, as well as Katherine Dewar, a special friend of my mother-in-law's, who wrote a book about PEI women's contribution to the Second World War. Congratulations to all those recipients.

And finally, as mentioned earlier, this is Social Work Month. I would just like to take this opportunity to thank all of our social workers. The commitment and passion that you have for the families of this Island is incredible. It's remarkable, really, as we consider the conditions in which you work, being short-staffed and spread way too thin. I understand what this does to the crucial therapeutic relationship that you try to form with all of your clients, so thank you very much for the work you do and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

**Ms. Beaton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise. Welcome to everybody in the gallery. It's always great to have the gallery open so the public can come back in. Thank you for being here today. I

want to say hi to everybody in Mermaid-Stratford and those that are tuning in and watching the proceedings today.

I visited the Reach Foundation yesterday. As we all know, yesterday was the last day of the 28-day campaign for – what is it, oh – for gathering period products for the – Taking Care of Women's Business. Period. Oh my gosh, it just flew out of my mouth. Anyway, the Reach Foundation, one of my constituents, Michael Smallwood, reached out to Bridgett MacCormac. Bridgett MacCormac is a staff member here who is really, really instrumental in spearheading that campaign. He voiced the need to have period products at Reach Foundation. As we know, people can't even function day-to-day if they don't have that type of supplies, so Bridgett offered the donations that the Legislative Assembly put forward and there was a ton of donations put forward from the folks here at the Legislative Assembly. So, I wanted to give a big shout-out to anybody who contributed to that donation, because it was really important and really well received from the Reach Foundation.

Also, this is Pharmacy Appreciation Month, and as we all know, pharmacy professionals across the country and across the world really were a focal point throughout the pandemic of providing health care services to Islanders. And so I'd like to give a shout-out to all pharmacy professionals and the pharmacies that provided frontline health care to Islanders when they couldn't actually access it during the height of the pandemic and moving forward. And we know with the booster shot, with the flu shot, with the new shingles vaccine, the amount of work that they have been doing over the last months alone has been outstanding.

A huge shout-out, I was to G. Visser & Sons on the weekend, on Saturday and they were one of the five farms across the province that opened their doors and they put out 150,000 pounds of potatoes in that day. Over 5,000 people went through their doors, and substantial donation, up over \$8,300 to the Food Bank. It's just outstanding the generosity of them opening their doors. Willem has given me a lot of his time to help me understand agriculture in the farming industry and I have a lot of appreciation and time for Willem. He's just an amazing person.

And finally, it is Agriculture Literacy month and just a big shout-out to Laurie Loane, because I know she spearheads a lot of the activities that are going to happen in our schools across the province this month. It's people like that who really champion agriculture.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the time.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

**Mr. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And again, welcome to the gallery, Adam, John, Quinn, Kirk and Kent; really appreciate you coming here to be here today.

I just want to echo what the Premier has said and give another shout-out to the hon. member from District 14 Charlottetown-West Royalty. He let me tag along to West Royalty Elementary School where it was great for winter wellness day. A little embarrassing for my daughter, who unfortunately had to watch me move around a lot, but it was great to see all the kids out.

And the hon. member, as well, was the second person to come along in District 10 on the weekend at Sobeys for the West Royalty Softball Association Fill the Dugout. It was a fundraiser for the Food Bank, took place on Saturday morning. The, the first, unfortunate, was Nancy Holland from District 10, thank you Nancy for making your donation.

I was talking with Dale Arsenault who's the president and Dale just wanted to pass along the words that he was very proud of all of the girls who came along, all of the staff. And when I was there it was with Sophia, my daughter, Emma, Emily, Sarah, Brooklyn, Dale of course the president, and Sean and Kim. They raised over \$1,700 along with eight gift cards and a ton of food, so I know the Upper Room really appreciates that.

And just to echo what the Leader of the Opposition said with the PEI Museum Awards. A member of District 10, Ed McKenna of Sherwood, Ed reaches out quite a bit and I did want to congratulate him here

publicly, he won an award for creating and maintaining the historic PEI Facebook page.

And lastly, just down the road from Ed in Sherwood, a big birthday wish today; I'll probably get in trouble for this, but a former colleague of mine, people know him very well in PEI, he's been on the radio forever. Gerard Murphy also known as "Murph" on Ocean 100, turns 60 years young today. So happy birthday Murph and have a great day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

**Mr. Howard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to rise and offer greetings to everyone in Summerside-South Drive. But one constituent, in particular, that I'd like to talk about today is my first-born Zander Howard. His code name was "Bean" the first time I saw him because he was only the size of a bean whenever we saw him on the ultrasound. Nowadays, he's just about to overtake his mother in height, so he's doing very well, and we now have a teenager in our house, so he's breaking all sorts of new ground in my life. And I just look forward to spending all sorts of time parenting this fellow through whatever is going to come through those years. So, onwards and upwards Zander.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome everyone watching home today from Kensington-Malpeque, and everyone in the gallery today. Welcome Quinn, John, Kent and Kirk, appreciate you coming here today. We're not used to seeing visitors, so it's certainly nice to see some familiar faces.

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone that's working at the bridge in Borden, doing what they need to do to keep COVID out of our province. Yesterday I talked to a very nice young lady, and she told me yesterday she worked, it was the coldest day she's faced yet down there in Borden with the bridge in the wind. And she

still had a smile on her face, and I know they've worked hard and have gone through a lot, so I just wanted to thank everyone working in Borden and all frontline workers for doing what they're doing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to see everybody in the gallery here and say hello to everybody in District 14, John, Kirk and Quinn are here, and UPEI President and CEO, Adam Mackenzie, so welcome for coming today.

Yes, yesterday was a big day, we did Winter Wellness Day at a few different schools and I want to thank the minister of education for coming. It was really, I was glad you were there, we did a session at Birchwood and from start to finish it was something, it was indescribable really what happened in there.

So, thank you for coming and Charlottetown-Winsloe, Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe, you did a good job. At one point the school was watching through a computer screen on this side and the gym was full, and I had to tap him on the shoulder because he was doing the exercise with the people. And I just said, "get with the program here if you want to keep up." It was a really great day.

Just to sum it up, a Grade 1 class from Vernon River and their teacher was Cheryl Roberts, she sent me a note and says, I can take of myself. And the kids had described on the board what wellness meant to them and if it's okay, it'll take a sec, I'll just read them it's pretty simple. "Exercise, don't have too much screen time, eat healthy, eat lots of vegetables, stay hydrated, sleep well, yoga, be kind of yourself, get fresh air, go to school, brush your teeth, cry if you need to" and this one is probably for this other side over there "take baths and showers".

Thank you very much, I'm just joking.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

**Mr. Hammarlund:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And welcome to online listeners in Charlottetown-Brighton, as well as those on the bench here, it's great to see you.

There's a lot of talk about freedom these days, be it for countries like Ukraine or individuals. Here in Canada we have a great tradition that our citizens are allowed the freedom of risky behaviors as long as this behavior does not endanger others. And people of all ages engage in this risky behavior with gusto, be it downhill skiing, on PEI, hockey, or riding motorbikes and ATVs. Considerable efforts are spent on fixing any injury due to accidents and efforts include risky and dangerous rescue missions for those who need it, be it at sea, or on remote mountain tops. Yet, somehow seniors reaching a certain age are denied their freedom to choose their risky behavior.

So today I would like to congratulate a certain 80-year-old Inuit, on finally be rescued by his community, who brought him home from a long-term care home in Quebec, to his own Inuit community. He's not exactly an Islander, but definitely a kindred spirit, at least to me.

The reason for the authorities not to help with his \$25,000 move was that it would be safer in the LTC home, not at home where no such facility existed. They may well be right, but why should it be their decision to make, and not the decision of the 80-year-old himself? Whether safe or not is not the issue, why shouldn't older citizens – why should older citizens be denied safety choices just because of their age?

We need to focus on senior's quality of life by their experience and want it for themselves. Safety is of course an important factor but should never be used to take away the basic rights of seniors to decide for themselves just like the rest of Canadians, including myself.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

**Ms. Lund:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.



It's a pleasure to rise in the House today and welcome back my colleagues, for what I'm sure will be another productive week. I would like to say hello to Adam Mackenzie, the President of the UPEI Student Union, thanks for joining us today. It's lovely to see a gallery full of people, and it's something we're all very delighted about, I can assure you. It's been too long, so that's just lovely.

I also wanted to extend congratulations to Marlene Campbell, who won one of the PEI Heritage Awards in Summerside. She was a recipient who won an award for her incredible contributions in promoting heritage in Summerside through her work at Culture Summerside. Anyone who knows her, knows she is an inspiration.

My colleagues in Summerside and I participated in the Coldest Night of the Year Walk in Summerside over the weekend and it was absolutely fantastic. The Summerside group – not our group but in total – raised more than \$83,000 for LifeHouse, which is amazing.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Lund:** It's absolutely amazing, and it wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for Cory Somers. Cory is the minister of the Summerside Baptist Church and he really spearheaded this for Summerside. He put together the initiative, he was the one who sponsored LifeHouse, and really made this happen. So, this is an incredible contribution and I just wanted to recognize his work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### Statements by Members

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

#### **Potato Entity Organizations Doubly Impacted Recently**

**Mr. Henderson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We all are aware of the impacts the COVID pandemic has had on our tourism industry on PEI. We have seen significant declines in tourism due to all the restrictions implemented by government's attempt to

prevent the spread of COVID. Our many festivals and events, and tourism sites such as museums, had dramatically lower visitation numbers than they had in 2019.

Then, along comes U.S. border restrictions to PEI potatoes again in 2021, limiting organizations that rely on donations and support from PEI's largest agricultural export, the potato.

The Canadian Potato Museum, located in O'Leary, tells the story of the commodity that provides the most nutritional value per acre of any food source in the world: the humble potato.

The Canadian Potato Museum had 20,000 visitors come to enjoy their displays in 2019. Since, they had a major renovation, investment, and upgrade to their food services at the museum. In 2021, there were less than 1,000 visitors come through the interpretive displays on the history of the potato in Canada.

Then, there is the PEI Potato Blossom Festival, which celebrates the impacts that the potato industry has on PEI with numerous community events, including the Canadian potato peeling contest and the Farmers' Awards Banquet recognizing many hardworking potato growers and workers, among other events like parades, washer toss tournaments, and singing contests.

This event has not been able to do many of the things that they have raised money for, worthy objectives, all the while celebrating the potato and its importance to our province.

I know both federal and provincial governments provided support in tourism promotions. The federal government has offered various wage subsidies to help. These organizations, specifically, were hit doubly hard by their ability to raise funds and ability to operate in the condition they were accustomed to.

The Province has announced money to support potato growers and the Potato Board under the PEI Potato Wart Emergency Contingency Fund, and government recently has announced an additional \$15-million potato ward fund for the 2023 Budget.

I hope it will offer supports to organizations like the Canadian Potato Museum and the PEI Potato Blossom Festival so they can build back better from where they left off in 2019.

So, I am asking the government to reach out, meet with these groups, and provide them some specific supports to initiate new concepts promoting our potatoes during this double jeopardy faced by these two organizations that celebrate our Island's world class potato industry and culture moving forward.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

### **Status Quo Housing Action**

**Mr. Howard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the fall sitting of the Legislature, I quoted a famous line from the movies when I spoke about the government's response to the housing crisis: "You're going to need a bigger boat", a metaphor for the tool and action required for the job being insufficient.

We need solid and immediate action. 100% of what can be done, should be done, and I have yet to see that effort come from government. Federal opportunities to partner on costs have been left on the table, and that's simply unacceptable.

To use another metaphor, I would compare this government's actions on housing to someone trying to go up an escalator in the wrong direction. Going at a normal pace is going to get you nowhere, or even moving backwards. We need to be sprinting and leaping up that escalator to get to the top.

At the top of the escalator is a government that recognizes that housing is a human right and where every Islander is housing secure.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Howard:** Once they're there, we can carry on at a normal pace to keep up, but right now, we're falling behind, and the escalator is actually speeding up.

Let me share yet another story of an Island family suffering through the crisis. A mother of two, pregnant with a new child, is allotted

\$1,200 to find suitable housing. There is simply no option out there. Inevitably, the family will be squeezed into a rental that is too small. This family is housed, sure, but inadequately.

PEI needs adequate public housing that can accommodate families of varying sizes. This will take huge investment and effort, and won't happen overnight, but that's why we need to see the action today, or preferably, yesterday.

Please, to those members in government, please recognize this growing issue and take action to stem the harm before it's completely beyond control.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

### **Legal Supports for Tenants**

**Ms. Lund:** Mr. Speaker, in the last few months, I've become acutely aware of the fact that we have rent controls in this province that don't control rent.

Many of my constituents were served a form for a legal rent increase in November, and I got a first-hand perspective of what it looks like for someone to appeal their rent increase.

The minister of justice keeps saying that IRAC helps with this, but I cannot stress enough that that's not accurate. Frankly, I have no idea how the minister of justice does not yet know this.

If you think of a hearing like a court case, IRAC acts like the judge in this case. So, they hear both sides and they make a decision based on what they hear and what the law says. They don't act as a lawyer. They don't help one side or the other make their case. The onus is on the landlord to say why they think the rent should go up, and the tenant to say why what the landlord has presented isn't justified.

Here's an example of that process.

Many seniors in my district were given a notice of a 26% increase being filed and that a hearing would take place. They had five days before the hearing, and then they got literally hundreds of pages of evidence that was prepared by the landlord's lawyer. It was written in legalese.

So, the process of the hearing was to go through those hundreds of pages line by line and the onus was on the seniors in my district to refute those hundreds of pages of evidence and say why they thought a single line that's in legalese shouldn't be included. Anything that they didn't refute, it was presumed that they agreed with.

These can take four hours, these hearings, and it entirely depends on your ability to refute the case. That's why groups of tenants who are contesting the exact same information get different results. It depends entirely on your ability to make the case.

If the minister can't see that this is a huge access to justice issue, I'm at a loss. Can you even imagine the level of legal literacy we are expecting people to have? Whose 90-year-old grandmother could we expect to do this successfully?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Lund:** The vacancy rates in Summerside are less than 1%, so that means when we approve a rent increase that is this large, the only option that constituents have, that seniors have, is to spend money that should be going to food and medication, and spend it on their rent. There is nowhere else for them to go. It's just this simple.

The minister of justice is uniquely positioned to solve this.

Premier, I am begging you. This impacted almost 100 seniors in my district, and you could help solve it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

**Ms. Jameson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, the member across asked about workplace sexual harassment in relation to our Interministerial Women's Secretariat.

The most recent Violence Against Women Prevention Grant had a focus on violence against women in the workplace. This is the first time there has ever been a focused theme for that grant.

PEERS Alliance received grant funding to engage the trans community to build knowledge on transphobic violence in the workplace. The working group will build strategies for resilience among participants and generate knowledge and strategies to educate employers and make PEI workplaces safer and more inclusive.

I look forward to hearing more from PEERS Alliance on the project progress.

The PEI Human Rights Commission had done a great deal of work and research on PEI on their workplace sexual harassment project known as the SHIFT Project. SHIFT addresses and works to prevent sexual harassment in Island workplaces through awareness, education, and training that is tailored for employees, employers, high school students, and the general public.

And finally, I'd like to acknowledge the RISE Program through Community Legal Information. It provides confidential free legal resources and support to people who have experienced sexual violence and workplace sexual harassment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A response from questions during Question Period on February 25<sup>th</sup> on the total of inspections that were completed in 2021: the majority of inspections are the result of routine, proactive inspections of workplaces. There were 3,020 inspections completed. Inspections related to workplace harassment. When the legislation came into effect in July 2020, the Workers Compensation Board conducted a broad education campaign

focusing on this new legislation and the responsibilities of workers and employers. Since that time, OHS offices have added workplace harassment to the list of topics they review with employers during a workplace inspection, primarily to ensure employers have a workplace harassment policy in place.

The OHS data base is not currently set up to quickly identify the reason for a complaint. However, we can confirm that there have been several complaints launched related to workplace harassment. All complaints are followed up by the OHS division of the WCB. A follow up to a complaint include a discussion with the worker or the employer to ensure that they have a policy in place, a workplace visit by an officer, or a larger intervention to ensure that all parties are following the requirements set out in the regulations.

Also, Section 3 of OHSWH regulations provide for confidentiality. Could this potentially silence workers? The section clearly allows the worker to share details of the incident to those who need to know about the incident in order to report it or assist with an investigation of the incident.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### Questions by Members

**Speaker:** For our first question, I'll call on the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

This weekend, our office received an email from an Island paramedic with some pretty disturbing accounts of their current work conditions. They're chronically understaffed. They are underpaid and they are undervalued by their employer.

#### **Recruiting and maintaining paramedics**

Question to the Premier: Islanders in a medical crisis need to be confident that help is going to be there when they need it. How does your government expect to recruit or even retain paramedics when you have the

lowest paid wages and such poor working conditions?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I think that, particularly throughout COVID, we have noticed that there are – or it has been brought to the full front of the fold – that there are a lot of aspects of our health care system that are challenged and one of the recurring themes is around wages.

I think we hear that. We recognize that and as we undergo these negotiations with various unions, we will take that certainly into account and we will do everything that we can to get the wages up. I hope once the wages increase, that that will help with some of the working conditions, but we also need to recognize those as well.

The point is very well taken from hon. Leader of the Opposition. Paramedics are valued here, and I think they need to see that more so on the bottom line. I would be supportive of that and will be putting forward more and more resources in my time I have here.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Yet again, we're hearing the right words from government that we're going to do everything we can, but very recently, we signed an agreement with Medavie which very much ties our hands in terms of what we can do, so please don't say we'll do everything we can when you've just signed an agreement which stops you from just doing that.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Leader of the Opposition:** Paramedics are highly trained professionals and incredibly important to our health care system. They're often the first to arrive at very traumatic emergency situations and they provide life-saving interventions. Paramedics spend

many year and tens of thousands in dollars on their education.

### **Salary of paramedics**

A question to the Premier: For such highly trained, critical frontline health care staff, how does your government justify paying them a starting salary of \$22 an hour when just next door in Nova Scotia, they start at \$28 an hour?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I think we recognize we need to do better. When we just went through the negotiations, we had the deal ratified by the union representing them who were very happy with their increase.

I know it's not enough. Everyone knows that. Does anybody in here make enough money? Of course, they don't. They always want it to be more and we're trying to recognize that. But we certainly do recognize the work that goes into this.

As I say, we've been exposed through the whole COVID experience and we need to do a better job as a society of making sure the resources go to where they need to go.

I'm not trying to suggest that that isn't the case, but there is a process to get there. There are number of avenues that we go through to get there and we're working through those processes.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

And I dare say that if you were a paramedic looking at the salaries of the people who occupy the seats in this House, you might say that yes, we do get paid (Indistinct) and I would tend to agree with them.

One of the most striking things about the email that we received on the weekend from the paramedic, was the fact that they signed off as Jane Doe. They did that because they have a confidentiality agreement signed with

Medavie, their employer, and therefore, they could not speak out about these unsafe conditions for fear of reprisals.

### **Safety of frontline workers**

A question to the Premier: In just this past week, we've had paramedics hiding their identity and RCW unions distorting the voices of their members so that they can speak out about the unsafe conditions in their health care situation. There's a disturbing trend here, Premier. When will you make it safe for these frontline workers to speak out?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it is safe to speak out. When the hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford in her House statement last week, she listed off the three avenues in which they're able to speak. You sign an NDA only to save the patient that you're dealing with, to protect that information. Anybody else in terms of work conditions, they can say whatever they want, to whoever they want, but when it comes to the personal information of the patient that you serve, that is what they don't want you – what we don't want you sharing, because it's not your information to share.

But I would say to every paramedic, to every long-term care staff, any health care worker in this province, if there's conditions you need to raise, you should raise them. You don't to distort your voice, you need to just stand up and say it and you will be protected, because it's illegal to be fired in this province for doing so.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Mr. Speaker, that is simply not accurate.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Leader of the Opposition:** We had somebody reach out to us who had to set up a fake email account because of exactly what the Premier's suggesting, it's perfectly safe to do – it's not safe for these people to do that, and that's a sin.

I've seen an ever-growing disturbing trend throughout this government, that the Premier has forgotten to listen to some of the most important people in this province, the experts; Islanders. And there's no place where this is more evident than the treatment of our frontline health care workers; this government has forgotten about them.

### **Consulting from frontline care workers**

Question to the Premier: Have you directed your Minister of Health and Wellness to not consult with frontline health care workers when you're making major policy changes when their contracts are out of date for years, or when you're changing laws that directly affect them?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Mr. Speaker, no.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Glad to hear that, thanks Mr. Speaker.

The trend of not speaking to Islanders, extends beyond health care workers and is common throughout this government. You consistently choose not to consult. You don't consult with nurses, you don't consult with paramedics, you didn't consult with teachers on their return to in-class learning during the height of COVID. You didn't even consult properly with the Child and Youth Advocate on a critical piece of child protection Legislation.

This government does whatever it thinks it wants to do and what is best for them without bothering to think about the people who are most involved and who are experts in the field.

### **Government listening to Islanders**

A question to the Premier: Why have you chosen for this government to no longer listen to Islanders?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I get accused of my storytelling background in

here, but I've got to tell you, the hon. Leader of the Opposition's really taking to craft.

I think if he would go back and look through his research, and I know he's very good at that, that he would see that PEI Teachers' Federation actually said: we're sorry you did consult with us on the back to school plan.

I think if you went and listened to his words, he'd say you didn't consult enough what the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate. So, we did consult, you just said it's not enough and I said in this Legislature that no bill will come to this floor until we feel it's a proper consultation.

So, if that's changed to Islanders, that we're consulting, that we're listening to people, I don't know if I'm buying that story.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

**Ms. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Earlier this year, the Province announced it would supply meals to seniors. Three meals, two days a week; lasted for a few weeks.

In the Budget speech, the Minister of Finance shared with us that 330 seniors from across the province applied for this program.

Yet the Budget highlight for food security was a Seniors Food Security pilot program exclusive to Kings County, and it's not even permanent.

### **Food security for seniors**

Question to whomever can answer it: Seniors experience food insecurity across the province, regardless of the colour of their district. Why is this government abandoning seniors who do not live in Tory districts?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure you can ask a question here without directing it to somebody, but I think because of the political overture suggested in it, I will stand up.

We have been approached by a local group in Montague who wanted to help and partner

with government to start a pilot project to help feed seniors, and that's what we're doing. Our intention would be to take it out across the province as soon as we possibly can.

But I certainly don't think the people who stood up and contacted us to do this would care to think that this was some kind of political move, and I think the suggestion otherwise is beneath this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

**Ms. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That hardly sounds fair. A community partner came forward; did you give the opportunity to anybody else in the province?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bernard:** We know that food prices are drastically rising and many of our Island elders are on fixed incomes and won't be able to cope with these increases. They're barely hanging on as it is.

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: For the seniors who don't live in districts represented by your government, how do you propose they cope with the rising cost of food?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

**Mr. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And indeed, this is a very serious issue and it's one that we've been discussing in the department at length.

I think starting with a pilot, the seniors food, even though it happens to start in the east with a community partner, I think is a great start.

One of the things we're looking at, and without spoiling anything, is really increasing the amount we put in some of our other programs that are directed specifically at seniors with money that they can choose to spend in whatever way they want, including food.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

**Ms. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we know we're beyond a pilot.

We've established that a school food program is crucial in this province. If there's one thing we know about hungry children, they have hungry parents, hungry grandparents, hungry cousins, hungry aunts, hungry uncles, hungry families.

In the *Poverty Elimination Strategy Act*, it states that by January 1, 2025, this government – the food insecurity among all Islanders will be reduced by 50%. That is less than three years away.

#### **Island-wide food security program**

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: How can you expect to reach these targets if food security programs aren't made Island-wide and permanent immediately?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

**Mr. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is really important that we address food insecurity and make sure that food is secure for all Islanders, which is why, as the member mentioned, we do have a PEI School Food Program that helps a lot.

And just to be clear, even when school was not in, meals were delivered to the homes of children and their families who needed them. We did the same thing for seniors during the most recent COVID circuit breaker. We're going to start doing that again with a pilot, but I expect that will expand out to the rest of the province.

We make sure that food banks have the supports they need to provide food to those that are desperate in need of it, and I think we're making good progress on this and I'm confident we can meet the timelines in the poverty elimination act.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

**Ms. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That summer food delivery and throughout COVID was because we asked for it.

**Premier King:** Oh, for (Indistinct) sake.

**Ms. Bernard:** And we recognize that students –

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. McNeilly:** (Indistinct)

**Premier King:** (Indistinct) talk about themselves (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** You have the floor.

**Ms. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Premier King:** (Indistinct)

**Ms. Bernard:** Are you finished, Premier?

**Premier King:** No, not quite.

**Ms. Bernard:** Continue.

**An Hon. Member:** (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** You have the floor.

**Ms. Bernard:** We continued that service because we recognized students are hungry. We had a three- to four-week Island-wide seniors program, and now it's just a pilot.

Food security is becoming a major issue for Islanders. In fact, I've seen many frustrated Islanders wonder how government could proudly pronounce funding to feed tourists, but not Islanders.

Forget a vacation; Islanders can hardly afford a trip to the grocery store.

### **Support to Island families**

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: Why couldn't you find it in your heart or your wallet to support Island families who are going hungry today?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

**Mr. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the Department of Social Development and Housing, of course, we work a lot with our most vulnerable Islanders, those really who are on social assistance, for example, or may need accessibility supports, those on fixed incomes.

I think if you look at the record of this government, in particular in the last year, we've increased the rates of payments in various areas to those people to help them so they can do things like make sure they can afford food and feed themselves, and with healthy food, as well.

I think if you look at our social assistance rates and the help that we give Islanders most in need, we compare very favourably. In fact, I think we rank No. 1 in almost every category across the country. I invite the member across to look at the Maytree report, and the new version of the Maytree report, I expect we'll do even better.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

**Ms. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### **Alliance for Mental Well-being**

Question for whoever is best able to answer it: Is the Alliance for Mental Well-Being an incorporated, non-profit organization in PEI?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Premier King:** You can't do that. You have to direct your question to someone.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Hudson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Alliance for Mental Well-Being – certainly it's a great initiative, with great staff. It's one of the things we hear so much



about is the gaps that we have in mental health and addictions and especially the mental health aspect of it.

The Alliance for Mental Well-Being, it will be working with our community partners as a not-for-profit, as arm's length from government to be able to work with the partners right across the communities in an upstream manner to partner and to provide additional services to Islanders when they need them, where they need them, and to be innovative.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

**Ms. Bell:** That's a really long answer that had nothing to do with the question I asked, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bell:** Which is kind of why I hoped somebody else might answer it, but that's okay. The Alliance for Mental Well-Being is not incorporated as a non-profit, as we heard in the committee presentation on January 12<sup>th</sup>.

In fact, this organization does not yet have a board or a mandate or objectives as it's not incorporated. It remains part of government operations. It is not arm's length. It is actually not an independent organization at all. Without a board of directors, it also has no strategic or fiscal oversight.

### **Responsibility of Alliance for Mental Health Well-being**

Question for the Minister of Health and Wellness: Who is actually responsible, right now, for the strategic and fiscal oversight for this government operation that is handing out millions of dollars?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Hudson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's very unfortunate the hon. member – and we see it across from the opposition time

after time – calling into question, basically, the integrity of some of these frontline workers –

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Hudson:** – that work day in, day out for Islanders and with Islanders.

Who is putting the programs together, for example, the four grant programs that have been advertised and that have been rolled out and that there's been a massive uptake with regard to the number of applications that have come in? Who is it? It is the executive director in consultation in working together with the interim chair of the operation who, by the way, is a very respected member of the community – a former employee of CMHA who was, again, a great partner with this government and previous governments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

**Ms. Bell:** It's a shame that the minister spends so much energy responding to a question that I didn't ask.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bell:** It was a very simple question about the oversight, strategic and fiscal oversight, of what in this government operation is a million-dollar operating budget, and that this government operation is about to award up to \$2 million in community grants.

### **Operational funds for government operation**

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: In the last operating budget, this government provided operational funds for 13 social sector NGOs with a total of a million dollars. How did you determine that this one single government operation needed that same amount of money, especially as it's not clearly delivering any tangible service?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Hudson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I really would take issue with the statement “not providing any tangible service”. When you’re working with community groups, when you’re working with partners, when you’re working with not-for-profits from one tip of the Island to the other, is hardly not providing any tangible results.

With regard to the oversight, with regard to the review of expenditures of grants that are going to be provided out into the community to provide that upstream needs that we see within mental health and addictions, every organization that we provide funding to is an NGO. They will be audited. We do have the Auditor General, who, on this side of the House, we certainly have great respect for.

Those are the checks, balances, that are put in place. We recognize that this needed to take place. We acted upon it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

**Ms. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The tangible activity of this organization is grant applications, and the first round of applications for those grants closed just this past February 18<sup>th</sup>.

There were over 40 potential grant applicants from the community at the information sessions provided; not surprising, considering how much money is on the table and how hungry non-profit organizations are for project dollars.

I’ve spoken to some of those applicants who have spent hundreds of hours on their applications. This is no small feat.

### **Non-profits competing for funding**

Question to the minister of health: How do you think making non-profits compete against each other for limited funding, picking winners and losers, is going to build community connection and resiliency as per the alliance website?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Hudson:** First of all, Mr. Speaker, we are not making not-for-profits compete against each other. That needs to be made completely clear.

I know that there have been some concerns put out by other NGOs with regard to the Alliance for Mental Well-being. The alliance, as well as myself, have had conversations with some of these organizations, who, for whatever reason, may not have been completely clear with regard to the mandate.

The hon. member states over 40 applications; the last I had heard is that it was 65 or greater applications, and to me, that speaks volumes to the interest and the validity, the importance of the process, and of the Alliance for Mental Well-being.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

**Ms. Bell:** I’m glad to hear that there are even more applicants than were at the information session. There is not enough money to fund every project application that goes in.

Perhaps the minister doesn’t understand that grant applications are competitive. You are competing for the money and not everybody gets funded. That’s how it works.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Bell:** It would help if you actually consulted with the people in the community that do these processes, and they could tell you that. In fact, we’ve learned that there was no consultation with existing key community organizations prior to the launch of this new initiative.

The United Way, for example, who’ve previously been a funding and grant partner for many important community initiatives, have demonstrated experience in overseeing grant programs and were not ever asked.

### **Benefits from grant programs**

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: This isn’t benefitting the organizations, the community, or the

individuals who will need mental health supports and services now. Who is this really benefitting?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Hudson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The member references the United Way. Absolutely, there have been great partnerships, working relationships with the United Way. There is no greater evidence of this than the launch of the 2-1-1 system.

But with that, specifically to the question that the member put forward, who is this benefitting? It's benefitting Islanders, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The University of Prince Edward Island Student Union provides an essential connection for students to ensure they have the best possible academic and social experience while enrolled at UPEI.

This year, the Student Union requested support for housing, HPV vaccines through 2022-2023 Operating Budget.

It would appear, though, that through the Budget address, both of those requests for funding have been ignored.

### **Request for support from UPEI Student Union**

Question to Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: If you were the president or the VP of the student union representing over 4,000 students, would you feel supported by this Budget?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

**Ms. Jameson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and hon. member, thank you for the question. This government values our partnership and the relationship we have with the UPEI Student Union. And certainly, I had the

opportunity to review the most recent policy document that entailed some of those areas that you're suggesting. I know one that is specifically under my purview would be around open educational resources and we were able to provide that additional funding in the Budget.

As it relates to housing and the HPV, that would definitely lie within the other departments, and certainly, I would encourage the student union to reach out to those other departments to ensure that those Budget needs were met.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Budget address noted that there will be a 2% increase in funding this year to UPEI and Holland College. Although, according to the Budget book, it would appear that the funding level is actually lower.

### **Funding for UPEI**

Question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: Can you please explain the 2% increase referred in the Budget address, and what it would seem to be there was actually a decrease in funding to UPEI?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

**Ms. Jameson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd have to delve deeper into the details regarding the question that the hon. member is asking. But, the reality of our contract is it would be a 2% increase to their operating funds. And then you have to look at all the additional increases to support the medical faculty, the Indigenous faculty, there's just so many new programs; housing, the new residence there.

So again, I'd really have to sort of, you know, delve in perhaps with some department personnel and we could probably go over some of those details with the hon. member.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, your second supplementary.

**Mr. McNeilly:** The way it would appear it surely would mean tuition increases and the mental health of students coming back, some of them potentially haven't even been on campus. I know there's a new residence being built and it's not going to be open in time for some – it's going to be at least 2023 after Canada Games. The students need access to housing now. In my district, students are getting priced out of Browns Court.

### **Adequate housing for UPEI students**

Question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: What do you say to students at UPEI who are and will be struggling to find adequate housing this year and next?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

**Ms. Jameson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

And I think we can all be proud as a province at the commitment to the new residence. Unfortunately, it's not going to be built tomorrow, but it's certainly in the work and it's going to take a lot of pressure off housing for students.

I know that I've had many discussions with the minister responsible for housing and I know that he is working on this file. And we've spoken in depth about the importance of providing student housing.

So, I am certain that if he'd like to pipe in, he could absolutely provide some more insight on that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

**Mr. Perry:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The minimum wage here on Prince Edward Island is presently at \$13 per hour and it's

expected to go up to \$13.70 on April 1<sup>st</sup> of this year.

### **Determining of minimum wage**

Question to the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture: Presently, can you tell me how the minimum wage is determined?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you hon. member for the question.

So, the *Employment Standards Act* requires an annual review of the minimum wage; that's taken place annually. The Employment Standards Board reviews that and then submits the recommendations to Cabinet.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

**Mr. Perry:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

So, yes that's true, presently the Employment Standards Board review the minimum wage annually and it provides a recommendation to government once that review is complete. If there is an increase requested, it can be a different increase every year.

### **Long-term strategy for minimum wage**

Question to the same minister: Has your department ever considered devising a long-term strategy for minimum wage increases instead of just randomly picking a different number every year?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you hon. member.

Certainly, that was a recommendation I brought forward to ask the committee to take a look at what a long-term plan looks like, because we do deal with this every year. We do feel that there needs to be a plan in place, once and for all, that will allow employers as well as employees a

plan. So, that was a recommendation I brought to the board and hopefully they're considering it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, second supplementary.

**Mr. Perry:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'm really happy to hear that that is something that you'd like to see also.

A defined plan will give employers an opportunity not only to plan for this year but to plan for years ahead, and they need that.

### **Commitment re: minimum wage strategy**

Minister, will you commit today that you will not only advocate for, but put in place, a long-term strategy for minimum wage here on Prince Edward Island within the next six months?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks, hon. member.

I certainly do support it, but what we're doing in our department right now is a comprehensive review that's going to take in the whole *Employment Standards Act*.

Six months, I can't commit to it, but I can assure that it is being worked on, and once we get our comprehensive review plan done and presented to the House, I believe we can find a path forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Scope of practice is a term that is tossed around a lot over the years in the Legislature, and I feel that it's becoming a bit of a buzzword.

I'd like to talk today specifically about scope of practice for nurse practitioners and pharmacists.

### **Vision for NPs and pharmacists**

A question to the minister of health: How do you see nurse practitioners and pharmacists playing a role in an accessible and responsive health care system? Specifically, I'm looking for what your vision is for these professions in PEI.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Hudson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do thank the hon. member for the question.

My vision is, as we move forward with medical homes, medical neighbourhoods, that we will see our health care professionals working in greater collaboration, and certainly within medical homes. But then, when you look at the broader spectrum of the health care delivery system through the medical neighbourhoods, the important role that our pharmacists will have to play in that.

And I think a couple of great examples of that, with regard to looking at the scope of practice, increasing it, is with regard to pharmacists and with regard to the diagnosis and treatment of low-grade UTIs.

Also though, we have to look at other jurisdictions as to what their pharmacists are providing under their scopes of practice. Have we made strides? Absolutely. Have we got a ways to go? Certainly, we do.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You are going to be very familiar with this question that I'm about to ask.

There are three hours of walk-in clinic time east of Stratford in PEI, and quite frankly, this past couple of months, we haven't even had that three hours allocated.

We have the Montague ER, but we know about the messaging and how important it is to not tie up the Montague ER with non-emergency cases.

As always, in eastern PEI, we're expected to drive to Charlottetown to walk-in clinics that are already full by the time we get there.

#### **Eastern PEI access to walk-in clinics**

A question to the minister of health: Do you feel that there's adequate walk-in clinic time east of Stratford in PEI?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Hudson:** Mr. Speaker, thank you very much, and thank the hon. member for the question.

As I believe it was last November that I had a meeting down in Morell with the hon. member and ones from the community, health care providers, and looking at some of the options that can be brought forward and how we can work together better to provide them.

I know then, it was shortly after that, that we ended up into the very unfortunate wave, the worst wave that we had of COVID –

**Mr. McNeilly:** Oh, there it is. There it is.

**Mr. Hudson:** It's a reality, Mr. Speaker, a very unfortunate reality, and I know that my colleague on this side of the House appreciates that, whereas some of the ones over here that I'm looking at –

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Hudson:** – they don't seem to. But with regard to – is there adequate access east of Stratford? I would have to agree with the member that, yes, we have to do better, absolutely, and to work with the community and work with the member on this.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh, your second supplementary.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The answer, we know, is no. There's not (Indistinct)

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Hudson:** If you had listened to my answer, you would have heard the "no" in it. (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacEwen:** I do appreciate the minister coming out, and he was quite attentive and was listening, and I know they were acting on it.

But as he knows too, I have been meeting with ministers of health since 2007 on this as well.

But I don't want to come here without proposing a solution to the problems that are going on.

**Mr. Hudson:** Good.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Finding ways to advance collaborative health care and improve patient access are goals that all governments are striving for.

Recently, I'm sure a number of us have read about an innovative partnership in health delivery in Nova Scotia that government and community pharmacies are partnering to offer residents timely access to routine, non-urgent care delivered by pharmacists and a nurse practitioner.

#### **Health delivery partnership for eastern PEI**

Question to the minister of health: Will the department of Health PEI look at this model that Nova Scotia is introducing in eastern PEI?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Hudson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I do appreciate that the hon. member states from 2007, so that goes back a long ways (Indistinct)

**An Hon. Member:** It hasn't gotten better.

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Hudson:** With regard to the specific question the hon. member references – eastern PEI. As the minister of health, as the minister responsible from tip to tip, I'm more than willing to look at any initiatives that will benefit Islanders right across this province.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to highlight it again. In Nova Scotia, it's a collaborative concept that's based on a pharmacist-led walk in clinic that opened last year in Pictou County.

So, through a new partnership, Nova Scotia health is adding a nurse practitioner to an existing New Glasgow clinic who will also provide care and health advice to patients at a newly established clinic.

I'm very welcome to having one in western PEI and eastern PEI.

Will the minister commit to implementing this type of model in rural PEI?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Hudson:** Mr. Speaker, and again, thank the hon. member for the question and for the point-blank request for a definitive yes or no that I am assuming that he wants to hear.

**Mr. McNeilly:** (Indistinct) *Jeopardy*.

**Mr. Hudson:** I'm not going to stand here and give him a definitive yes or no. As I had said before, we are looking at initiatives, medical homes, medical neighbourhoods, how we can incorporate the whole areas to provide the very best health care that can be provided right across the province.

If a component of that can be along the line of the initiatives that the hon. member has brought forward, I'm certainly very open to that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am telling him that it will work. In Morell, we already have the elements there, as he knows. We have the nurse practitioner; three hours a week, mind you, the only three hours a week available east of Stratford in PEI.

We have the pharmacy there. I don't need to tell anybody in this House about how important a local pharmacy is to a rural community. It is your primary access for health care that is open off-hours, too.

### **Collaborative care for Morell**

We have those two things available in Morell now. I don't want to wait another year or two. Can we see this model? Can we commit to working with the stakeholders that are in Morell right now to bring this collaborative care clinic concept to Morell?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Hudson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With regard to working with the partners in the community, absolutely. We'll work with the partners in the community, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

**Ms. Lund:** Mr. Speaker, tenants across the province are struggling with the unaffordability of housing, and post-secondary students are no exception.

In 2019, the Conservatives promised to extend mobile rent vouchers to students, but since being elected, government has fought tooth and nail to avoid implementing this promise permanently.

### **Rental vouchers for UPEI students**

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: With this Budget, will students finally be eligible for rent vouchers or will they continue to break

the bank while government breaks its promises?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

**Mr. Trivers:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I understand that possibly the president of the UPEISU is there in the gallery. I wanted to say hello to you and thank the member for the question, because supports for housing for our students on PEI, our post-secondary students, are really important. I've been working with the UPEISU for a number of years as minister of education and now as minister of housing to help address those.

One of the things that we were looking at with the former vice president of Academic and External Affairs was applying to our Community Housing Fund. It's for a UPEI Student Union-led co-op housing initiative.

I think we could probably enlist the services and the expertise of the Member from Charlottetown-Brighton. I'd like to invite him to be part of that as well, and working together, I think we can come up with some innovative solutions to help address student housing.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, final question.

**Ms. Lund:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll remind the minister that he campaigned on making this happen and I'm sorry to hear that now he's looking for new solutions.

With the rising cost of living comes more debt for recent graduates. To encourage recent graduates to work in PEI, the department of education has relied on the Debt Reduction Grant Program, which forgives student debt for the years which they work here.

Considering that PEI is currently experiencing a labour shortage, it seems like this would be an important program to invest in.

The Budget address makes no reference to this program.

### **Students and Debt Reduction Grant investment**

Question to the minister of education: Are students correct to assume that there will be no new investment in this Budget?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

**Ms. Jameson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Two investments that this government can certainly be proud of in this latest Budget are the \$400 increase to the George Coles Bursary, and I know that the George Coles Bursary, as well as the Island Advantage Bursary, those two have been – well, we've seen throughout the years the significant increases that we've made, so I know this is a wonderful news story for students.

As well, we have our community bursary. This is available to high school students who are volunteering, and they can earn \$10 an hour towards their post-secondary education. So, we've just recently increased this. I've been hearing wonderful things, and I'm really proud of these two investments.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** End of Question Period.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Speaker's Ruling

**Speaker:** Hon. members, during Question Period, the opposition was asking questions to the ministers, but no specific minister. According to *Beauchesne's*, they don't have to direct their question to a specific minister, but it does have to do with government business.

But in all fairness, it would be best interest of the opposition to ask the question to a minister because they might sit over there and take up our Question Period time.

**An Hon. Member:** No, they wouldn't do that.



**Speaker:** No. So, it's not in the rules, but best interest, save using up your time, I would ask a minister the question because they will sit.

**An Hon. Member:** From experience.

**Speaker:** From experience.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### Statements by Ministers

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

#### **Occupations in Demand**

**Mr. MacKay:** Mr. Speaker, immigration has always played an important role in helping to address some of the challenges our province is facing.

Immigration has helped bring new Islanders to our province, which has increased our population; reduce our median age; grow and diversify our Island communities; fill labour gaps that support economic growth for our province; and strengthen our Island's economy, something that we've been working very hard to do now more than ever before as we recover from this pandemic.

The strength of our Island's economy is measured in part by the number of people in our labour force. Thanks to immigration, our labour force continues to grow a little more every year.

However, we know there are still labour shortages, and employers continue to face staffing challenges. These shortages were certainly an issue before the pandemic, but now, because the pandemic has reshaped our workforce, it has intensified the need to fill jobs in some areas, and workers are in high demand.

That is why today, our Office of Immigration is launching the Occupations in Demand stream.

This new stream was developed collaboratively with our federal government counterparts, and I would like to thank them for their assistance.

The stream is an employer-driven program that allows employers to fill specific positions that they are unable to fill through the local job market, such as nurse aides, accommodation, housekeepers, truck drivers, and construction labourers, just to name a few.

This new stream will help reduce the period of time an applicant has to wait before applying for permanent residency for these jobs in demand.

This stream has several key requirements: with the employer offering full-time employment; the applicant being able to speak one of the province's two official languages, as well as have educational training.

For more information on this stream, I encourage employers to visit our website at [ImmigratePEI.ca](http://ImmigratePEI.ca) or contact the office at 902-620-3628 to review all the program requirements.

Immigration has helped build the strong province we have today, and it will continue to do so as we move forward together.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

**Ms. Altass:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a very interesting announcement from the minister. I look forward to delving into this a bit more, how this new stream will work. Most certainly, I would agree that immigration is a key part of how we're going to need to address our labor issues moving forward. I think it is certainly welcome news.

Some other points on this I would like to highlight, while I have the chance, would be finding ways to ensure that our international students have opportunities to stay and build their families, and live and work on Prince Edward Island. Moving forward is a wonderful way as well.

I hope that this new stream will also address those opportunities for international students to stay here and work on Prince Edward Island.

Most importantly, I think we always need to keep at the forefront how can we ensure that PEI is the very best place to live and work for everybody, so that would be for new immigrants, that's for Islanders, that's for everybody working in all areas of Prince Edward Island. If we can keep that at the forefront, then we will make PEI a desirable destination for all workers in every occupation. I think that's a question we always need to ask ourselves and something we can always improve on.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

**Mr. Perry:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the minister for his announcement.

I can firsthand say, without immigration in my own area – Royal Star is the largest employer west of Summerside, of Slemon Park, probably wouldn't be operated right now and that would have a huge negative impact on the economy, not only up west, but right across the Island.

So, what I'm hearing from the minister is that the occupation and demand stream targets specific occupations that are in high demand, like tourism, construction, and such and I assume that based on the labor market information that eligible occupations will change, or are subject to change – I'm assuming.

I also heard the program is an immigration of skilled workers; I'm not sure how it differs from the present PNP streams that are in existence, but I look forward to looking into it more and looking into it more deeply and finding out more about it.

Again, I want to thank the minister for this announcement. I welcome any help that we can give to the labor market of demand here on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

### Tabling of Documents

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety and Attorney General.

**Mr. Thompson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By Command of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I beg leave to table The Victims of Crime 2020/2021 Annual Report, for the period ending March 31<sup>st</sup> 2021 and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Health and Wellness, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety and Attorney General.

**Mr. Thompson:** Mr. Speaker, by Command of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I beg leave to table the Supplement Report of the Justice of Peace Renumeration Review Commission and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

Another one?

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

**Mr. Thompson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By Command of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I beg leave to table the Department of Agriculture and Land Annual Report for the period ending March 31<sup>st</sup> 2021 and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Fisheries and Communities, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Hudson:** By leave of the House, I beg leave to table the answer to written question No. 100 and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Social Development and Housing, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

Government Motions

Orders of the Day (Government)

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

**Ms. Compton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Premier, that the 1<sup>st</sup> order of the day be now read.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

**Clerk:** Order No. 1, Consideration of the Capital Estimates, in Committee.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

**Ms. Compton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Hon. Premier, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the grant of supply to Her Majesty.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road to chair the Committee of the Whole House, please.

**Chair:** The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to consider the grant of supply to Her Majesty.

A request has been made to bring a stranger on to the floor.

Shall it be granted? Granted.

Hon. members, we left off on page 53, the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning. The division, French Education, Programs and Services has been read and is presently under debate.

Please state your name and position for Hansard.

**Chris DesRoche:** Chris DesRoche, director of Finance and Administration with the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning.

**Chair:** Thank you very much, Chris, and welcome.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Chair.

A question on the class sizes for French Immersion programming, are they growing, are they stable or are they declining?

**Ms. Jameson:** (Indistinct) I would say relatively stable.

**Mr. Gallant:** I know this is jumping, but we're in this section. Your grants, when you look at the grants from pretty well all the departments, except for the next one, Early Childhood and Development, they're all relatively the same. Can you explain that? The only one that's going up any significant amount is that one and that's the \$10 child care. Why don't the grants fluctuate any?

**Chris DesRoche:** It would depend on the section, but in this particular section, the director has not expressed a need for additional budget in order to carry out his responsibilities.

**Mr. Gallant:** So they don't see any increase of application? Could you explain: What are these grants? Is it something that someone in the school system applies for?

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, there is a considerable number of grants. I'm not sure if you have the handout. There's all kinds of different areas from French teacher bursaries, French student bursaries, French book event, some cultural activities, some French student exchange, language development.

**Mr. Gallant:** So is this something initiated by teachers?

**Chris DesRoche:** It would depend on the line. Certainly, the French student bursary would be initiated by the student.

**Chair:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**Mr. Gallant:** That's it for now. I'll have some in the next section.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

**Ms. Lund:** Thank you, Chair and welcome back to both of you today.

I don't know if this is a question you'd like to deal with in this section, but I thought I would ask.

I know I've heard from a number of people who have expressed shortages to French substitutes, access to French substitutes. I was just curious if there's a contingency plan in place if there's not enough French teachers so that we don't sacrifice the quality of French programming?

**Ms. Jameson:** Not (Indistinct), Chair.

**Chair:** Hon. member, that's not in this section, but it will be coming up.

**Ms. Lund:** Not a problem.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

**Ms. Lund:** Thank you, Chair.

I was just curious if you would like to speak to contingency planning, but if you would prefer to speak to it in staffing, that's fine with me.

No further questions in this file, Chair.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** I've been speaking to somebody who runs a Francophone early child care centre, early learning centre, excuse me – and requesting that the *Early Learning Child Care Act* be translated into French because they have a number of employees who are unilingual French. In order for them to understand what the codes and what the various requirements of the act are, it would be really helpful to have it in French as well as in English. I'm wondering whether your department has any plans to do that translation?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah, it would likely be better suited for the next section, but I am aware of the question – the matter. Let's just wait – let's get through this section and move along, yeah.

**Chair:** If you don't mind asking the question when we get in that section.

**Leader of the Opposition:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Okay. Do you have another question for this (Indistinct)

**Leader of the Opposition:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Any further questions?

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total French Education, Programs, and Services: 3,510,200.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Early Childhood Development

“Appropriations provided for early childhood learning, including grants for Early Years Centres, child care centres, funds for the purchase of learning materials, and curriculum maintenance and support.” Administration: 4,600. Materials, Supplies and Services: 163,100. Professional Services: 122,100. Salaries: 2,818,700. Travel and Training: 37,800. Grants: 52,073,600.

The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

**Ms. Lund:** Thank you, Chair.

I was wondering if you could walk us through where the bulk of the new investment in this section is going to.

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah.

**Chris DesRoche:** Sure, I'll speak to the smaller ones first.

So, under material, supplies and services we've added \$104,000 to that line; and, professional contracts received a \$100,000; in travel and training, \$20,000, but certainly the bulk of our investment this year is in grants to the early years centers, or programs related to the early years centers, and the staff at the department to support the early years centres.

Under the staffing we've added \$1.3 million and that would be 11 new positions at the department: we have a coach; a data reporting coordinator; another center inspector; resource support for the special

needs grants program; junior evaluation analyst; two administration staff; two inclusion coordinators; and a EAL/FAL coach; and a finance manager.

Certainly, most of the increase is in the \$25.5 million in grants. Again, there's a lot of programs within that, however, there is five programs, or five initiatives, that make up most of the money. Reducing parent fees is a significant cost of about \$4.6 million. They reduced to \$25 a day on January 1<sup>st</sup> of this year and they'll reduce again to \$20 on October 1<sup>st</sup>.

The second significant initiative is increasing wages for ECE's. This current year on October 1<sup>st</sup>, we increased the ECE rates, or ECE one, two, and three at \$1, \$2, and, \$4, bringing the top end of ECE three rate to \$26 an hour. This coming October 2023 – sorry, 2022 – another increase for the same three levels of 50 cents, \$1, \$2, bringing the top end of the ECE three rate to \$28 an hour.

The next significant initiative making up the \$25.5 million, is \$5.9 million for 12 additional early learning centre designations – early year centre designations, as well as increasing spaces at existing centres. That's the \$5.9 million dollars.

Something that received feedback from during the consultation process for the agreement, is the staff are in front of children all day with not a lot of time to take breaks and stuff like that, so we're investing in about 100 support staff into the centres that will navigate through the centre and address any issues like that, so that was 4,048,000.

The next most significant initiative is we're currently in development of a pension plan for early years staff. That is anticipated to cost about \$1.2 million it won't be – it's not anticipated it'll be mandatory, so it'll depend on how many volunteer to participate in that program.

There're six or eight smaller programs, but that certainly makes up 22.5 of the \$25.5 million.

**Ms. Lund:** Thank you for that answer, Chris. I do have a couple of follow ups from it. First, can I just confirm that that's not all

provincial dollars? Most of that that would be federal contribution?

**Chris DesRoche:** Correct.

**Ms. Lund:** Yeah.

How many new spaces do you expect that that's going to create?

**Chris DesRoche:** We actually recently awarded new spaces. I believe it was – 220 new spaces were just created last month, or approved, I should say.

**Ms. Lund:** You say they were approved last month; do you have a sense of when you expect them to be online?

Like, when they would be available?

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, I mean it would be as soon as the centres can staff and accept their registrations, but the spaces were added into high priority areas of the province with longer wait lists.

**Ms. Lund:** So, did you say that they will be available as soon as they're able to staff them, was that the answer?

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, certainly these are all individual centres that run their own operation, but I would say they would be accepting registrations and starting the staffing process as soon as possible.

**Ms. Lund:** Do you know if you have enough ECE's that are waiting for employment that you'll be able to staff to staff these, or do you anticipate having any staff shortage problems?

**Chris DesRoche:** Certainly, there's always a need for additional staff at early year centres, which is why I guess some of the smaller programs that we didn't mention in the grants program are anticipated to help with that.

On the retention side, certainly, the pension plan is expected to retain staff as per adding staff and we also have \$100,000 allocated we're referring to Innovative Retention Grant, so the centres actually apply and tell us what their ideas are for their own centre and we'll fund those ideas.

We have invested fairly significantly into the Holland Collage accelerated program and also, Skills PEI is assisting with a Steps to Success Program, so that would allow people who don't currently work in the industry; they're hired at the centres and while they are hired at the centres, they're matched with somebody who wants to upgrade their certifications. So, they will be hired at no cost to the centre, but the centre is expected to continue to pay the staff that's out in the accelerated program.

**Ms. Jameson:** And they'll gain a level one

—

**Chris DesRoche:** Yes, exactly.

**Ms. Jameson:** — in the Steps to Success.

**Chris DesRoche:** Yes, and the person that's coming in from outside the centre will perform the level one three 90-hour courses while they're engaged at the centre for anywhere from 16-21 weeks. That's hoping to expand the number of staff.

We also have grants — we have tuition grants — up to \$2,500 for staff that wish to upgrade their certifications. The upgrading is an important factor in order to achieve the higher rates which will presumably help with retention.

**Ms. Lund:** Thank you for that answer, Chris.

It does sound like you are anticipating some staff shortage; and also, that you are coming at it from a number of perspectives to try to address that.

Do you have a sense of how many positions you will require in order to get all of these centres up and running?

**Chris DesRoche:** I'm not sure what you mean by get the centres up and running. You mean the designated centres?

**Ms. Lund:** Specifically, you had indicated that there are a number of centres that are being funded and I was asking when they would come online; you had said they would come online whenever we have the staff to fill those centres. I was just curious, how many staff — how many ECE's, specifically, we would need for these new spaces?

**Chris DesRoche:** Well the 12 additional designations are existing centres that are licensed that want to become a designated early years centre, so it's the same staff, same operation. Certainly, the extra spaces would be the growth at existing centres and we're providing some capital grants if they need any expansions.

**Ms. Lund:** I appreciate that clarification.

Can you let me know where those spaces are in the province?

**Chris DesRoche:** I have a list of centres.

So, maybe I'll read off the area and the spaces of each centre. It wouldn't be summarized; you'll have to summarize it after. Charlottetown, 17 spaces; O'Leary, 20 spaces; Souris, seven spaces; Charlottetown, 10 spaces; Kensington, nine spaces; Cornwall, 21 spaces; Summerside, 36 spaces; Slemon Park, three spaces; Stratford, 16 spaces; Stratford again, 31 spaces; St. Theresa, six spaces; Murray River, 10 spaces; and Charlottetown, 34 spaces.

**Mr. Myers:** Favoring King's County, again.

**Ms. Lund:** Thank you, Chair.

I was going to ask you about the salary raises that ECE's can expect and you gave us some numbers that seemed to range about 50 cents to \$4 an hour.

**Chris DesRoche:** Depending on the certification level, yes.

**Ms. Lund:** Is there a table of that that you would be able to present, it would be easier than me asking you a bunch of questions on that.

**Chris DesRoche:** Yes, we can bring that back.

**Ms. Lund:** That would be helpful.

What about other staff that work in early child care? Will they also be eligible for raises, or is it just ECE specifically?

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, another initiative that we had this year is for the special needs' assistants and the autism assistants. If they are certified, they're going to be paid in

accordance with the wage grid as opposed to the uncertified rate. So, they all will experience some significant increases, depending on their certification.

**Ms. Lund:** I suppose this one is really more a question to the minister, specifically. I know my colleague, Mermaid-Stratford, had raised the idea of child care on hospital grounds. We certainly heard from those working in health care about the challenge that that presents. I'm just curious if you have any thoughts on that, minister, if that's something you are interested in pursuing?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yes. The department's been in discussions with Prince County Hospital currently and I'm not sure where they're at as it relates to those discussions, but certainly, there seems to be an appetite there to get something up and running.

**Ms. Lund:** That is exciting to hear. Would you imagine that that would start as a pilot at PCH and potentially, expand to Charlottetown, minister?

**Ms. Jameson:** I'd have to get an update from my staff as to what they envision for that.

**Ms. Lund:** Thank you for that answer. I'd be really interested in an update on that because I think it could have a huge impact, particularly for those who are working in health care. We hear from many women alike that it's an enormous challenge. I'd be really interested to hear your thoughts on what a project like that could look like because I think it could be transformative. I don't know if you wish to comment on that or if you'd just rather bring something back.

**Ms. Jameson:** I'll bring it back.

**Chair:** I, too, am interested in that. I've actually brought it up here a few times. Being married to a nurse who worked at Prince County Hospital, I know the importance of having child care and just the irregular hours. It's something that other nurses have mentioned, too, so I'm glad that you're looking into it.

The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

**Ms. Lund:** Exactly. It's one of those things where irregular hours is a huge challenge, so I look forward to having a more robust discussion on this. I did have one other question here.

There also seems to be a decrease in Early Years Education and Training programs. Just wondering if I'm reading that correctly and if so, why that would be?

**Chris DesRoche:** You in the tabling document?

**Ms. Lund:** Yes.

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, there was some upfront costs with Holland College and Collège de l'Île and UPEI with regards to investing in some of the programs like the accelerated program.

**Ms. Lund:** Thank you, Chair.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

**Ms. Bell:** Thank you, Chair.

It's a question specifically around an ongoing challenge for funding early childhood educators who work in Best Start Program. The Best Start workers have their independent evaluation done of their accreditation and it came out as an ECE 5. There was a commitment for their funding to bring them up to the same level as the EC workers made back in 2019, but that has not yet been honoured. I know there have been a lot of ongoing discussions. Just wondering if you could advise, first of all, is that salary increase for Best Start workers going to be in this Budget? I wasn't able to find it in here. It could be in here but, I wasn't able to track it down.

**Ms. Jameson:** Thanks for the question.

That Budget item will be moving to health, so those will be good questions for health.

**Ms. Bell:** Okay, but the reason I'm asking it here is because the ongoing discussions for the last two years where the board and the board members have been having meetings with the department of education, like multiple times, every year. They don't know that. They're waiting for an update from

your department. I've had multiple correspondence, as recently as December 2021 from your department so, when were you going to advise them that that was actually – they were talking to the wrong department in that case, because they don't know that?

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, the Best Start Program, as the minister said, is actually managed in the health department, but we do have a line with our contribution to the program, but they would also have a contribution. Our amount hasn't changed but it might be a better question for health when their file comes up.

**Ms. Bell:** I appreciate the Best Start Program itself is, in its core, a health program. It is about improving outcomes for children who are deemed to be in a situation which may have some risk factor.

But what we're talking about here is those salaries that are paid to the providers of child care who have been assessed as ECE 5 and the commitment in your original, initial throne speech, actually, really clearly states: that this is an investment in highly successful early childhood education. The Budget plan follows through on the wage increases for early years educators with a commitment to working on a long-term plan that sees these wages consistent with the value we all place on these programs. The wage benefits will be extended to the Best Start Program as well.

So, this was identified as an early education ask, Chair. It has been negotiated over the last two years – not acted on but negotiated – with the department of education. The health line is still in health for the delivery of the Best Start Program. This is about the wages and the equitable wage grid for the educators. I'm really concerned that a commitment made to you almost three years ago now, it's going to be bumped to a different department after all this discussion and not paid.

Could you clarify if there's been any commitment? Are we going to see that increase this year, whoever pays for it?

**Chris DesRoche:** The Best Start Program is jointly funded, and this is our amount that's the same each year. If there was an increase

for wages, it would show up in the health department. It's jointing (Indistinct)

**Ms. Bell:** Okay, so you're going to honour the commitment to increase the wages for the Best Start workers to ECE 5, but you're going to pay it out of health?

**Chris DesRoche:** I can't say what the health increase is. I'm not privy to their file, but it is a jointly funded program and any increases to the program in general would come from health.

**Ms. Bell:** I just need to clarify. This program is not new. It's been around for years and years and years and I know, it is primarily funded out of health. This aspect of it has been in education for the same length of time.

My concern is when I get to health, the health minister is going to sit there and say, I have no idea what you're talking about, because every negotiation and discussion has happened on this, up to and including the last correspondence from you, minister, as of December 2021 – that's two months ago – was with your department.

So, if you – in the process of building the Budget, at what point were you going to tell anybody else that this wasn't in your department anymore? That seems very last minute to suddenly decide that it's not and not tell anybody.

**Ms. Jameson:** We do have a meeting scheduled – the department does have a meeting scheduled with Chances in the coming, I think, days. They'll be able to delve into the details around the dollars.

**Ms. Bell:** If you're having that meeting this week, don't you have that information now? Do you not know what that information is about how much you're funding them now?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yes, but we, again, we're only one part of the equation and our funding is remaining consistent. Any increases that are potentially coming out of the health Budget should be directed to health.

**Ms. Bell:** So why are you meeting with them if you're not going to tell them about the increase that's not your department?



**Ms. Jameson:** Well, to talk about the transition to health because, as you say, up until now, education really has been the main point of contact but, moving forward, health will be.

**Chair:** Hon. member, so basically, it's a line item that's in to another department so, if you could just move on to a different question.

**Ms. Bell:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Okay.

**Ms. Bell:** (Indistinct) a commitment made in 2019 and this organization has been delivering this in good faith waiting for that increase to their wages for this critical program and now, while the Budget is being tabled, we're hearing that it's changing responsibility.

Chair, I think that says – what that says is that they're not going to see that funding this year and that's incredibly disappointing. I would have hoped the minister could bring information now and I would ask, if possible, could that information be brought back on whether or not that wage increase is going to happen, even though it's with a different department, given that the responsibility has been with your department up until literally today?

**Chair:** Hon. member, I think it's unfair to say that that line item in a department that's not on the floor yet, we'll not be able to answer that. I think we should wait, in fairness, until they get to the floor and you can ask that question and then you have an opportunity during Question Period or written questions or at any sidebar conversation to get that addressed.

So, I'd like to move to a different thread. Do you have anything further, Charlottetown-Belvedere?

**Ms. Bell:** No, I'm fine.

Thank you.

**Chair:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thanks, Chair.

I'll go back to the question that was being asked in the last section. I'll give it a little bit of context this time.

The Francophone community on Prince Edward Island is increasing. We see that in the enrolment in the five French learning centres that we have. Occasionally – well, more than occasionally, we have employees in those centres who are unilingual Francophone.

In many other provinces, all of their acts would be translated into French. I know New Brunswick is the only official bilingual province, but Ontario, for example, all of their legislation is available *en français aussi*, in French also.

Not here in Prince Edward Island, and I understand we don't have the capacity of some of the bigger provinces, but we do have La Commission scolaire de langue française as part of your department, and it would strike me that it wouldn't be a huge amount of work for your department to translate, as you've been asked a number of times by directors of Francophone learning centres, the *Early Learning and Child Care Act* into French.

I'm just wondering if you have plans to do that.

**Ms. Jameson:** Thank you for the question.

There have been and there will be more discussions with the educators around that. Whether it's the entire act that will be translated or only certain pertinent portions of it that pertain to sort of more their day-to-day work, I think that there's an appetite to move forward and ensure that some of it's translated.

So, yes, I don't know the details of those because again, those discussions haven't really yet – we haven't firmed up a plan, but they are ongoing. And I do recognize, and my children go to a French centre, so I do recognize and appreciate the concerns being brought forward, and we want to make sure that we're there to support the educators in those centres.

**Leader of the Opposition:** I appreciate the answer, minister, and again, I'm not familiar enough with the act to know how

voluminous it is, but I know that the ask consistently has been for the whole act and the regulations to be translated into French.

Again, I wish I knew how much work that would entail, but I would suggest that, probably within your department, you have the facility to do that. And I know it's not just simply translating. It's not Google Translate. That's not what we're looking for here, I get that, because it's legislation, but I really hope that you do, as you just suggested, look into that, and it is the entire act and the regulations.

Thanks, Chair.

**Chair:** You're welcome.

The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

**Ms. Beaton:** Thanks, Chair.

Thank you. Good to see you.

One of the main objectives in the mandate letter is to work with private and public sectors to ensure that the delivery of child care services is successful and responsive to the needs of Islanders.

I wanted to ask about the child care registry. Can you tell me how many children are on that registry?

**Ms. Jameson:** We'd have to bring that back. It's ever changing on a day-to-day basis, but we can get the most up-to-date numbers for you.

**Ms. Beaton:** And I guess with that, I'd like to understand what's the average wait time, because I've sent constituent concerns of health care workers whose name has been on the list since they were four months pregnant, going back to work at the end of this month and still no child care spots, which is hugely impactful to the health care sector, given the fact that we are so short-staffed. We need to put as many people in there as we possibly can.

Obviously, creating more spots is one of the key strategies in order to reach that objective of providing child care.

You have 220 spots that have been approved last month?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah.

**Ms. Beaton:** Can you tell me – I guess my question kind of needs the registry numbers because in order to understand how many spaces you need to create; you need to understand how many children are on the registry.

I guess I'm just wondering what the performance measurements are. This is the area in which there's been huge investment in. It's particularly in this year, but even previous to this, we've added additional child care spots.

I'm wondering: Is the objective to clear the registry? And if your objective is to clear the registry, how much more investment besides this additional \$25 million is going to be needed in order to do that?

**Ms. Jameson:** I can tell you, it was committed to, within two years, to increase the number of spaces by 450 through the agreement, and that's all spelled out.

To this point now, we've increased it by 220.

There is a requirement; I know infant spaces are always the main challenge. That's one of the benefits of moving some of these centres to designated, because there's a requirement to have infants. So, we saw an additional 44 infant spaces come online through this last increase.

Also, with the family home centres, all the incentives that we're providing to them, we feel that there will be a number of spaces open up through those, and we've had a lot of interest already from a couple of town halls that we've done. There's enough incentive there to encourage the family home centres to become licensed.

We can do probably a better assessment here in the months to come, but we're certainly making strides on that registry.

**Ms. Beaton:** I'm just trying to grasp, do you have just a "guesstimate" on how many are currently on that registry?

**Ms. Jameson:** We'll bring it back.

**Ms. Beaton:** Okay. So, how do we identify who's going to fill those spaces? When you have a registry, is it a first-come-first-serve in the area? And if it is, I guess we're kind of talking about – the person I spoke to, she was four months pregnant and now she's gone through her maternity leave, so we're talking 16, 18 months wait period in which they're phoning around to every single child care centre anywhere around them. It doesn't even have to be close. It could be anywhere. And that's a heavy stress level.

So, how are we identifying who's that next person in line so that that takes that stress load off of Islanders?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah, it would be a first-come-first-serve, and again, those infant spaces are more challenging to find. I would think if she was looking for a three- or four-year-old space, she would likely be able to find something relatively quickly.

But certainly, we can bring back the average time, and really, through these significant investments, we're hopeful that these wait times – eventually, hope to eliminate these wait times, that this won't be a concern.

If I look at Kathleen Flanagan when she's presented to committee here, on PEI, there is more available child care than anywhere else in Canada. So, again, it's not perfect, but we're certainly leading the way, and through these investments, we will continue to increase accessibility to these spaces, and through our partnerships as well, because all the centres and home centres and that, they all have a role to play.

**Ms. Beaton:** Am I right in assuming that the objective is to clear the registry and to have child care accessible to everyone?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah.

**Ms. Beaton:** That's the objective, okay.

How did we identify that it was 400 spaces that we would invest in in the two years? I'm just, I guess, looking for the performance indicator. If we hit 400 this year, are we going to then go to 500? Do you have a projection as to where you're going to go after that to know clearly how long it will take you to clear that registry?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah, absolutely. Much of that would be laid out in the agreement with the federal government. I can certainly bring some more information back on that.

The reality is I think we'd like to be able to add a thousand spaces this year, but we recognize we don't currently have the staff to support that type of growth. So, we're moving sort of in tandem; we're building this system, and there's multiple different layers to it.

**Ms. Beaton:** My understanding, the operation budget, we also predict out to three years, right? Do you have requests in to further increase spaces over year two and year three of the operation Budget?

**Chris DesRoche:** The federal agreement does escalate over the years of the agreement, but I think it's important, as the minister said, to recognize that the investments in recruitment and retention will then form some of those strategies.

So, if we see the sector staff growing, I think I'm safe to say that the minister would want to support that with additional investments in spaces when that's available.

**Ms. Beaton:** Great, and just one other question; that's kind of where I was going yesterday. When you have that objective and digging down into those key strategies and how you achieve it and laying that out so that we can all see where we're going to be in this year, next year, because it really comes down to planning, too, for anybody who's waiting for those child care spaces, and will they be able to return to work? I mean, that's a huge issue for women particularly –

**Ms. Jameson:** Absolutely.

**Ms. Beaton:** – especially when we're talking about education and health care, when trying to get back to work and how impactful it is to their family.

So, I'd love to see – is it possible to bring back what that plan looks like, where the registry is, and what steps do we need to take as a province to ensure that we're supporting clearing that registry, so that that's the object, then we have a clear pathway to do that?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah.

**Ms. Beaton:** Okay, thank you.

**Ms. Jameson:** Absolutely, and we can bring information back, but we can also – after we had signed the agreement with the federal government, we had provided a briefing to all the caucuses, so we're happy to do that. I know the staff would be happy to give an update as to where we're at in the agreement and what sort of our next steps are for the coming year and years to come.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

**Ms. Bernard:** Thank you, Chair.

I just have a question around something that's in your mandate letter that was announced by government back in 2019.

I know in the letter, it said that you would work with the minister of health on the First 1,000 Days Initiative, so I'm assuming part of that would fall in your budget.

Are we going to see anything in this Budget for that program?

**Ms. Jameson:** I would think that all of the investments in child care are part of that First 1,000 Days, really. I'll have to look at my notes as to when the committee last met.

But as you know, Dr. Morrison was the chair of that work and has obviously been preoccupied, but I know she'll be reengaging everyone and making this a priority moving forward.

But I would think, if you look at early learning, that's a huge component of it. Even the Best Start Program, it's something that will be reviewed through the First 1,000 Days Initiative.

**Ms. Bernard:** That's kind of, I guess, why I was a little bit concerned about that, given that Best Start has also moved.

Of course, child care is an essential part of the First 1,000 Days, but it's so much more than that. I'm wondering, because from what I've seen, there's been nothing shared with the public on this work, would you be able to bring back what has been done so far?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah, absolutely, I can. And it really is a file that's led by health, so currently, they're in the midst of doing a scan of all the services and programs offered throughout government, but I'd encourage you to ask the minister of health as well for that information.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

**Ms. Bernard:** I'm good.

Thank you, Chair.

**Chair:** You're welcome.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Thank you, Chair.

You were talking about January 21<sup>st</sup>, it moved to \$25 a day; October 1<sup>st</sup>, it's going to go to \$20 a day. But I missed the other ones. What's after that?

**Chris DesRoche:** That's as far as our action plan currently extends in the federal agreement, but the target is an average of \$10 a day.

**Ms. Jameson:** By the end of 2024.

**Chris DesRoche:** I think 2024 is the year.

**Mr. McNeilly:** So, we have an action plan to October 2023, but then after that, there's nothing. It's a two-year action plan?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah.

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, a longer-term agreement, but it's – I'll give you an example. Our other federal agreement was a 10-year agreement with three-year action plans, and it's a good process to do an update on where things left and what new priorities might be added to the agreement.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Will not having that after 2023 stall things? Are we –

**Ms. Jameson:** No.

**Chris DesRoche:** It'll be finalized prior to the end of the current action plan.

**Mr. McNeilly:** So then, by October 2023, we'll have maybe a couple more –

**Chris DesRoche:** That's right, yeah.

**Ms. Jameson:** Again, ultimately, the goal is to get to that average \$10 a day by 2024.

**Mr. McNeilly:** I guess I would like to see that sooner. There could be some things happen next year that I'd like to see that sooner rather than – you know, just for continuity and moving forward.

Before, in the past, there were ECEs and EAs in the school system and there seems to be a different – an imbalance between the ECEs moving this way and vice versa.

You made some changes. You talked about them today. Does that provide balance? Are we at a balance point between ECEs and EAs with these numbers?

**Ms. Jameson:** I think we're almost there. Yeah, we are.

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, I think we're very close.

**Ms. Jameson:** I think with our next raise, yeah –

**Chris DesRoche:** This coming October (Indistinct) \$28 for a diploma ECE after their four steps, and it'd be close. I could bring back the EA rate, but I think it might be – it's in the 28s or 29s.

**Mr. McNeilly:** That's a positive. So, now you have balanced the playing field. Now you have just a recruitment problem across both, because there's, definitely, there's a need for EAs and ECEs.

Again, can you talk a little bit more about how we're going to recruit for those positions, because the number of jobs is up? What are we doing to recruit for ECEs and both EAs?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah, Chris spoke earlier about the Steps to Success program. That was made possible through funding from the Department of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture and SkillsPEI. There are currently 34 participants in it and they're working towards their level one

certification. They've come into centres across the Island at no cost to the centre to fill in for individuals who wanted to pursue the accelerated program through Holland College.

Through those, the accelerated certificate, there are 22 registered, and the accelerated diploma, there are currently 18 registered.

So, that's about 80 new, potentially, certified educators that'll be coming out here in a year. We had had our first pilot with the Steps to Success last year and it was a great success, and hence why there was an appetite with, of course, the Department of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture to increase it, and I'm hopeful that we'll be able to see another version of the program in the future, as well.

**Chris DesRoche:** We also have one other program I failed to mention, is the Return to ECE Profession Grant. If somebody's been out of the industry for two years, there's a \$5,000 stipend to return to the industry and work in the sector.

**Mr. McNeilly:** The minister of economic growth made an announcement today about immigration programs.

Because there's so much federal money coming into early (Indistinct), do you know if early (Indistinct) would qualify for that program that the minister announced?

**Ms. Jameson:** It's a good question. I'll look into it.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Yeah, so, that would be good because it seems to be a need, and I know that your field is becoming increasingly diverse, too, with people coming into this –

**Ms. Jameson:** Absolutely, it is, yeah.

**Mr. McNeilly:** – and I think that's a good thing.

You had mentioned before about an inclusion coach. What is an inclusion coach?

**Chris DesRoche:** (Indistinct) we have two inclusion coordinators, and they're going to work with the centres on strategies (Indistinct) just in general inclusion in the

centres, whether it be a disability or diversity or what have you, but those positions haven't – I don't think they've started yet, but they're very close to starting.

**Ms. Jameson:** So, when you look at our special needs funding and our autism funding and supports, just to help better support those families with special needs and see where any gaps or opportunities exist.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Oh, so it's inclusion for the families, so for the families that are attending the daycare (Indistinct) it's not inclusion for the employees?

**Chris DesRoche:** No, it's for the children.

**Ms. Jameson:** No, it's for the children, yeah.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Okay, is there anything for the employees? Was there any diversity inclusion at this level?

**Chris DesRoche:** There's a small – there's a newcomer's program for \$26,000, but I'd have to bring back information on what that entails.

**Ms. Jameson:** That's through the LINC program at Holland College, correct? I think that's –

**Chris DesRoche:** I'm not sure. I'd have to bring that back.

**Mr. McNeilly:** And I'd like to see the information (Indistinct) that for families because if you have a diversifying group – I've seen it. I've been to some different centres, and it's fantastic. The kids get different – but it might be hard for both the employees under high stress, and so I'm mildly disappointed that you're growing at such a rate, but we're not putting the steps in to support the employees in the diversity.

**Ms. Jameson:** Quick comment.

The educators are eligible for PD as well, so there could be some opportunities and it's a really good point and certainly one that we can address with the ECDA as well.

**Chris DesRoche:** We do have an EAL/FAL coach as well that would work center staff as part of those lead positions.

That might help.

**Chair:** Hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Okay, so I'll leave it there because I want to move on, I don't want to be talking all day.

I've been approached by; in my community we need more space, like actual physical space, there's no place to move to have an early childhood – I was approached and said, listen, we would take anything to put a facility in. We want to come to your community to build something, but there's no places. Is there a program within all this funding to help with the bigger picture of actually creating facilities, new facilities to provide early childhood development education?

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, there's a capital grants program and the budget is \$750,000 and you're eligible up to \$37,500, I believe, towards your expansion or construction.

**Mr. McNeilly:** What I'm talking about more to, is that's fine if they find a place. But the assistance, the housing we have, the housing minister and they're finding it – I think there needs to be some sort of a context there where the department says, hey, you know what, there's a need in West Royalty, Charlottetown, we'll work with them to find those facilities.

**Ms. Jameson:** Well, you know a couple of examples more recently is Kinkora, the municipality, they've actually taken on the administration, the center is housed within the community center and they've taken on sort of the administrative aspects of running the child care facility.

Also, more recently, Mighty Oaks has started up out in Tracadie and the municipality, they were able to provide the old Tracadie school to Mighty Oaks at a very, very reasonable, nothing cost, more less. So, the municipalities we're seeing are understanding and appreciating the importance of child care for the future of their communities.

I know another couple of members in here have actually approached me for some options within their community, so I think this is a really wonderful model if the municipalities can get behind them.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Yeah definitely.

Those are great. In my community, I drive around, and I don't see anything. Where everybody's looking for those places, so that's just a concern of mine. So, I just wanted to – glad to get the ministers – two more subjects.

Always an issue, I know there's some good funding here but what is the – how do we deal with the infant spaces? It's just a very difficult problem and I know there's been some different things; but is the plan sufficient enough to provide our population growth into the future. Our population's growing, infant spaces are always lacking behind, people are always – as soon as they even remotely think they're going to get pregnant they seem to go on the lists.

Can you talk about how we deal with that? How do you deal with that as a minister?

**Ms. Jameson:** I think first and foremost, it's moving centers to the designated model where they is that requirement to have those infant spaces and those ratios.

Secondly, we talked about our family home centers and the spaces that will be expanded as a result of those.

Then thirdly, some changes to the age, I think it's in legislation and it's currently, an infant is deemed an infant up to the age of 22 months, I believe. In some other jurisdiction they've decreased that to 16 months.

But we need the sector to buy into that, because some could argue that there's – a 16-month-old is much different in terms of their development than a 22-month-old and that. So, we have been having discussions with the ECDA around that and I know that they've engaged their membership aids and I'm hopeful we'll make some progress on that, because it would open up some additional spaces.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Well, thank you very much.

I'll be watching that because it's just a recurring question for sure.

The last line of questioning I'd like to ask the minister today is, early centers, there's a lot of talk about ventilation all across the board, throughout the entire board. Education, seniors, we don't know what's coming down the road. We've pushed you on ventilation on a number of different occasions – can you talk to me about what's been done in early childhood centers? Has the standard changed at all for ventilation in those centers?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah, so early this year, I guess, we would have done a call out to all the centers requesting additional information regarding their ventilation whether or not they would like HEPA filters, so we did put an order in for about 200 HEPA filters I believe. And those have been, I think the majority of them, have already been delivered the centers at no charge to them. So, government took it on.

**Mr. McNeilly:** I would clap for that.

There's 200 HEPA filters out in the early childhood centers, there was a request put out, but have you done any inspections on those? Are they up to standard? Did you notice anything if you had done the inspections along the way?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah, there's –

**Chris DesRoche:** The question that was posed was whether or not they had a mechanical ventilation system and if they did not, then we were there to support them with HEPA filters for all classrooms that would be high traffic, basically.

**Mr. McNeilly:** So, each location in Prince Edward Island got a HEPA filter if they had no mechanical ventilation?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah, or more, however many they needed.

**Chris DesRoche:** Licensed or designated.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Licensed centers.

That's good, minister, that's good.

Thanks, Chair.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke. I was going to say TV-Sherbrooke. Tyne Valley. That's how I did it.

**Ms. Altass:** As seen on TV, Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

I want to just start out by reiterating something that was mentioned by a couple of my colleagues just briefly.

I have been surprised, actually, by the number of parents who have contacted me from my district recently in particular, mostly women who are healthcare professionals who can't find child care and who are considering or who are choosing not to return to work.

So, you do have that double overlap there, so I'm really looking forward to – like the problems with access to child care – but also the problem with your needing health care workers. So, you've got a dupe problem there. So, I'm really looking forward to an update on those discussions between your department and the department of health.

I mean, it's a huge issue. It's happening more perhaps your – or I don't know if you're aware of how much it's happening, but a lot.

So, you've had some town halls recently around family home care licensing. I'm wondering, first of all, since you had those town halls, how many new family home care licenses have been issued?

**Chris DesRoche:** There were four licenses issued and seven applications ending.

**Ms. Altass:** Of the new child care spaces that you are planning to open in the next few years, what's the breakdown between expected spaces in family home care centers and in early learning centers?

**Ms. Jameson:** (Indistinct)

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, we'd have to bring back information on the family home centers that we have and how many are enrolled.

**Ms. Altass:** I mean it would be interesting to know how many are enrolled in them currently, certainly, but I'm wondering in

terms of your plans to achieve your – the number of spaces you have outlined. I believe it was 220 this year, is that what you said? And then up to 400 and some in the next year?

So, just wondering if you could bring that back, how many you're expecting in each of those different types of child care settings? Because I think that's important, particularly when you're trying to determine courses of action to achieve those goals, you need to figure out exactly what that's going to look like. We can't just pick a number. So, I'm curious to know that.

As well, and I might have misheard, so I just want to get some clarification. I believe the minister said – and I could have heard this wrong – that in PEI we have more available child care spaces than any other province, is that – can you elaborate on that, how you came to that conclusion?

**Ms. Jameson:** Thanks for the question.

Well, firstly, we're known on a national level to be leading the way in terms of our child care approach throughout the years. That was a statement – I'm referencing a statement that Kathleen Flanagan had said here in committee. And, perhaps we can connect with her on where she would have determined that.

But again, we know that other jurisdictions are constantly reaching out to us for guidance and support because the Island has been a leader throughout the years. I think we, even through this federal agreement, our goal to get to the \$10 a day by 2024 is more ambitious than other jurisdiction because we are that better placed to get to that point.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

**Ms. Altass:** I think in terms of the quality of our early childhood – early child care, early learning centres – yeah, certainly PEI is a leader in terms of the quality that we provide, but that's a very different thing than having enough spaces available and the fact that we do have this long wait list.

I'd be really surprised to hear that we are doing some much better than every other province. That's quite concerning, because



there's so many people who can't find access to child care. It's a huge issue. I would like some clarification on that.

I just wanted to touch on something else that you mentioned – so that in other jurisdictions you mentioned that infant spaces are considered to be up to 16 months, but here on PEI it's up to 22 months.

Do you know how many other provinces that would be the case for? How common is that difference?

**Ms. Jameson:** I'll bring it back.

**Ms. Altass:** And –

**Ms. Jameson:** Oh, sorry.

**Chair:** Go ahead; the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

**Ms. Altass:** You mentioned that the early childhood sector just sort of needs to get on board with this idea that the infant spaces can only go up to 16 months. I'm assuming that you're having some pretty in-depth conversations because that is a significant difference between the care needed to care for a 16-month-old versus a 22-month-old.

We are talking about experts in this field who are giving – they're clearly telling you, what sounds like they're telling you – that they don't agree that it should be dropped down to 16 months. So, what are the reasons why there has been resistance to that idea?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah, thanks for the question. It's actually been the ECDA who has been conducting the consultations with the sector. I don't like to – I wouldn't like to delve into too many details in terms as to how many are opposed to the change. I gather it's not many, but we do really want the buy-in from the sector to move something like this ahead. Hence why we haven't introduced it previously, but the discussions are on-going and we're happy to make any legislative changes when the time comes that the sector agrees that that's the right step in the next – next step in the right direction.

**Ms. Altass:** You defiantly, of course, need the buy-in from the sector. But my question wasn't how many centres, or whatever, are

resistance not a number, but what are they – what are you hearing, what are they expressing?

Maybe you can go back in and find out a little bit more about those consultations because, before suggesting, I would say that they should get on board with this idea, you really need to understand you know why there's resistance and listen to those experts. They may have some very valid concerns. They may have concerns that could be addressed if – I don't know what they are, and you don't know what they are – so before we jump to those conclusions, that's to step one.

That's all for now.

Thank you, Chair.

**Chair:** Your welcome.

The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

**Ms. Beaton:** Thank you, Chair.

I just wanted to quickly just wrap up a conversation we had on the Best Start Program. I do have a Best Start, the Chances in my district as well, so my understanding is is basically been moved – is there a warm transfer from education, all the meetings that have been held to the Department of Health and Wellness in order to pass that to that department?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah, I think that's what they'll be discussing in their upcoming meeting.

**Ms. Beaton:** Okay.

Have you taken the funding that would have been allocated to them, because I believe that was kind of agreed upon and that was what the discussions were; have you transferred funding out of education into health to make up for that?

**Chris DesRoche:** Not yet. We still have \$1.2 million budgeted here, but this would be transferred before the next budget to them.

**Ms. Beaton:** I know I'm into accounting bits here and I hope you just bear with me, because when you're dealing with a program

that is now joint and crossing over two departments, it makes it really difficult in this setting to identify that. So, when that goes over into health and that journal entry – presumably is what it is a journal entry over – do you have an idea based – I guess both CFO's have discussed that journal entry happening.

Do you know if that funding then will be increased in total? Have you kind of talked between the CFO's based on those journal entry discussions, if there's going to be an increase over all two of that line item.

I just don't see it in the health one right now.

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, not in particular; it's more of a function of who's going to lead the program and try to make the transition seamless for the clients.

The client will deal wholly with health and in the background, we'll transfer this amount over to health so they're not dealing with two different and two different funding streams necessarily. But our amount has exceeded and changed. If there was an increase to it, it would be in health.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

**Ms. Beaton:** That's all my questions.

**Chair:** Okay.

**Ms. Beaton:** Thank you.

**Chair:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**Mr. Gallant:** So, is there any answer to where you come up with the amount from the federal government for the early learning centres for the program that you announced the other day, like where did you get that amount for the \$10 day care, like is that based on enrollment now?

**Chris DesRoche:** I think that's a national target that they're hoping to achieve.

**Mr. Gallant:** So, can you explain to me like a national target, so how did it pertain to PEI? Would another province get 50 million and we got 16? It had to be based on something; would it be based on numbers?

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, based on pro-rated population.

**Mr. Gallant:** As we know, there's families that their children will be in school by the time the program kicks in, like they're children will be old enough to be in – out of that system; they'll be in school, so they won't benefit from it.

**Chris DesRoche:** Well, certainly it went down to \$25 in January and this October going down to \$20 so they'll –

**Mr. Gallant:** From what?

**Chris DesRoche:** Previous to that, it'd be depending on the age level 27, 28, and \$34.

**Mr. Gallant:** Okay.

**Chris DesRoche:** (Indistinct) being infant, so it's a considerable decrease for the infants.

**Mr. Gallant:** So, it has helped significantly that way.

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, yeah.

**Mr. Gallant:** When you look here through your grants and things, so you have an early years education and training programs, 776,000, last year it was 1 million – 25 – like why the variants there?

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, we mentioned that previously, there'd be an upfront cost into some of the Holland Collage, UPEI, and Collège de l'île Programs in the first year of this agreement, which is this year, that's why the forecast is higher than next year.

**Chair:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**Mr. Gallant:** That's it for now.

I have some in the next section, thanks.

**Chair:** Shall the section carry? Carried.

Autism Services

“Appropriations provided for supporting autism intervention services.”  
Administration: 8,300. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 16,600. Salaries: 1,008,100.

Travel and Training: 16,800. Grants: 1,250,000.

Total Autism Services: 2,304,800.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party; keep going with that.

**Mr. Gallant:** Grants, as I had indicated earlier stayed the same. You have a one line with the amounts for intense behavioral intervention, early years autism grants; could you explain that to me what's all entailed in that \$1,255,000?

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah that's the budget that we provide to early years centers to hire autism assistants to work directly with the children.

**Mr. Gallant:** So, that wouldn't fall under salaries?

**Chris DesRoche:** No, they're not our staff; they're at the centres.

**Mr. Gallant:** How's the time for the turnaround time for diagnosis for a family to have their child diagnosed?

**Chris DesRoche:** Currently, right now we have 80 children being serviced and nobody on the waitlist; of that 80, I think there might be three or five that are in the intake process, but there's no waitlist for service right now.

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you and that's great to hear.

That's all for now.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

**Ms. Lund:** Thank you, Chair.

I am just wondering if you can clarify something. You said there is no wait time for people to access a diagnosis or no wait time to access IBI?

**Chris DesRoche:** This program.

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah, IBI.

**Ms. Lund:** The program IBI, but not the diagnosis. That makes a whole lot more sense to me.

I suppose this is more directed to the minister as well, but I'd like to go back to some questions I was asking the other day about the school-age autism funding program.

I have spoken to a lot of families who have found that, while they're waiting to get their full diagnosis, they have a provisional diagnosis from their doctor. That tells them that you probably have autism, but we haven't gone through the process of getting that gold standard assessment that really delves into making a personal care program for that individual, which is a wonderful thing.

But in the meantime, there's no pathway to get that clear, gold standard diagnosis; could take three years for people. And until they get it, they can't access the school-age autism funding, which is a real problem.

I'm just wondering if you have put any thought into expanding the terms of this program so that a provisional diagnosis allows people to access things like a tutor or an aide in the community or any of those types of things. Do you want to speak to that, minister?

**Ms. Jameson:** Thanks for the question. Following the questions that you had asked me in the House, I had asked our expert on the file, the lead on the file, to work with SDH to see if there were any opportunities to expand or change the eligibility for that program. The program is not currently housed in our department but it's certainly something that I hope SDH will look into.

**Ms. Lund:** That is exciting to hear. Clarification, did you say school-age autism funding isn't housed in your department?

**Chris DesRoche:** That's right.

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah.

**Chris DesRoche:** Between three and five years ago, the school-age autism program was transferred to SDH.

**Ms. Lund:** School-age autism funding.

**Chris DesRoche:** 6,600 for tutoring, that one?

**Ms. Lund:** Presumably.

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, that's the one.

**Ms. Lund:** That is good to know, but it is exciting – oh, hello, do you have an intervention, minister?

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, you have the floor.

**Mr. Trivers:** Just signing on here.

**Ms. Lund:** No, that's really exciting. I appreciate hearing about that, and I will look forward to seeing what comes of it.

I've also heard from a number of people who have found it really difficult to find a special needs assistant for their child when they're navigating autism.

I'm just wondering, since you have the full scope of education in your purview, if any additional steps are being taken to address what seems to be a shortage.

**Chris DesRoche:** Yes, I had mentioned earlier, the special needs assistants and the autism assistants, if they're certified, will now be paid in accordance with the wage grid. That's a significant increase in wages if they are certified.

**Ms. Lund:** That's definitely a good thing. I know I've spoken to a number of families who have indicated to me that their workers change all the time, and in fact, they're not even always notified when their workers change. Sometimes, they have workers who have never even met their children.

I was just wondering what you think is the cause of the high turnover in this area. Is it high caseloads? Is it low wages? I see that you are addressing the low wage side of it, but if workload is unmanageable, I'm not sure that will solve it in its entirety.

**Chris DesRoche:** I think the feedback is that the majority has been the wage rate, which we're trying to address.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

**Ms. Lund:** Thank you, Chair. I don't think I have any additional questions on that.

**Chair:** Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Early Childhood Development:  
57,524,700.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Joint Consortium for School Health

“The Joint Consortium for School Health represents education and health ministries across all provinces and territories, except Quebec. The organization is responsible for promoting collaboration within and across Provincial, Territorial and Federal boundaries to improve the health and learning of Canada's children and youth.”  
Administration: 8,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 5,000. Professional Services: 52,000. Salaries: 187,800.

Total Joint Consortium for School Health:  
252,800.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Provincial Libraries

Public Library Services

“Appropriations provided for the management and operation of public libraries and provision of technical services for public libraries. The Public Library Service operates public libraries in 25 locations across the Province, with administrative headquarters located in Morell. The facilities include three French language libraries and French language collections in selected libraries.”  
Administration: 118,300. Equipment: 2,700. Materials, Supplies, and Services: 295,100. Professional Services: 22,000. Salaries: 2,871,200. Travel and Training: 10,600. Grants: 6,500.

Total Public Library Services: 3,326,400.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

**Ms. Bell:** Thank you, Chair.

(Indistinct) with the main large library in Charlottetown is currently under move out of the Confederation Centre and into the new building and I know there's a couple of projects but there are, obviously, also one-

off costs associated with that but there's no indication if there's any real change in line items here.

Is that being managed out of a separate budget, any costs that may be incurred by the library in the move and so on that would be operational in nature?

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, the move and the capital project would be better directed towards the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. However, in our forecast, we did add \$100,000 to new materials in anticipation of the new, larger library.

**Ms. Bell:** I know from the recent tour there, it's a significantly larger space so I know (Indistinct) and fixtures and fittings come under capital, but yeah, they've got a lot more space to fill.

Will we be seeing an increase generally to allow for the fact that that's a much more substantive space and needs more material and supplies going forward? Is that something we would hope to see in coming years as well?

**Chris DesRoche:** Potentially, but certainly this \$100,000 will assist greatly. In salaries, there's also an events coordinator that's been added for that particular library.

**Ms. Bell:** Thank you for mentioning the events coordinator because one of the exciting pieces around the new library space is how many community spaces it's going to be adding into the inventory of available spaces for community groups to use and access.

I've heard a lot of concerns from members in the community, however, that there may be a fee required.

I'm just wondering, is that something that government has any role in determining whether or not spaces can be provided free of charge to ensure that they're as accessible as possible? Particularly I'm thinking of non-profit groups and the community groups.

**Chris DesRoche:** I'm not sure. We don't have with us the rental policy that the events coordinator will be responsible for, but we can bring that back.

**Ms. Bell:** I would appreciate that. I mean, I know there's always conversation when we have things (Indistinct) may be free that that, then, puts competition with profit-based or other spaces that are already in play. But I'll be really clear: there's a real lack of space available, particularly for groups that need flexible space. Whether there's conditions around that or something, it would be really good to see that the library is as accessible as possible and that includes affordable.

So, yeah, if you could bring that back, I'd really appreciate it. I think that will give a lot of reassurance to the community that this is a truly accessible space. Thank you.

Thanks, Chair. I'm good.

**Chair:** You're welcome.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West  
Royalty.

**Mr. McNeilly:** I was just going to ask – the member kind of asked. I was just saying there was a salary increase there and you did mention an events coordinator in that position.

Could you say what the other positions were?

**Chris DesRoche:** No, I didn't. There was a children's librarian position at that library and previously was employed by the City of Charlottetown. Now it's going to be employed through our department with revenues coming from the City of Charlottetown.

**Mr. McNeilly:** So, another position but revenues are coming to the department now?

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, the person is going to be employed by us instead of the City directly. The City is going to fund us for the position. It just gives the opportunity for more collaboration with professional development with our unions and stuff like that.

**Mr. McNeilly:** So, those are just the two positions that would be indicated in here?

**Chris DesRoche:** That's right, yeah.

**Mr. McNeilly:** Other than that, was there going to be any new training with the new library? I know that the training budget's stagnant but it's a new facility. Are there any new training programs?

**Chris DesRoche:** Not necessarily, but they are moving in April and not expected to open in May – was the scheduled date, so they'll have some time to familiarize themselves with the new library.

**Mr. McNeilly:** There's a decrease in material, supply and services. Do you know what that is? Just back to the original –

**Chris DesRoche:** That's right. It was just a one-time influx of materials in anticipation of the new library opening.

**Mr. McNeilly:** That's it for me, Chair. Thanks.

**Chair:** Any further questions? –

**Mr. McNeilly:** – there's a decrease in materials, supplies, and services. Do you know what that – it was just back to the original –

**Chris DesRoche:** That's right, yeah, it was just a one-time influx of materials in anticipation of the new library opening.

**Chair:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

**Mr. McNeilly:** That's it for me, Chair. Thanks.

**Chair:** Any further questions?

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thanks, Chair.

I know we're all excited about what's happening in Charlottetown, and rightly so. I think it's going to be a fantastic space when it's all finished.

But I always like to put a little cheer out there for the network of small public libraries that are scattered throughout the province, and what a brilliant job they do of getting the resources from central libraries and out to the outlying areas. My wife recently requested a book, which was

brought to the Crapaud Public Library within, I think, two days or something like that.

So, I'd really, really like to commend government on its continued support for those more rural libraries and the critical role that they play for rural Islanders.

I know there have been some new programs initiated in the larger libraries; the renting of instruments, for example.

I'm wondering whether that – and I should know this, but is that also available in – are the instruments moved to the small outlying libraries, as well, if requested?

**Chris DesRoche:** I think all materials transfer between libraries, yeah.

**Leader of the Opposition:** So, all of the programs that are available centrally are also available in the outlying areas? Okay.

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, I don't know about programs –

**Ms. Jameson:** Programming, yeah.

**Chris DesRoche:** – in particular, but the “library of things”, if you want to call it that, yes.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Right. That's great.

I appreciate the time.

Thank you.

**Chair:** You're welcome.

Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Provincial Libraries: 3,326,400.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Public Archives and Records Office

Public Archives and Records Office

“Appropriations provided for archives and record management services under the requirements of the *Archives and Records Act*.” Administration: 6,900. Equipment: 244,000. Materials, Supplies, and Services:

11,400. Professional Services: 3,000.  
Salaries: 2,114,200. Travel and Training:  
9,400.

Total Public Archives and Records Office:  
2,388,900.

The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

**Ms. Beaton:** Thank you, Chair.

In this section, we had a Special Committee on Government Records Retention and focused heavily around how government handles records.

One of the recommendations that came out of that special committee report was ensuring that all departments come into compliance and that everybody takes the RIM 101 training. What was really interesting in the last strategy was that it provided all the departments and the percentage that had taken the RIM 101 training, which was really telling information.

I don't see it in the current strategy of where we are and whether that is a goal that we would reach 100% of public service employees taking that RIM 101 program.

Can you tell me, is that a priority in the upcoming three-year strategy?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah, thanks for the question. It absolutely is.

Recently, I guess it would have been last year, 1,600 teachers took their training as a PD day.

We have many in health that we'd like to get their training done, but of course, they've been focused on other fires recently.

But absolutely, that's the goal, is to get 100% trained.

**Ms. Beaton:** The most recent RIM strategy for 2021-2024 doesn't actually have that as one of the key strategic goals that will be achieved over the next three years. How will you measure that and ensure that that stays front and centre of the overall strategy, to ensure that everybody does actually take the program and that that tracking will be continuing?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah, no, it's a good point. Our assessment that we'll be tabling here any day now would provide sort of a progress report on all of that. So, that'll likely keep us on the right trajectory.

But I know in discussions with the department, it's certainly a priority and –

**Unidentified Voice:** (Indistinct)

**Ms. Jameson:** – yes, it would be part of the annual report.

**Ms. Beaton:** Is there, I guess, a work plan to identify how the seven strategies will be implemented? I see the first one is existing legislation policies and procedures will be reviewed, and then it goes on from there.

Do you have a work plan that identifies the timelines in which each of those strategies will be implemented?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah, we can bring that back.

**Ms. Beaton:** Appreciate that, thank you.

And then the other questions I had were just basically – at a high level, can you just tell me what the overall strategy is trying to accomplish? And there's an increase in funding by \$500,000 in order to achieve that. Can you just tell me the high-level strategies that you're working on, and then what those will achieve and how you're measuring to that?

**Ms. Jameson:** Okay, the focus of the new strategy is policy creation and revision; retention schedule creation and revision; retention schedule and implementation; the adoption and implementation of electronic information management system, which Chris can speak more to; RIM training; and increasing records management oversight of affiliated bodies.

We're hiring six new positions this year and seven next fiscal, correct? (Indistinct)

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, there are 13 additional positions budgeted in the coming year, six of which have already started in the fourth quarter of this year.

**Ms. Beaton:** And primarily, what will those new positions be working on? Is that the electronic records?

**Ms. Jameson:** Yeah, we have that breakdown. Three of them will be focused on the electronic data management system, and we do – you have a breakdown, do you?

**Chris DesRoche:** Yeah, we have three additional records analysts, two records coordinators, three electronic document records management system coordinators, four records clerks, and one records centre clerk at the actual records centre.

**Ms. Beaton:** One of the other recommendations that came out of the Special Committee on Government Records Retention was implementing duty to document.

Is that an item within your legislation review that you're looking to implement? I know your response to the Legislature last year said that that would require basically a jurisdictional scan to review.

Can you tell me if that's something that you're going to be implementing?

**Ms. Jameson:** Thanks for the question.

It's currently not something within this most recent three-year plan. The only jurisdiction that's currently including duty to document is B.C., so I think there's still some work to be done around taking a deep dive into what that could look like for PEI.

**Ms. Beaton:** I guess, I mean, when we look at why that government record retention special standing committee was created in the first place, was because we'd had a really significant breach that Islanders were concerned about when it came to e-gaming and the record retention. That's what's brought forward so much good work in this area in the first place, and it's come a long, long way.

But one of the things in – I believe it was when we reviewed it, it was New Zealand had duty to document –

**Unidentified Voice:** Yeah.

**Ms. Beaton:** – so, I mean, it's not necessarily that we have to be on par with the rest of Canada. We could leapfrog ahead and look at other international jurisdictions that are doing it well so that we don't fall into a situation that we had that required a special committee in the first place, which we all don't really want to go back there. We want to make sure that government documents are being maintained in the way that they were intended to maintain.

So, I felt like, out of the special committee, that was a really solid recommendation to look at. So if you are looking at the legislation as part of this process, I really strongly recommend looking outside of Canada to see who actually is doing it well, because maybe who we want to model ourselves after isn't actually in Canada. It might be outside. And I think that New Zealand example was a really interesting one that we looked at.

That's really my only comment. It's not really a question. I just, you know, still recognize we spent – that special committee did a lot of work around how we can improve our government records, and I still think that that's something that's very important for us to pursue and to keep going.

And I do want to recognize the new three-year strategy being launched earlier, I think, this year or end of last year, because I appreciate that that was another recommendation coming from the standing committee, so I appreciate that that work was done to keep moving us forward.

Thank you.

**Chair:** Any further questions?

Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Public Archives and Records Office: 2,388,900.

Shall it carry? Carried.

**Ms. Jameson:** Mr. Chair, I move that the Speaker take the chair, and the Chair report progress and beg leave to sit again.

**Chair:** Shall it carry? Carried.



Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having under consideration the grant of supply to Her Majesty, I beg leave to report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Motions Other Than Government

**Ms. Beaton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask that Motion 97 be now read.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

**Deputy Clerk:** Motion No. 97.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, the following motion:

**WHEREAS** the House has under consideration *Bill 49, Supported Decision-Making Agreements Act*;

**AND WHEREAS** the Supported Decision-Making Coalition of Prince Edward Island has indicated significant concerns with the said bill and requested that it be referred to Committee for further public discussion;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that this House commit *Bill 49, Supported Decision-Making Agreements Act* to the Standing Committee on Health and Social Development for further study and consultation;

**THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Committee invite the Supported Decision-Making Coalition to present before the Committee on *Bill 49*;

**AND THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Committee solicit and consider input from any other relevant stakeholders or the public on *Bill 49*, in the form and manner the Committee deems appropriate;

**AND THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Committee report to

the House with its findings and recommendations in the upcoming fall sitting of the Legislature.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and to speak to this motion this afternoon.

I was very happy to see the piece of the legislation finally come forward, as I was very happy to see government members support the motion I brought forward in the previous sitting last fall, urging government to finally bring forward a piece of legislation on supported decision-making, something that's been promised for literally decades.

Government has been consulting on this prospective piece of legislation for many, many years, and the place where they have gone repeatedly and for the most expert opinion is the PEI Coalition for Supported Decision-Making, a group which speaks on behalf of a wide range of organizations, all of who have members who would benefit from supported decision-making legislation.

And I'm standing here today, I mentioned I was delighted this legislation is coming forward, as indeed I am, but I'm concerned because that very coalition where the expertise in this matter lies have expressed concerns about the bill as it is currently drafted. And not little concerns; these are fundamental concerns about the core of what this bill is and how it would impact the people that it is designed to help.

Broadly speaking, the concerns that the coalition have are the following.

When the legislation says that, in principle, all adults are presumed to have the capacity to make decisions, the way it would operate doesn't truly follow that principle. Some of this is weedy, and I apologize for that right up front.

What we're talking about here is individuals with intellectual and cognitive abilities which are different from us, and in many places, in order for them to retain their independence and their dignity, they can

select helpers – friends, people perhaps from within their family, people perhaps from within their community – who will help them make decisions to ensure that they are making the best decisions for themselves so that they can maintain that independence, that dignity that every human being deserves.

It should be pointed out that the UN passed a charter back in 2006, I think it was, a Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which enshrines these rights of individuals, all individuals, including persons with disabilities, to have the opportunity to make decisions for themselves. And often, the mechanism for doing that is a piece of legislation – goes by various names, but in our province, we're calling it supported decision-making.

The coalition has expressed concerns to government about the legislation as is currently drafted, and in essence, their main concern can be distilled down to the fact that in most pieces of legislation, it is assumed that people have capacity, that they have the ability to make informed choices, and therefore, comply with a piece of legislation or contribute to its construction; that there is capacity, there is the presumption of capacity.

The problem with this legislation as written is that that presumption is not there.

The status quo in Prince Edward Island is that individuals are indeed able to draft decision-making agreements, outside the law. We have no law here which promotes or upholds that, but we do have agreements that have been written. But unfortunately, all too often, those agreements get nullified by, either professionals or social workers or members of a family who make arguments that the individual who has entered into this agreement willingly lacks capacity, and that agreement can be overturned.

Time and time again, members of the Coalition for Supported Decision-Making have seen that happen to people in their community; that loss of dignity, that loss of independence, that loss of being able to make decisions for yourself, which is, again, going back to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, something that is a right enshrined.

The status quo, as I said, allows Islanders to make supported decision-making agreements but they can be overwritten, and all too often, they are overwritten.

The draft *Supported Decision-Making Agreement Act*, which is what this motion is hoping to refer to standing committee, does little to change that status quo. It still asserts that supported decision-making agreements entered into by an adult who is deemed to not be able to, and I quote, "...understand the information that is relevant to the decision and to appreciate the reasonably foreseeable consequences of a decision and the failure to make that decision", that that can be challenged.

Again, in simpler language, the ability for people to make their own decisions, supported by people that they have chosen to be around them, can be challenged.

So, what changes would the coalition like to see that would move this piece of legislation from essentially making no difference to the status quo to allowing Prince Edward Island to be a progressive leader in this field?

Well, a different, more relevant idea of "capacity" is really the answer to that.

Capacity is something – I mean, laws – let me back off a little bit. The law is not static. The law evolves and it reflects society as it changes. Not so long ago, women did not have the vote here. Not so long ago, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community could be prosecuted for being who they are. But thankfully, the law in those areas has moved forward and what we're suggesting here is that the law is lagging behind society's understanding of what capacity means and of what dignity and respect for all individuals in our community entails.

What we would like to see here is a recognition of that change, of that different interpretation of what capacity means. What is needed according to the coalition is legislation which protects the autonomy of adults with challenges. That's essentially what we're looking for and this piece of legislation as currently drafted does not do that.

There must be an upfront presumption of capacity to identify and choose those who

they would like to help in making their decision. Remember, I said that that's what supported decision-making is. These individuals get to choose friends and family members who they want to support them. There must be an upfront presumption that they are able to do that and yet, what we have in this legislation is an ability in clause 3 (a) – I'm not going to get down into the weeds of the legislation because that will come when we get to debate this legislation, either in standing committee or here in the House – but basically what it does is it overrules that ability, that presumption of capacity.

And the position of the coalition, again, involves a new idea of capacity – that recognition that the law has to move with the times, thinking about the relationships between autonomy and dignity and personhood. All of those things are complex factors, but they all have to be enmeshed in a piece of legislation.

A modern concept of capacity has to ensure and assure equal rights for everybody, including those with profound disabilities, in order that they can take risks, that can make mistakes, that they can learn through making those mistakes because that is the stuff of life. That is how we learn. That is how we grow and that is no different for people with cognitive and intellectual challenges.

This piece of legislation is also contradictory. The definition of capacity refers to the fact that a person may have assistance in making decisions, but again, Section 3 (a) states clearly that a person may be deemed to lack capacity to enter an agreement through which they elect people they choose to assist them.

In fact, a person's ability to have assistance in making decisions is not enshrined in the act; it can be overturned, it can be challenged. That's a fundamental flaw and it does not provide the independence and the dignity and the respect that all PEI citizens deserve.

The Department of Justice and Public Safety has told us that, in their opinion, PEI's legislation cannot be similar to BC's. I'll get to that in a second. That's the only province in Canada that has passed – and they don't call it supported decision-making, they call

it the *Representation Agreement Act* – but it facilitates the same thing. They say that we cannot have our legislation similar to BC's because the definition of capacity would, and I quote, “create ambiguity”, and that's coming from the minister's department.

The department has pointed out that the draft legislation in many ways does align with the BC act, that *Representation Agreement Act* – at least the original draft of it. The problem with that is, the original draft of the BC act, which is over 20 years old, neglected to include that presumption of capacity and that created a really strong negative reaction in the community – the same community represented in BC as are represented here by the Coalition for Supported Decision-Making in Prince Edward Island.

They were spitting mad and they went to government and they said we need something in here that gives a clear definition of presumed capacity and they included that. It's called Section 8 of their act.

What the Coalition for Supported Decision-Making here on Prince Edward Island is saying is the act that was brought to them after years and years and years and years of consultation with very clear asks from the coalition for this presumed capacity came back without that. And they're spitting mad, too.

They want the same provision, the same clarity as exists in the BC act to be present in the Prince Edward Island act. It should be noted that the BC act has been in place for 20 years and it has never been found to be in violation of Canadian law or of the Constitution. That's a fundamental part here, because the department's lawyers are arguing that this ambiguity created by giving presumed capacity will create legal problems for people here on Prince Edward Island. I call you-know-what on that.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Leader of the Opposition:** So, the net result of the draft legislation is that it maintains the status quo. It keeps in place that system of control through which the life decisions of adults with more severe challenges can continue to be controlled by those who are

in positions of power and with greater persuasion ability. People like doctors, people like social workers, people like members of their own family. That happens all too frequently. I could cite a number of cases here on Prince Edward Island where that has happened.

For 30 years, adults with intellectual disabilities and people with cognitive impairment, such as Alzheimer's, have advocated for supported decision-making as a substitute for guardianship. Guardianship, of course, is where those abilities, that right to make decisions for yourself, are taken away; they're stripped away. That's what this law would do. That's what this draft legislation would do. It's not good enough. It's not good enough for some of the most vulnerable people in our community who deserve to have the best piece of legislation that this Legislature can pass.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Leader of the Opposition:** I said in my remarks last week during debate of Motion 73 which was on alternative living models for seniors, for elders, and I'm going to quote from what I said – quote myself, that's weird: "I believe that everyone wants to be in control of their own life as they age. I also believe that every little piece of independence and freedom that gets chipped away diminishes you as a human being."

I was talking about becoming older and losing that autonomy, that independence which comes sometimes with the housing conditions, the housing that's being offered.

But it could equally apply, not just to aging but to – it could equally apply to the degree of intellectual and cognitive abilities that one has. I could read that sentence again and replace 'aging' with the 'degree of cognitive and intellectual abilities' and I believe it would be exactly the same, that with each piece of freedom that gets chipped away, you get diminished as a human being.

If we get this legislation right, that fundamental right that's expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will be upheld. The effects of the UN Convention would be in changes of attitudes and approaches of the general public. It provides tools for persons with

disabilities to live lives of dignity and autonomy to their fullest potential. It represents a far more modern and a far more complete way of viewing persons with disabilities, of looking at them as subjects with rights who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent, as well as being complete contributing, acting members of society.

PEI can join BC as a leader in attaining these rights and I hope that this government has the foresight to bring forward the best bill we possibly can for Islanders.

Let's have a full and open public debate on this legislation as most other provinces do through a standing committee. Let's send this to standing committee. I ask all sides of this House to support this motion and in so doing, the fundamental rights of some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

**Ms. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Supported decision-making promotes self-determination, control and autonomy. It fosters independence. It involves consulting with family or friends, colleagues or classmates, and/or professionals before we make decisions.

We all practice this, regardless of our capacity. What this bill comes down to is who has the right to make this decision on our capacity. Decision support is about respecting the values, experiences and goals of the decision-maker. It is important to note that this supporter does not need to agree with the final decision. They need to respect the decision-makers right to make decisions, take risks, make mistakes and change their minds.

The concern that the supported decision-making coalition has with this piece of legislation is that it does not follow the presumed capacity model, as mentioned, something for which they have been

advocating for officially through their coalition for the last 11 years.

In a proper process that honors the right to legal capacity, we understand that persons with disabilities shall enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others in all aspects of life. This is fundamentally linked to human dignity and personhood, and in March 2010 this was ratified in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

I for one, am not going to disagree with a coalition that has representation of 10 different community partners which work with adults with intellectual disabilities; autism and cognitive impairments such as dementia. The organizations represented which oppose the current draft legislation and who believe it is crucial that this legislation be sent to committee for further study include: PEI Association of Community Living, Resource Abilities, PEI People First, PEI Citizen Advocacy, The Autism Society of Prince Edward Island, The Stars For Life Foundation, Cooper Institute, The Brain Injury Association of Prince Edward Island, and Special Olympics Prince Edward Island. They have been working tirelessly since 2011 on promoting community discussions about supported decision-making, intellectual cognitive development disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, and those who support them – for all those who support them.

All this with a goal of ensuring that people represented in these various organizations, their family members, service providers and the general public are taken into consideration when discussions around supported decision-making happen.

After seeing the most recent draft of the legislation and speaking to the policy people and lawyers involved, they are very concerned with the proposed act as it does not reflect the up-front presumed capacity for all. The current legislation is very close to how things are done now and that is the problem. Their experience has been that the moment that a service person, family member or community member doesn't like a decision that the person at the center of the agreement has made, there is a challenge to their capacity – that's terrible, and often an application for guardianship. Nothing in the new legislation will change this.

The coalition tells us there are there are fundamental problems with this legislation, and we must move on from the status quo. The Premier had mentioned before he wouldn't bring a piece of legislation to this floor that wasn't ready. The coalition's telling us it's not ready. I for one trust the collective knowledge, wisdom and understanding of this group of professionals and advocates and do not need to be convinced any future that this bill is not in its current form, ready for debate in this Legislative Assembly and I support this motion to send this bill to committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

**Mr. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this motion.

As we've heard from the mover in the seconder, this legislation has been debated for quite a long time. I think there was actually a version introduced in 1997. I believe the coalition has been around since 2011, if I'm not mistaken, and members of my department have worked with them for a number of years.

Of course, the goal of the department, the goal of the coalition, really are the same at the end of the day and they've been working to try and do this in the legal framework that they believe is proper.

So, I'm going to represent, as a newcomer to this legislation really, the view of the department. "This board of decision-making legislation is an important piece of legislation that's intended to provide adults with a recognized process they can use on exercising their right to have support when making decisions about personal or financial matters."

All adults have the right to have support in making life decisions and all adults are presumed to have capacity unless it is demonstrated otherwise. And, as we've heard this seems to be the key point of debate.

Supported decision-making is different. Supported decision-making is different from substitute decision-making. When someone is unable to make decisions and needs someone to do that for them.

So the Department of Justice and Public Safety has the mandate for legislation dealing with substitute decision-making. It developed the powers of attorney and personal directives act which create a process for people to authorize others to make financial and personal decisions on their behalf. It is also developing legislation for adult guardianship and trusteeship processes for people who are required to have a substitute decision maker appointed by the court.

The Department of Social Development and Housing has consulted with the coalition on the creation of a supported decision-making bill currently prepared to go before the House, and they met with them very recently. And believe me, the professionals in their department really thought they – really felt that we came to a spot where we had a piece of legislation that the coalition could agree to. However, here we are, so.

Department officials have worked with the coalition diligently for a number of years on bringing this legislation forward, and the department has consulted with out colleagues and the Department of Justice and Public Safety in taking the advice of the Legislative Council Office, that's who we all work with both in government an in opposition private members when we're creating legislation – to create a bill that is consistent with the *Powers of Attorney and Personal Directives Act*. And other substitute decision-making legislation under development, and the Canadian Legal Environment.

So, all parties are interested in having legislation that makes it easy for anyone wanting to have a supporter present when making decisions. We share a common goal with the coalition to have an easy to understand process for creating an agreement that clarifies when someone is exercising that right. And it should be understood that Canada has a specific reservation to the Convention on the Rights Persons with Disabilities, known as CRPD

on the matter of capacity described by the coalition.

So these are legal terms, but they call it a specific reservation to the CRPD on the matter of capacity as described by the coalition. This reservation enables Canada to have substitute decision-making legislation that applies when a person loses legal capacity to make decisions. Due to Canadian constitutional and judge made law, we cannot have legal frameworks that deal with capacity the way in which the coalition would like.

Now I've heard the opposite from the mover and the seconder here today, and again, I'm presenting the view from the experts in the department who have worked with the coalition for many years. Now, referring this bill to committee will not change the legal and constitutional framework that our laws much comply with. All of this information was previously presented to the opposition during the legislative briefing, and government also had a specific consultation with the coalition to explain its approach on this issue. Like I said, I thought we were in a good place with this legislation, but we're hearing we're not, and the coalition came forward with a statement as well.

So, when this piece of legislation is combined with the *Powers of Attorney and Personal Directives Act* brought forward by justice and public safety, it will provide important tools and protection similar to those that exist in other Canadian jurisdictions. So, this suite of legislation will actually provide, we believe, what the coalition is looking for. But, if the coalition and the opposition truly believe that laying this piece of legislation to provide a legal framework to support adults with decision-making is necessary and import, then representatives from the Department of Social Development and Housing and the Department of Justice and Public Safety – I think my colleague, Minister Thompson would agree – would be happy to present at standing committee.

If we need to go to standing committee to debate this legislation and that's the will of this House, then we would be happy to do that.

The Premier had made it clear, and I agree with him whole heartedly, we need to have fulsome debate, and we want to make sure the legislation is best it can be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am supportive of Motion 49 going to committee as well, and I'd like to just add a few comments and then call for the question.

It seems a growing trend with this government that they say consult with people and then they do what they want.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Gallant:** I think this bill needs to go to committee and I call for the question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** Is there anyone else to speak to the motion?

If not, I'll go back to the mover of the motion, the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the comments made by the Leader of the Third Party and the minister. Minister says he represents the experts in his department, I am representing the experts in our community who have been working on this for 11 years.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Leader of the Opposition:** Delighted to have this debate, delighted that the minister is willing to take this to standing committee, and I call for the vote.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** Hon. members, it's been asked for a vote on the motion.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Recorded division, please.

**Speaker:** Standing vote.

Sergeant-at-Arms, you may ring the bell.

[The bells were rung]

**Mr. Deagle:** Mr. Speaker, government is ready for the vote.

**Ms. Altass:** Mr. Speaker, the official opposition is ready for the vote.

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, third party is ready for the vote.

**Speaker:** Okay, hon. members, while we're voting, we'll do everybody that's sitting in the Chamber first, and then we'll do virtual after the Chamber is done.

Do you hear that? He'll get it.

All those voting against the motion, please stand.

All those in favour of the motion, please stand.

**Clerk:** The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank, the hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities, the hon. Member from Morell-Donagh, the hon. Minister of Finance, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe, the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, the hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning, the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land, Justice and Public Safety and Attorney General, the hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture, the hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing –

**An Hon. Member:** (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** Ernie.

**Clerk:** Oh, pardon me, minister – the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, the hon. Leader of the Third Party, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, the hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-

Belvedere, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton, the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, and the hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

For the members attending virtually, I'm just going to ask you to indicate which way you're voting.

The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing, are you voting yes or no?

**Mr. Trivers:** I'm going to vote for the motion, in favour of the motion.

**Clerk:** And the hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, are you aye or nay?

**Mr. Aylward:** (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** Hon. member, your motion passed unanimously.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move that Motion 95 be now read.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

**Deputy Clerk:** Motion No. 95.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank, the following motion:

**WHEREAS** the population of Prince Edward Island stood at 136,665 in 2001;

**AND WHEREAS** the population of Prince Edward Island grew to 140,224 by 2011;

**AND WHEREAS** the most recent recent population figures of Prince Edward Island from Statistics Canada indicate the province has reached an all time high;

**AND WHEREAS** this represents a population increase of nearly 30,000 year round residents to the province since 2001;

**AND WHEREAS** the province's five year Population Strategy Action Plan, released in 2017, set a population target of 160,000 by 2022;

**AND WHEREAS** despite the limitations to movement created since 2020 by the global pandemic the five year targets laid out in the Population Strategy Action Plan have been exceeded;

**AND WHEREAS** the population growth experienced has contributed to pressures in the areas such as housing, infrastructure, schools and health care that require sound strategies to address this;

**AND WHEREAS** now is an opportune time for the renewal of the province's Population Strategy to help plan for orderly growth into the future;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that this Assembly encourage the province to undertake a renewal of its Population Strategy to help map out a plan for the sustained, orderly long-term growth of the province's population.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe to start debate.

**Mr. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to rise and move Motion 95, which does deal with the provincial population strategy.

I know we've heard a lot of different strategies; the member earlier today talking about the minimum wage strategy.

Many of the issues that we discuss in this House here do revolve around population for here in the province, including questions from the seconder of this motion, Cornwall-Meadowbank, just as recently as last week.

Dealing with programs, services, infrastructure, and even institutional capacity are influenced by questions of our population.

I am a person that I love doing the census and I encourage all Islanders right across the board to do the census because these are the things that can help government to shape policy and procedure, and basically help



improve Islanders' lives. And the decisions, of course, that we make here in this House can make changes that do affect our population.

The story of our population in many ways reflects the story of our province, our people, and our place. We're so deeply intertwined. It was nice to hear the minister's statement today for economic growth and tourism about the Occupations in Demand, where he specifically talked about immigration and how this new program will help with the labour gaps and also strengthen our provincial economy.

The province has a unique history for how the population has ebbed and flowed, kind of like the tides here on the Island, Mr. Speaker, which you would be very familiar up in the eastern end of the Island. We can all kind of trace our roots to PEI and where that comes from, and really noticed it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the huge dynamic and the change on PEI and the growth and how we've seen that.

It's most evident with my daughter and my son, seeing their school pictures and you see, and you ask them, "Oh, where's this student from?" "This student is from Russia." "Where's this student from?" "This student is from Nigeria." "Where is this student from?" "Originally from Pakistan." So, it's great to see the growth here on the Island.

We have seen much opportunity in the province's history of population through interprovincial migration. We've also had a repatriation immigration, as well as new births. We also have heard of the times of when the population's growth was going down a little bit. We all had those friends back in the day who were going out west to maybe pick up a job out west or maybe going down to the New England States or maybe someone like myself who moved to Toronto at one point in time.

I'm sure here in the Chamber that we all have friends that are maybe in those same, similar situations, where we've had that friend or a neighbour or a relative that made that decision to leave PEI and see if there was a different opportunity outside of the Island.

There is humongous growth in the province. I don't know if you've noticed in that motion, Mr. Speaker, but I find it mind-boggling: since 2001, the province has gained nearly 30,000 year-round residents calling Prince Edward Island, and as I had mentioned earlier, that includes myself. In 2001, I was living in Toronto, but I always thought in the back of my mind, Toronto was a great place, but my heart was in PEI. I wanted to come back to the Island, I wanted to raise a family, and I wanted to be able to live and work and call PEI home again.

According to the recent population figures through the census released by Statistics Canada, Prince Edward Island has led the country with growth of 8% in the last five years. Breaking it down a little bit more specifically, in Queens County, I think it's up by almost 10% growth, and the subdivisions in Charlottetown, which many of the members represent here in this Legislature, is almost growth 7.5% or around 2,700 residents growing within the Charlottetown centre.

Of course, these are only estimates and the actual numbers may be higher. This is actually the sixth consecutive year that PEI has led the growth in all the Canadian provinces in population growth. I believe Yukon Territory may be a little bit higher than PEI, but as far as the provinces go, PEI is leading the way.

I do want to break down a little bit just the actual demographics because this was something, in doing my research and looking through the census numbers, from 2011 to 2010, so in the last 10 years, the total school-age population has risen by 4.4%. That's roughly just a little bit over 1,000 people. Of course, with that, we've seen increases in the student population of the elementary, the intermediate, and also the high school levels.

As is noted, the member from District 14 Charlottetown-West Royalty would see the expansion right now at West Royalty Elementary. There is that need when you see a growth in the population in school-age students.

This is another unique figure that you might find interesting, Mr. Speaker. With an estimate of 106,631 Islanders between the

ages of 50 and 64, the province's working age population has climbed by over 12% in the last six years. The number of people age 65 and over in the province has increased by 3.5%. That's since 2020 as the baby boomers, some of them will be moving into that retirement age.

We've heard the story with a lot of people, a lot of visitors; maybe they came to the province 10, 15 years ago. They vacationed here with their kids and they'd bring their kids to the Island and maybe stay out on the North Shore, stay here in Charlottetown. A lot of those people are buying cottages and moving here and becoming those permanent residents; the 30,000 people that I talked about.

In spite of that fact, the overall median age in the province actually decreased for a fifth consecutive year. A lot of people, you say that, oh, PEI's population is ageing. It's getting older. Some of the numbers through the census actually show a little bit of a difference from that. It shows some of those numbers declining, which means that a lot more younger families are moving here to the province and calling it home.

Of course, with growth there are some negatives. I don't like to use the term "negative", but there's the growth, the positive growth, but there are some little things that may need to be improved on.

The Premier noted this last week that the pace of growth over the last two decades has actually outstripped the ability of successive governments to keep pace with that growth, and now we are playing catch-up.

The population growth experience has contributed to pressures in the areas I specifically mention in this motion of housing, infrastructure, schools, health care. You know, there are going to be further pressures put on the environment as well and I'm sure that I am missing others. The pressures will not go away. I do think that this is an opportune time for the province to renew the province's population strategy.

I think one thing that everyone in this House can agree upon – and like I said, I think back to the most recent conversation that I had last week with a new constituent to the area, and I said: What brings you back to the

Island? He said, well, I lived in Toronto during COVID. I did not want to stay in my apartment for months on end and barely have that chance to get outside, so wanted to move back to PEI. I'm sure that other members in the House have those same stories that they can tell.

We do have to work on our infrastructure with our growing population. The province's first population strategy was actually introduced in the late '90s and the most recent version was updated in 2017. As we have seen, a lot can happen in a year, as with COVID.

The population strategy dashboard from 2017 to 2022 did highlight some goals and priorities, like population growth, working age population, workforce participation rate, interprovincial migration, international immigration, immigrant retention, retention of international students, business to startups, and GDP per capita.

Do you know what's funny, is looking at all of those, it does look like a lot of those check marks have been checked, and so now is the time as we are in '22, at the end of the population strategy from 2017, is to get an update as the province moves forward.

That strategy actually had set the target to grow the province's population to 160,000 people by 2022, which is this year. As was mentioned earlier, the census puts us at that which, truthfully, the census numbers, once they are fully enumerated, we might actually be higher than that goal of 160,000.

Despite the limitations to movement, too, when the numbers for net migration into the province may have been hindered a little bit because during COVID, the pandemic did shut down a lot of avenues for people to be able to either migrate to Prince Edward Island or come back to Prince Edward Island. I do think that those numbers will actually be higher than that.

In closing, as the motion is stating, it is a great time for the province to renew the population strategy to help plan for the orderly growth into our future. Again, I talked about just some of the specifics with housing. There's been a lot of growth in my district alone, in District 10 Charlottetown-

Winsloe, and there is future development going to be put in place.

Housing, I know all the members have talked about housing in this House and we've heard stories. The government needs to have that in their plan, in the strategy. Also, with regards to health care, the medical homes and neighbourhoods, I'm a proponent of this. I do think they are a great idea and I think that that plan needs to be put in place as our population does grow, and the news of the UPEI medical school, I think, is a great idea as well.

We talk about schools. The one little thing – it's funny because it is great to see when I drop my kids off at West Royalty Elementary and I see that expansion slowly coming to fruition and the hope that the students are going to be able to use that.

But then you look down the road and if you drive a little bit further down through District 10 and you head down towards Queen Charlotte and Colonel Gray High School, as West Royalty Elementary grows, we know that those students are going to be heading down to those schools later on down the road. We have to make sure that we have the infrastructure in place to be able to accommodate all of these new Islanders.

Last is I hope that the government will go and look at renewing this strategy and also have that conversation with the various municipalities. Again, of course, I'm speaking more so for Charlottetown. I hope that the minister will have that conversation because a lot of the infrastructure in Charlottetown is shared on different levels, right from the federal government to provincial and also to the municipal government.

I do look forward to hearing all of your thoughts on this. I do, of course, ask you to support this motion.

At that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

**Mr. McLane:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm honoured to rise and second this motion, Motion 95, moved by my colleague, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

I'm glad that the subject of the motion, our provincial population strategy, is so well suited to the conversation that we, as members, in this Assembly – the conversation about our population touches on so many issues that we deal with both as government and as a society.

For much of our province's history, the conversation around population revolved around questions of decline and how to slow or reverse these trends. That conversation we are now having around population is much different. Now the conversation is about keeping pace with growth while accommodating the increased pace of Islanders returning home and people choosing to make Prince Edward Island home.

Now, some of this may be reflected in regional trends as the census shows that the population of the Maritimes grew faster than the prairie provinces for the first time since the 1940s. This was due to a combination of increased immigration and more people moving here from elsewhere in Canada.

As the motion states, our province has seen considerable growth over the last two decades, particularly over the last decade. We have seen nearly 30,000 year-round residents added to our province's population. This has helped renew many Island communities. Those extra Islanders live, work, play, and that adds to our overall economy.

In fact, according to the 2021 census figures, Prince Edward Island's rate of population was the highest ever recorded in the province from the years 2016 to 2021. We can see the evidence of that population growth at play in the Budget speech delivered last week by the Minister of Finance.

Among the impressive accomplishments noted that in 2021, they were just shy of 1,400 housing units completed in the province. For context, these 1,396 housing units completed was the biggest year for housing completions since 1974 and it was the third biggest year on record.

Looking at my own district, Cornwall-Meadowbank, I can certainly see that every day. Cornwall itself has grown by about half over the last two decades and according to the 2020 census, its population stood at 6,574. That represents an increase of almost 23% between 2016 and 2021, making Cornwall the 14<sup>th</sup> fastest growing community with at least 5,000 people in all of Canada, which I've already said before.

As that population has grown, so has the demand for services to support, both in Cornwall-Meadowbank and the entire province. Our roads and bridges have had major upgrades to handle increased traffic volumes. The schools in the Bluefield Family of Schools have undergone renovations to accommodate rising number of students enrolling year after year, and they continue to bust at the seams.

The Town of Cornwall is bustling as a commercial main street district continues to develop with several projects on the drawing board. Recently, I sat on a planning meeting of Cornwall Town Council and that evening, there was a heavy agenda as there were six new subdivision proposals on the drawing board for consideration that night. No doubt similar meetings are happening in other communities around the province as we adapt to our increasing population.

As our communities continue to adopt to population growth, the timing is right for the province to look at renewing its population strategy. A renewed population strategy can blend the positive that we've seen to date, as well as include some of the lessons that we have learned along the way. The result, I think, will help guide government decisions as it considers many decisions it faces around housing, infrastructure, schools and health care. Our population growth brings challenges for sure, but also brings great opportunity.

In closing, I intend to support this motion. I would encourage other members of the Assembly to consider doing so also.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

**Mr. Deagle:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I wasn't going to speak to the motion, but I do kind of find this a little frustrating because governments – well, any government wants more people. You want everyone to come here, which is great because we need it to grow.

However, we have a new manor that was built in Montague which was one bed less than the older manor. I have people calling me constantly – we can't get in the manor; the waiting list is so long. I say I feel terrible, but there is nothing I can do.

We have a consolidated school which we are putting, I think, it's around \$8 million into, which is excellent. It does need it. However, it's busting at the seams. Why aren't we planning to allow for the population increase that we have because the apartment buildings are going up in Montague like crazy. I think council approved three more buildings at their last council meeting.

I think government – our government and, I guess, previous governments – honestly, any government, we need to plan better. So, okay, well, we're going to renovate this school, but the reality is that there's not enough room in the school. Any of the teachers will tell you we need an expansion. We need another wing on the school for the classrooms because some of the classrooms don't have windows. The renovations that they are doing are quite impressive and quite nice, but the reality is there's just not enough room in the school.

A lot of schools that surround Montague have quite a bit, probably have more room in them because a lot of the reason Montague is quite full is French immersion and it's not offered in the schools outside of Montague Consolidated.

No one wants to always rezone because they like going to the school that they're in, but I don't know, something has to be done because I'm not quite sure – I think five years ago when you would have said that Montague Consolidated wouldn't have any room in it today, no one would have thought that was the case, but the reality is it's quite full.

Housing: I get calls about seniors' housing constantly. People on the waiting list. I had one last night, a 75-year-old lady can't get into housing. She has cancer. She can't live in her own house anymore. What do I tell her? I'm sorry, but there's no room and there's a massive waiting list. We need more housing.

Health care: There's always people calling looking for – can't get in to see a doctor and what not so, yes, we want people to come. It's great, but we have to look after who we have here already, and I think we need to do a better job of that.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**An Hon. Member:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Deagle:** I knew you were all going to say these things, so I just thought I'd get up.

**An Hon. Member:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Deagle:** An increasing population is good because it provides the tax base, new builds, income tax. Government needs revenue and they need to provide the services that we all want, and we asked for, in the Budget. We need that money. More of a population is obviously a good thing. We need it to provide the services.

But the infrastructure hasn't kept up, whether it's roads, schools, manors. We do have a new hospital coming in Montague, thank heavens. Kings County definitely needs that. It'll be interesting to see what the design is and how that process goes hopefully to meet the needs of our area.

Really, we need to think outside the box I think on housing. A lot of the restraints that contractors have in building a subdivision is just the significant cost of putting in the roads, the water and sewer. Those are significant costs that are barriers to building subdivisions, especially in Three Rivers. I know that's one of the downfalls, is just that initial cost to start, but if we could somehow work with contractors and builders to maybe lessen those costs so they can build homes and people can move into them because I know how that we do need low-income housing because people (Indistinct) we do need that.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Deagle:** But there's also the families, that perhaps two people that are making 50,000 each or even 60 that are struggling, too. They can't – a \$400,000 mortgage or 500,000 is just not, it's not doable. It's not. I was going to build onto my house a couple of years ago and I looked at the price and what it was going to cost, and I was like, that's just not doable. Everyone has a budget –

**An Hon. Member:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Deagle:** – and it's not possible. Not possible.

So, I think, you have that one side of it, low-income housing, but if we could build homes and perhaps for families where there's two people making 50,000. Middle-income families. They have multiple kids in sports, and they can't afford a \$600,000 home. The reality is, is we have too much demand and not enough supply so, not enough inventory to meet that demand and the reality is, the prices go up. That's how it works, right?

I'm not – I don't have a magic wand that will fix that issue, but I think we do need to think outside the box.

Anyway, like I said, I support the motion. I think government needs a plan and it needs to be a fast-moving plan to meet a lot of these targets that we have because the population is only going to continue to grow. We'd like to see that, but we also need the services to service those people that are moving here.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks and I'll certainly support the motion.

Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wasn't sure if I was going to get up to say a few words. I'd certainly like to say it's

pretty hard not to support this motion. I want to commend the two newest members of this Legislative Assembly for bringing this forward. You have a government over there that's been there for three years and it took two new people to come and bring this forward, so that's wonderful.

It's pretty hard not to support – I mean, our administration was around, we started this, and we had a plan and, of course, the plan changed because we didn't get re-elected as government. But this government had lots of time to revisit this plan. We've all heard lots of comments. People couldn't get building permits. Contractors couldn't get building permits.

**Mr. Henderson:** (Indistinct) get a building permit in O'Leary.

**Mr. Gallant:** Buildings were stalled. We all see the development around PEI. I see older homes in my district being bought up by people from Ontario, New Brunswick – moving here and renovating them. They're finding a contractor to do it; they just need to get a building permit.

I'm very proud of the record that we set, the previous administration; 160,000 people here on PEI. As was said here earlier, we all know family members or a friend that moved away and raised their family and just always wanted to come back – come back every year and now they're starting to come back. This government needs to start focusing on those things.

As I indicated, they've been in power in for three years. They have to stop blaming everything on COVID. They've had all kinds of money from the federal government to get the ball rolling.

I will admit one thing: In our administration, when we were in power we built new manors until the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir – I couldn't understand why we were building a manor with the same amount of beds until I was told we're trying to encourage the private sector to do that.

**An Hon. Member:** (Indistinct) Tyne Valley.

**Mr. Gallant:** Well, we did, but then this government come along and they're not helping our private sector with nursing or anything so, there's a big void there for these beds, whether they're private or public. And I mean, we all know, and you all know in here, I'm a strong advocate for seniors.

**An Hon. Member:** Call the hour.

**Speaker:** Hon. members, the hour has been called.

**Mr. MacKay:** I am looking forward to getting up and talk about immigration in your government.

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacEwen:** (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** Can you adjourn debate with a seconder?

**Mr. Gallant:** I adjourn debate, seconded by the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good debate in here today. It was a good day, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** Yes, it was.

**Mr. MacEwen:** I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance, that this House adjourn until March 2<sup>nd</sup>, at 1:00 p.m.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry? Carried.

The Legislature adjourned until Wednesday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, at 1:00 p.m.

The Legislature sat at 1:00 p.m.