



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of Prince Edward Island**

**Official Report of
Debates and Proceedings**

(Hansard)

Third Session of the 67th General Assembly

Tuesday, 5 May 2026

No. 22

The Honourable Brad Trivers, Speaker

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Tuesday, 5 May 2026

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests	1025
Statements by Members	
Charlottetown-Victoria Park (PEI Honourees – <i>Atlantic Business Magazine</i>).....	1029
Leader of the Third Party (Annual Rural Exhibitions).....	1029
Georgetown-Pownal (Junior Achievement Prince Edward Island).....	1030
Responses to Questions Taken as Notice	
Workforce and Advanced Learning (Tourism workforce).....	1030
Oral Questions	
Leader of the Opposition (Future of government programs) (further)	1031
Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park (Early learning and child care funding) (further)	1032
O’Leary-Inverness (Oyster industry) (further)	1034
Charlottetown-West Royalty (Nurse practitioners) (further).....	1035
Leader of the Third Party (Ambulance services).....	1036
Charlottetown-Victoria Park (Bullying in schools) (further)	1037
Charlottetown-Victoria Park (Early learning and child care funding) (further)	1038
Charlottetown-Belvedere (Mobile mental health).....	1039
Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke (Age restriction for nicotine products)	1040
O’Leary-Inverness (Oyster industry) (further).....	1041
Charlottetown-West Royalty (Opioid use).....	1041
Statements by Ministers	
Premier (National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls).....	1042
Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park	1042
Leader of the Third Party	1043
Agriculture (Mental Health in Agriculture Day).....	1043
O’Leary-Inverness	1043
Leader of the Third Party	1044
Education and Early Years (2026 Easter Seals Ambassador – Rowan MacDonald)	1044
Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park	1045
Charlottetown-Victoria Park	1045
Tabling of Documents	1046
Orders of the Day (Government)	
Committee, Third Reading and Pass	
Bill 21 – Combative Sport Commissioner Act.....	1047
Recorded Division – Passing of the Bill	1054
Second Reading and Committee	
Bill 26 – An Act to Amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act (No. 2)	1055
Bill 20 – An Act to Amend the Prince Edward Island Lands Protection Act	1062
Orders Other Than Government	
Second Reading and Committee	
Bill 103 – An Act to Amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act.....	1065
Adjourned	1077

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
67th General Assembly
Third Session

Lieutenant Governor – His Honour the Honourable Dr. Wassim Salamoun, O.P.E.I.

Speaker – Hon. Brad Trivers

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Member and Party	Constituency (District)	Other Responsibilities
Arsenault , Gilles (IND)	Évangeline-Miscouche (21)	
Bell , Hon. Zack (PC)	Charlottetown-Winsloe (10)	Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning Minister responsible for Acadian and Francophone Affairs
Bernard , Karla (G)	Charlottetown-Victoria Park (12)	Third Party Whip
Bevan-Baker , Peter (G)	New Haven-Rocky Point (17)	Third Party House Leader
Burridge , Hon. Jill (PC)	Stratford-Keppoch (6)	Minister of Finance and Affordability
Compton , Hon. Darlene (PC)	Belfast-Murray River (4)	Minister of Land and Environment
Croucher , Hon. Robin (PC)	Souris-Elmira (1)	Minister of Education and Early Years
Curran , Brendan (PC)	Georgetown-Pownal (2)	
Deagle , Hon. Cory (PC)	Montague-Kilmuir (3)	Minister of Health and Wellness
DesRoches , Tyler (PC)	Summerside-Wilmot (21)	Government Whip
Dillon , Susie (PC)	Charlottetown-Belvedere (11)	Deputy Speaker
Dollar , Hon. Kent (PC)	Brackley-Hunter River (15)	Minister of Housing and Communities
Henderson , Robert (L)	O’Leary-Inverness (25)	Opposition Whip
Hudson , Hon. Ernie (PC)	Alberton-Bloomfield (26)	Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy

Member and Party	Constituency (District)	Other Responsibilities
Lantz , Hon. Rob (PC)	Charlottetown-Brighton (13)	Premier Minister responsible for Indigenous Affairs Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs
MacEwen , Sidney (PC)	Morell-Donagh (7)	
MacFarlane , Matthew (G)	Borden-Kinkora (19)	Leader of the Third Party
MacKay , Matthew (PC)	Kensington-Malpeque (20)	Government House Leader
MacLennan , Hilton (PC)	Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke (23)	
McNeilly , Gordon (L)	Charlottetown-West Royalty (14)	Opposition House Leader
Perry , Hon. Hal (L)	Tignish-Palmer Road (27)	Leader of the Official Opposition
Ramsay , Hon. Barb (PC)	Summerside-South Drive (22)	Minister of Social Development and Seniors Minister responsible for the Status of Women
Redmond , Hon. Jenn (PC)	Mermaid-Stratford (5)	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Artificial Intelligence
Simpson , Carolyn (L)	Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park (9)	
Thompson , Hon. Bloyce (PC)	Stanhope-Marshfield (8)	Minister of Agriculture Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General
Trivers , Hon. Brad	Rustico-Emerald (18)	Speaker
Vacant	Cornwall-Meadowbank (16)	

[The Legislature met at 1:03 p.m.]

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome back, everyone, to another week in the Legislative Assembly. Welcome to those watching online and, of course, to those joining here in the gallery. I want to say a special hello to our 2026 Easter Seals Ambassador, Rowan MacDonald.

[Hear, hear!]

Hon. R. Lantz: I had the opportunity to visit a few schools with Rowan last week, I believe. Was it last week? The week before. Time goes fast in this game. But we had a great time. Rowan brought a lot of energy. The students at the schools brought a lot of energy. I know it was a lot of hard work, Rowan, but you did a great job. Great to see Rowan here with his dad, Chris. We've got folks here with the Easter Seals campaign: Helen Chapman with the Easter Seals; Janice Blacquiere with Tim Hortons; Della Parker, I believe you're on the board of Easter Seals? Chair. I'm sorry. Indulge me here, Mr. Speaker. Thank you all for coming. Thank you for the work you do.

Thank you to the other guests here today; nice to see you.

[1:05 p.m.]

I rise today to recognize that yesterday, May 4th, was International Firefighters' Day. That's a day that we all say thank you to the brave and women, both our dedicated career firefighters in our cities and the selfless volunteers across our rural communities, of course, who put their lives on the line to keep us all safe. We owe a great of gratitude to their sacrifice and their unwavering commitment to public safety across Prince Edward Island. I want to recognize all of those brave firefighters.

Yesterday, I had the chance to have a meeting with two of our first-year medical students. Hannah Deveaux and Andrew MacKinnon are both members of the inaugural class of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences Centre

at UPEI. Hannah and Andrew are currently working on a community engagement component of their training. It's really interesting. They're visiting organizations in the Souris area to learn more about the programs and services delivered in the community and to hear from both people delivering those services and receiving those services.

It's very interesting because this is insight into a variety of challenges and social factors that affect the wellbeing of our communities, and it will ultimately make them better doctors, better physicians, better caregivers. It was very encouraging to meet the next generation of Island physicians and learn a bit about the training they're doing.

I want to thank Minister Croucher. Minister Croucher brought Hannah and Andrew to my office for the meeting. Minister Croucher was engaged with them throughout the day. He was taking from my office to Island EMS to have a visit there and meet some of the staff at Island EMS and hear about their work. They're receiving a very, very well-rounded education. I really enjoyed that. I'm wishing all the best to the whole UPEI medical class as they finish up their year over the next couple of months.

It was an exciting Sunday evening for Montreal Canadiens fans, like me, as the Habs topped the Tampa Bay Lightning in Game 7 of their opening series. But it was even more exciting to have Summerside's very own Noah Dobson back on the blue line for the Habs after a three-week absence with an injury. Noah battled through to help secure the series win. I'm wishing the Habs much success in their second-round matchup against the Buffalo Sabres, and all the best to Noah.

I have one more item of great news about another PEI athlete, Anikha Greer, from Argyle Shore here on Prince Edward Island. She's done it again. Over the weekend, she won the Copa Sur CrossFit Semifinal event in Brazil this past weekend. I've known Anikha a long time. She has worked tremendously hard and overcome a number of obstacles to realize her dream. She's qualified for the CrossFit Games for the second year in a row and will be competing this summer in San Jose, California, for the title of Fittest Woman Earth. Congratulations to Anikha and her proud parents, Scott and Lee-Anne Greer. You've made your Island proud, Anikha. You've shown the world what true grit and determination look like.

I also want to acknowledge today's announcement that the Hon. Louise Arbour has been named Canada's next Governor General. This was just this morning, I believe. Justice Arbour has devoted her life to public service and the rule of law – and the protection of human rights, she's very well known for – both here, at home, and on the international stage. I congratulate her on this historic appointment and wish her every success as she prepares to serve Canadians in this very important role.

Finally, today is the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, or Red Dress Day. We honour those who've been lost, support the families and communities, and reaffirm our shared commitment to ending violence against Indigenous women and girls and the 2SLGBTQIA+ people. I will have a statement about this later in the proceedings.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Have a great day.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to rise today and welcome all those who are watching online – in particular, those from Tignish-Palmer Road – and all those who are joining us in the gallery today.

[1:10 p.m.]

And of course, our 2026 Easter Seals Ambassador, Mr. MacDonald; thank you for coming. Unfortunately, I couldn't make it when you were up west – was it last Friday, or Thursday, I guess – in Tignish, St. Louis, M.E. Callaghan and École Pierre-Chiasson. We were down here on Friday morning for a session. I know you had a good time. The kids thought you were fantastic. They thank you for bringing the enthusiasm and all the love you brought to the schools. Thank you for everything you have done this year, along with the campaign team, Della Parker and everyone else, for the great work that you have done this year.

I also want to recognize some other guests. Shelley LaVie – long time, no see. Shelley is well known in Souris, not for her husband [Laughter] but for all the work that she's done with the Town of Souris over the years. Welcome, Shelley; it's nice to see you back in here again.

Nurse practitioners joining us today. I must say that I had my first visit with a nurse practitioner. I do not have a family physician, so I had to go through Maple. I had an appointment with Amanda Williams, who works out of Slemon Park – fantastic, fantastic nurse practitioner. I was really happy with the compassion, the care, and the knowledge that she had. Welcome to nurse practitioners.

Roger Palmer – welcome here. Talking about nurse practitioners: his daughter is going through the process right now, Jenna Palmer Gallant. She'll be a welcomed asset to our Island health care system. Welcome, Roger. Also, to Dean MacArthur: welcome back to today's session.

As was mentioned, yesterday, May 4th, was International Firefighters' Day. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteer firefighters and those who are within the industry for their many selfless hours that they give to our communities here across Prince Edward Island. I also want to, in particular, recognize the Tignish volunteer fire department and the Miminegash volunteer fire department for all they do in my district to care for the constituents of mine.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome back to everyone in the Legislature today for another day and another week of good and wholesome debate on matters of importance to Islanders.

Welcome to everybody in the gallery. It's great to see so many familiar faces in the gallery.

To Rowan MacDonald and father, Chris, and the whole Easter Seals team that's out with us today; great to have you in the gallery. Rowan, we had a good time at Englewood, the kickoff, the very first school, I think, on your tour. Wonderful to have you out to Englewood, my old stomping ground. You had the entire gymnasium so excited with your dancing. I think "Thunderstruck" was playing as we walked into the gym. That was pretty awesome.

Roger, great to see you out today; and nurse practitioners; Your Worship, Mayor Dunphy and Shelley LaVie, great to see you out in the gallery

today; and everybody else who's with us today for the proceedings.

Today is an important day, May 5th, National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit People. Looking forward to the statement that's coming from the hon. Premier in a little bit.

Also, May 5th, today, Mental Health in Agriculture Day – I think we'll be hearing perhaps from the minister on that. Looking forward to those statements today.

This is Canadian Mental Health Association's 75th national Mental Health Week. The theme this year is "Come together, Canada – Stronger connections. Better mental health." Mental Health Week is a call to spark small, everyday actions of connection and to recognize the role we all play in supporting mental health through connection.

The PEI Division of the Mental Health Association is hosting community barbecues tomorrow, May 6th. At the Hope Centre in Alberton, the public is welcome to drop in between 12:30 and two for a barbecue and a tour of Hope Centre. Also tomorrow, same day, May 6th, Notre Dame Place in Summerside is hosting a similar event with a barbecue between 11:30 a.m. and 1 p.m., and the open house from 1-3 p.m.; that is tomorrow.

In recognition and in honour of International Firefighters' Day, I would like to give an acknowledgement to three newly certified firefighters in the Kinkora and area volunteer fire department. Congratulations to Mason Baldwin, Camryn Wadman, and Brock MacArthur.

It's a huge commitment, as we've often touched on in this House before, to become a volunteer firefighter. Eighteen evenings spent in the classroom, five days of field training, a two-day hazmat course, a four-day medical first responder course, and a final test. Thank you to the Kinkora recruits for coming forward and growing the Kinkora and area volunteer fire department. Thank you to those recruits and all firefighters across the province.

[1:15 p.m.]

Finally, Nature PEI is hosting their monthly meeting tonight at 7:30 p.m. at the Assumption Parish Hall on Stratford Road. Paige Crowell

from DFO is going to talk about the white shark and other species that are in our gulf waters. Thanks to Chris Ortenburger for keeping everyone informed about Nature PEI events, and events in the Bonshaw area.

With that, I wish everybody a great day in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to rise today and say good afternoon to everyone in District 1 that might be watching today. What a treat it is to have Your Worship, Mayor Joanne Dunphy, and our CAO for the Town of Souris, Shelley LaVie. As most of you know, Shelley's husband, Colin LaVie, proudly represented the district, District 1, for, I believe, 12 years and served as Speaker of this great House. It's nice to see you both here today.

Finally, I, too, want to welcome Mr. Rowan MacDonald here to the gallery, our 2026 Easter Seals Ambassador. I got to spend a morning with Rowan and his dad, Chris MacDonald. Chris and I, we go way back; we were friends during our camping years. It was great to reconnect. Also, welcome to all the Easter Seals team that's here today. I'll have the pleasure of giving a ministerial statement a little later on, talking about the Easter Seals.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today and welcome everybody to the gallery, especially you, Rowan. I'm really sorry I couldn't get to be in Summerside with you. I made it a few times with the lovely ladies that travel around with you, and all the group, I guess. That's why they raised so much money this year, Rowan – all your wonderful work. Thank you for that.

As Minister responsible for the Status of Women, I want to recognize today is National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People, also known as Red Dress Day. Today, we stand together to remember the missing and

murdered Indigenous women and girls in our community, our province, our country, and beyond.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

I would like to welcome back my colleagues, staff, and our Pages – Jorja, Jisele, and Eva with us today; thank you for being here – everybody tuning in from Charlottetown-Victoria Park and all over this beautiful Island, and a very special, warm welcome to everybody joining us in the gallery, especially Rowan MacDonald and team.

I got to attend Prince Street; it was the only school I was available to attend. One of my friends' sons – I asked him what he thought of the day. He said it was really cool and fun. So, thank you for being cool and fun, Rowan, and for raising so much money for such a great cause, and thanks for being with us here today.

I wanted to draw attention to my red pin in honour of Red Dress Day, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Day. This pin, I picked it out on purpose because it was designed and created by Mikayla Bernard, who is a 16-year-old young woman. She is the niece of Bethany Collicutt-McNab, who is often in here, and a constituent from O'Leary-Inverness. I just think it's beautiful and I just wanted to draw attention to it. It's made of birch bark. Thank you, Mikayla.

With that, have a good day.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I guess you can see by my tie – I'm not wearing my Bruin tie. We went down to defeat on the weekend. A tough go there, but I've got a red tie on today.

Also, I want to acknowledge Rowan MacDonald here from Easter Seals. Great work that you did in promoting the cause of Easter Seals across the province.

Also, I have a constituent here today. I have Roger Palmer, a constituent of O'Leary-

Inverness from East Bideford. He's an oyster processor and grower with Red Shore Shellfish and J.P.'s Shellfish; he's the co-owner of that.

But there's another of part of Roger – we have a lot of things in common. We both found our partners in Coleman, both our daughters played hockey together for many years, and both of them went on into the health profession – both are nurses. And, in fact, now our granddaughters and grandsons are playing on the same hockey team, so we see each other quite a bit in the hockey rink. But Roger missed me so much, he thought he'd come down and see me at work.

[Laughter]

R. Henderson: Good friend. Welcome, Roger. Thanks for coming.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, would like to rise and say hi to all those watching from home, in particular those in District 9. A special shout-out to Rowan. I had the privilege of joining Rowan, his dad, and team at Lucy Maud Montgomery and École François-Buote. It was lightning in terms of the energy that you brought. It was just such a pleasure to be able to be there.

To all those in the gallery joining us and to all those here in the House, I hope we have a wonderful day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:20 p.m.]

Pleasure to rise and say hello to everybody watching from Charlottetown-West Royalty. I, too, want to just acknowledge – I thought I saw Rob Mitchell come in, so welcome, Rob Mitchell, leader of our party.

As well, there are a few people here today – Rowan, obviously; congratulations on the huge success. You shot out of that bus at West Royalty like Ben Johnson from the past, I tell

you; it was unbelievable. Thanks for your energy.

We have some special guests here. Ellen Christie – she’s the Nurse Practitioner Association of Canada president – is here today; welcome here today. Megan Carter is the chairperson for Prince Edward Island; Candice Rochford is the secretary. Welcome. Katie Whitaker is a psychiatric nurse from Vermont who came up to Prince Edward Island from Vermont. The only one problem is that our rules don’t really acknowledge her experience. We have to work on that, and I’ll be asking some questions on that later.

I want to say happy Mental Health Week. We have some questions on that. It’s Red Dress Day; that’s very sacred here on Prince Edward Island. I wanted to extend my wishes on this day.

Thank you.

Statements by Members

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

PEI Honourees – *Atlantic Business Magazine*

K. Bernard: Thank you.

Every year, *Atlantic Business Magazine* picks the 25 Most Powerful Women in Business in Atlantic Canada. These women are changemakers whose power extends beyond the context of their jobs to influence their industry and broader community.

According to the Canadian Women’s Foundation, 82 percent of all Canadian women between the ages of 24 and 54 are employed, but only 15 percent of Canadian CEOs are women. Their labour force participation rate doesn’t translate to them being within the highest-ranking senior executives in a company. This makes recognition like this that much more important.

This year two winners were selected from PEI: Josie Baker and Jill van Duinkerken.

Jill van Duinkerken is the CEO of Duinkerken Foods. Being bakers and being diagnosed with celiac disease was hard, and Brenda van Duinkerken, founder of Duinkerken Foods, wanted to change that. Jill grew up in the

kitchen beside her mom, and when she finished university, she joined the family business and is proud to carry on the tradition of sharing new gluten-free family recipes with the community.

Josie Baker is the executive director of PEERS Alliance, an organization that seeks to educate, engage, and support PEI residents to build healthier, inclusive communities and to end stigma surrounding sexual health and drug use using a trauma-informed approach.

I had the honour of attending an awards celebration ceremony last week and what an honour it was to be in the presence of these two powerhouse women, along with all the other strong, community-minded women in that room. Thank you, Josie and Jill, for all you do every day, and a sincere congratulations to you on this prestigious award.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Annual Rural Exhibitions

M. MacFarlane: With the arrival of the warm spring weather and seeing farmers out working the land, my mind turns to the many rural fairs, festivals, and exhibitions that we enjoy in PEI each summer and that will soon be starting up across our province.

From Tignish to Souris and a dozen points in between, our rural exhibitions showcase local food and talent; host livestock, poultry, and horse shows and truck and tractor pulls; celebrate our Island heritage; and promote the rural, agrarian lifestyle upon which PEI was founded.

Supporting these exhibitions is the Prince Edward Island Association of Exhibitions, a non-profit, volunteer-led organization. From its website: “The association began in 1973 with the vision to bring all PEI exhibitions together under one organization to give events a collective voice to further grow and develop.”

Also supporting our exhibitions is a network of hundreds, if not thousands, of dedicated volunteers and organizers across the province who contribute countless hours to making sure these big events succeed year after year.

One of these incredible volunteers was my friend and neighbour, Elmer MacDonald, who

served as president of the PEI Association of Exhibitions and was instrumental on the board of the Crapaud Exhibition for 40 years. Elmer would often say how the planning for the next Crapaud Exhibition would begin the day after the last one ended.

I look forward this summer to attending as many fairs and exhibitions as I can, and I encourage all members and Islanders to do the same. There is no better way to disconnect from the online world, reconnect with our agricultural and rural ways of life, and see our beautiful Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-Pownal.

Junior Achievement Prince Edward Island

B. Curran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in the House today to recognize an organization that is shaping the future leaders of our province: Junior Achievement Prince Edward Island.

[1:25 p.m.]

In District 2, we know the value of hard work and the importance of looking out for your neighbour. Those are the same values that JA PEI instills in our youth. By bridging the gap between the classroom and the workplace, they are giving students the tools they need to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

Whether it's through their financial literacy programs or the hands-on experience of the company program, Junior Achievement is teaching our young people how to turn an idea into reality. I have seen firsthand as a volunteer the spark in a student's eye when they realize they have the potential to be an entrepreneur, a creator, or a community leader. These students are learning discipline, meticulous recordkeeping, and the integrity required to run a business – skills that will serve them and our Island for generations to come.

Our family farms and small businesses are the backbone of our communities, but it's the next generation that will keep them thriving. Organizations like Junior Achievement PEI ensure that our youth don't just dream about the future; they build it.

I also want to invite all members to support the 2026 Junior Achievement PEI Business Hall of Fame Gala. This event takes place on Thursday, May 21st, at 5:30 p.m., at the Delta Prince Edward. It is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the legends of our business community while supporting the leaders of tomorrow. Single tickets and tables are available and can be secured by calling the Junior Achievement office.

I want to thank the dedicated volunteers and mentors who give so many countless hours, and the students who continue to push the boundaries of what is possible here on PEI. I ask all members of this House to join me in celebrating Junior Achievement PEI for their commitment to empowering our youth and for building a stronger, more prosperous Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Tourism workforce

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty had asked some questions on Friday with regards to support through the department for the tourism industry specifically. I'm going to table this during tabling of documents, but this is the labour market development agreement proposal '26-27, which was provided to the department.

We are taking a very comprehensive approach to supporting the workforce here on PEI for tourism. The partnership – we do provide core funding to TIAPEI, which has increased in the last number of years. This funding is designed to support an industry-led approach to address human resources, labour market, and skill development needs in the sector.

The department meets regularly with TIAPEI to better understand the emerging labour market needs, and we will also continue to advocate with the federal government on issues such as program changes and the need for more flexible immigration pathways to help ensure the tourism sector has access to the workforce that it needs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Over the weekend, thousands of Islanders spoke loudly about the cuts to education programs and to support staff. These cuts go well beyond our early years centres; they have a ripple effect across all sectors. Parents will have a harder time finding spaces, which will lead parents to not re-entering the workforce, which comes with an emotional and a financial toll. Islanders know these cuts are misguided. It is very frustrating that the Premier doesn't see it the same way.

Future of government programs (further)

Question to the Premier: Who made a decision to focus cuts on the programs and services that young Islanders and families depend on the most, and were they even aware of how just how far-reaching these impacts go, Mr. Premier?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Those decisions are made collaboratively between my department, the Premier's Office, and....

Look, \$18 million was the investment in early years under the government that he represented in 2018. We've grown that to \$101 million right now. As we talked about, the funding for the Canada-wide agreement was a 50-50 split. It's now sitting at about 60-40. So, instead of spreading fear and chaos in the industry, I would suggest that the Leader of the Opposition join me in advocating for continued partnership with our federal partners in Ottawa.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: My god. So tone deaf. You think this is fear and chaos right now? You wait – Mr. Speaker, that minister can wait.

Speaker: Careful with the language there, member.

[1:30 p.m.]

Hon. H. Perry: Islanders are continuing to learn more about what's being cut, and this pattern is very clear. This attack on families impacts communities, it impacts businesses, and it impacts some of the most pivotal years of a child's life. When it comes to bricks and mortar like schools and hospitals, this government loves saying they are investing in the future. However, it doesn't make sense when you're investing in buildings rather than combining this with giving young people the best possible start to life.

Question to the Premier: Will the Premier table any analysis or consultation that informed these cuts that you just said you were part of – by the Minister of Education – or will you confirm that these decisions were made without fully understanding their impact on Island families, our communities, our economy, and the futures of Island children?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to make the record clear: this is not a cut; it was a reduction in pedagogical service with no impact to the child-to-educator ratio in the province. That's a bit of misinformation that I wanted to correct.

Again, under your government, early years educators were at \$16 and change per hour. They're well over \$31 an hour right now for their wages. Special needs assistants, autism assistants – our increase in the budget was \$15.6 million this year alone for early years, and a lot of that funding is going to our autism and special needs sector. Again, day rates were \$34 for infants under his government; they're now \$10 a day.

This government is continuing to invest in some of our most precious Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

They're going to need a lot more money when these early years centres close.

These cuts are not stopping at staffing for early years centres or books or bicycles. We're now hearing that the elementary eye care program is under review – a program that helps children access basic care like eye exams and glasses.

Question to the Premier: Is this review another example of this government trying to balance the budget on the backs of the next generation?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education and Early Years just outlined the incredible investments we've made into our early years system here in Prince Edward Island, which is the envy of the nation.

We are in difficult fiscal times. We are showing restraint in our spending growth, but as you've all seen, we continue to invest in Prince Edward Islanders. We continue to invest in the programs and services that Islanders rely on. We will continue to do that. We will continue to build the best child care system in the nation. We will continue to support Islanders as we can as we continue to build the foundation of a strong economy here in Prince Edward Island that helps pay for all of these services that Islanders rely on.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, they're not helping pay; they're taking and cutting programs. But they're not cutting the NHL deal.

Islanders still don't have a clear picture of what's being cut from this government's budget. We've asked the Minister of Finance to table a full list and she refused. She talks about transparency; that's not transparency. It's a government making decisions and refusing to be upfront with Islanders about the impact.

Question to the Premier: Will the Premier direct his Minister of Finance to table the full list of cuts and reductions so Islanders know exactly what's being taken away?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition and everyone on that side of the House has a book this thick of every single line of our budget. They've got last year's budget; they can do their homework.

But this province has continued to grow, both physically through population growth, and an economy that's been the envy of the country. In many ways, we've continued, even this past year, to lead on many measures through economic growth.

This government has made a commitment, an ambitious commitment, to continue to invest in the infrastructure so that we can sustain that growth over the long term. Not only that, but we are continuing to invest in Islanders who are being impacted by an unprecedented affordability crisis, in no small part to circumstances that are well beyond our control around the world internationally, through measures like the Island essentials benefit and through a whole host of other programs, services, and tax cuts that benefit Islanders to get them through difficult times. Those are the things that we're proud of on this side of the House.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:35 p.m.]

And just for homework purposes, the early learning and child care system on PEI began under the Liberal government when we first moved kindergarten into the public education system to the tune, many, many years ago, of well over \$10 million. Then we began our early years system of early years centres, and we did all of this with no federal funding.

Early learning and child care then was part of the promise of a commitment to the children, which raises a simple question: What does this government see in early learning and child care, and what do they define as education?

Early learning and child care funding (further)

To the Minister of Education and Early Years: Do you, as minister, consider early learning and child care education, yes or no?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: I'm not quite sure where she's going with that question.

What I'll tell you is that we highly value our early years sector. That's very evident in the amount of investment that's made. I'll say it again – \$101 million right now, with \$15.56 million this year alone. We've grown our spaces from 45 under this Liberal government to 83 in '25-26, with an additional 21 licensed home-based centres.

We're supporting this industry like no other. Back in those times, there were 1,500 children enrolled. We're sitting at 4,275 now.

I can keep talking about this, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you. So, clearly not education.

We've heard a lot from this government about protecting education in this budget. The Finance minister has said every department was asked to make a cut. Last week, the Premier said that there were no cuts to education – in fact, there was growth – but when you look closer, early childhood programs are the ones that got hit. Once again, it feels like this government is putting itself first instead of focusing on early learning and child care.

As the Leader of the Opposition rightly pointed to a few moments ago, the ripple effect of this decision will be massive. It will affect quality, parents' ability to work, the schools when children arrive in 2027 – buckle up – communities, and the Island economy.

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Given that there are no cuts to public education and every department had to cut, did the early years division – I'm going to ask it again – see the majority of cuts within your department?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Again, this is not a cut, Mr. Speaker, it's a reduction, and the answer to that is no.

I'm glad you brought up the Leader of the Opposition. I'm old enough to remember the very short time that he was Minister of Education, and he cut teachers. We've grown our workforce. We've grown our workforce by,

I don't know, 500 or 600 staff members in a few short years. Again, \$18 million of investment – seven short years later, \$101 million.

I can keep standing up, but again, I would encourage the member to join me in advocating for increased supports in our wonderful partnership that we've had with the federal government instead of spreading fear and chaos in the system.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, to that, last week the early childhood sector met with department staff, and they were told they were losing up to 50 percent of their support staff. The minister then said, "No, no, no, it's 25 percent," and the Premier said education spending increased.

When the Premier says one thing, the minister says another, and department staff have yet another message, there's a communication problem and there's a credibility problem.

To the Premier: Who has the final word on early learning and child care funding in this government, and why don't we get a straight answer?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: To be very clear, if the member was confused, it is a 25 percent reduction in pedagogical supports in the system.

Yes, I have met with the ECDA. I met with them this morning. You know what? Again, I am going to encourage you, member, to join me in advocating as opposed to spreading misinformation, fear, and chaos in the system because that is not helpful to anyone here.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: So, cut 25 percent, cut 50 percent – we're not sure what it is, but I can tell you the impact: it's going to mean loss of staff, loss of quality, loss of spaces.

This government keeps announcing child care spaces, but without staff – and now losing staff – those spaces won't open. Providers have made it clear, and they are already struggling to find and keep educators. Spaces are sitting empty.

To the Minister of Education and Early Years: How many new ECE positions has this government funded in this budget, and how will you ever meet the demand?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: I'll have to bring back the exact number of spaces that we funded, but I will tell you this: we've increased our special needs assistance grant from \$1.3 million in 2016-2017 to \$6.7 million this year alone – record investments in this sector.

[1:40 p.m.]

We have great partners in Holland College, Steps to Success, the accelerated program. We're going to continue to work with those sectors to graduate new ECEs into the system. I'm so proud to say that our ECEs now have a job that they can see themselves in as a career with a livable wage and a pension plan, thanks to this government's investment.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you.

He raises Steps to Success, but this minister has cut the training grants, which means that people aren't going to be able to get to it. And while there's been no public announcement that Steps to Success has been cut, it will devolve and just fade away.

I'll go back to it – it's a dog's breakfast of a mess, Mr. Speaker.

To the Minister of Education and Early Years: How do you expect the spaces to stay open with a plan that has cut the funding for grants and is taking away their supports? When they start to close, what in the world are you going to do?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Again, I'll correct some of the misinformation. The grants were not cut; they were reduced and capped. The pedagogical support was not cut; it was reduced. This is important stuff in an industry –

[Interjection]

Hon. R. Croucher: So, again, this member can stand up, and she can say whatever she wants on that side of the House and believe it to be true. I am working with the great staff and board members with the ECDA. I've assured them that we're going to work collaboratively to get through this. I believe that's the best path forward, is to collaborate and work together. My door is open to this member if she wants to sit down and talk more about it.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Our PEI oyster growers and processors are going through a difficult time getting their money from this government. The Minister of Fisheries stated in this House that these producers got their money, yet then he tabled information to the contrary contradicting his very own statement.

Oyster industry (further)

Question to the Minister of Fisheries: How did your department calculate the money growers were actually entitled to?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism.

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. member states that I tabled information in this House that contradicted my original statements. That's not quite accurate. Let's take a look at what has gone out the door. In the mitigation programs, there has been a little over \$6.1 million approved in applications, and just about \$4.4 million that have actually gone out the door.

This government – we are committed to the oyster industry. As I've said before, I have a request in to the federal Minister of Fisheries

and Oceans for a meeting. That went in about a week and a half or two ago. Our office has not heard back on that at this point in time.

I would encourage the hon. member to join me in that type of advocacy.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O’Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Well, it seems, Mr. Minister, they’ve tuned out. They know you can’t deliver the program. We’ve got processors and growers here that haven’t got any money yet, right here.

What if producers are not in agreement with the government’s calculations and it doesn’t take into account the lost sales of increased inventory over one year and the mortality that occurred the next year? Some growers have been designated “special circumstances.”

Question to the Minister of Fisheries: What does “special circumstances” mean? Is there an appeal process for those processors and growers who feel your calculations are not reflective of their losses? Can this appeal happen quickly, because many growers need to make their orders for seed for the coming year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism.

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I do agree with the hon. member with regard to the plans, that it is absolutely necessary as we move this industry forward over the next time period to get it back on its feet.

I do know that staff in my department have been working diligently with individuals with regard to getting the required information to process these applications. I assure you that staff will continue to do that.

Thank you.

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

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

I’d like to welcome the incredible nurse practitioners here in the gallery today. Nurse practitioners have significantly enhanced our health care system as they become more integrated over the years. They manage their own patient panels and provide exceptional care to Islanders.

[1:45 p.m.]

Yet nurse practitioners continue to be underutilized, and they are ready to do more, ready to provide even greater care for Islanders, and Islanders need that.

Nurse practitioners (further)

Question to the Minister of Health: What steps have you taken since becoming the minister to ensure these invaluable professionals are being fully utilized to the extent of their education, skill, and compassion?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Welcome to the gallery. Good to have them here.

I know we’ve just hired 10 or 11 of the graduating nurses from UPEI – we announced that a few weeks ago – which is excellent news. They’re very important in our system. They have a very important role to play. I think if we all work collaboratively together, all allied health professionals, we can deliver improved access to care for Islanders, and nurse practitioners have a very important role to play in that.

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

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

The problem is that their collective agreement expired March 31st, and there are things that they could be doing, and we’re falling behind the rest of the region.

Nurse practitioners can provide much of the primary care for Islanders that we need on a regular basis, yet many still face barriers, whether it’s access to usable billing numbers or

the ability to fully operate within the system. They are a dedicated and determined group of caregivers who, if given the opportunity, are willing to expand access by seeing patients in the evenings, weekends, and much-talked-about walk-in clinics.

Question to the minister: What actions has your department taken to remove these barriers and enable nurse practitioners to deliver even more care? When can they expect to finally practice to the full scope of their practice?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would think the hon. member is probably referring to recent changes in the *Canada Health Act*, or at least the interpretation letter of nurse practitioners being able to bill fee-for-service. We do want to allow that. Obviously, that would have to take place at the bargaining table in negotiations. Our hope is that nurse practitioners on PEI will be able to bill fee-for-service in the spring of '27, so about one year from now.

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

G. McNeilly: Perfect. That's optimistic, but we're also watching an MOA from the physicians that kind of got stalled, and it's still in the pause mode, and that was supposed to be in April 1st. So, I'm going to hold the minister to that and be accountable on this side.

We have a nurse practitioner here who was a child psychiatric nurse practitioner from the United States that came here – thank you for coming – but she can't practice because of regulation issues within Prince Edward Island.

Will the minister have a look at that and any other nurse practitioner issues for people coming from the States to Canada that can't practice to the full scope of their practice?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think it would probably go without saying that obviously we would want them here, and to work and practice here. I do believe that licensing and regulation would fall under the

College of Nursing and Midwifery, but certainly more than willing to work with them to reduce regulation. If that means we can get nurse practitioners to come from the United States and work here, then I think that's a good thing. Obviously, there would have to be collaboration between government and the body that regulates them because really, the licensing falls under them, but I'm more than willing to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Speaker, since 2019 when this government came to power, ambulance response times in PEI have nearly doubled. I've been told that at times, only two ambulances are available to cover the entire province.

Ambulance services

Question to the Minister of Health: Does the government believe, minister, that two ambulances is adequate coverage for PEI, and does this meet the service requirements outlined in its \$27 million/year contract with Medavie Health Services?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think you mentioned two ambulances and....

[Interjection]

Hon. C. Deagle: Province-wide?

I can get the exact numbers and bring them back to the House. I don't know it off the top of my head, but I'd be more than willing to bring it back.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, first supplementary.

M. MacFarlane: That was the question, Mr. Speaker: When we have a whole province that is only able to be serviced by two ambulances, was the minister okay with that? So, I don't really need to know how many ambulances there are in the whole province at any given – you know, tied up or not able to be staffed.

Government contracts for emergency health services are supposed to guarantee minimum standards of care. Islanders deserve to know whether those standards are being met, namely that an ambulance will be available to get to them quickly during an emergency.

Question to the same minister: When ambulance shortages occur, is Medavie required to formally report critical staffing levels to government, and will the minister table that data so Islanders know the true state of the system?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:50 p.m.]

Again, I don't know this answer off the top of my head, but I'd be willing to bring it back.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, second supplementary.

M. MacFarlane: Ambulances and paramedics play critical roles in our province, Mr. Speaker, so I'm really looking forward to the minister getting up to speed on that aspect of his portfolio.

If this government is serious about fixing ambulance wait times, it needs to address the root cause, which is staffing. Paramedics on PEI are paid significantly less than those in neighbouring provinces, yet government continues to focus on recruitment over retention.

Question to the Minister of Health.
Government's approach is putting Islanders at risk while expecting fewer workers to do more. Why is this government providing funding to Medavie Health Services for recruitment efforts while failing to directly invest in retention through a fair collective agreement that includes closing the wage gap for the hardworking paramedics that we already have?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not going to comment on negotiations in a collective bargaining process. That's between

those two groups, and I think it's gone to reconciliation or – I can't think of the word off the top of my head – arbitration. It might not be there yet, but that's between those two groups.

Obviously, I think we want a fair deal, and there has to also be a focus on retention as well. It's a very difficult job. I know the Minister of Education has spoken to me before in the past, but it is a very difficult job with a high turnover rate. So, there does have to be a focus on retention.

We did meet with Jason Woodbury and Alice Rice two weeks ago, I believe, now and heard their concerns.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

It's almost exactly a year since I asked the Minister of Education in this House if he would commit to implementing consistent reporting mechanisms to track bullying in all Island schools. His response back then, and I quote, "Absolutely. I will have staff consult with educators in our schools so that they do have the tools that they need to address these issues."

Bullying in schools (further)

Question to the minister. All we were asking for is that you track bullying. It's hard to solve a problem if you don't understand the scope of it. You made a commitment back then to Islanders. Why haven't we seen any results?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always good to be able to get up and talk about bullying. It's something that I'm very passionate about, something that is a big focus of the work that we do in our department every day, and something that I take very, very seriously.

We are internally looking at bullying, the root causes, why it's happening. I can't quite put my finger on that just yet, but we're doing a lot of work. Alain Pelletier – if anyone had the opportunity to go to a school and watch his presentation, fantastic. We're doing a lot of work on bullying and we're going to continue to.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, first supplementary.

K. Bernard: Thank you. That had nothing to do with my question.

In response to this lack of action, I brought forward a motion calling on government to implement tracking for bullying in schools. The motion had unanimous support, even though the minister later told media that he did not support it in practice.

The Minister of Education says he wants to track absences better but then doesn't do anything. Then when asked to make a simple improvement to tracking, he says no. The minister can't seem to pick a lane.

Question to the minister: You had a year, and all you can say is that the solution I brought forward isn't good enough. Where's your solution then, and why isn't it implemented?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Quite frankly, I don't believe your solution is quite good enough. But like I said in the media, the spirit of it – certainly, I understand the member working and trying, and I respect that. Is there a better way to do this than a dropdown menu in PowerSchool? A hundred percent there is. We cannot track bullying in all its forms with a dropdown menu. We're going to find a better way. We're working on that.

I met with a student engagement team yesterday; it's part of their focus. That work is going to continue. As long as I'm in this chair, getting to the bottom of the bullying issues that we have in the province, just like every other place in the country, is going to be my focus.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, second supplementary.

K. Bernard: I'll believe all of that when I see it.

This isn't the only topic where the minister says one thing and does another. This government's first inclusive education action plan was clear:

we need to increase supports to children before they enter school. So, what did they do? They cut pedagogical supports, an evidence-based approach to getting kids ready for school and their future.

We have a record number of students entering school who are not potty trained, who need extra support, teachers who can't keep up, and this government is cutting something against the best interests of our children, our education system, and our future. Either the success of our children and our students is a priority or it's not.

[1:55 p.m.]

Early learning and child care funding (further)

Question to the minister – tell Islanders: Is it a priority, and you're reinstating the funding to pedagogical supports, or is it not a priority, and you'll stand behind the cuts?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: I clearly stated to the ECDA board this morning that I am unable to reinstate the pedagogical supports, but we are currently working to lobby and advocate to our federal partners to bring that Canada-wide agreement back up to the 50-50 because it's sliding. We've been shouldering that load now for a couple of years, and we can't continue to do it with the rising costs in everything.

Again, \$101 million of investment – we have \$15.6 million this year alone for autism and special needs supports. We're going to continue to support the sector as we have done for the last seven years.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The *Joining Forces* report written by Prince Edward Island's Ombudsperson released in October of 2024 made it clear that Prince Edward Island stands alone in Canada in how we respond to mental health emergencies.

The report stated the decision to implement a standalone mobile mental health model without

embedded police has resulted in our unit being asked to do what no other similar unit in Canada has done: adapt a low-risk operating model to both low-risk and high-risk situations.

Mobile mental health

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness:
Can you explain the benefits of this model?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think it's a good service that we do have offered out of Charlottetown, Summerside, and Montague – at least stationed in those three areas – really, with a lot of support aimed at reducing visits to the ER. We've had over 8,000 calls – telehealth – that people have been supported; 1,300 in-person visits through these mobile mental health units, and I think has resulted in around 180 visits to the ER, which is good news because we want to reduce those visits.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, first supplementary.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Prince Edward Island Association of Chiefs of Police – PEIACP – remains strongly supportive of establishing a police-embedded co-response mental health model. In a written response to the standing committee in January 2026, it was stated by the PEIACP: “The establishment of a co-response model would not only improve outcomes for Islanders in crisis but also enhance the safety and effectiveness of those who support them.”

Question to the same minister: Has there been consideration to include plainclothes law enforcement embedded into our mobile mental health units?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

No, there hasn't, to put it bluntly. There is a relationship, though, with our police services, the idea being that we will use them when they are needed. If the mobile mental health team feels that they need that support, they can make

that phone call and have that support. But having them as part of the team full-time – no, that hasn't been considered.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, second supplementary.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While I appreciate the efforts to communicate a new number for an access line and in-person support through Medavie, 911 and police continue to be the primary point of contact for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. While police receive training in mental health responses and crisis deescalation, we know that clinicians are the subject matter experts.

Question to the same minister: Is there a willingness to have discussions with Medavie, the Department of Health and Wellness, as well as our law enforcement on how we can integrate law enforcement into mobile mental health services to provide to Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a good question. I guess you could say we'd always be open to all ideas and exploring any and all options. I would say that right now, that's probably not going to happen. Can we look at it in the future? Perhaps.

We do have a relationship with police services – RCMP, city police, and whatnot. Right now, I would say no, but definitely conversations we can have in the future to see if this is something that's possible.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In 2020, this government took a courageous stand on public health by raising the legal age for tobacco and vaping to 21. However, a significant gap has emerged.

Nicotine pouches are discreet, flavoured, and highly addictive, yet they are currently being sold to 18-year-olds right here in PEI. We have a responsibility to ensure that all nicotine products

are held to the same high standards of protection for our youth.

[2:00 p.m.]

Age restriction for nicotine products

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Will this government commit to closing these loopholes immediately by amending provincial legislation to bring nicotine pouches under the same 21-plus restriction as all other nicotine products on PEI?

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Yeah, it's certainly come full circle. Here I am the Minister of Health now.

The nicotine pouches – or Zonnics, as I guess most people refer to them – are certainly a huge issue and a concern. Right now, the legal age to purchase Zonnics is 18; nicotine and electronic smoking devices is 21. I would like to see the age of nicotine pouches or whatever you want to call them increased to 21 as well.

I think we'd probably look at doing that this coming fall, but there would also be consideration to increase the age of cannabis to 21, which now sits at 19, and to align that right across the board, which I support, and Public Health supports. I think we'd look at doing that this fall as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, first supplementary.

H. MacLennan: Thank you, minister.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most effective outcomes of our 21-plus legislation was that it effectively removed legal nicotine purchases from our high school hallways. By leaving nicotine pouches at 18, we have effectively reintroduced a legal supply chain back into the schools, making it nearly impossible for teachers and administrators to maintain a nicotine-free environment.

I guess I'll go to the Minister of Education with this one. Does the department recognize that the 18-plus age for pouches has reintroduced a legal

supply chain into our high schools, and what is the plan to support the staff who are now dealing with these products in the classroom?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will stand shoulder to shoulder with the Minister of Health and Wellness to achieve the goals that he's set out, for sure. As far as our school environment, I have not had a conversation or a comment or concerns come back to the department from our administrators regarding these pouches or "Onnics" or whatever they're called.

What I will tell you is the minister and I attended a breakfast, I guess it was, with the Heart and Stroke and PEI lung association. After the breakfast was over, the minister and I had a great conversation with the representatives over there and have committed to sitting down as soon as this Legislature closes and discussing the path forward in supporting restricting cannabis, vaping products, and now these pouches to our youth.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, second supplementary.

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Prince Edward Island has a proud tradition of promoting healthy, active lifestyles through our community rinks, soccer fields, and our young sports programs. We are hearing more and more from coaches and parents who are concerned about the growing presence of nicotine pouches in the locker room – products that are often marketed as a performance booster or a clean alternative to smoking.

A question back to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Alongside potential legislative changes to the legal age, what steps has the department taken to promote public awareness so that parents, coaches, and young Islanders understand the specific health risks associated with these nicotine products?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There definitely has to be an education piece to this. What's happened is big tobacco companies, which own the vaping products and now the pouches – it's all big tobacco companies that own these because they need to find a new way to get youth addicted to nicotine, one of the most addictive drugs in the world. Nicotine use and smoking is still, I think, the biggest killer in PEI, causing the most deaths.

I'd like to see the age of Zonnics increase to 21, and cannabis to 21 as well because there's scientific evidence that it has impacts on the brain up until the age of 25, actually.

The Zonnics have come in now. A lot of jurisdictions are trying to reduce youth vaping, so now the big tobacco companies have moved to the pouches because they're easy to hide – they're easy to hide in classrooms, locker rooms; you just put them up in your cheek, and all the youth do it.

[2:05 p.m.]

I was at a pharmacy the other day and I saw the Zonnics behind the counter and the pharmacist said – I asked her about them, and she said: “We don't even want to sell them anymore, but the corporate headquarters has said we have to sell them because clearly they're making money off of them.” She said all it is is a lineup of youth coming in. You only have to be 18, and they said sometimes it's an 18-year-old with three people that are clearly younger than 18 behind them, and they have to sell them. They don't have a choice. They said they used to have an age verification to ask, but they've even taken that away.

So, we've got to stop trying to get our youth addicted to nicotine. That's one of my goals as Health minister and through Public Health.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Fisheries has left the process of getting money out to oyster growers to the eleventh hour. The oyster industry is tired of excuses and finger-pointing. They have no cash flow to order oyster seed or even put groceries on the table. Growers can't even get in contact with the department to get answers to their questions.

Oyster industry (further)

Question to the Minister of Fisheries: When will all the outstanding applicants of oyster grower support actually receive their money from your department?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism.

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not going to debate individual applications here on the floor of this Legislature as it appears that the hon. member actually wants to. I also want to reiterate that there are no special considerations. Everybody is treated the same by my department.

I'll go back, as well, to look – over \$6 million approved in applications, over \$4.3 million out the door. If anybody is pointing, it's the member from across the way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, final question.

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm concerned. Just this weekend, I got word that there were maybe three overdoses on the streets of Prince Edward Island, and I'm very concerned about what that means. That's very concerning. We've got to make sure that the minister knows and is taking action to see whatever he can do because we've heard that there are new drugs around the Maritimes, and I'm quite concerned.

Opioid use

My question is to the Minister of Health: Can you confirm this, and what are you doing to make sure that we're doing as much as we can to protect the people who don't have homes in Prince Edward Island from difficult and strong drugs?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's definitely a serious discussion and conversation. I don't want to necessarily comment on – I think just due to the personal

nature of the issue and for families, which is extremely sad.

At a national level, Canada has seen a decline in the number of opioid overdose deaths. One reason is broader awareness and access to naloxone, which temporarily reverses the overdose. In 2024, the PEI take-home naloxone program was expanded to over 60 pharmacy and community sites across PEI. Since then, over 14,000 naloxone kits have been distributed to Islanders.

PEI has done well. Obviously, I think we can still do better. Obviously, we don't want anyone to overdose; we'd like to avoid that in any way possible.

I'd be willing to sit down with the hon. member and perhaps the Chief Public Health Office to really just have a fluid, good discussion on this. But yeah, very sad what the member is speaking of on the weekend.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today is National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, also known as Red Dress Day. It's an important time for reflection and remembrance as we honour the lives of Indigenous women and girls that have tragically been cut short by violence.

I hold survivors in my thoughts, as well as the families and loved ones of those who have been taken or are still missing, as they grieve, remember, and honour those they've lost. It's essential that we all recognize the disproportionate and unacceptable levels of violence faced by Indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people to understand the deep harm it causes to Indigenous families and communities.

This is a day about raising awareness and reaffirming our commitment to implementing the MMIWG Calls for Justice as part of our

efforts to prevent violence here on Prince Edward Island.

[2:10 p.m.]

The Province continues to advance programs and initiatives that support the Calls for Justice, with education playing a key role in strengthening and sustaining this work. Each year, our government publishes status reports that track the Province's progress on fulfilling the Calls for Justice and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. The latest report, *Our Continuing Pathway of Understanding and Action*, is now available on the government website.

We remain committed to working in partnership with Indigenous communities to advance the calls for justice through a government-wide approach, one that is guided by Indigenous voices and grounded in respect, sincerity, and compassion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the Premier for his statement and to acknowledge the importance of today, May 5th, as Red Dress Day – the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People. Today is a day of remembrance. It's a day to honour the lives taken, families left grieving, and communities that continue to carry this pain with strength and dignity.

I also wanted to recognize the Indigenous women, leaders, elders, youth, organizations, and families across PEI who continue to lead this work with courage and care. The 2025 annual report published today shows important work happening in our province. We must continue and we must be able to take the lead on our accountability. We need to know not only what meetings that we've held but what are the programs that are happening, where are the gaps, and where do we still need to continue to go?

Our Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people are safer today and there is growth but are Indigenous families better supported? Are services culturally safe, accessible, and properly funded?

Wearing red matters, remembering matters, but remembrance must also be matched with action. On this day, we recommit ourselves in this House to listening, learning, and doing the hard work needed to make this province safer and more just for everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited people have faced many extreme injustices in our country – racism, forced sterilization, sexism, homophobia, and violence at many levels, and much more. These are deeply rooted, systemic incidents that need to be addressed. The intergenerational trauma as the result of residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and various other forms of racism have led to the high level of violence we've seen in communities.

We're talking about a culture where traditionally women were valued most – where it was understood that the eldest women in our community were wise and highly respected – and now, we've seen the violence that has originated from the systemic challenges in our country.

We have to take this seriously. The calls to action are very clear. They're divided up by government departments. I do thank the Premier for the update. I encourage the good work to continue, but it is simply more than checking a box off of a check list; it is about making significant foundational change.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Mental Health in Agriculture Day

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today is the second annual Mental Health in Agriculture Day. Last year, we proclaimed May 5th as this day of recognition. The goal is to ensure that the mental health of Islanders working in PEI's agriculture industry remains a priority. This day reminds us to raise awareness, fight the stigma, and ensure that everyone knows the supports that are available.

The farmer's counselling program is a free service available at FarmersTalk.ca FarmersTalk provides free counselling services to farmers, farm employees, and their families. Last fiscal year, FarmersTalk provided 300 counselling sessions. There have been over 700 hundred sessions provided since this program began in 2023. It's unfortunate that people still struggle.

In today's world of uncertainty, trade barriers, and increasing costs, it can be hard to stay positive, but I am grateful that there is a place to get help. The FarmersTalk program is here to stay.

May is a stressful month for our agriculture industry. The costs of starting another planting season and the uncertainty it brings can get the best of us all.

[2:15 p.m.]

There are financial concerns, and there are also emotional costs in this business. I know it all too well. Eight years ago, Harold Haslam, a dairy farmer and friend, took his life. So, as long as I'm in this chair, we are going to advocate for mental health in agriculture.

When we talk about mental health, we reduce the stigma, and we realize we aren't alone. To anyone who may be struggling, please know that you matter. Your health and happiness are worth it. You are not alone. We are together. There is help available; visit FarmersTalk.ca to learn more.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks, minister. This, too, is a very important topic that we have to discuss and be aware of. It's little wonder that farmers have such a difficult challenge.

If you look at the weather conditions, it's always such a variable. Just here on the weekend, forty-some millimetres of rain fell at my place and what was almost ready to plant has now got to wait for another few more weeks. When you look at filling up the fuel tank with diesel, it's gone up exponentially – like double just in a few months. The environmental regulations that you have to fulfill, the overwhelming paperwork that

we deal with as farmers, fertilizer prices going up, and just even the cost of machinery. I dropped into Green Diamond on my way in and I got a little part; it was \$12 of plastic. It's just hard to imagine the cost of some of this.

But it does have a big impact on farmers, their marriages, their children, so I think it's really important that we recognize the importance of farmers and the challenges that they face and making sure that they look after their own mental health as best as they can.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the statement from the minister, who has been touched so closely by tragedy on the farm.

It's so important that we take this day to recognize mental health awareness on the farm. As we've heard already today that the stressors of operating and running a farm – weather-related, that the costs are constantly rising, the regulations and the requirements always seem to be rising, the margins are always getting slimmer. What an incredibly stressful way to make a living by growing food that the rest of us enjoy and feed the world.

I couldn't imagine actually having so many variables from day-to-day that could completely be outside of my control to be able to operate a business – incredible stress.

It's great to hear the uptake of the FarmersTalk program. It sounds like it's really meeting the need where it's at. To hear the commitment from the minister, it's going to continue on is wonderful news to meet the needs of the farming community. I know others in the farming community have been working to assist with mental health awareness as well. The East Prince Agri-Environment Association with Andrea McKenna had some work done over the last year as well to promote the farmer's mental health program.

I appreciate being able to talk to this important issue in the minister's statement. It's not something just for May 5th; it's something that we need to talk about regularly to support farmers in our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

2026 Easter Seals Ambassador – Rowan MacDonald

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am honoured to rise today to welcome the 2026 Easter Seals Ambassador, Rowan MacDonald, to the Legislative Assembly today.

[Applause]

Hon. R. Croucher: Welcome, Rowan, and welcome to your dad, Chris MacDonald. As I said in my greetings this morning, Chris and I go way back. I won't say how far; it will give away our ages, maybe.

But I'd like to thank Helen Chapman, executive director of Easter Seals PEI, as well as Janice Blacquiére, coordinator of the school tour, and Della Parker with the Rotary. These ladies have been instrumental and played such a huge role in the success of the tour year over year and the work that goes into it.

Rowan is 16 years old, from Charlottetown, and a grade 10 student at Colonel Gray High School. Over the past week, he has travelled from tip to tip as part of the Easter Seals School Tour visiting – get this, Mr. Speaker – 65 schools and raising a record-breaking \$65,000.

[2:20 p.m.]

I had the pleasure of joining Rowan for part of the tour and Mr. Speaker, it was my birthday. He even convinced the Morell Consolidated crew to sing me a happy birthday. What stood out most was the energy he brought to each and every school that he visited, whether it through his Spiderman dance moves or his quick wit, Rowan had entire gymnasiums on their feet, creating spaces where everyone felt included and uplifted.

Rowan's motto for his Easter Seals journey is clear and powerful: "There is ability in every disability. We are no less. We are unstoppable." It is evident that Rowan truly lives by that motto; he is indeed unstoppable.

The Easter Seals School Tour is a valued annual tradition that brings together students, school

staff, and communities to support Island residents living with disabilities. This initiative led by the Rotary clubs across the Island and supported by the generous contributions of community sponsors, including Tim Hortons PEI and Coach Atlantic/Maritime Bus, helps make the school tour possible each year. I would like to thank all those who contribute to its success year after year.

And to Rowan: Thank you for your leadership; it is truly inspiring and you should be proud of all you've accomplished. You remind each of us what is possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Applause]

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to first thank the minister for his statement today, and I would like to join him in recognizing Rowan and Rowan's dad and the other members of the team that took part in the tour. As the minister has already said, Rowan, you are a true inspiration to us all to what's possible, to what we're capable of, and I thank you very much.

I was just so pleased to attend two events, as I've mentioned, at Lucy Maud Montgomery and École François-Buote. The spirit in those schools stood out to me, but that was because it was the leadership that Rowan brought to the tour. It was amazing. The students were engaged and they understood that inclusion is not just a word that we say, but it's actually something that we practice. It's in how we welcome people, how we support one another, and how we make sure that every child understands and believes that they belong.

Easter Seals has done remarkable work on Prince Edward Island for many years. Through its school tour, its ambassadors, its volunteers, and its community partners, it helps young people to learn about ability, accessibility, respect, and compassion.

I also want to recognize the families, educators, educational assistants, staff, volunteers, and of course, Rotary members, and McDonald's, who helped make this work possible. Their efforts make a real difference in the lives of Islanders

living with disabilities. I'll back that up – it's Tims.

Easter Seals reminds us that every Islander has a gift to share, and our job as a Province is to make sure that barriers are removed so that those gifts can shine.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you.

I, too, would like to thank the minister for bringing this statement forward, and again, welcome Rowan and team into our gallery.

Every year, I look forward to hearing what the motto is going to be because every year, it's so unique – the personality, the gifts that you bring – just who you are makes the tour so different every single year. Every year, I look forward to the motto because I think the motto represents the ambassador and the work so well.

I loved your motto so much: "Ability in every disability. We are no less. We are unstoppable." I think you're absolutely right. You showed your personality through that motto at every single school that I was at. When I see you in media and when I hear reports from colleagues in the House, you just brought so much energy.

This work is so important. The money that's raised – and it's not just about the money raised; it's the skills that students develop along the way when they get to practice their philanthropic skills. They get to raise money together and work together as a team towards something. Those are really, really valuable life skills which help work towards inclusion, which is always our goal.

[2:25 p.m.]

I just want to say a huge thank you to you, Rowan, and to your dad, Chris – a huge thank you. You're who made this year a success.

And of course, I would love to thank Coach Atlantic, Tim Hortons, and most of all, the Rotary clubs. Thank you so much for all that you do for this cause and for all the other things that you do.

Thank you.

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table the Province of Prince Edward Island Department of Education and Early Years summary of early years funding from 2017 to 2026. I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Hon. Z. Bell: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table the Tourism Industry Association of Prince Edward Island labour market development agreement proposal '26-27, and I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism.

Hon. E. Hudson: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter, signed by myself, sent to the hon. Joanne Thompson, in which I acknowledge the tremendous increase in funding for small craft harbours, strongly urging the minister to provide substantial funds to small craft harbours in the province of PEI, and especially to initiate immediate tenders going out for the repair work at Miminegash Harbour and Red Head. I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter to the Premier and Minister of Education and Early Years that they will receive shortly, along with over 2,500 signatures, urging the funding be reinstated to early childhood supports. I move, seconded by the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a document with over 2,533 signatures from Islanders not in favour of cuts to early childhood support staff. I move, seconded by the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table the Real Stories, Real Impact campaign from the Early Childhood Development Association of PEI with over 150 stories – and more to come – on the impact of this loss. I move, seconded by the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a CBC article entitled "PEI Minister of Education commits to new anti-bullying program in all Island schools," where the minister commits to implementing a new reporting program for bullying in all Island schools. I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table a Guardian report from May 2nd that says that despite support for a bullying-related absence motion, the Education minister says it's not the best way to address the issue in the short term. I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[2:30 p.m.]

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table an article from three days later, May 5th, 2026 – a CBC article entitled “Understanding why PEI students miss school could help keep them engaged, officials say,” where they say it is a priority to start tracking absences and the reasons. I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Rural Development and Tourism.

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By leave of the House, I beg leave to table a letter forwarded/sent to hon. Joanne Thompson from myself. It is with regard that the impact that right whale sightings have on our fisheries and also outlining the initiatives that our fishers have taken in response to this. I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning, 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 Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the 19th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 19, *Combative Sport Commissioner Act*, Bill No. 21, in committee.

Speaker: Minister.

Hon. C. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere to chair the Committee of the Whole House.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intituled *Combative Sport Commissioner Act*.

Promoter, do you have a stranger you'd like to bring onto the floor?

Hon. E. Hudson: Yes, Chair. I actually have two that I would like to bring onto the floor, please.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

Welcome back. If you could please state your name and your title for Hansard.

John Morrison: John Morrison, director of sport, recreation and physical activity.

Clare Cudmore: Clare Cudmore, special advisor to the Deputy Minister.

Chair: Minister, would you like to do an opening statement or are we good to just jump in?

Hon. E. Hudson: No, but with your indulgence, I would like to recognize two in the gallery, please.

Chair: Go ahead.

Hon. E. Hudson: Certainly, I want to welcome back Melanie McGrath. She has brought her daughter with her, Keely, today. Welcome back, Melanie. Thanks for joining us.

Chair: Is it the pleasure of the committee to have the bill read clause by clause, section by section, or open for general questions? General questions. Perfect.

The floor is open for general questions.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for coming back. Over the weekend, I had somebody from the jiu-jitsu community reach out to me with a question. Their concern was that this would be kind of like a one-size-fits-all. One of the things they had mentioned, for example, is about the financial impact.

[2:35 p.m.]

I know that you had it divided into two, professional and amateur – but I'm just wondering, specifically, will the jiu-jitsu community have to follow the same protocols as MMA in terms of things like having a ringside physician? Would that be something that they would have to do in an amateur jiu-jitsu tournament?

Clare Cudmore: One of the benefits of the legislation that's under consideration is that, in fact, it does not approach each sport as a one-size-fits-all regulatory model. The legislation as it's drafted actually specifically allows for different considerations for different sports.

Through our consultation with the amateur sports groups, we did find that there was a misunderstanding that the requirements that are detailed in the act would apply to all amateur sports. In fact, that's not correct. You would see in the sections, for example, that relate to the requirement of having a medical plan and the different officials that are required for different events don't apply generally, but rather specifically when required by the regulations.

We do not anticipate, currently, that jiu-jitsu would require the attendance of a ringside physician; however, the advisory council that's established by the act does have the authority to make different recommendations for different circumstances.

When you review the reg-making authority that's found in section 58 of the act, you'll see in subsection (2) it allows for the establishment of different classes and different requirements. For example, if there was, at a higher level of the sport, more risk that may result in a recommendation for a physician, it would allow for different requirements to be set out for different areas.

But as the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park would be aware, there are different age groups, different belt levels. We would envision different recommendations, and currently, would not anticipate that, for example, some of the more burdensome requirements for higher-risk sports – where the higher-risk striking and submission techniques would be required, such as MMA – would be required for a sport like jiu-jitsu.

K. Bernard: So, I'm assuming the – I think you called it a commission or advisory...?

Clare Cudmore: Council.

K. Bernard: Council. Okay, sorry. So, I'm assuming the advisory council would work with the different organizations to figure out what makes sense when coming forward with regulations or when creating the regulations.

Clare Cudmore: We would anticipate, as part of their work, that they would be consulting with the different sports groups and making recommendations that would best position both amateur and professional sports to proceed safely and successfully in the province.

K. Bernard: With your indulgence, I have a very quick message here that a 14-year-old jiu-jitsu player wanted me to share on the record about this legislation.

Teagan Wakelin is 14 years old. She says: "A lot of Islanders have been a part of this sport for many years, and it is amazing knowing you don't have to travel across the bridge every time to compete. This sport brings women so much confidence, control, and independence, and

showing that in your own home province means a lot.” I just wanted to read that into the record.

Thank you.

[Hear, hear!]

Chair: I thought that would be a great way to say, “Shall the bill carry,” but the hon. Leader of the Third Party has a question.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for coming back to the floor for more good discussion on this bill. I know we covered a lot of ground last time. I’m not going to retread that, but I’m wondering what section it is where the commission is held accountable or responsible for a failure of duty.

Clare Cudmore: Part 5 of the act sets out – I’m presuming that you’re talking about the enforcement for non-compliance with the act.

M. MacFarlane: That’s right.

Clare Cudmore: It’s part 5 of the legislation, which was dealt with....

Chair: Part 5 as in way back...?

Clare Cudmore: Starting at section 45.

Chair: Oh, section 45. We carried that one, didn’t we?

Oh, general questions. My apologies.

M. MacFarlane: The question that had been put to me, again, over the weekend – when Islanders know we’re debating the bill, they often come forward and say: “Here are some questions.”

If the commission fails to ensure that there’s a qualified medical professional ringside or fails to ensure that there’s a regulated official in the cage, and someone gets hurt or worse, is the commission responsible for that failure of duty? Who bears the liability in that situation?

[2:40 p.m.]

Clare Cudmore: If I can just clarify – the way that the legislation is established, it is actually the responsibility of the promoter or the individual who is seeking the event permit to comply with the legislation and the regulatory requirements.

Let’s use a professional event as an example for the purposes of the discussion. A professional promoter is required as part of securing and maintaining the event permit, which is the authorization for the event to proceed, to comply with any requirements in the legislation in terms of, for example, the medical plan.

The legislation also establishes that an inspector is sent to each event on behalf of the commission to ensure that the requirements for the event are complied with. If, for example, the professional event requires the attendance of a ringside physician and an ambulance and that ringside physician is no longer available – has to leave the event – the inspector is actually empowered, under Part 5, to stop the event until either a ringside physician can return or that the event can be cancelled.

Whether or not an injury occurs at an event, the issue of liability for the commission is dealt with in the liability clauses, which are found at sections 55 and 56. As the Legislature may be aware, issues of liability are generally dealt with courts after the fact.

But certainly, the expectation would be if an event is proceeding and the ability of the event to proceed in compliance with the act is in question, the officials who are present at the event, including the inspector, have a legal obligation to stop either a specific bout or the entire event to prevent and mitigate risk for both the participants and the people who are in attendance.

M. MacFarlane: If I’m hearing you correctly that it’s contemplated that the inspectors will be on-site throughout the event in order to make sure that if there’s a change because the event could start out in full compliance and then, part way through, could fall out of compliance. If the inspector is not there, then how does it get addressed?

Clare Cudmore: The legislation requires for professional events that officials who are appointed by the commission are required to be in attendance. Those officials, in accordance with the act, include both inspectors and individuals like referees, judges, corner persons, timekeepers, and other individuals.

Each of those officials who are present, including the ringside physician, are appointed by the commission. Each of those individuals

also has a statutory obligation under the act to comply with the requirements of the legislation.

Not only does the inspector have the authority to stop the act, for example, a referee as part of the terms and conditions of a professional licence which is granted under the legislation, has a legal obligation to stop an event in the event that the requirements for the bout or the event to proceed safely no longer exists.

There is the inspector, who may be the commissioner, or an inspector and the commissioner, and the officials all work together collaboratively to ensure that the event is able to proceed or is best positioned to succeed safely and successfully.

M. MacFarlane: I am interested in the whole area of liability and where it falls and who it falls upon. I heard you say a little earlier that it falls on the proponent, primarily, as opposed to the commissioner or the commission.

Clare Cudmore: I was referring to the responsibility to comply with the event permit, specifically falls upon the promoter.

The issue of liability: Under the legislation, there are exclusion of liability clauses that apply to government and the employees of the commission. You will see that they apply for actions that are taken in good faith.

Our understanding from consultation with other jurisdictions, both the – and, again, speaking about the professional events – the contestants that participate in professional events have contracts that include what we understand is liability information.

[2:45 p.m.]

Ultimately, the determination of liability would be dealt with, in the event that something was to occur, after the fact. Certainly, the commission, having complied with the legislation, would seek to rely on that exclusion of liability clause.

M. MacFarlane: Yeah, and I guess that's sort of where I'm looking at now, is section 55 and section 56 as we're working our way towards the end of the bill, as we get into these section on liability that the commissioner, or an adjudicator, or any delegate of the commissioner, or an inspector is largely immunized from liability if the jobs are done in, I think it says, in good faith. Then of course,

there's no Crown liability, so there is an indemnity clause here to protect the Crown from any liability.

So, looking at it from the perspective of an injured participant or a family member, it would be determined in the court system, but if there's boilerplate around anyone who's responsible, it makes it very hard for an aggrieved or injured member of the public or participant to be able to find legal recourse.

Is it your opinion that if the boilerplate is not so significant, that there could be no finding of fault?

Clare Cudmore: Certainly, the liability clauses would apply to the commission. You would also note, going through the legislation, that a promoter is required to have general liability insurance. In the event that there was an injury to the general public, one would hope that the recourse of that general liability insurance would be available.

The nature of this type of sport is the taking on the issue of risk. We understand from the work that was done in preparation of the bill that there are opportunities to seek liability insurance for contestants. The availability of that insurance is limited, but certainly for the amateur sports for example, where there are designated provincial sport organizations, those umbrella organizations like Karate PEI, Judo PEI – much like Hockey Canada – have access to insurance for participants. You would see under the designation of provincial sport organizations, there has to be membership in a governing body and also liability insurance available.

There are certain levels of risk that need to be taken on by participants, as with any sport and as with any person that walks down a road. So, we have drafted the bill to best position the events to occur safely and successfully. It is our considered hope that the manner in which the legislation has drafted will help ensure that events that become unsafe for reasons outside of the control of the participants, like the changes to the availability of medical assistance for professional events – that those events would be stopped until the event can proceed safely.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you for that answer.

Previously, when we were debating the bill, the Member from New Haven-Rocky Point behind me was attempting to ask some questions with

respect to the submission from the Information and Privacy Commissioner. I'd like to get into those questions, Chair; we're doing general questions. So, I think this is largely around section 57 of the bill. I also have some on section 58 as well.

But my first question, if you'll indulge me, Chair, as I work my way through the Privacy Commissioner's letter, she indicates that it's unclear how section 58 applies as it is a provision that requires any money received under this act to be paid into the consolidated revenue fund.

Now, section 58 is the regulations. Did that section get changed in a subsequent draft?

Clare Cudmore: Yes. In fact, that was actually my error in an email to the Privacy Commissioner. We had followed up to ensure that we received feedback, and I made a numerical error in referring to the particular section.

M. MacFarlane: Oh, okay. That dispenses with that one.

[2:50 p.m.]

Looking at section 57, which is the confidentiality of information clause, the Privacy Commissioner had a number of questions and concerns with respect to that. I guess namely, the heading is "Confidentiality of Information," but her comment was that's not what the section was about; it only addresses when and to whom certain information can be disclosed, and while it refers to the FOIPP act and the *Health Information Act*, it doesn't make any entity created under this legislation subject to the FOIPP or *Health Information Act*.

Do you have any comments with respect to that?

Clare Cudmore: Certainly, the feedback that the Leader of the Third Party is referring to refers to an earlier draft of the bill. The section that's before the Legislative Assembly currently was updated as a result of the feedback received from the Privacy Commissioner.

The sections in question were modelled off of provisions from another jurisdiction. We also explicitly requested feedback on those sections because there is an intersection in the administration of the act where the commissioner, by virtue of the information

that's required for licensing and oversight, is provided medical testing information and things like that.

We were, as always, grateful for the feedback of the Privacy Commissioner. You will see that an overriding concern throughout the feedback that we received from that office was a concern that it was not clear that the act applied. Out of an abundance of caution, we added subsection (5) to confirm that the commission is subject to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

I also will point out that it's important to remember that this legislation, while lengthy and technical, is narrow in scope insofar that it only applies to the oversight and regulation of combative sports events in the province. The information that's being collected by the commission only relates to those who apply for approval to participate in these events. This is not a commission that's going to be broadly collecting information and is subject to the requirements of the freedom of information legislation.

As a result of the feedback that we received from the IPC, we did change the section.

M. MacFarlane: Okay. I'm just going to keep covering off a couple of the questions I have on that, if you don't mind, Chair.

Yes, the commissioner did say that she foresaw the process being problematic due to the large amounts of personal information that will be required or authorized to be collected by these entities. I know you addressed that in your response now.

But the overriding concern that I'm just going to get you to clarify for me – I know there's a new subsection 57(5). Her comment is that the entities established under this legislation are not designated as public bodies under the FOIPP act or its regulations. Therefore, the FOIPP act will not be applicable to them.

If I look at the subsection (5), it defines and establishes for greater certainty that the commissioner and inspector and an adjudicator appointed in accordance with this act. We've got the three there – the commissioner, adjudicator, and inspector, but she had also made reference to the PEI Combative Sport Advisory Council in her letter.

Clare Cudmore: The feedback from the Privacy Commissioner was considered in terms of how we made changes to the act. Where we considered it appropriate, we made changes.

The advisory council is collecting general information about rules and requirements that may apply within the province. As a result, we updated subsection (5) as we felt appropriate, given the feedback that we received.

M. MacFarlane: I appreciate that. It looks like three out of the four bodies were established in that subsection (5) that the department felt were relevant to consider.

I guess my final couple of questions would be: At the conclusion of the commissioner's letter, she indicated that she'd be pleased to review any future versions of the proposed legislation and provide comment. Did the final draft or revised drafts, subsequent to what she was originally providing, get provided to her office?

[2:55 p.m.]

Clare Cudmore: It was not provided. We felt quite satisfied that we had addressed the concerns and, as a matter of course – as would happen with much of the legislation development – we didn't go back because there were no further issues that we felt that her consultation provided. We are grateful for the opportunity to go back if, as a result of making the changes, it was felt necessary, but we didn't feel that it was necessary given our ability to address her concerns.

M. MacFarlane: She also makes reference in her final comments that her office would also be pleased to review the regulations once they are available. Is there thought that her office would get a chance to look at the regulations as well?

Clare Cudmore: As a matter of course, to ensure that there are opportunities for feedback, we would anticipate a broad consultation, including both the Privacy Commissioner and follow-up with the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, on regulations as they relate to their particular, specific jurisdictions and expertise.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you. That's all I have.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much, Chair.

Just a few questions here on regulation (n). I don't really understand (n). It says: "governing transitional matters that may arise due to enactments of this act or rescission of the Order in Council..." and it quotes a number. I just don't know what that is.

Clare Cudmore: In 2014, when the Criminal Code was amended, in order to allow particular amateur events to continue within the province, there was an order-in-council issued that related to sports like judo and karate, and they set out a number of different requirements. This is what I would refer to as a belt-and-suspenders clause that will allow us to address issues that may arise between the impact of that order-in-council and the coming into force of this legislation when the technical regulations are complete. It's just there just in case we need it.

G. McNeilly: Okay, I got you.

Then, in (2), "Classes, etc., may be established":

"A regulation made in respect to the licences and event permits may create different classes of persons...."

I'm not familiar with that. I don't understand that. What does that mean?

Clare Cudmore: That would be a legal term that would allow – for example, if you were to think about it in terms of hockey, they have U14, U16.... I've run out of sports analogies. I'm not a sporty person.

This regulation would allow us to, for example, establish an age bracket, or a class of licence, or rules that would apply based on different categories and different considerations.

G. McNeilly: Okay, perfect.

Just on (3), too – Establishment of requirements and section (a), (b), and (c) – when I read it, it just reads to me kind of like you can just do whatever you want at the end of the day with that.

Can you just explain that section for me a little bit?

Clare Cudmore: This, again, establishes the ability of the department to be flexible to ensure, for example, when rules are being developed for

particular sports, that those rules can apply to an amateur participant or a professional participant – varying ages or abilities.

For example, in jiu-jitsu there are different belt levels, so we wanted to make it absolutely clear when creating regulatory authority that the rules and requirements that are approved under the act can apply to different things. This goes back to wanting to ensure that the legislation doesn't create a one-size-fits-all requirement for all combative sports when each sport that will be under consideration for approval is very different and the needs of those sports may be different.

G. McNeilly: Okay, perfect. I appreciate that, and that's what I thought, but it just opens it up. The regulations will be tough to put in place.

[3:00 p.m.]

Just on 59 too – minister, obviously there's a lot that's not in the bill that's put in regulations; the regulations are going to take quite a bit of work. When do you foresee this bill being enacted or – any foreseeable future?

Hon. E. Hudson: It's a good question. I think you look at the bill, too, the amount of work that has been done on this bill – and I give all credit to the staff for the work and the consultation that was carried out. I think, looking forward, as you had mentioned, member, yes, regulations – there's going to be a lot of work in them as well. At the end of the day, it's going to be done right. I know it will be done right given the staff that I have in the department.

I hesitate to state an exact timeline on this, but it will be as soon as possible and doing it absolutely right.

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much, minister.

This bill was tough to go through, and I think it should be. I think all the MMA fighters out there go through an incredible amount of training and they work very, very hard. It should be no different with this bill on the floor.

The last little while, I was looking about ways that we could call this.... How do we get Matt MacGrath's name in this bill? That's what I was out looking at doing. I don't know if it can happen, but I wanted to say that he has given hope to people across the Island. He has trained young people. He has included everybody and

he'll be forever remembered – in my books, especially, working in the activity world. I just wanted to say that he has done so much for so many youthful people.

Thanks a lot for bringing this bill forward, and thanks a lot for letting me just say: thank you, Matt, for everything that you've done.

Thank you.

Chair: Shall the bill carry? Carried.

[Hear, hear!]

Hon. E. Hudson: I want to thank John and Clare for being my strangers on the floor here, the great job that they have done.

I do want to echo the comments of Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty as well. It is an important bill. It's one that we've had good discussion/debate on, I would have to say, over the last couple of days.

Certainly, I want to thank Melanie and her daughter, Keely, for joining us again here this afternoon. It's great to have you with us once more.

I also, Chair, do want to take a moment to recognize the late Matt MacGrath.

As has been mentioned, Matt spent years coaching, mentoring, and advocating for a sport that he strongly believed in. It wasn't for his own recognition, but to ensure that athletes could train and compete safely and compete with respect as well. His voice helped shape the path that led us here today. If it hadn't been for his voice, would we be here today? Probably not. His commitment left a lasting impact on Island sport. I think of two young women that Matt coached in wrestling that have strong ties to the western part of PEI and went on to win gold medals in wrestling at the Canada Games.

[Hear, hear!]

Hon. E. Hudson: Chair, this moment is part of Matt's great legacy, carried forward by so many athletes across this province – by so many coaches as well, and families he has influenced along the way.

Thank you.

[Hear, hear!]

Hon. E. Hudson: I move the title.

Chair: *Combative Sport Commissioner Act.*

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. E. Hudson: I move the enacting clause.

Chair: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island as follows.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. E. Hudson: Madam Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report the bill agreed to without amendment.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[3:05 p.m.]

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

S. Dillon: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having had under consideration a bill to be intituled *Combative Sport Commissioner Act*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and has agreed to same without amendment. I move that the report of committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the 19th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 19, *Combative Sport Commissioner Act*, Bill No. 21, ordered for third reading.

Speaker: Minister.

Hon. C. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the said bill be now read a third time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Bill 21, *Combative Sport Commissioner Act*, read a third time.

Speaker: Minister.

Hon. C. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Finance and Affordability, that the said bill do now pass.

Speaker: A recorded division has been requested.

Please ring the bell.

[The bells were rung]

R. Henderson: The opposition is ready for the vote, Mr. Speaker.

K. Bernard: The third party is ready for the vote.

T. DesRoches: Government is ready for the vote, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Alright, members. We're voting on the third reading of the bill.

This is a bill introduced by leave of the House, read a first time, read a second time, committed to a Committee of the Whole House, reported agreed to without amendment, read a third time and it is now moved that the bill do pass.

All those against, please rise.

All those in favour, please rise.

[3:10 p.m.]

[The Clerk calls the roll]

YEAS

Bell
Bernard
Burridge
Compton
Croucher
Curran
Deagle
DesRoches
Dillon
Dollar
Henderson
Hudson
MacEwen
MacFarlane
MacKay
MacLennan
McNeilly

Perry
Ramsay
Simpson

Speaker: Members, the bill has passed, and it is unanimous.

[Hear, hear!]

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors, that the 2nd order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 2, *An Act to Amend the Early Learning and Child Care Act*, Bill No. 2, ordered for third reading.

Speaker: Minister.

Hon. C. Deagle: Second reading?

[Interjections]

Speaker: Third reading.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Order 25. Wrong one. Sorry, Clerk.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors, that the 25th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 25, *An Act to Amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act (No. 2)*, Bill No. 26, ordered for second reading.

Speaker: Minister.

Hon. C. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Bill No. 26, *An Act to Amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act (No. 2)*, read a second time.

Speaker: Minister.

Hon. C. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

I'd like to call upon the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere to chair Committee of the Whole House.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act (No. 2)*.

Promoter, do you have a stranger you'd like to bring onto the floor?

Hon. B. Ramsay: I have two, actually.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

[3:15 p.m.]

Hon. B. Ramsay: Madam Chair, I have a few people in the gallery that I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today. I have my deputy minister, Doriann Macmillan; I have provincial manager of Child Protection, Lindsay Long; and executive assistants Pam Wynne and Marlene MacDonald. Welcome, ladies.

Madam Chair, I would like to table a letter dated April 28th, 2026, addressed to the Premier and the leaders of the official opposition and the third party, from the Child and Youth Advocate of PEI, Marvin Bernstein, in support of the amendment to this bill that I'm bringing forward today.

I know there are copies made.

Chair: The clerk will distribute, or the Page.

If we could have our strangers give their names and titles for Hansard, please.

Mike Henthorne: Sure. My name is Mike Henthorne, and I'm the director of Child Protection with the Department of Social Development and Seniors.

Jill Hume: I'm Jill Hume, and I'm the associate director of Child Protection.

Chair: Promoter, do you have an opening statement?

Hon. B. Ramsay: I do. Thank you, Chair.

This bill will strengthen clarity around the legislated duty to report, making it explicitly clear that all persons are required to report concerns about child safety or wellbeing.

We want to acknowledge the Child and Youth Advocate, Marvin Bernstein, and his office for the positive collaboration of Bill No. 26. Our goal of this amendment is to clarify any confusion in mandatory reporting under section 12 of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* and to future clarify the responsibilities that we all share in promoting the safety and wellbeing of children.

This amendment clarifies that any individual who is concerned that a child's safety or wellbeing is endangered by anyone must report it. This will align with the practice that already exists.

Thank you, Chair, and with that, I...

Chair: Now, is it the pleasure of the committee to open this up to general questions? Okay.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, minister, for this, and welcome to the two of you here.

I'm very excited by this amendment. I think it's a great move forward, so I thank you for bringing it forward, minister.

A couple of questions just on the application once it's in place, because if I'm understanding it correctly, it's a bit of a switch from the way things have been in the past. So, first question: Does this amendment now mean that a child in need of protection – under the old act it was from parent – in this amendment, it's from any person? Am I accurate in interpreting it that way?

Mike Henthorne: Thank you for the question.

This is something that we have always promoted. When you're concerned about the safety or wellbeing of a child, call Child Protection. In the day-to-day work, we are already prepared and ready and already do exactly that: answer calls, take child protection reports, document it, and assess those child protection reports.

With this change, it will continue to be at the assessment level. We will determine if a child protection investigation is required on a parent, and if it isn't required on a parent, we will coordinate with other services and support to make sure that the proper response is happening, too, with families.

C. Simpson: That was the clarity that I was wondering; I was hoping to hear a child in need of protection from anyone, not only their parent, but this is the best next step, if you will, until we get there.

[3:20 p.m.]

My next question would be related to – this is the work, Mike, that you've talked about that your team already does. Does this, do you suppose, add additional steps to their workload, and if so, how will they be prepared? How do we support your team? How are they prepared for what I expect would be, perhaps, an increase in workflow?

Jill Hume: We don't actually anticipate an influx of calls. We already receive most of those reports, and our social workers are trained to assess based on if someone is a parent or what other support services may be needed. I'm sure there will be some additional calls, but we don't anticipate a huge....

Mike Henthorne: Yeah, and just further to that, I brought our duty to report mandatory report posters that we developed back when our act was implemented in 2024. It does say: "Are you concerned about the safety or wellbeing of a child? Please report." Or, not even "please." You have to report. We've been promoting that in over 100 presentations and information sharing, so we're happy to continue that.

We have trained child protection social workers delegated and ready and able to take all child protection reports that are being made.

C. Simpson: Just so I have this straight, before this amendment, if somebody made a call in,

your team would determine that this was potential against a parent, and therefore you would kick in. What would happen – because I'm wondering if that means if it wasn't against a parent. Now you're saying we would work and we'd get the appropriate whatever in place. Without this legislation, what would you have done?

Mike Henthorne: Section 13 of our act does specifically outline an assessment – what we do with every child protection report. That will continue, and when an investigation on a parent isn't required, we still have work we can do. We still have supports and services we can offer. We still have collaboration with police services. We still have all of that sort of thing that we have always done and will continue to do.

This amendment will clarify any ambiguity and use as plain a language as possible to make sure that it's crystal clear, that of every individual's responsibility to make child protection reports.

C. Simpson: It formalizes a practice that's in place in lots of respects, is what I hear you saying.

Mike Henthorne: Well said. Yes.

C. Simpson: Okay. If you were to look at the definition of a child under your act – a child is an individual under the age of 18 – do you see any need to look at a child or a youth and separate that out in some way in terms of...? I'll leave it at that. Or is it that a child is under the age of 18 so if that call comes in, it doesn't matter the factor or the age? You will (Indistinct) –

Mike Henthorne: That's right. We had extensive consultation and process from 2020 all the way to when our act was proclaimed in 2024 that reviewed that really significantly. It was determined that there is one section of the act, when it talks about agreements with youth, that is specific to ages 16 and 17. All others, it was felt it was best to ensure that a child was a very clear definition: from zero until the day before they turn 18 years old.

C. Simpson: I'm going to assume, but I'm going to ask the question: Because this is practice that's being formalized, in essence, the supports and training that your team may need in terms of their own protocols now – will that be formalized and put in place for them? If so, how

quickly? And then how quickly can you turn around investigations?

Jill Hume: Like Mike and I have spoken to, it is the practice already. I don't anticipate a lot of training needs for staff. Our practice isn't really going to change. We will be there to support them through the change in legislation. They're all aware of the amendment and what that would look like, but we don't anticipate a lot of training needs. It is already a practice we are involved with.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mike and Jill, for being here again.

[3:25 p.m.]

I'm just going to jump off for one question from what the Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park was asking, just to kind of get confirmation. Let's say I make a call for a child in need of protection, or where I think their safety or wellbeing is at risk, and it is not a parent. I can rest assured that when I call you, my job is done.

Mike Henthorne: Right. Not only that; we can assure everyone that we document every one of those calls. We will assess those calls to make sure that we have all the relevant information. And I did want to add that we have a tool that we use to promote our –

[Interjection]

Mike Henthorne: Yeah, and our consistency in making sure that we assess all child protection reports, use our clinical judgement, but we do have a structured decision-making tool that we use that is ready and we're ready to go today to make sure that we respond appropriately and responsibly to every child protection report that's made.

K. Bernard: I'm assuming that you did some jurisdictional scans to look at what other jurisdictions do. Is there anything that you have from that jurisdictional scan that you might be able to table?

Mike Henthorne: I can tell you today that the use of the language in the act as proclaimed in September of 2024 mirrors most if not all of the

other jurisdictions in Canada that reference that specific wording about a child in need of protection.

Because our act is so progressive, we're taking that a little bit further and saying, listen, we're ready to take all reports when it's about the safety or wellbeing of children. Other provinces may only be concerned about requiring mandatory reporting for children who may be in need of protection. On PEI, there are a lot of discussions and public interest in that section of the act. That's a good thing. Drawing attention to our shared responsibility to protect children is really important.

So, we're taking that opportunity to make sure that that language in section 12 is as crystal clear and as easy as possible to understand. That's very common language: call if you have concerns that the safety or wellbeing of a child is endangered. We are very proud of the act and how it's been rolled out since 2024, and this small change will help alleviate any ambiguity or confusion that may exist.

K. Bernard: Because it might be difficult for people to assess themselves if a child is in need of protection.

Just kind of going back to that, if you take a look at acts in other provinces, they kind of take a bit of a different approach, like you said. They'll often maintain that definition, "child in need of protection," in the duty to report section, but they don't link the child in need of protection only to a parent.

I note that in that section, in "Child in need of protection" – that's not shown in what we have right now. But under the "Child in need of protection" section, it still does say "a child in need of protection," and it still has that parent language. I think that it's obviously very important that this be very, very clear. Do you worry about that causing some confusion?

Jill Hume: Section 3 is where we speak about child and youth protection as the foundation of our act. Section 12 speaks specifically to mandatory reporting.

K. Bernard: Sorry, I didn't mean section 3; I meant in the mandatory reporting.

Sorry, Chair, can I clarify that? I'm sorry.

I need to look at section 12, but there's still reference to the parent. Do you understand what I mean, before I keep looking at this?

Chair: Do you want to have a quick minute, and I'll go to the hon. Leader of the Third Party and come back?

K. Bernard: Sure.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

M. MacFarlane: Okay, thanks, Chair. I didn't want to interrupt the table looking into the answer there if that's okay.

[3:30 p.m.]

I just want to continue on this line of questioning. If we look at the explanatory notes, it makes it clear that section 1 broadens the duty to report any circumstance where a person has knowledge or reasonable grounds to suspect that the safety or wellbeing of a child is endangered.

I just wanted to ask the question again about resources in the department to be able to handle this, because by going from "a child in need of protection" to "the safety or wellbeing of a child is endangered," it does seem to me that a couple of things can result from this: the onus to report is enhanced when we see the safety or wellbeing of a child potentially being endangered. I feel like the onus and obligation to make a report is much, much higher now than simply identifying when a child is in need of protection.

And I know you've said before, in some of the promotional materials – the posters and that – that it already sort of uses that language, but we must anticipate that this could result in an increase in calls and therefore an increase in the workload by the workers who are receiving the calls.

Mike Henthorne: Yes; thank you for the question.

We have an incredibly skilled team within Child and Family Services that cares deeply about children. We respond every day with the most skill and ability that we bring to work. We are, like most child protection systems across the country, stretched. We attempt to provide all the support and positions that are needed to be able to be in place to do the work every day. It's not easy work and we're incredibly proud of the

skilled professionals that come to work every day.

We have reviewed these amendments with our team, with our whole division – our 400-and-some individuals – and yes, of course any change brings about worry, but the worry would be more if people weren't making the reports. So, we're happy to get all those calls and we're ready to document them and do the very best we can every day to respond.

M. MacFarlane: No, it's absolutely true, Mike, that – I have such respect and admiration for the people who work on this particular front line. I saw the work that these workers do in my family law practice for so many years, and I also saw, regrettably, parents try to use this route as a tool to enhance their legal case, and it's really unfortunate to see that happening, but I did see it happening, and unfortunately it does happen and continues to happen.

Does the department recognize that? I guess the question I'm going for is: Is there any data collected or retained? Obviously, it's very sensitive personal information as to the nature of the calls that are received and the parties involved.

Mike Henthorne: Yes.

Jill Hume: Yeah, we track how many calls we get, the nature of the calls, how many of those calls lead to a child protection investigation, how many child protection investigations leads to a finding a need of protection of a child; so, we track all of that information.

M. MacFarlane: Charlottetown-Victoria Park confirmed that the liability or obligation on a person stops when the call is made to the department to report a potential situation where a child's safety or wellbeing is endangered. There's now enhanced liability on the public to report in that broader circumstance.

What's the liability for failing to step up and report, now that the definition is broader and we're looking at the safety or wellbeing of a child?

Mike Henthorne: Sure, and just to further that point, we should be more clear that not only is there a duty to report; there is, under section 12(2), an ongoing duty to report. That's when anyone becomes aware of new information, there's an obligation to make additional reports.

So, your obligation does not end with one call. If you have more information and become aware of more concerns, you have an ongoing duty to make that child protection report.

[3:35 p.m.]

As far as consequences around false or misleading reports, there is some avenues within our regulations and within the act that does explain that it could be an offence – much like most legislation has – that say that if you are not doing a piece of legislation that you are required, there can be an offence under the act for failure to report or providing a misleading report. That's identified in the act as well.

M. MacFarlane: Just my last question would be: Is there a need, in your minds, to communicate in clearer language – a layperson's language – when the obligation to report might be triggered if you see certain...? I know it's hard to find and identify and I don't know whether I'd want to embark on that, but to me, the safety or wellbeing of a child is very broad. I'm just not sure myself or others in the public would always know when to make the report.

I guess err on the side of caution would be good advice, but do you have any thoughts on that?

Mike Henthorne: My first thought is we do extensive and ongoing training and presentations. Since our act was proclaimed in September of 2024, we've had over 100. Our teams do that; Jill and I do that. We go and answer questions and talk about scenarios and talk about – sometimes people have questions and concerns, much like you raised today.

We always say if you have to think about, "Should I call or should I not call?" you've already made your decision and that you have to call. Any time there is anything, you're not going to get in trouble. Nobody gets in trouble for calling. It is confidential. The report source is protected, so the caller's name and identity are protected under the act. We're incredibly skilled at making sure that we protect that confidentiality and know that it's so critically important to call when you're concerned about a child.

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

K. Bernard: I got such anxiety whenever that exchange was happening about the definition of

safety and wellbeing because I think back to my teaching days, and in my filing cabinet, I had a file that was discreetly marked and it was where I kept track of things that concerned me for the safety and wellbeing of my students.

That just kind of popped into my head, and so.... By all means, I support this legislation; I'm just saying as a teacher, when you're considering the safety and wellbeing – and child in need of protection – that opens up a whole bunch of things. Your calls might go through the roof, I don't know.

This is off the cuff, and I don't know if the legislation would cover this, but let's say you start getting calls about a specific child in school and it's things like strange bruises, moldy lunches – what's going to warrant...? What would investigation look like, versus, "I've got proof that this child has been physically injured by whomever"? Do you know what I mean? The differences in the "They have weird bruises and I'm just concerned; maybe check it out," versus "I saw this child...." You know.

So, what does that look like?

Jill Hume: Our staff are trained to assess reports, like we talked about, and to complete child protection investigations. No one needs to have proof that something has happened to make a child protection report. That onus comes on us. Our staff have the training and expertise to do that.

Mike spoke of our structured decision making tool that will guide assessments. It doesn't replace our clinical assessment, but it guides our assessment of child protection reports. We currently get all of those reports that you just spoke about, about the moldy lunches, or "I'm kind of uneasy about this," as opposed to, "This child disclosed this specific event to us."

[3:40 p.m.]

I guess for us, this clarity provides the staff that have the expertise and the expertise to make those assessments themselves instead of putting it back on teachers or guidance counselors or members of the general public to try to figure out, "Is this a Child Protection issue or not?"

K. Bernard: This has led me to a couple of other questions. Let's say that I'm a teacher, and I've called, and I've called again, and then it happened again and again, because it's duty to

report, and potentially – correct me if I'm wrong – if you fail a duty to report, it can be up to \$10,000 or imprisonment up to six months. So, I'm calling, and I'm reporting these things, and Child Protection has noticed a trend and are like: we've investigated this and didn't really find a whole lot; however, we're noticing these trends.

Is that something that you would track, and then would that lead to further investigation if that were the case?

Mike Henthorne: Yes, every information that we gather is documented and part of a file. When we assess new child protection reports, our teams have the responsibility to review the history that we have been a part so that we're not making decisions solely on that one call; we're basing it on all of the information that we gather for that call, our contact with the police that we're able to do under the authority of the act, and also the past information that will inform our response to any concern that comes up.

We also have the ability to contact the person who made the report to share with them the information. If we determine that the child is not in need of protection, that we're not investigating, we have the ability under section 15 to communicate that back to the person that made the report.

We're doing that because we know sharing information is critically important for safety and wellbeing of children. We're promoting that within our department and in our meetings with all of our colleagues and other divisions and departments to share information so that we can better promote the safety and wellbeing of children.

Recognition of Guests II

Chair: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Hon. Z. Bell: I thank you for your indulgence for recognition of guests. I just had a chance to stop out, and I chatted with Florence and Keenan Adams. They're from British Columbia. Keenan is actually a Conservative candidate in Port Coquitlam, B.C. They're visiting us.

They're with Gail Hurry. Gail is actually from Charlottetown, just outside District 10 Charlottetown-Winsloe; relatively close. But Gail – I forget the whole pathway – would be a

direct descendant of George Coles, and, of course, we're in the Coles Building.

First of all, welcome Florence and Keenan – really appreciate you visiting us – and Gail, thanks so much for joining us.

Thank you, Chair.

Orders of the Day (Government)
continued

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

Okay, going back to the confusing question. I'm really no further ahead. I'm just going to read what my question is because it's jumping back and forth between the actual – the full bill and this.

Section 3 has the clear definition of a child in need of protection, which includes where the safety and wellbeing of the child is endangered, but limits it to the engagement being caused by a parent. Changing “child in need of protection” to “the safety and wellbeing” may cause some confusion since the term “safety and wellbeing is endangered” is linked with only parents currently in the act.

Does that make sense to you?

Mike Henthorne: Yes, it makes complete sense.

K. Bernard: Oh, good.

Mike Henthorne: I'm sorry; I probably could have answered this question when you originally asked it, but thanks for clarifying it.

As Jill said, this does clarify and make it crystal clear with better and more plain language to call when you're concerned that the safety or wellbeing of a child is endangered. When we assess the report, we will, as part of the power and authority under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, investigate when it fits that criteria under section 3. Any change to section 3 would definitely require tremendous legal consults and different thoughts and amendments.

[3:45 p.m.]

The act is working. We're less than two years old with this new progressive legislation that everyone is very proud of. It's working well. We feel like taking a scalpel rather than a sledgehammer to it is needed. Clarifying this ambiguity today is going to be so helpful to promote that safety and wellbeing of children.

K. Bernard: This isn't a question, just more of a comment: I can't believe that was only two years ago. That feels like 48 years ago.

Anyway, thank you. That's all I have.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

I'm just wondering, with the expansion from child in need of protection to the child's protection and wellbeing, or the new wording – I get it there – does the definitions section need to be updated to include that as well, would you think?

Jill Hume: We talked a lot about that, and because safety and wellbeing is used in the legislation the same way it would be used in general language, the advice was that it didn't need to be defined in the legislation.

C. Simpson: Following up on comments already, I do agree with you that people will be making calls; I do wonder if there'll be increased calls. I think promotion of the change will be really important so that the general public – back to the member's comment – understands what this really means for you: if you're asking yourself the question, just make the call.

So, my question is, if I'm asking myself the question at two o'clock in the morning and I make a call, is there a 24-hour call, and how quickly will that get processed?

Jill Hume: Yes, there are several social workers across the Island on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and every report would be assessed as we receive it to determine the imminency of a response time for it.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Seeing no further questions, shall the bill carry? Carried.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you. I wanted to thank these guys for their hard work. Thank you so much to the team at Social Development and Seniors. I appreciate it. Thank you.

I move the title.

Chair: *An Act to Amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act (No. 2).*

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. B. Ramsay: I move the enacting clause.

Chair: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and Legislative Assembly of the Province of Prince Edward Island as follows.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report the bill agreed to without amendment.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

S. Dillon: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having had under consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act (No. 2)*, I beg leave to report that the committee has gone through the said bill and has agreed to same without amendment. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. C. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Land and Environment, that the 18th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 18, *An Act to Amend the Prince Edward Island Lands Protection Act*, Bill No. 20, ordered for second reading.

Speaker: Minister.

Hon. C. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Land and Environment, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Bill No. 20, *An Act to Amend the Prince Edward Island Lands Protection Act*, read a second time.

Speaker: Minister.

Hon. C. Deagle: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Land and Environment, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. Deputy Speaker, are you good to chair Committee of the Whole? Thank you.

[S. Dillon in the chair]

[3:50 p.m.]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Prince Edward Island Lands Protection Act*.

Do you have a stranger you'd like to bring onto the floor?

Hon. D. Compton: I do. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

Please state your name and title for Hansard.

Lynn Trainor: Lynn Trainor, senior legislative and applied research analyst.

Chair: Thank you.

Promoter, do you have an opening statement?

Hon. D. Compton: I do. Thank you, Chair.

The reason for this amendment is the department is repeatedly hearing anecdotally that certain areas where there are high incidents in residential areas of land under an acre, which is really not considered "land", as far as non-residents go – you could buy a lot under an acre with a house on it, you could buy a second, a third, and accumulate them, and it doesn't really go towards your total. The main goal of this bill is to amend that.

Chair: Is it the pleasure of the committee that the bill be read clause by clause, section by

section, or open for general questions? General questions.

Lynn Trainor: Before we start, I just wanted to correct something for the record that I misspoke on the last time we were here. I believe it was the Leader of the Third Party that asked a question regarding the definition of municipal property. Your question specifically was: Where did these exemptions that are not considered municipal property come from?

I said at the time that it came from other areas within the act or the regulations that provided for these exemptions. That is incorrect. The second one, a lessee in respect of a municipal property subject to a lease, was something we intentionally inserted.

That may give you more questions, but I just wanted to clarify that for the record.

Chair: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Yes, just to give me some sense of this: you're not allowed to buy multiple properties within a municipal because – this is only if you're a non-resident or a non-Canadian or...? What are we focusing on, here? Because I would have tons of people that would own multiple properties, say in O'Leary as an example.

Lynn Trainor: Yes, this is only for non-residents. When you talk about land, there are provisions for a corporation and for a non-resident. For the municipal property, it only applies to a non-resident. So, a resident person can have multiple residential properties.

R. Henderson: If I go, once again, to my district, I have O'Leary that's an incorporated municipality, and I have Unionvale and Knutsford that are not incorporated. There's nothing that would prevent a non-resident from purchasing multiple properties in Unionvale or Knutsford, as an example.

Lynn Trainor: Basically, the way it was kind of carved out was the goal was to close the gap on what was missing. In the act currently, if you look at the definition of land, land is real property in the province but does not include any parcel of land of one acre or less that is situated within the boundaries of a municipality with an official plan approved by the minister. That is that exemption from the application of

the act. What we did was we made that exemption now a thing whereby all real property now is covered.

[3:55 p.m.]

If you're talking about a municipality, for example, that is not a planning authority – it doesn't have an official plan – then real property in that would be considered land and therefore that would be counted towards your aggregate landholding.

If you're in the city of Charlottetown, for example, with an official plan, then if you're looking at one of those specific types of property, it's now called a municipal property.

R. Henderson: That's a little meaty, but anyway.... To figure all that out.

But I mean, if I look at, say, O'Leary – has a municipal plan. You're saying, though, that then this would be up to the municipality to decide to restrict that? If they so choose to say that a non-resident can purchase multiple properties – in this case, they cannot; that's not up to the municipality, it's up to the Province.

Hon. D. Compton: Member, if there's no official plan, then it's under the purview of the Province, right?

R. Henderson: And if there is an official plan?

Hon. D. Compton: If there's an official plan, then it would go to the municipality.

Lynn Trainor: Just to clarify on that though, a municipality would have no authority over landownership. They would dictate land use through zoning, et cetera. As a non-resident, if you were going to acquire land in a municipality over and above your first municipal property, you don't go to the municipality, you go through the channel of an application through IRAC and you make your application that way.

R. Henderson: So, that was a loophole that was happening in the past, that people were going into municipalities and purchasing up multiple properties, then? Is that what you're trying to prevent here then?

Lynn Trainor: Yes, certainly, we were hearing that anecdotally. It's difficult to track because if you hadn't previously been required to file an application – but now you will have to make this

application. We were hearing that it was happening and kind of looked into what's going on there. I know in Three Rivers, we heard that a lot. We heard it a lot in Stratford. If you recall, there was a period of time there.

Now, the federal government brought in legislation, that prohibition against the purchase of residential property by non-Canadians. Stratford would have been included in that area, and we did see that drop off. That would kind of indicate that there may be – or may have been – non-Canadians acquiring property in that area where now they're not prohibited.

R. Henderson: If I look at the situation in O'Leary, again, there's a significant Filipino population there, and they have been purchasing property. Usually what tends to happen is one person will purchase a property, they move a family in with them, and then they purchase a second property a little later on and then that family that was there moves there and they take another family in.

This will prevent that? And is that a bad thing, I guess, is my first question on that?

Hon. D. Compton: Hon. member, as far as owning land – this is my understanding – it's different than non-residents and taxation on land. Owning land, you have to be in the province 365 days in a two-year period and file income tax. If they've done both of those things, then they are considered a resident when it comes to purchasing land.

R. Henderson: I guess the point I'm trying to think as I'm thinking here on this is that, yes, this individual would be Canadian. They buy the property, but they bring in people from other countries to stay in their place, even though that new person coming in is not a resident of the area or whatever.

What are you really changing then? This is what I'm trying to figure. Or what are you trying to prevent?

Lynn Trainor: Basically, it's really built around the monetization of housing. In the end, it's about who is going to own the property. If you're talking – there's a definition of what constitutes a resident person. If you're not a resident, you're a non-resident. If a second property is acquired, it depends whose name it's going in. If the person buying the property is buying a second one then, yes, they will need to

make an application. If the second person, again, is a non-resident and it's their second one, they will need an application.

[4:00 p.m.]

R. Henderson: I go back to the same issue. I don't find in O'Leary it's a case of non-residents buying the property. I mean, it's not that hard to become a Canadian citizen, ultimately, or a citizen of PEI. So, I'm just kind of questioning what you're really preventing here. At the end of the day, people are going to buy – if somebody moves in here from another place or another country, they become a citizen, they buy all the land that they want to buy, and they move other people in, and....

I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing, but the point is that's what's sort of happening. I don't know what this would really prevent in that.

Hon. D. Compton: Well, what we have heard and seen is vacant homes that are purchased by non-residents within a town or a municipality, and if it's under an acre, then they can buy a second and a third.

You're kind of switching citizenship and residency. They're different things, as far as law is concerned, and as far as property ownership is concerned, but I guess it's no different than you or I buying two or three homes and renting them out to someone who's a non-resident.

We just want to make sure that homes are not left vacant and that if a non-resident is purchasing, we have an idea of how much land they own. That goes towards.... Yeah.

Chair: And on that note, it's four o'clock.

Hon. D. Compton: Madam 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.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

S. Dillon: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having under consideration a bill to be intitled *An Act to Amend the Prince Edward Island Lands Protection Act*, 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.

Orders Other Than Government

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time, I'll ask that the 27th order of the day to be read.

Speaker: You move?

Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 27, *An Act to Amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, Bill No. 103, ordered for second reading.

Speaker: Member. Charlottetown-West.... Or either one. Somebody should....

C. Simpson: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that the said bill be now read a second time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Bill No. 103, *An Act to Amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, read a second time.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Hillsborough Park.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the said bill.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

I'd like to ask the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere to chair the Committee of the Whole House. Thank you.

[M. MacKay in the chair]

Chair: The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act*.

Promoter, welcome. Would you like to take a stranger to the floor?

C. Simpson: Yes, Chair. I have two, please.

Chair: Shall it be granted? Granted.

[4:05 p.m.]

Chair: Good afternoon and welcome. Can you both please state your name and title for Hansard, please?

Dr. Janet Payne: Dr. Janet Payne.

Madison Ranta: My name is Madison Ranta. I'm the director of policy and public engagement in the opposition office.

Chair: Thank you.

Promoter, would you like to give an opening statement?

C. Simpson: I would, thank you, Chair.

I would also like to recognize in the gallery joining us today Jena Banks, Pat Banks, Carolyn MacArthur, Wanda Parry, Jessica Burke, and our leader, Robert Mitchell.

I am pleased to bring Bill 103, *An Act to Amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, to the House for debate. At its core, this bill is about one thing and one thing only: protecting our children – young people who, for one reason or another, find themselves outside the care and protection of their parents, and often without the ability to fully understand the risks that they're facing.

During the teen years, as a child is developing their social-emotional skills, and their executive functioning skills – which is basically the brain's management system, focusing on such things as impulse control/emotional regulation – children are often unable to see the risk associated with their behaviours.

It is also during this time in development where peers become increasingly important and highly influential. Each and every one of us here in this Chamber can look back at a time during our own teen years where we may have made decisions that we wished we hadn't, that we were impulsive and perhaps a bit risky. Or, as parents, we understand the challenges of supporting our own teenager through their journey.

All children will at some point make decisions that aren't in their best interest. Most will be

able to weather through those decisions and be just fine, learn from them, grow, and move on. However, there are others who will be at risk, who won't weather it well, and who will need our help.

Across our province there are situations where a child leaves home without consent – runs away. This is rarely a simple decision for that child. It can come from fear, confusion, conflict, and distress, and it is in those moments that they're not just away from the safety of their home that they are exposed, they are vulnerable, and they are at risk.

For parents, this is simply a devastating situation, and currently there is no help for them. In those moments, time matters. The longer a child remains outside a safe environment, the greater the risk for their safety and wellbeing.

This legislation amendment addresses a critical gap that exists today. Our current system does not give clear or timely authority for police services to act in those critical moments. This bill, if passed, will change that. This bill provides clear authority for police services and the director of Child Protection to act quickly when there are reasonable grounds to believe that a child who has left home is at risk.

Bill 103 provides the ability for police to step in quickly when there are reasonable grounds to believe a child's safety is at risk. It allows them to find that child and bring them home – if home is a safe place to be. That's a critical point to be made to this amendment.

Specifically, the bill enables an application for a warrant to locate and bring that child home – if home, as I've said, is a safe place to be – or, under the director of Child Protection, to somewhere safe. It also recognizes that in urgent situations where a child may be in immediate danger or could disappear before a warrant is obtained, police can act right away.

This bill allows this protective intervention to happen quickly. It's important to note that this bill balances intervention with respect for families. Where it is safe and appropriate, children are brought home to their parents as soon as possible, but where there are concerns for the child's protection at home, as I have said, the law ensures that child protection safeguards are in place.

This bill is not about expanding the authority for its own sake; it's about clarity, it's about responsiveness, and ensuring that parents have a tool to help them protect their child, and police services have a tool they need to act quickly, decisively, and responsibly.

[4:10 p.m.]

At its core, this bill is about one thing, as I've said, and one thing only: protecting children when they are at their most vulnerable. It's about providing help that would protect a child before it becomes far more a situation where a child is harmed, is using drugs, becomes inappropriately sexually active, is at a risk to themselves or to others, or breaks the law.

No piece of legislation can replace the safety of a loving home and no piece of legislation like this will solve every issue, but we collectively have a responsibility to act when that safety is uncertain or has broken down.

This bill is about stepping in during moments of uncertainty. It is about making sure that no child slips through the cracks. It is about ensuring that when a child is endangered, we do not hesitate, we act, because at the end of the day, this isn't just a policy; it's about young people who deserve to be safe, to be protected, and to know that someone will come looking for them.

I'm also fully aware that this bill alone will not resolve the issues families are facing when a child runs away, but I also know it's a step in the right direction. It provides parents with the ability to protect their child.

We here in this House regularly discuss policy safeguards that are necessary to protect our children from such things as sexual abuse, bullying, affects of social media, exposure to drugs and alcohol, and their overall mental health and wellbeing. We recognize that as lawmakers, we must do all we can to protect our children. So, I ask all members of this House to keep those very children who need us most in mind as we consider this bill.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

C. Simpson: If I may, Chair, I would like to turn it over to Dr. Payne who also has a statement.

Chair: Sure.

Dr. Janet Payne: Thank you.

I'm nervous today. This is not my usual place to be. My heart is beating out of my chest. I know about two-thirds of you from other contexts, but I'm going to share my story with you this afternoon.

To give you a little bit of my background so you know.... I'm wearing two hats today: one as the mother of seven children and six grandchildren, but the other as the professional. My PhD is in education. I've practiced as a counselling therapist for over 20 years. I'm certified with the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association and the PEI College of Counselling Therapy. I'm a licensed teacher here in PEI with a special designation as a school counsellor. I have the title of an adjunct professor at UPEI within the faculty of education. Most importantly, I teach adolescent social and emotional health of learners in learning – this morning, actually – where we focus on the developmental stages of children ages 12 to 18.

I'm just sharing my background in an attempt to establish that I know a little bit about child development.

My husband, Neil, and I have been together for over 35 years. We had six children in our early years, and then into our forties, we had our little bonus baby – we had our Kai – and we thought we were going to be good at it because we had done it so many times before. By that time, we had jobs where we were able to make ends meet, thankfully. We had more patience as older parents. We had more time because we only had to focus on one, not on seven.

In spite of all this – in spite of the academia, in spite of the expertise, in spite of those lived years of experience – I am failing my child. I am failing my child completely, and I'll tell you why.

I feel like a hypocrite. I teach other people about social-emotional health. I teach other people about adolescence and how to care for them, and I'm not caring for my own 13-year-old. I could cry telling you that.

One year ago today – exactly one year ago today – Kai was doing really well: playing provincial basketball – we were going to all the off-Island tournaments; doing okay in school. He has

dyslexia, just like I do, just like all our kids do, but we were getting through it.

[4:15 p.m.]

And then last May, I picked him up at the school bus and he was completely emotionally distraught. I honestly thought I was going to have to take him to the ER; he wouldn't even go to basketball. Something happened at school, and I'm not using the "bullying" word because we overuse it. We use it in the wrong context so that it's not important in the proper context. But something did happen to him that was very dramatic, and it changed things for him.

He played basketball all summer, and in September, he returned to school. Within one week, I had two emails and a phone call from two teachers and a vice principal saying, "Janet, big warning: Kai is hanging around with a whole different group of kids. He really shouldn't be with that group."

Now, no kid is an evil kid, but some kids have a lot of background and a lot of hardship, and these were the kids he was gravitating towards. He said to me, "I feel like I have a friend group now. I have people that I can really connect with; they want to be around me." And he felt that sense of belonging that is so significant to children who are 13, and 16 and 17. He had a social group.

Within weeks, his behaviour escalated out of control. He started trying drugs/alcohol. He stole from us. He refused to go to school. Dropped out of basketball; he was an awesome player, probably the top six player in the province in terms of his age group, and he dropped out because the kids he was now hanging out with – they weren't going to play sports. That wasn't going to be part of their life.

Neil and I were freaking out. Who you hang around with has such a significant impact on your wellbeing as a child.

So, by the end of September, Kai decided he would move in with his new older friend and his friend's father. This dad was doing his best, but there were no rules. This dad was managing his own recovery, had his own child back – there was no mom in the picture – and yet this is where Kai wanted to stay because there were no rules there. He could run the roads. He could do whatever he wanted.

We were told by police that Kai was 13; their hands were tied. The act was different now and they could not take him home to us; that Kai, at 13, had the right to decide where he would live.

I originally thought that had to be a mistake. There was no way that I thought that that could be true, that that could be actual legislation that we have here on PEI. No way. I mean, who could fathom that legislation would be in place that would allow a 13-year-old that much power to determine where they would live? I'm looking at the family over there, and you know. You're living it.

It was absurd. It was only after I read the act that I realized that this was true.

I'm looking around this room, and I recognize so many of your faces. I've seen you at the rink. I've seen you at many different places. You're involved in your communities. You care about families. You do really good work. You're not just here for a paycheque. And most of you, maybe all of you, have children of your own; you have grandchildren. You know 13 is a crazy age to allow children to decide where they're going to live.

Knowing what we know now about neuroscience and brain development, we know so much more now than we did before. We should be raising the ages of when you can make these decisions, not lowering them like they were just recently.

So, our problems with Kai continued. Over the past eight months, he's been officially missing, as in a missing person's report, on six separate occasions. We've dealt with West Prince, East Prince, Charlottetown, Stratford, Summerside – Summerside is sick of me – and Kensington police on so many occasions.

Over the winter it was even worse. Many teens don't wear jackets or boots or mitts. On one occasion he left home, and it's easy for kids to take buses now with a toonie or with not; they can travel from one end of the Island to the other. He went to Charlottetown and was located by police sleeping in the entranceway to the Bank of Montreal.

They told us there was nothing that they could do. He wasn't going to commit suicide, he told them, so they couldn't apprehend him. They told him he couldn't stay in the entranceway, he had to leave the Bank of Montreal, but because he

was 13, they had no authority to take him home to us.

[4:20 p.m.]

Kai continued to sometimes associate with 18-, 19-, 20-year-olds who are known criminals who groom children. You know what I mean, in the back row. The police explained it wasn't against the law, and they could not prevent him from staying at these houses because he had the right to decide where he wanted to live. He was 13. This was not living. This was couch-surfing. This was grooming. This was incredibly dangerous behaviour.

I called to complain that he'd been tattooed; maybe 20 tattoos on his little hands and little arms. I mean, this child still has baby teeth and he's tattooed. I called to complain he was engaging in sexual activity with older youth. Both of those things are against the law here on PEI. I was told by police that this was his business. Well, it wasn't. It was my business as his mother, but I had no way to control that.

In desperation – and this is where things got a little crazy – I took the advice of several social workers, and I had to declare that I abandoned my child. I had to give up my parental rights. I had to sign papers that said I was abandoning him as his parent, believing that if I abandon him as a child and he was taken into the custody of the Province and taken to a group home, that when he ran and when he left, that the police would have to be obligated to return him home to the group home.

But boy, was I wrong. I was totally wrong. Over the six weeks that Kai lived at the group home, he fled twice. Both times, he was on his own for five days in a row. Both times, he got in trouble with the law. Once he was on a video passed out.

The supervisors at Child and Family Services and Child Protection met with me to manage me and explain that they follow the AWOP policy: the “away without permission” policy. This means that as long as they get a response from a child every 12 hours on the cell phone, they do not have to request that that child is taken back by police. We can't force them to come back to the group home, they told me. It is totally voluntary.

I was blown away by this. As icing on the cake, these supervisors let me know that the only way

Kai could get any real help was if he would do something serious enough that he would be charged within the youth justice system. This was sad. Here we were, parents desperately calling every agency, every system, every support available on PEI, and at the end of the day, were being told that our child would have to commit a serious crime before we could get any help.

I'm sitting here before you today to ask you to vote yes to this bill. I've lived this firsthand. I've heard so many stories from Islanders who've reached out to me since my own story of Kai being missing went on to social media.

The bill is not going to solve any problems in terms of the big picture, nor will it fill the many gaps, but it's a first step. It's a necessary first step that at least allows police to take that child home when they're running away.

We're living in a new age when it comes to the dangers that our kids face. You know, they can jump on a bus, go from Kensington to Charlottetown to Summerside. They can connect with very bad people online. This is not the Kinkora that I raised my first six kids in; this is a very different world. It's a world of very real human trafficking in Summerside, and drug-running, and the potential of overdose and death. These are not exaggerations. This is the reality of this world.

We've given little children adult responsibilities, and we've taken all the power away from parents to actually parent our children. It's simply unacceptable. I have faith in the good people in this room to do better for our children.

Thank you.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Hon. member.

C. Simpson: Thank you, Chair.

I also have another impact statement that I'll read on behalf of the mom.

"My name is Jena Banks. My daughter was 13 years old when my worst nightmare became my newfound reality. Nine months ago, my daughter was an honour student. She loved school, band, and most of all, her family and friends.

"It was the summer of 2025 when she met a not-so-welcoming crowd at the Charlottetown public library. In nine short months that feels like a lifetime, my only child has become unrecognizable, both physically and mentally, gone for days and weeks on end, not knowing where she is or who she is with, just knowing it was not a safe environment for a 13-year-old little girl. Only coming home to eat, get clean, and leave again. As a parent, I felt just utter despair and hopelessness as I watched the transformation in real time.

[4:25 p.m.]

"After speaking with police services on many occasions, I reached out to Child and Family Services to open a file against me; I thought that would help. I brought together school officials from the junior high, Public Schools Branch, Justice and Public Safety, as well as, again, Child and Family Services.

"During these numerous meetings, Child and Family Services clearly stated that they could only help if the child was in danger at the home, not from outside influences. So, who does protect them from danger outside the home?

"The way it currently stands right now, Charlottetown police services can perform a wellness check and search for the missing minor, but as long as they have 'eyes on the child,' they unfortunately are not able to remove the child and take them home to a safe place.

"During my encounters with police, they provided my daughter with a social worker through Justice and Public Safety who works with my daughter and has gone above and beyond for our family. I was also introduced to the Bridge program. Unfortunately, they only provide services and resources for youths 16-plus, but they certainly have helped me obtain a therapist during my darkest time.

"Police officers I had spoken to in depth from other provinces opened my eyes to how Ontario, for instance, handles youth, and were appalled that minors here are allowed to roam the streets at all hours of the night and stay in places that have been deemed deplorable. Without the direction of Child and Family Services, there was nothing the officers could do, leaving them feeling just as helpless.

"I took the advice and called the youth advocate lawyer and was hit with the same messaging – a volunteer organization – that my 13-year-old would have to reach out to them herself, and there was nothing they could do to help this volatile situation that was getting worse every single day. Another brick wall. More hopelessness and despair.

"If this amendment was part of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, I firmly believe I would not be in this position today and nor would my child. Why, you may ask? Police would have been able to take her home to her mom, not leave her living on the streets. She would not have been able to make more contacts in the underbelly of our society. The things she must have seen on those streets haunt my dreams. The little girl that still has a room of stuffies is now a broken shell of that little girl I see every single day, and I wasn't able to protect her from the monsters.

"With this amendment in place, it will help the most vulnerable age group and keep them from becoming part of the youth justice system. But unfortunately, already this has happened to my child, who is now facing criminal offences. Nine months; same amount of time to bring her life into this world, and it's been taken away from me.

"Young children's futures and lives are truly hanging in the balance. This amendment can and will make a difference. It will give parents and the police and Child Protection Services the power to keep our children safe. I do understand children deserve rights, but so do we as parents. I don't believe a 13-year-old is able to make these types of sound and reasonable decisions regarding their safety and their future.

"I may not be able to save my own child at this point, but I will never stop advocating.

"To the Charlottetown police services; Michelle Shanahan, youth child worker; Natalie MacKinnon from Stonepark; Katie Corrigan from the Bridges program; my family and friends and coworkers; and all of those that have supported me, thank you for giving me strength and never giving up on me or my daughter.

"Lastly, thank you to you for listening to our story and working so diligently to make change and opening up this very important

conversation. I sincerely pray no one in this room ever has to go through this, watching the light of your life slowly fade into the darkness.

"Jena Banks."

Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Is it the pleasure of the committee that the bill be read clause by clause, section by section, or open for general questions? General questions. Alright, I'll start compiling a list.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you very much, promoter, for bringing this bill. We've chatted about this many times over the past few months. It was something that you wanted to do, and you shared it with our caucus. I understand the purpose of it and such because we've had those conversations.

[4:30 p.m.]

I do want to thank Janet for coming in and bringing us into your personal life. That takes a lot of courage, but you're doing it for the right reasons and I do appreciate that. And also to Jena for writing that letter – thank you very much for doing that because it's impossible for me to understand what families like you are going through, but you give me some insight into it and you drew me in with your statement, with both of you. So, thank you very much for that.

But I do have a question: Do other provinces have similar runaway clauses that are equivalent to the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*?

C. Simpson: Thank you for the question, member.

Yes, they do. We did do a cross-jurisdictional scan. There are others that do have such a clause. I'll turn it over in a moment to Madison to explain what they are doing and others, again, that are looking at this to take a look at protecting our children when they need it most.

Madison Ranta: Just in speaking about some other jurisdictions that have similar clauses to this, Ontario's *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* is probably the most similar to what we're proposing here.

They have a three-step test where somebody seeking a warrant in similar situations there – if they're convinced in that province, in Ontario, that somebody is younger than 16, has withdrawn from their parents care and control without consent, and there is reasonable, probable grounds that that child's health or safety may be at risk, in those situations, in Ontario's legislation, they have the ability for police or Child Protection to seek a warrant to apprehend the child and bring them home or to a place of safety, if that's not home for them.

British Columbia is another jurisdiction that has a slightly differently worded clause in their *Child, Family, and Community Service Act*. They have a clause that allows Child Protection to take charge of a child for up to 72 hours if it appears to the director of Child Protection that the child is lost or is a runaway. Then they're tasked with returning that child to the person responsible for the child.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you, Madison. I forgot to thank you, too, also for your work in the creation of this amendment. Thank you for that.

What sort of feedback have you received from community members on these proposed amendments?

C. Simpson: The feedback has been quite positive to us. Madison will cover off in a few moments where we did go to seek input, the groups that we did reach out to.

Questions, almost in disbelief that it wasn't possible now for some, but then those that knew that it wasn't and that recognize, too, the limitations of the bill from the point of view of – it won't solve problems, but it is a tool that will work to keep children safe before it becomes an ultra-dangerous spot for them.

We did have one concern raised about the act, from the Child and Youth Advocate who did have a concern about the amendment not ensuring that children would remain safe – that home might not be safe. But we actually believe that the amendment does cover that off quite nicely; in fact, the amendment says children are not to be taken home if it's deemed that home is not a safe place to be so that we do feel that the concerns raised by the office was accurate.

I was at the Home and School Federation annual meeting, and one of the staff members there introduced me to three of the youth that also

reviewed the bill and gave feedback. They introduced me as the person who was bringing this forward. They said, "Oh, very nice to meet you," and I said to these three young people, "It's not my intent to do anything that takes your rights away. It's our intent that – sometimes children will make decisions and don't have the skills and tools, and this is an attempt to help them," and all three of them agreed with that.

Once it was understood that in no way does it interfere with protecting a child if home is not a safe place to be, people felt much more comfortable. I'll turn it over to Madison.

Hon. H. Perry: I'm fine.

C. Simpson: You're good? Okay.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Janet, for coming in. I've known Janet for a very long time. I'm very sad in what's happening in your life. Thank you very much for your testimony as well; I appreciate that.

Member, I applaud your efforts to support parents and their children. Children are safer when we work together, for sure, and we share the same goal of doing all we can to promote children's safety and wellbeing. I'm committed to working with you and all members of government to improve communication and protocols between all services that support children and youth.

I just have a couple of questions, if you don't mind.

[4:35 p.m.]

I'm curious about – and I don't know if the Leader of the Opposition asked this – who you consulted with for the bill. For example, did you consult with police services across Prince Edward Island? If so, did they say what the impact might be on their operations?

C. Simpson: The answer is yes. I'm going to give that to Madison to give you the details, but the overarching summary of that is we're trying to do what we can now without a tool to help us. So, they'll try to encourage to take the children home, or "maybe it would be best if you...."

They're doing all that they can, but if that child says no, they have to leave that 13-year-old on the street.

So, what they're saying is that they feel that this will give them a tool to help them do their job as well, but I'll turn that over to Madison.

Chair: Excuse me, hon. member. Just make sure you speak into the mic.

C. Simpson: Oh, you'd like to hear me. I'm sorry.

Chair: Thank you.

C. Simpson: Thank you. Sorry about that.

Madison Ranta: Just to your question, minister, about our consultation with police services, we did reach out to and receive feedback from the Chiefs of Police Association on the Island – so, the chiefs of police for Charlottetown, Kensington, Summerside, and the RCMP.

They did have a couple questions for us about some of the definitions as it related to the scope of the premises – if that would include, say, just a home, or if that would also apply to outbuildings on a property – kind of some technical, procedural questions or how it would apply.

They had also noted that they'd likely have to update their own internal policies on how they deal with runaway children if this were to come into place.

We had also sought feedback from a few other groups. I'll just quickly list off:

- Boys and Girls Club;
- BIPOC USHR;
- Chiefs of Lennox Island and Abegweit;
- Child and Youth Advocate's Office, as the member noted;
- Child Protection;
- the meeting with yourself, minister;
- Fédération des Parents de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard – the French school parents association – in addition to the PEI Home and School Federation;
- Generation XX;
- IRSA;
- Mi'kmaq Confederacy;
- Native Council of PEI; and
- Office of the Children's Lawyer.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Can I just ask a question about the conversation, maybe, with the Child and Youth Advocate – I know there was also the youth advisory council, I think, that you met with also – and what the response was from them, and what challenges that the Advocate...? Because I know he doesn't support this, right?

C. Simpson: A request went out and there was some email dialogue back and forth. We didn't actually physically meet. The concern raised by the Child and Youth Advocate was that children were put back in harm's way by bringing them back home. This bill does not do that. This bill actually states clearly: if police services or Child Protection believe a child is in danger, and home is that dangerous place, they're not to be brought back.

The committee, as well – I asked to go and see the committee. That didn't happen, but they did provide written feedback. Basically, it was along the premise that – the same sort of thing – we need to make sure children are protected, and that some kids can make that decision for themselves.

This bill doesn't argue that. You'll note that we haven't defined the age group. We've left it with the definition as you have in your legislation, minister. A child is defined as an individual under 18 years of age. We deliberately didn't get into "this only goes to 13," or 14 or 16, because we leave that at the discretion of the professionals to make that decision. You may have a 17-year-old – and Dr. Payne can talk about that – who is biologically 17 years of age but, for a whole lot of reasons, may not be functioning in their best interests for all kinds of reasons – brain development and the exposure that children have that we didn't have.

So, "Does this bill ensure that we're not taking kids back to an unsafe environment?" was the overall concern, and I feel 100 percent assured that it does not do that. It actually supports you to do your job.

[4:40 p.m.]

Hon. B. Ramsay: When we do or change legislation in our Department of Social Development and Seniors, we always use CRIA, which is the child's rights assessment. Did you

look at CRIA throughout the process of this change?

C. Simpson: That's a great question, minister. I actually asked the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate if they would complete a CRIA review for us, and that was not possible. I do remember that there is a modified CRIA approach that can happen when legislation comes through and impacts, especially if regulations are needed.

But us, to take this bill through, we did not complete that CRIA review itself officially. I was looking at it as we went through about the sorts of things we need to consider, but it was not an official CRIA review.

Hon. B. Ramsay: That is something that we use. That's a tool that we use and we're trying to get all of government to use that tool.

C. Simpson: May I just add to that? I also was very confident that, should the bill pass, that's exactly what would happen, especially if regulations are required with this as well.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you for bringing this, promoter, and thank you for sharing your story, Janet.

Hopefully – I'm trying to understand it. I have listened to all of the debate so far and read over it quickly. I just want to, for my understanding I guess – I don't know how many sections are in the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*. I know that this is putting the introduction or the addition of 28.1. So, just so I'm clear, in this – because you talk a lot about ages. Janet talked about the age of 13. Of course, I have a daughter who is 14 and a son who is 11. Using the definition under the act, it's 18.

So, I know you talked about someone who might be cognitively not the same as a typical general 18-year-old, but if this was to pass and this amendment was added, am I wrong in understanding that a 17-year-old, as an example, would fall under this act?

C. Simpson: That's an excellent question. We toyed with that. We toyed with: do we want to start to play around with the ages from the point

of view of having this from 13 to 16? We chose not to define the age because the department has defined the age; Child, Youth and Family Services protection is under the age of 18.

We also recognize that when parents make that call, police services and Child Protection will also determine whether or not they will indeed intervene. There could be a case, at 17, where they do not. We recognize that, but to answer your question, yes; it would mean that a parent of a 17-year-old could make that call.

The determination would be up to the – the act does not state that the police and Child Protection “shall,” they say they “may.” They will do their review and make the determination as to whether or not they're bringing that child back home.

I'd turn it over to Janet. Perhaps you have anything you'd like to add to that.

Dr. Janet Payne: In dealing with six different police detachments and the RCMP over the past eight months, what I heard mostly from them is: “We wish we could help you. We can't. Our hands are tied. We can't take your child home and we wish we could.” I really believe that this amendment would give our officers that ability to take children away from very dangerous situations and take them home.

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you for the clarity on that.

I have one follow-up question, Chair, and then I have another question on a specific section in here.

My follow-up question on that is:

You've highlighted two cases, promoter. Janet shared her story, and Jena's you read into the record. I don't know this and maybe this isn't a very fair question to ask you – I know you've done some research onto it and you've probably – it's one of those situations where it could be where some people might not go through the same procedure.

[4:45 p.m.]

Do you have any idea of how often this would happen? Maybe that's something more the department would know; I don't know if you know the answer to that.

C. Simpson: That's an excellent question because I asked the same thing.

I'll turn it over to Janet, who's talked with other parents. I can tell you that the two families that have shared their story today is just the tip of the iceberg, but I'll turn it over to Janet.

Dr. Janet Payne: I'll answer that in two ways.

This is a frequency that's hard to determine because so many parents are too embarrassed to talk about this. I'm too old and calloused to not talk about this, but there are so many parents in vulnerable positions that they feel they can't reach out. You know. So, how do we count and measure something when so much of it is hidden? That's my first part of my answer.

The second part is I put a social media post on because I knew the police were going to put the missing child post on, and I didn't want to be deemed as that person who always posts about gold medals and high school graduations. I wanted to be authentic and real, so I posted the negative. I put it out there that I'm failing as a mother and I have a child who's missing. The response that I got was overwhelming.

Now, I don't own a cell phone. I'm one of the few people that doesn't own a cell phone, but when I go on my computer, I am overwhelmed with the response and the stories from people I don't know. They're sharing their whole heart with me about, "This was my 13-year-old." "This was my 15-year-old." "I don't have any power. I don't know where to go."

And I'm privileged, you know? I'm privileged because I work in a system where I know how to advocate. I sometimes have a voice for things, and sometimes, I'm just stubborn and try to find a solution, but not everybody has that privilege.

Back to your question. In terms of frequency, I don't know. I can't give you a number, but if we look at the overwhelming response that I got through social media, we have a significant problem out there.

Hon. Z. Bell: I have two phones, so if you want one, you can take one, by all means.

[Laughter]

Hon. Z. Bell: Okay. I'm really torn on this. I hate to harp on the age. I use the example of myself, and this is just – sorry, I do have a

question, but it's going to be on a different – I just want to say this.

I went away. I had the opportunity and the privilege – my parents worked very hard, and I had the opportunity to go away at a very young age. I went away out to Notre Dame out in Saskatchewan when I was 15 years old.

How do I say this? I'm guaranteeing that my parents were probably happy for me but also worried for me because, again, they're losing – I don't want to say losing that control, because I was going to a relatively safe environment at a private school, but of course, there's the potential. I guess it's more the unknown – the parents not knowing.

So, I will say that, that I'm still – I do really appreciate the debate and I'm really torn on which way I side because, again, I do believe that kids have their rights, but I do believe in parental rights. I just wanted to say that. I just wanted that on the record.

My question specifically is with regards to section 4 where it says "return child to custody of parents." So, it says here: "Where the Director or a police officer takes a child to a place of safety under this section, the Director or police officer shall...."

Again, maybe this is covered in the actual act and not the amendment, and pardon my ignorance in not knowing the act as well as I should, but what is determined as the place of safety, I guess?

C. Simpson: That's a great question, both your comment and your follow-up question. I'm going to speak to the comment.

Government – the Department of Social Development and Seniors – has deemed, under the act that protects children, to have that age in place for a reason. We honoured that in this amendment, not to confuse or muddle it up in any way, and trust that Child Protection, who is doing their job – we heard earlier – will continue to do that and make that determination. So, that's my first response.

[4:50 p.m.]

My second response to that would be almost the same. The director of Child Protection and the deputy director and the 400 staff that are in there that take these calls – the rest of the act would

kick in, member. It doesn't deflect – and that was so intentional. We did nothing, to the best of our ability, to have an unintended consequence for the minister and her department to protect children. This was an added resource to help parents protect their children. If they run away and parents ask for help, there's something that now can be done that doesn't exist today.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Artificial Intelligence.

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, everyone, for coming in today to talk about this. I have a couple questions, and please forgive my greenness on this.

I'm always trying to think about – to ensure that it'll work, do you know what I mean? And I'm sure that you thought of that too. So, I'm trying to think about any of the problems that we'll run into.

I'm assuming the RCMP and the court system, should it be needed, are on deck to support, or there is a smooth path for us to get there.

C. Simpson: I'll answer first, and then I'll turn it over to Madison.

Yes, because they're trying to help now without a tool. So, with that, I will turn it over to Madison and the feedback that we did receive formally from them.

Madison Ranta: I would just add briefly to that. In the comments that we received from the Chiefs of Police Association, they didn't indicate to us that they believed that the proposed amendment would be unworkable. It was more so that they would have to make sure that any internal policies that they may have when children run away would be updated to reflect the new legislation, as opposed to that there would be any other challenges that they foresaw from the proposed amendments.

Hon. J. Redmond: And just kind of following along that – so, should that need to happen, did they suggest any timeline? I'm just kind of envisioning – trying to respect everyone in the room that's living these situations. I hope that three years from now, we're working through things in whatever form. Do they know how long, or what that could be, by chance? What changes would have to be updated from an RCMP and courts perspective?

C. Simpson: We didn't delve into what that would mean in a practical sense for their own policy development. They acknowledge that a policy would need to change. Again, trusting police services that they have that in place.

We also don't have a proclamation date in respect for what the minister may need to do when this does – if it should get passed, and what that could look like. And remember, it's just a tool. It's just a beginning to help parents bring their kids home to safety, if that's where they should be. We know it's not going to be the be-all and end-all, but it's something that doesn't exist now. There are countless stories of children falling through the cracks, and we need to stop that.

Hon. J. Redmond: And just another question with respect to the ages. I think you said 13 to 18 probably would be the age range? Sorry, that's part A.

C. Simpson: That's a great question, member. Under the act right now, a child is able to determine where they live at age 18, so under 18, if you had a runaway child, that's a child in need of protection. That's a different approach.

But the legislation – and I might get Janet, perhaps, to speak to that – would say at 13, though, you could make that decision, and we're arguing and I'm arguing that, actually, no. Many, many, many children cannot make that decision for themselves. Their brain development – the synopsis of what's happening, without getting too technical – is not in place to be able to analyze the risk behaviour and understand that beyond tomorrow, this carries you for life. It's an instant gratification that many of our teens are living, and then the grooming that is happening, the exposure that they're getting, the peer group that becomes everything.... To Janet's point, if that peer group is not a strong, healthy peer group, that's a strike against you.

So, I'm not saying that children can't make good decisions; I'm saying when children struggle, no, they can't, and sometimes parents need help. They can't predict the long term. They can't predict that this can cost them severely in their life, and worse. So, we have to help parents protect their children.

Janet?

[4:55 p.m.]

Dr. Janet Payne: I guess if we just touch on the brain development and we think of the three parts of the brain, we think of the brain stem, just looking after the basic functions; we think about that limbic system, in the middle – talks about emotional regulations; and then we think of that prefrontal cortex, with the decision making, the prioritizing, the judgement.

What we know now is that in the teen years, we've got that middle part all lit up, the emotional part. The limbic system is doing its thing. You throw a whole lot of hormones on that, you've got a lot going on there. But that prefrontal cortex – it just hasn't caught up yet. We know with boys especially, it could be mid-to later-twenties. I've seen that in my own family. I've seen that with my own husband.

[Laughter]

Dr. Janet Payne: The rules that we have in place now are outdated as compared to what we know now with neuroscience. We have to catch up. At 13, we cannot expect kids – some kids – to make the decision of where to live.

Hon. J. Redmond: I guess I'm just thinking about age range. The younger age, those are excellent points from doctors; absolutely. I was thinking when they get into their older teens; for example, for post-secondary students that will travel at 17, possibly. Will this apply to them? Will it apply if they're out of province studying?

C. Simpson: That's a great question. I think that was similar to what the member was asking.

If a parent is concerned about the safety of their child and if they're away attending school, they haven't really run away, but this is a clause.... Perhaps if they've left the dorm, if they've left that home, if they've run away from that premise – that home or that environment that parents approved – and all of a sudden, their child's gone missing for four days, that may be, under this act.... Well, not maybe, it would be something that – family could call; your mom could have called and said: "We haven't heard from him. He's not checking in anymore. We don't know where he is. We need you to locate him." And they can do that.

There are other things that would kick in, too, member, in terms of missing persons and those sorts of things. But may I just add to that: out of province, unless the legislation of the province

matches this, that's another.... This is applicable to people on PEI, just for clarity.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Seniors.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you.

I wanted to ask a question, because I know that you talked with police services. If this were to go through and police were then able to go and apprehend a child, and the child is combative – kicking and screaming, you know; you can imagine how upset they're going to be if that's the case. So, they're going wherever they're going to apprehend the child, then they get the child home and the child is doing the same thing, then they leave out the bedroom window.

What's the next step? What do parents do then? And what do police do then? Did you look into that? Did you talk to police about how they feel about how that cycle could continue on? Because they're not (Indistinct)?

C. Simpson: You're absolutely right. We understand that this very much could be a cycle; in the front door and out the back is what was asked of us, and that's very real and very possible.

At the same time that a parent calls and asks for help and that help is achieved, then Child and Family is now involved; Child Protection Services is now involved. Other supports can start to be in place.

Will a child who is brought home the first time stop running away? I think your son's run away 25 or 30 times. No. But with working with police services, we at least have a tool that Mom can work with police services on what's best to do next.

Yes, you're right – in the front door, out the back. But that's better than not having a good outcome for a child.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Yes. I just have one more, just a follow-up, because I'm just trying to put this into perspective.

If Betty didn't come home from school today, she went to Mary's house, but the parents say, "I don't know. I don't really like Mary. I don't know if my kid is safe over there," they can call the police at this point and say, "Look, you've got to go to Mary's house and get my child."

[5:00 p.m.]

I mean, I guess I wonder where the lines would be drawn for police services and what that might look like because I understand the severity of what you're going through, Janet, but I'm concerned about the folks that are just kind of going, "I don't know, and now there's a law, so maybe I can just call and get...."

I wondered if you could explain that.

C. Simpson: I'll speak to that. As with any law, it's only as good as the enforcement of that. Will there be people who might take advantage of that or just not get in the car and go? I can't speak to that. I can't speak to a parent's abuse of the intent and the spirit of the law. I'm sure if it's –

[Interjection]

C. Simpson: Right? It does happen, and I respect that, but it's happening now, minister, I would argue.

Now, police services can make that determination – "Here's what we're going to do," or not do – and maybe the second time you call, "We're not going to go," because it's not "shall" go; it's "may" go.

We are trusting police services and Child Protection to do their job and do it well.

Dr. Janet Payne: Just to add to that, to address your first question about the kids coming and going and back and forth. Well, a big part of this problem is that teens now know what the rule is.

I was driving two teens around about two weeks ago, and I heard one say in the backseat, "If the police pick you up, they have to tell you, 'We don't have to take you home.'" I heard these teens talking about that rule because it's so well known; they tell each other that.

If this rule comes in place, at least these children will know that there's a different rule out there. That alone will make a huge difference.

Chair: Thank you.

The hour has been called.

[Interjection]

Chair: Shall the hour be extended?

Some Hon. Members: No.

C. Simpson: Mr. Chair, I move the Speaker take the chair and the Chair report progress and beg leave to sit again.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

[Hon. B. Trivers in the chair]

M. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having under consideration a bill to be intituled *An Act to Amend the Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, 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. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Morell-Donagh, that this House adjourn until May 6th, at 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

See you tomorrow, members.

[The Legislature adjourned until Wednesday, 6 May 2026 at 1:00 p.m.]