

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Darlene Compton

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Standing Committee on Education and Economic Growth

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SUBJECT: Briefing on the growing demands on child care capacity

COMMITTEE:

Brad Trivers, MLA Rustico-Emerald [Chair]
Karla Bernard, Leader of the Third Party
Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker, MLA New Haven-Rocky Point
Robin Croucher, MLA Souris-Elmira (observing member)
Susie Dillon, MLA Charlottetown-Belvedere
Robert Henderson, MLA O'Leary-Inverness
Gordon McNeilly, MLA Charlottetown-West Royalty

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

none

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

none

GUESTS:

CHANCES (Lucas Currie, Marianne Ellis, Nathalie Nadeau)

STAFF:

Alysha MacEachern, Committee Clerk

Edited by Hansard

[The Committee met at 1:31 p.m.]

[B. Trivers in the chair]

Chair: ...call the meeting of the Standing Committee on Education and Economic Growth to order and welcome everyone here today. Maybe we'll just go around the room really quickly. This is Gord McNeilly, Rob Henderson, Peter Bevan-Baker, Karla Bernard, Susie Dillon, Robin Croucher, and I'm Brad Trivers.

We have the folks in from Chances today, and if you wouldn't mind just saying your title and your name into the mic, then that'll help our A/V folks as well know exactly who's speaking where.

Marianne Ellis: I'm Marianne Ellis. I'm the senior operations manager for Chances.

Lucas Currie: I'm Lucas Currie. I'm the CFO of Chances.

Nathalie Nadeau: I'm Nathalie Nadeau, the executive director of Chances.

Chair: Welcome, welcome.

I'd like to get adoption of the agenda, if anyone wants to move that.

Susie, thank you.

Without any further ado, we're going to get the folks here from Chances to give a briefing on the growing demands on child care capacity, and whatever other information you feel relevant around that topic. So, I'll turn that over to you to make your presentation.

Nathalie Nadeau: Perfect. Thank you so much for inviting us. It's a privilege to be invited amongst this committee. Although Chances is one of the leaders in early childhood care for the Island, I just want to make sure that – we're going to speak around our experience from a Chances perspective. I don't necessarily represent the whole sector. I just wanted to put that out there.

You should all have a little presentation. When we were asked to come in, within the letter of this committee, we were asked to

look at what the current gaps are, and the recommendations for this committee to bring back to Executive Council, for government, to see how you can move forward in terms of supporting organizations like us.

It is a very demanding and pressing issue. There's definitely been a significant increase in families moving to PEI, which is really positive for the economy, but the need is growing.

I'm just going to ask you to go to the first page.

Assessing Child Care Needs in PEI: Insights from the UPEI Health Research Network and CHANCES Survey

This summer, in August, we launched our first family needs assessment. When I started this position – I've been in the position for a little bit over a year and a half. My predecessor was Ann Robertson, who is the founder of Chances. Coming from an exterior perspective, I couldn't find any suitable data to say what the need of the population is, because first, it's growing, but it's changing. Looking at newcomer population, people from all over the world are coming to PEI and the demand is increasing, but we don't really know how and where. So, I couldn't get a good grasp on where the child care need is in the system.

But also, this particular family needs assessment – which, we're still analyzing the data – came out of an eight-week survey. We got 887 respondents, so we hit the population result survey; the 1 percent of the target population. You can extract your data as a population survey, which is more meaningful.

[1:35 p.m.]

I just wanted to start with looking at where the current needs are because we know that child care is a need, but there is more pressure in different areas than in other areas, for example.

We really focused on finding child care in a convenient space, so if you're in Cornwall, that there is accessibility for child care in Cornwall – not necessarily Charlottetown or

close proximity – and affordability as well; so, looking at people’s income and if it’s affordable. I want to remind us that the last set of results was in the fall of 2023. We’ve changed the rate to \$10, so that might help alleviate some of the pressure for families.

If you look: Out of 887 respondents, 74.9 percent of the participants reported at least one child care need, which is significant when you look at it. Most people would have a need for child care in families that we surveyed.

Looking at the highest demand, I was really surprised as well. If you look at the second set of results, Cornwall would be the one that needs the most accessibility in terms of child care. Although Stratford, for example, is a really fast-growing community and we know that there is demand there as well, but the access for services for child care is greater in Cornwall, for example.

So, when you look at mapping the needs, it’s really important, as government and as members of this committee as well, to figure out where the growth is and where the need is as well. O’Leary, as well; it’s not only about accessibility but affordability. There were a lot of results around affordable child care. You can see that in the results: people who have less than \$100,000 income have more difficulty affording child care.

These are very preliminary results. I was trying to get something for this committee to review today, but we are extracting a whole bunch of data. It will be really interesting from social determinants of health. So, if you want at some point for us – Chances and UPEI – to come back and present the results, it would be very valuable; there are a lot of questions about mental health access, health equity, accessibility, more child care housing, all the social determinants of health.

I wanted to start with that because it’s important to kind of find – and this will be one of our recommendations in terms of really identifying the needs.

Bridging the Child Care Gap: Issues and Recommendations

Let’s look at bridging the child care gap. If you go to page 2, I’ve kind of identified

what the issue is, and then the gap and recommendation that would be made. Again, we are only speaking from our experience at Chances, as well.

1. Access to Space

One of the key things that government has made recently is to have an expansion of low-interest loans, which is amazing in terms of an organization. I think it’s a positive step forward, and although I’m going to go through all the gaps in services, I just want to make sure that I’m on the record for saying that PEI is really leading the nation in terms of early childhood education, recognizing the profession, and the increase of salaries.

I’ve never experienced something that positive in terms of the strides that we’ve made in the past even five years. So, although I’m going to go into more negative, there is a lot of positive on the Island.

Gaps

This low-interest rate loan is really great, but the key issue is physical space. As an organization as big as Chances, we do have funding available to either buy real estate or land, but for a smaller organization, when there are mortgage rates at low interest and there is a loan provided by the Province – but if you don’t own the land or you don’t have access to land, it’s very costly. That’s a significant barrier. I know that the market prices have increased in the last few years, so that’s another issue that we’ve encountered.

[1:40 p.m.]

Recommendations

One of our recommendations: for example, Chances operates in one of the schools that has low numbers of students, and we’re able to provide 110 child care spaces there. It’s low rent, there’s a great collaboration with the school system, and that collaboration is great in terms of providing that space.

The recommendation that we are making is the Province could look at, strategically, what space they have available that could be used as a child care space. That would be one thing. Then there might be some

supportive funding for renovation because there are lots of regulations to be put in.

If there are some schools that have low student rates that could be connected to another school and then we can have spaces to operate within the facility – it doesn't necessarily need to be a school; it could be another building. I know the Community Outreach Centre is supposed to move. These are the types of things to look at when you look at empty space.

Another thing that is a recommendation is to launch a public request for proposals. So, looking at a request for a proposal for a construction company to actually build the building, and then going after another request for proposal for an organization – like Chances or another organization – to bid on the operation of the facility.

There are lots and lots of barriers in terms of building a building – construction and everything – or renovating. So, if we had access to the physical space to make some modifications, or to actually have someone build and for us to operate, that would be an easier path.

2. Specialized Government Unit/Representative for Navigational Support in the Early Years Centre Sector

Gaps

The second thing that we wanted to emphasize is a specialized government unit or representative for navigation support in the early years sector. There is a lot of regulation when it comes to establishing an early years centre or a school-age program, and it's not organization-friendly in terms of looking at all the requirements.

There are the regulations, but also the Fire Marshal establishment, and it needs to be more streamlined to be able to figure out what you need and ensure that you have everything in place before the department comes in and assesses if you're licensed or designated.

Recommendations

The recommendation would be to streamline the process. We are a huge organization, and I have capacity to pull teams to be able to

navigate the system. I can't imagine a smaller centre; it would be really discouraging.

To give you perspective, we bought a centre in Kensington because there was a high demand in the spring of 2022. We were operating as licensed child care in August of 2023. So, it took us a year and a couple of months to be able to do renovation, not construction, and to go through all the permits.

There are different rules and regulations. As a service provider, it's not something that we necessarily have expertise in and it's really hard to navigate, so I could see that this would be very discouraging for a smaller organization.

Did you want to ask questions, or just at the end?

Chair: Typically, we wait until the end of the presentation, just in case, but some people like to get on the list early.

Nathalie Nadeau: Okay.

Chair: Which is good because they've got lots of questions, and very important questions as well. I already have my name on the list. [Laughter]

Go ahead, thanks.

3. EYC Funding Formula

Nathalie Nadeau: So, on page 3: the early years funding formula. For having the designation and support through government, there is a formula that each centre would be qualified to receive funding from the Province. It hasn't been increased since 2018. If you look at the increased cost of food – everything. In terms of rent, our rent costs went up significantly.

[1:45 p.m.]

Recommendation for Formula Revision

So, one of the recommendations would be to revise this formula to ensure that operators can actually sustain their programs, because right now, for Chances, we're able to manage. We're a nonprofit agency, so we're not looking at big profit, but we do rely on

other sources of revenue to be able to fulfill all of our expenses.

So, this is something that, as an organization, to be able to grow, we need to be strategic in ensuring that we have proper funding to not go in a deficit.

We make some recommendations about the formula, and the incentive to expand as well. If you're barely making ends meet in terms of your designation funding, you're not going to be as willing to expand your scope.

4. Limited Grants Available

The other recommendation would be limited grant availability. There are quite a few grants available but it's something that comes and goes, and we're never sure if it's going to renew every year. For example, there's a lot of costs associated with material when you open a new centre. For Kensington, for example, it cost us \$30,000 just for the material to set up a centre; there's no grant for that.

As well, when you become a licensed centre, there's a period that you need to wait for designation. If the Province can eliminate that, they wouldn't necessarily license any facility, but you would get designation right off the bat. I want to say that because I know that a few years ago, you needed to wait a full year in order to apply for designation. They've removed that, which significantly helped.

From the moment that we opened in August – and we were strategic on waiting until the call of designation in September – from August to now, Chances (Indistinct) pocket \$100,000 to be able to operate Kensington's facility. It is a small facility, so that means that we charge the parents the \$10 a day, and we pay staff on the grid. The government will reimburse us until the designation call, at least \$75,000, but this is just to put in perspective that it is a lot of money for a small organization.

If the department can come, assess if we meet the requirements for licensing/designation, we should be designated then. It shouldn't be a call for designation, because for me, I'm not going to open a centre now if I don't know when the next call is going to be, and we never

really know. We know about a couple of weeks before. If it was public or if there was regular information about when the call of designation is, that it's quarterly, that we know, then we can plan our cycle. You don't want to open a centre right after the call closed because then you're up for another six months to incur all these costs.

Grants around food, other expenses, material: because the formula hasn't changed, we're cutting it short in terms of those costs.

5. Enhancing EYC Funding and Staffing: Addressing Managerial and Nutrition Staff Needs

On page 4, enhancing early years funding and staffing, there are some key points. Although there's been significant advancement in ECE wages – and I want to recognize that, and the pension and everything, which we do not have any issue recruiting or retaining staff. That's really amazing, especially in the environment that we are right now in terms of hiring and retaining staff. That's a very good step forward. But there are key things that are missing in terms.

Nutritional staff are one of the main, key – the Province has really embraced ensuring that there's food security in all centres. These are very important positions, but they're paid \$15.75. If you look at the living wage, it's \$20. It almost is embarrassing when you look at the grid that the nutritional staff are, really, very close to minimum wage. So, it's very hard to recruit. This is another example that we at Chances – and I know of other organizations that didn't have a choice to up the salary to be able to recruit. So, that means that it lowers the overall financial sustainability for the program.

[1:50 p.m.]

Also, for bigger organizations – I know Chances is bigger, but there are other centres that have the capacity to grow. One thing that we are keen about for Chances is having, it doesn't matter which centre you enter in, there is the same policy: the standard of care is high. But that requires oversight because what we don't want is one director that operates one way in one centre and another operate in another way;

discrepancy. We want it to be a Chances environment, or whatever organization it is.

You require a position like Marianne, who oversees the overall directors and ensures that there's an education program, quality education for the program, incident reporting, ensuring that all the due diligence is done. But these positions are not funded in the designation. It only funds within the actual program, from the director, all through ECEs and nutritional staff; anything above some managerial position, and even our payroll system. We're a big organization; we're 200 staff. We need to have something that's more manageable and efficient.

These types of things are not something that is considered in the designation formula, so we expense that as part of our overall budget. But this is something that, again, it's not in tune of wanting to necessarily grow because the more you grow, the more Marianne needs to add in terms of being manageable.

Recommendations

We're recommending that the Province look at different formulas. If you're a bigger organization, that you want to have those many centres – we have 10 centres and we're really interested in increasing our numbers – then there's a different formula for bigger organizations versus a one-director organization.

6. PEI Early Learning and Child Care Registry (ELCC) Challenges

The last recommendation within this sector would be the Early Learning and Child Care Registry challenges.

On the Island, we have a great registry from a parent perspective or from a family perspective, but from a data collection perspective, it's very hard to determine where the needs are. If I'm a parent, I put my name in for a place for a centre. If there's a spot at Murphy's, for example, but my first choice is somewhere else in Stratford, I'll go and put my child in Murphy's, but I'll leave my name there in case I get a spot at Stratford.

So, some communities look like they have a higher need than they actually have, and what's happening is each centre is doing their own separate list. When you look at the actual wait list, it's not a true representation of what the actual need is.

Recommendations

One of the things that we're recommending is that we're doing an overall of the current registry, because there are challenges from a department standpoint to pull data to effectively allow resources. What you don't want to do is over-resource a community; then you're stuck with not having enough registration in your program as well. It is important to identify where the actual real need is.

Bridging the School-Age Gap: Issues and Recommendations

1. School-aged Care Is Not Funded

I know that the committee asked for early year centre, but since we're here, I just want to throw in a little bit of information about school-aged care because it is quite the demand. I would say that this is my number one thing that I've asked frequently. Since school started, I think I had around seven different communities reach out to Chances to open an after-school program. It's very, very hard to operate within the situation that we're in, in terms of rent – high rent costs – and no financial aid from government regarding school-aged kids.

[1:55 p.m.]

From a Chances perspective, one of our key mandates is to serve the most vulnerable population. We want to keep our price really low. We're the lowest in terms of parent price, or parent fee. But that means that our staff are not paid significantly either. We're looking at \$17 an hour and we just upped it from \$16 an hour. You can't recruit staff, you can't retain staff, and it's not sustainable.

If I'm in a school that I'm not paying rent, it is a little bit more manageable in terms of providing that sustainability, but when you're in a centre that you're paying extremely high rent costs, it's a program that we have a lot of challenges with.

From a Chances perspective, we do have the capacity to expand, but without any support from government in terms of school-aged care, there is no interest to be able to grow in that area.

Recommendations

One of the key things that we're recommending is implementing a funding model similar to the early years centres, and I know that's something that government is contemplating. It will increase the capacity to have qualified staff, but also qualified programs, because we don't necessarily just want to have a program. We have an opportunity for after-school care to be able to be a leader in the nation like our early years centres.

So, a dedicated grant would be good for school-age – as a gap, in terms of having that funding available for school-age – and then we would be able to more sustain our funding towards that.

There are lots of challenges. There's universal kind of care that was – we're starting to work with the Department of Education on this, and I know that was something that the Premier was really passionate about as well.

But it's certainly something that the need has significantly increased, and although our mandate is really to not make any profit and really help the community, we're not able to expand on this area until there is something, either grants or something from government to help us subsidize our costs.

Chair: Well, thank you for that very thorough set of issues and recommendations. That will help make our job a lot easier.

Before we continue into questions, though, I realized I didn't introduce the clerk, Alysha MacEachern – sorry about that – our excellent clerk. I wanted to welcome the folks in the gallery as well; in particular, Mary Beth Parsons, who of course is the chair of the board of Chances. It's nice to see you here. We have a journalist student as well who's taking things in. Nice to see that.

So, I have Gord and Karla and Rob on the list right now. I'm going to do the three questions and move on type of thing, but if

you're on a roll and you have questions to clarify the current line of questioning – and Peter, as well – I'll be flexible on that.

Gord, take it away.

G. McNeilly: Thank you for coming in. That was very enlightening, and it's nice to hear an opinion because in this area, we kind of just hear what government says and then you have to really think about it.

I think this is a major issue. I know government is trying to solve it, and the federal government has come in with policies that are great for parents and are great for kids, if you can get into the system; all across the board.

In saying that, I don't know if we understand the scope of the problem, if you said that people are on different lists in different parts of the province, because I'm hearing there are 600 on this list, 500 on this list, 400 over here at this facility.

How can we deal with something so important and have duplication of people on lists? That would be my question, I guess.

Nathalie Nadeau: I think this would be one of the recommendations from the Department of Education, to really do an overhaul of the registry. I do think that the numbers are high, but when there's duplication or there's no cleanup of the actual lists, it doesn't give you a correct representation of what the actual need is.

So, we're making specific recommendations on having different tabs – if a parent wants to remain on the list because they weren't into their preferred centre, there should be a box for that and it should be counting as a separate entity versus in the overall data.

[2:00 p.m.]

It's very important to actually know what the list is, but most organizations have their own lists as well, which would be more of a true representation of what the wait time is, per se.

G. McNeilly: I know this is a major concern with parents; especially infant spaces. People are – before they even get pregnant, if it's just a thought, they're trying to get on

lists. This is happening. What do we do to look at – and how bad is this situation in Prince Edward Island with the amount of infant spaces required versus what we have now?

Nathalie Nadeau: Do you want to answer in terms of the wait times?

Marianne Ellis: Yeah, wait times, honestly, in a lot of our centres it's been siblings coming in because that's how they cycle it through. I hear horror stories every day working in centres; people calling and begging for spaces. Honestly, there's people that have been on there – exactly like you said – before they were even pregnant, and they still don't have a space by the time the child is a year old.

It's hard to understand the list because of the way – even if you were to look at the numbers on the list, it's all ages too, so you can't tell how many infants. You can tell as a director, but to go through those 450 people to figure out where the child really is – it should be categorized into ages. That would be a big step actually, if it was in ages alone. Then it should be a requirement for centres to take infants off the list if they are in a centre.

Nathalie Nadeau: I think with the new regulation that was just out to increase the number of infants in one room to 12 – which is a great step forward, but it comes from the square footage. The square footage per child increases as well, and you need a sleep room as well. When you think about that, if my main issue is space, that doesn't help in terms of – I would need an appropriate space to increase the number. Sometimes when you increase, you increase the staff members, but also bathroom or fire.

So, there's a lot of different red tape that we need to go about. It's not as easy as just saying that we're going to increase to 12. You need to have the proper space/square footage per child to ensure that you're abiding by the regulations.

G. McNeilly: That's where our problem is, but as an ECE, would your number one thing be almost to take two-, three-year-olds, four-year-olds? Is it a difficult challenge for centres to say, "We're going to double our

capacity and that's the direction we're going to go in"? That would be my first question.

Then afterwards, is the Province doing enough? Do we need more targeted infant space loan programs or incentives for more facilities to do that?

Nathalie Nadeau: You can jump in if you want.

Definitely. If I take the example of Kensington, it's measured specifically. The department comes and measures everything and you can only fit 15 kids in that space, and you can only fit 10 kids. If you expand a number, that means you need to expand your current space. The construction loan would be a good way to do it, but you still need to be able to afford that loan, even if there's low interest. You also need to have space within your land to expand as well.

If you're looking at a new build, that's where the land and everything comes in place. I think funding is key, for sure, but space is as important. Like I've mentioned, if you have any government space that is empty, if you have lots that you're not using, if you have new builds that you know in Charlottetown or some area that are building, put that as a requirement to have child care space, that we have dedicated space. It's hard to find, and to be able to build something, it's going to take a couple of years. It's challenging.

I think funding will always be something that we advocate for, in terms of the inflation and all of that, but I'd say the number one thing right now is the physical space to increase.

Chair: Gord, I'll come back to you.

Karla.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you so much. This has been so interesting.

[2:05 p.m.]

I was first elected back in 2019, and the issues we're hearing now are different from the issues we heard back then, which tells us we're growing, and with growth comes

challenges. So, this is really interesting. We were pushing hard to get that grid on and haven't really – I mean, other than personal anecdotes, this is the first time hearing specific examples of how that grid is working and some areas where it needs to be improved. I have a lot of questions, but I'm going to keep them contained as much as I can.

The first thing I'm looking at – I guess all is tying back to the grid, my first set of questions. So, as we consider nutritionists – nutrition staff – they're not on the grid. You had also mentioned the managerial positions. Are there any other positions that are not on the grid? Because really, when we're considering child care, it's not just about a person designated to look after a child; there are all kinds of things if we're considering a child in a wholistic way, which they should be considered in.

So, are there any other positions that are not on the grid that should be?

Nathalie Nadeau: The nutritional staff – maybe I wasn't specific enough – they are on the grid, but the grid is incredibly low. It's a little bit embarrassing to put them on the grid as low as it gets.

From the managerial kind of position, no. There's no oversight of multiple centres if you're a bigger organization. Also, I'd say the financial support as well; from a finance standpoint, payroll and anything related to payments, billing, and things like that, those are not supported for bigger organizations. So, it really leaves a hole in terms of that, and we need to pocket that cost.

Did you think of any other positions?

Marianne Ellis: No, all other positions from within an early years centre are on the grid.

K. Bernard: So, I'm hearing we have a little bit of work to do on the grid itself, now.

Unidentified Voice: Yes.

K. Bernard: Okay. The other thing that I'm looking at is the funding model. You say it hasn't been increased since 2018 and there are all kinds of problems with that, of

course. So, in this recommendation, there's the encouragement for people to grow centres.

I'm wondering, with the grid that we have, is it good enough to recruit people? Because I'm stuck between this – and I'm going to bring up the Stats Canada release. I'm sure you've seen it; I'm going to bring that up a little bit later. I'm just wondering because what we're hearing is that people are on wait lists for years and years and years and years, yet we hear people putting children in the child care centres are actually decreasing.

We'll get into that later but is the grid – encouraging centres to grow is one thing, and I guess retention you say is okay, but is recruitment? Do we have enough early childhood educators to grow, and do you see government working towards trying to grow that? Is the grid the answer for them, or do you see other things happening where government is trying to recruit early childhood educators?

Nathalie Nadeau: I think from the professional standpoint, I do think that the grid for early childhood educator is appropriate. I mean, this has been amazing in terms of leading from a nationwide – from that particular sense.

There are key positions, like nutritional staff, that would need to be a little bit higher. We don't have any issue recruiting or retaining at this point. It made a significant change. If you had talked to me even two years ago, it would be totally different.

I think from a grid perspective, it would be to look at school-age now, to be able to put them on a sort of grid that is more appropriate, that's livable wages, that people can actually do a profession out of this. I think the field is really recognized now; a lot of people are going into Holland College, and it's very positive.

So, I think what the government has done for early childhood professions in this province is remarkable. I don't want to dismiss that. I think from a formula perspective, it would be the operational cost of the materials, the food, and things like that. That hasn't changed because it's based

on the wages and the benefits and the parent fees.

[2:10 p.m.]

Maybe we could go in detail around the formula as well just to give you some perspective. I don't think it's necessarily the grid, but it's more the formula that they use that would need some tweaking.

Marianne Ellis: I just want to mention too, Karla, that the accelerated program that they're operating now with Holland College has had a lot of staffing turnover with getting level 3s, people who are already in centres, and the Steps to Success bringing people into centres to see if it's something they want to do has been wonderful as well for retaining staff and getting staff.

Nathalie Nadeau: They're motivated to go up the grid as well, because they can see that, "Okay, if I'm an ECE 2, or an ECE 3, I make this much more money and I can get the qualification."

Marianne Ellis: And with the free education aspect, that's huge for people; people can't afford that. It's a wonderful program, and for backfilling for centres so that they can send people to school and not have that wait of finding someone to replace, it's huge. That's actually really wonderful that we've done that as well.

Nathalie Nadeau: Want to explain the grid situation (Indistinct)?

Lucas Currie: Yeah, the funding formula, how it works is that the wages are essentially funded and then it creates a buffer of profit at the top. Then it's that buffer of profit that covers operational expenses like rent, program materials, and groceries. As those expenses just increase due to inflation and the formula largely staying the same, that level of profit just shrinks over time.

It goes back to our recommendation; it's just to revisit the calculation and to tweak it in a way where that buffer of profit is a little bit more, just to cover those increases in costs.

Chair: Karla, maybe one more.

K. Bernard: Sure. I'll save my question, but just kind of a comment on what you were just saying there.

When the grid kind of was in place and established, because I used to work in the school system, I had a few EAs I used to work with who reached out to me who started their careers as early childhood educators. That's where their passion was and they loved it, but they had to leave because they just couldn't live on those wages. They were devastated, gave up their jobs, went to be an EA in the school system, and then contacted me; there are some bumps trying to go back from being an EA to an ECE. There are certain bumps and they were running into them, but they were like, "Now that there's money, it's a livable career. It's a valued career now. I want to go back there."

I'm going to leave for now, Chair. Can I get put back on the list?

Chair: Yeah, I'll put you back on the list, for sure.

Rob, I have you next.

R. Henderson: Okay, I had a previous question I was going to ask, but I'll kind of jump off a little bit on Karla, when it comes to the staff training issues.

I'm more familiar with Chances in O'Leary and the same at the facility in Tyne Valley, which is not a Chances-operated facility, it's an early years centre. But one of the issues that I tend to hear hasn't been so much space and things. Now, I haven't talked to Krista at Chances in O'Leary for probably six months or more, but the issues tend to be around the staff; we can't get the staff to get the training.

Now, you might say that there are lots of training opportunities, but that's probably Charlottetown or Summerside, but now we're up in O'Leary. It just seemed like that was the big – I know you have a staff complement and you can have a certain amount of non-certified workers, but getting those non-certified people to get up to the next level where they can get up to a better pay, it's a little harder in a rural community.

Maybe you can sort of brief me a bit. My understanding is, currently, there's not an early years training program in the west. Are there any online options for them?

Marianne Ellis: There's not yet. I have been talking to Megan Drummond from the ECDA about it. There is a possibility for them to go if they get a Steps to Success interest in that area, but there hasn't been interest to cover for backfill.

Now, because we are lucky, we did actually say that we could send and cover on our own cost before, which we will do if necessary if they get into the program. We didn't have anyone apply for this current level 3 from that location. But yeah, there's definitely a gap there in terms of getting people to backfill for centres.

R. Henderson: Yeah (Indistinct)

Marianne Ellis: Yeah, exactly. We are lucky that we can do that, but a lot of places would not be able to afford that.

Nathalie Nadeau: The pool does shrink when you go into rural communities. I do think that if you have a remote access or even online, or even hybrid, that you get online and then you need to go or there's an instructor that comes in, definitely, this is the discussion that we had with the ECDA as well, and the Province. But definitely, if I would put my energy in terms of education, it would be in rural centres.

[2:15 p.m.]

R. Henderson: I just think there needs to be some way that we can figure out how to train some of these people, whether it's online training, or evening/weekend, something that kind of complies with the regions that you're dealing with because like I say, it's not acceptable for somebody to leave work in, say, O'Leary at 5:30 then have to get to, say, Summerside or Charlottetown for a course in the evening. That's not going to work.

So, then the question becomes, when it comes to the standards that you're setting, maybe it's a case that the standards are too high in the way your training complement has come into place. One of the things I've found, too, is we're also having quite an

impact on our unlicensed sites. I mean, I'm spinning my wheels here. We gained a few more seats at Chances, and then all of a sudden, I lose them at the unlicensed sites. So, I've still got large numbers of people that this is a major issue; they cannot access.

So, what are your thoughts on that? Is there a different formula that can come into play here to solve a problem, at least in the short term? If we can't provide the training, if we can't accommodate these people to get upgraded, how do we still provide some level of service that's appropriate for meeting families' needs for child care services?

Nathalie Nadeau: Yeah, and I do think that if there is a model where you can get on-the-job training or support, or even a mentorship program...

R. Henderson: There we go, yeah.

Nathalie Nadeau: ...that could be really beneficial in terms of retaining. In the grid, there's no designation in terms of those types of positions, but that's certainly something that would be very beneficial in terms of training staff.

Marianne Ellis: I agree. I know Megan has been trying to build, with Holland College, an online course that is equivalent to the same one that you can take in Charlottetown, and just meet in a centre somewhere west and do it that way. So, it is definitely in the talks. I'm not privy to all the conversations, so I don't know where that's at, but I do know that that's something that, yes, has definitely been brought forward, and I agree completely.

R. Henderson: I look at some of your grid there, or charts, but in O'Leary, how many people are on the wait list currently or within the last month? You probably have those numbers.

Marianne Ellis: We actually just opened up another room in O'Leary too, on Monday.

R. Henderson: Oh, okay. That's good.

Marianne Ellis: Yeah, it just opened, so we're able to take five more kids just as of Monday.

R. Henderson: You knew you were coming to committee. I know... (Indistinct)

[Laughter]

Marianne Ellis: Yeah, the list there is very long. It's in, like, the 350 range.

R. Henderson: Geez.

Marianne Ellis: But that's also at all centres, and like I said before, that wait list is not accurate. That's one of the things that's kind of hard to get a direct number of what – because you can call the families on the list that are already in care or they don't want care yet. It did take us quite a few calls to get the five spaces filled that we currently filled on Monday.

R. Henderson: Right, yeah. Well, I had heard in O'Leary there was probably about 80 on the wait list. I also checked with Tyne Valley – now, this is about six months ago – and there was about 80 on the wait list there. Yes, there may be some duplication as they're not overly far apart, but that's a large number...

Marianne Ellis: It is, absolutely.

R. Henderson: ...and these are parents who are trying to get back to the workforce. It wasn't that long ago I had a call from a person who wanted to get back into the workforce in the health profession, and she has no spots. No options. So, I just think that when you look at those kinds of numbers, I think we're at a point where something's got to change.

That's why I look at some of the standards that come around to your staffing complement, because I'm quite confident I can find you space. That's not the issue in O'Leary, anyway, but I would say that it's the staffing. And I can probably find you workers, but I can't find them with the standards that you're requiring to make the thing work.

I just think there needs to be, really, some out-of-the-box thinking to figure this out because it was great to have high standards at the start, but now all of a sudden, we're not meeting the needs of families. How much could we slightly compromise that to

make it suitable and/or make it far easier to do the training?

Put me on the list for future, but I'll –

Chair: Yeah. I'm going to go to Peter, and then Susie.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I really appreciate you being here, and I particularly appreciate your very clear, very comprehensive identification of issues and recommendations for those issues in the various facets of child care here on Prince Edward Island. This is a really valuable document, and I'm going to guard this closely as we approach the next sitting of the Legislature.

I'm going to ask a general question, first of all. I'm struck by how enthusiastic you are and how apparently the wage grid now is really not as much of an issue as it was, as Karla said, even as recently as three or four years ago.

[2:20 p.m.]

But I'm also struck on the other end of things by how much of an issue the wait list is, or the establishment and management and the way that wait list is dealt with.

So, my first question: When government says that they have created new spaces – we hear that all the time – what does that actually mean? Does that mean that real, tangible, new spaces have been built in existing daycares? Or does it mean that theoretically, government has granted space to daycare, should they be able to meet the requirements of staffing ratios and square footage per child and all the rest of it?

Marianne Ellis: Exactly. It's put within the regulations in that, if they expand, they can have nine infants or whatever, but you have to meet all the criteria in order to do that. That's where the barrier is; it's to meet that criteria for centres.

P. Bevan-Baker: So, just to be clear, when new spaces are created, they're not actually physically created.

Marianne Ellis: No.

P. Bevan-Baker: These are just the opportunity for those spaces to be created.

So, that explains to me how things are not adding up here, because we have a situation with a growing population – a rapidly growing population – here on Prince Edward Island. But Karla mentioned the Stats Can report from just last week, I think it was, where despite the fact that our population has grown substantially since 2019, there are fewer Island children in daycare today than there were in 2019, both in terms of actual hard numbers, but also the percentage of the population.

Even though things have improved in some areas, something's not working here. I think you mentioned that other than the after-school care that you mentioned at the end, Nathalie, perhaps to me this management of the wait list is fundamental. Can you talk a little – I know you've gone into some detail already....

Okay, maybe I'll frame it this way. I represent the south shore region and I see in your survey on page 1 here that Borden-Carleton is mentioned twice. It's actually top of the list – it's not a place you want to be the top of the list – for more accessible daycare. It's also one of the highest demands for affordable daycares.

I know from my own experience, the large daycare provider, Merry Pop-Ins, in the south shore region – not just Borden-Carleton, but it encompasses a lot of area – have lived every single one of the challenges that you listed off the top. I'm not going to relist them now.

What would you like to see for an area, like my area that I represent, that would give parents a really clear idea of where the spaces are that are available and what the expected wait time would be?

Marianne Ellis: I think there is (Indistinct) central that does operate that wait list.

P. Bevan-Baker: Run by government?

Marianne Ellis: Yes, because I feel as though –

Nathalie Nadeau: Or an agency. The ECDA or –

Chair: The ECDA does it right now, don't they?

Marianne Ellis: Yes, but the actual website needs to be updated, I would say. It should be sorted out by age groups and it should be sorted out by location so that it's easier to follow. Then every few months, parents are supposed to – they're supposed to log in, I think it's every three or four months, and validate that they still want a space or whatever. But sometimes either they forget to do that and they're bumped off the list, or sometimes for some reason it doesn't actually work, and it doesn't take them off the list.

So, there are a couple issues happening. Parents are thinking that if they just leave their account, they're going to be bumped off the list if they're in a centre, and sometimes that's not happening, or they forget.

Other things that could be updated on it are centres – it's supposed to be – centres are supposed to follow it, which we do, and they're supposed to delete children once they accept them in their program. They're supposed to mark that they're in their program. That's not happening. There needs to be some type of person that operates it and manages that to be able to ensure that it's the most up-to-date list.

Nathalie Nadeau: It's like more oversight on the registry because it is very hard to kind of pinpoint what the wait time is.

Marianne Ellis: You really can't.

Nathalie Nadeau: Yeah, and looking at the registry for each centre. So, you really need to have an overall of the – to update the system, to have more oversight. It's easy for centres to just pull numbers. How many infants are waiting at Murphy's, for example? I can pull that. You need to go through the list, the 400-and-something people list, and you need to physically sometimes call them to see if they're still interested. Sometimes people have been in another daycare for months and you don't know; they're still on the list.

It's a lot of administration burden for each centre to do.

[2:25 p.m.]

Chair: Just to clarify on that point, is the ECDA responsible for the current child care registry?

Marianne Ellis: I think they are, yes.

Chair: Yeah, but they rely on private EYCs to update the numbers, and you're saying that –

Marianne Ellis: Well, just to clean off as you're going.

Chair: So, the data coming from the EYCs isn't necessarily up to date or clean.

Marianne Ellis: That's correct, yeah.

Chair: Okay, I was just getting a little confused there about who was doing what. Okay.

Nathalie Nadeau: But you need more oversight, right? You need more oversight and accountability to be able for centres to update it.

Chair: Okay, great.

Sorry, Peter.

P. Bevan-Baker: No, I appreciate your intervention there, and it's that lack of coordination which seems to be central to this current process not working well.

So, you talked about the new centre that you recently opened in Kensington. You're an established organization with a lot of institutional knowledge about how to navigate through this – and all of the other advantages that come with scale and size – and yet, you're still carrying a debt load of \$100,000 or so; or you will be, or whatever.

Nathalie Nadeau: That was just to –

P. Bevan-Baker: That wasn't my question, Chair. I just want to be clear on that.

Chair: No, I'm counting over here.
[Laughter]

Nathalie Nadeau: That was to operate. So, the costs will be recouped back when we apply for designation. We'll recoup 75

percent of our costs. The cost for renovation – just to give you perspective – was almost as high as the cost of buying the facility.

Lucas Currie: I'll note as well that that loss that Nathalie referred to was because we decided to charge families the \$10 a day and also pay staff on the grid. As an undesignated centre at the time, we had the option; we could have charged families \$40 a day and then paid lesser wages, but we wanted to do equity across the board.

It was a decision we made with the hope of getting designated. If we didn't get designated, that's \$150,000 that would have been down the drain. So, it was a risky decision, but luckily it paid off.

P. Bevan-Baker: I appreciate so much about what Chances does and the variety of programs that you offer, particularly for families who need that extra help. That's just an example of the ethic that you've taken into this new centre. So, thank you for that.

The question I was going to ask is: Clearly, on Prince Edward Island, there is a demand for these services, and the way an economy typically works is – of course, you have some regulation, but – if there's a demand there, you can create supply and things even out.

Now, I know this is a very heavily regulated sector, and that's part of the issue of why this isn't happening spontaneously. But if I were a new entrepreneur wanting to set up a new day care centre in the south shore region, for example, what is – I'll give you three things.

What are the three things that you would love to see government do that would actually make it financially possible for me to make that happen?

Nathalie Nadeau: I think if government could provide either physical space or land to be able to operate in, if there is a person we can contact at the Province who could guide us through all the regulations and the paperwork around permits – if you're in a rural centre like O'Leary, you need to apply for a permit from the Province, but if you're in Charlottetown, for example, you need to

have two sets of permits, Charlottetown and the Province.

It's heavily regulated and it's very hard to manage. We did cheat sheets and everything, because I'm like, "I'm not going through this again without a plan in place," because it is quite – and it's changing now that it's up to date. So, really, navigation services around somebody who could help within government to apply for permits, to ensure that we have all the proper – because once you set up shop and if you're not meeting the proper needs, then it costs a lot of money to change it.

So, space, and then some grants for setting up the program. Either grants for materials – because it does cost a lot of money, managing any renovation costs if you need to renovate – or playground equipment and all of that.

Would you say, or is there anything else that I'm missing?

Marianne Ellis: Yeah.

Lucas Currie: Yeah, and to build off what Nathalie said around the permits, we've been through the process now once or twice and we understand what needs to be done, but you apply for a permit, then you have to wait three months to even hear back. So, whenever you buy a space and you're waiting for the permit, that space is losing money every day. As a large organization, we can kind of fund that, but a smaller one wouldn't be able to.

[2:30 p.m.]

To speak to the space: To me, personally, I think it all comes down to space. We operate out of Belfast School, St. Jean, and Prince Street School, and it's very easy to start in a preexisting space. You just hire the staff and you're ready to go. But talking about buying a new building and performing hundreds of thousands of dollars in renovations, there are just too many barriers.

So, it goes back to one of our recommendations, which is to just perform some kind of internal audit of all the public space available, and then just give us or another centre the space.

Nathalie Nadeau: And then some grants to renovate and ensure that you have proper – but it is quite significant, the amount of requirement from a fire standpoint.

For example: Murphy's, we've been operating for years, and we need to do our license every year. Now it's a regulation that we need to have a fire panel. Only that thing will cost \$10,000 and there's no grant for that. You know what I mean? It's something that we're able to afford, but a smaller organization would not. It would just remove your profit.

Chair: Not to abuse my position as chair, but I'd like to intervene on this one as well.

A good example: The Rural Municipality of Kinkora. It just happened that the CAO there used to be an ECE, as well as they have some passionate people on the council that are pushing for it. The municipality of course runs the early years centre there, and of course the administrative experience of a CAO and they are the municipality, so they'd be able to cut through the red tape and comply to government programs. This is what they do, day in and day out, and it's been a really successful model.

I just wanted to get that on the record that if any of the members have municipalities in their area that would consider that, it seems like a very good way to go. And of course, organizations like Chances where you have the expertise, you have a CFO, you have an executive director; you have people who are focused on the administrative side and can cut through.

That is one thing that I know directors of EYCs have told me. That's the challenge for them. Very typically an early childhood educator first, and then administrator second. Anyhow, I just wanted to intervene with that. Thanks for humouring me.

Peter, did you have one more?

P. Bevan-Baker: Not on this particular topic, but when I was preparing for this meeting, I didn't actually realize that Chances is an acronym for Caring, Helping, and Nurturing Children Every Step. I didn't know that. How lovely. And you are living that acronym, so thank you.

Nathalie Nadeau: We should advertise that more.

P. Bevan-Baker: Yeah. [Laughter]

Chair: Thank you.

Alright, I'm going to go to Susie here.

S. Dillon: My first question is only because I get it asked to me, about the whole process of: you get on the list, but some centres pull off their list. I'm just wondering if you might be able to give me a little bit more of a perspective on – you say there are two lists that form, one for the registry and one for the centre. What does the list for the centre mean?

Marianne Ellis: We don't really have centre lists. We go from the registry, but if there are siblings within our centre, that's kind of like our centre...

S. Dillon: So, they get pulled first.

Marianne Ellis: Yes.

S. Dillon: I have another question.

Chair: Oh, yeah. Go ahead.

S. Dillon: I just wanted to jump onto what Robbie was saying. When you take your ECE program and you get that certification to be able to go get a job, who mandates that? The license comes through the ECE...?

Marianne Ellis: The government license... Yeah.

S. Dillon: Okay. So, I'm just kind of thinking back. I worked as an educational assistant, and we have hired a number of educational assistants in our education system these days. Some of those people are not necessarily certified, and they have the option of doing hybrid learning. They also have full-time online learning to be able to get that certification.

I'm curious to know. Is it because there is no online ECE program, or is it because government doesn't recognize the ECE program that's coming from another institution if it doesn't come from Holland College? Is there something online, do you know? I know it's not really your thing. I

guess I'm just curious to know if you might –

Marianne Ellis: There are some from other colleges, but it does really depend on the college and whether they are recognized through the department. I'm not sure because, honestly, they say to us to just send it forth, and they make the decision. It really varies, so it's hard for me to answer that really fully.

Nathalie Nadeau: But that's something to look into in terms of if you do have a meeting with the department. I think this is very key in terms of rural and more remote communities, to have that access.

[2:35 p.m.]

If there's already a program that has established that, like EA, that's something that they can look at in terms of best practices and kind of mimicking that process as well.

Chair: It's a great question. Just hearkening back to when I was minister, I seem to remember there was a hybrid program at one point. I just don't know if it's going any longer. You guys obviously are not aware of it, so if it's not, we need to advertise it a little more maybe. [Laughter]

Marianne Ellis: No, I don't think it is anymore. I think it was taken over by the Steps to Success, level 2/level 3, through Holland College. I think that's the only program that's now operating.

Chair: Susie.

S. Dillon: Just when Robert was mentioning about people not being able to come maybe from the rural areas to the city to be able to get that schooling, that it would be key to be able to have some kind of evening/online learning to be able to get that accreditation going; I thought that was a good thing.

Can I keep going?

Chair: Yeah, go ahead.

S. Dillon: My only other question was – I was curious to know if your after-school programs run within your centres that are

existing. And I'm going to ask: What do you charge for after-school programming?

Nathalie Nadeau: I'll do the first part. One of the things that we do operate within our centres, and these are the most successful after-school care that we have. It's more sustainable, and we can have one license, so we're able to move staff around.

We're able to maximize on the hours of the nutrition staff, for example, to give that person four hours to do the cooking, and then go up to – yeah, so that would be the only consideration, if I want to grow in that area, that I might consider.

When it's a standalone program, it's very different. You don't have the oversight there. We don't have a full-time supervisor to supervise. Now, we did make the decision to have full-time, but we do have centres that are offsite, and this is where it's more challenging.

And we charge...

Lucas Currie: We used to charge \$12.50 a day. I believe it's up to \$14 a day now. We did that on a step basis over the span of I think a year and a half, two years.

That was done to offset some of the operational costs that have been increasing. We were just left with no choice because it's a pay-for-service program that, again, receives no funding. So, unfortunately, it's a situation where we had no choice but to put a little bit of that cost onto the customer, and then whatever loss we incur, we try to fund that through other areas of the organization.

Nathalie Nadeau: But even at \$14.25?

Lucas Currie: I believe it's \$14.

Nathalie Nadeau: \$14. We're still the lowest on the Island, but the board is really good in terms of supporting the staff as well. So, in order to increase costs from a parent fee, we increased the salary for staff as well because I did some after school care as well as the executive director, and my CFO as well. So, when you're at that stage of the organization as big as Chances, you need to look at your programs and say, "Okay, this is not sustainable."

S. Dillon: Because kids would be bussed from their school to your prospective location.

Nathalie Nadeau: Yes.

S. Dillon: Can I ask one more question?

Chair: Go ahead, Susie, yes.

S. Dillon: If there's a school cancellation or a PD day, do you do a full-time day for your clients who come for after-school care?

Marianne Ellis: We do; we just call the provincial government. If the provincial government is closed, we close for the day, but if the provincial government is operational, we will open.

Nathalie Nadeau: And we do PD days for full day, and most of our sites would have summer camp as well.

Chair: Thank you.

Robin, you go ahead, then we'll be through our cycle. I might have a couple questions before we start again.

R. Croucher: Mine's pretty easy. Thank you for coming in and presenting to us. This has been very educational, for sure. I'm going to start with a comment and then a quick question.

The educational barriers to becoming accredited certainly is something that a few of us have echoed. I'm a little biased; all three of my children went through a private home, with a lady who was unlicensed, and received the best quality of care. So, I think that we need to look at ways to make it easier for ECEs to get educated and licensed.

My question is: The regulatory changes. They're fresh, they're new, with increasing infant spaces and capacity at our early learning academies. Will Chances be taking advantage of those increased spaces in all of your centres?

[2:40 p.m.]

Marianne Ellis: We can't in all, with the infants, because we don't (Indistinct) nap rooms. So, space is still a barrier. There are

two centres that we currently are able to do that, and actually, on Wednesday we're having someone come into our Murphy's centre to see if we have the right spacing to get nine infants in one space.

Nathalie Nadeau: Definitely, that's the goal. In terms of square footage and all that, this is where we need to figure out if we have enough space in our current space – from the new grant perspective – because they've upped the number of children that you can have in one license up to 125 kids. But there are limitations for that, because the formula is still just one director for 125 kids. That's a significant amount of kids to have oversight over.

We kind of advocated for having an assistant director or someone to help that oversight, because going from a centre that's 80, you have the same formula as 125 kids. From a Chances standpoint, we will. We are very interested in expanding in our two sites in Cornwall and Stratford because we own the lots. I would be interested in increasing as much as we can if we do have the space, but it's definitely a challenge.

Chair: Go ahead, Robin.

R. Croucher: So, from your staffing perspective, what is their feeling on increasing the capacity and the workload, and the responsibility that it's going to put on them? What is the feeling in the field around this?

Marianne Ellis: Ratios will remain the same, so the workload will be very similar. It will just be more structuring how your day is going to flow, with more infants or within rooms of centres.

Nathalie Nadeau: I think with the infants – for three infants, we get an educator. So, that will increase our staffing, but from having 125 kids in one centre for a director, that doesn't change. You can have a director making the same salary for a smaller centre of 30, versus another one that is at 125. I would not, personally, increase my capacity to 125 if I don't have another assistant. We'll pay for it because it's too much of a risk.

R. Croucher: One more question. Do you see this regulatory change as making any

kind of a significant impact on the waiting list in the near future?

Nathalie Nadeau: I think it could; not significant. It will help some organizations. You're not going to see a significant amount. Like I said, the interest loan rate is a great program, but you still need to have cash flow to be able to afford the mortgage, have the land, and have sufficient space to expand.

To be quite honest, if we struggle with the renovation and everything for Kensington, and it is one of our smaller centres, and we're a big crew, I would be discouraged doing this as a single entity. I do think that more support to grow will be needed to make a significant change.

R. Croucher: Great. That's it for me. Thank you for your honest answer on that.

Chair: Thank you. Just before I (Indistinct), I just wanted to ask a couple.

Just going back to the survey, I have the list here. I'll put on my MLA hat here, and I noticed that sort of in the middle of the Island, you've got Kensington and you've got North Rustico, but Hunter River and Kinkora, as I mentioned, are not on the list. But when you administered your survey, that was Island-wide to all of the EYCs?

Nathalie Nadeau: Yeah, it was all Islanders. All Islanders; not just related to an EYC. It was everyone. I live in Cymbria, so I would put the nearest bigger town – yeah, you're my MLA.

G. McNeilly: Oh, dear. [Laughter]

Chair: Lucky, eh? So lucky.

Nathalie Nadeau: But I would put Rustico as my closest town. It's within that catchment. People would choose the town that's closer to them because we couldn't identify all the little communities. It's based on which town is closer that they would identify.

Chair: Great. Thank you for clarifying that. I'm a little surprised that Hunter River didn't make the list. I'm not so surprised on Kinkora because they've been expanding (Indistinct) –

[2:45 p.m.]

Nathalie Nadeau: Yeah, there was a lot of different – but I think from a census perspective, it's really similar to the Stats Canada as well. We try to mimic, and I work with UPEI, and I think with the previous survey that they did was the best that we could do from a representation standpoint. But we could pinpoint the exact community in our survey.

Chair: Great. My next question was: The Early Childhood Development Association is kind of responsible for looking at early childhood development across the Island, across EYCs, working with your organization and others. It seems like there could be some overlap between some of the work you're doing and some of the work the ECDA is doing.

A survey like this, for example, is something off the top of my head; I said, "I wonder why the ECDA isn't doing that." Not to get too deep down there, but do you work closely with the ECDA?

Nathalie Nadeau: Really closely, yeah. Absolutely. I think they're a great organization and they do support the field tremendously. I've given you 1 percent of what my survey – my survey is very targeted on social – mostly the demographic, but also from a health and mental health perspective. I have questions about food security. I have questions around income. There are all kinds of – so, this was like a little piece of my bigger survey.

I do think that it is going to be really interesting to look at the analysis of this because that's going to tell us in terms of poverty, or living wages, and things like that. So, I'm happy to send the report once it's concluded, and if you're interested, for me to come back and do an overview. But it's very informative in all aspects of it, and we can pinpoint to community-specific – what are the challenges in O'Leary, or – you know.

Chair: Well, thank you. I think I could safely assume the committee would love to receive that analysis when you have it complete. Yeah, for sure.

I'll go over to Gord now.

G. McNeilly: Thanks a lot. Just a great presentation that's helping us understand this.

Just picking up on what you said: what government has done or what they haven't done is not really going to solve the issue.

We just passed the Capital Budget, and if we wanted to be serious about this, we would have had a budget line in the Capital Budget, much like we did with housing, and it wasn't there. It's not there. So, it's (Indistinct) capital budget.

I mean, government can do it, but it takes a critical – they have a program for housing; it's \$50 million the first round, \$75 million this time, 2 percent loans, to build housing in PEI. Well, that's being out there and hopefully housing is built, but I see that we're not building nearly enough.

My question with you is – we're looking at that – and this is great that you're coming in, because maybe that's what we have to do. Would you say that government needs to build these centres first, and then you can do your job? Other EYCs can do their job, take over that, and then run it? Would you say that's the approach and that's the model?

Nathalie Nadeau: A hundred percent, yeah. If everything is in place because it is quite – and we don't know. We don't have the expertise in construction and permits, so if you have someone tendered for actually building the physical building and we can bid on operating, that would be the dream. I would increase significantly.

G. McNeilly: Just going back to the first thing you said: access to space. "The Early Years Centre (EYC) Expansion Low-Interest Loan Pilot Program aids space access but faces significant challenges."

What I've heard about that loan program from people is that it was inconsistent, it was slow, it was disjointed, and it wasn't enough money. Would you agree with that? At the beginning, it seemed like the government was testing the water with their toes when they needed to jump in.

Nathalie Nadeau: I'm unable to speak – because when they did the launch of the pilot project for ECEs just before Christmas.

We're putting a plan in place to develop two new buildings, so I haven't been through that process yet.

G. McNeilly: Perfect. Along that way, the government said they consulted with early childhood centres across the province. I don't know who they consulted with because I didn't really get a sense that that consultation was enough.

[2:50 p.m.]

What I'm hearing is that we ended up with a program that didn't listen to the community and didn't match the needs of the people in the field, what they wanted to be successful. Go and ask people in the field what they need. It has to be individually based; everybody's different.

Would you agree that the Province could do some more listening as this gets going so that we can do better in this field?

Marianne Ellis: Absolutely.

Nathalie Nadeau: Yeah, absolutely. I do think that they've made significant changes, and I see that they're committed as a department, and the minister as well. But in terms of, yeah, listening to – my plan was to give that to the department as well, so that they know what we shared here.

G. McNeilly: Exactly.

Chair: Maybe just one more, Gord, and we'll go on.

G. McNeilly: I just want to thank you for coming in. I think it gives me a good sense of what we need to do and what we have to do in here to make democracy work for our children, our young people. Whether the lists are whole or half or whatever, there is a ton of people that need access.

Nathalie Nadeau: The need is there, absolutely.

G. McNeilly: We're all in this together. Thank you very much for coming in.

Nathalie Nadeau: No problem.

Chair: Karla.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

This continues to grow in being interesting, but I'm still stuck on one thing, and that is the fact that this Stats Canada – are you familiar with what I'm referring to, the one that talks about the amount of people? It came out December 5th, but it just –

Nathalie Nadeau: Yeah, that just went out.

K. Bernard: Did it just come up today?

Nathalie Nadeau: No, not today, but it just came out not too long ago.

K. Bernard: Yeah, but it just came to my attention today, and as I was reading it, I'm like, this doesn't make any sense at all to me. What it's saying is that there are fewer children in daycares, but the demand is higher than it was. How can those two things be true at the same time?

Nathalie Nadeau: If you look at the percentage of people that are waiting, on my first sheet here, it says that 74.9 percent – 664 participants – reported at least one child care need. I mean, they're not in the child care system right now; they're still waiting on having a place to put them. Maybe that's where the discrepancy is, is that there's fewer children. Maybe it's not a match through the space.

It's a very interesting stat. I had a discussion with the researcher at UPEI because we want to try to make a link between the result that we're seeing and that as well, to be able to clearly understand the gap. That's my first instinct, but I'm not – it would be a follow-up thing. I'll try to make sure to capture that in the analysis that we're going to do.

K. Bernard: That would be amazing because I seriously have not had something that's baffled me more than this. (Indistinct) won't do it. I shouldn't say that, but it's true.

What's especially baffling about that is the fact of how much our population has grown, and not only have the needs of centres changed over the last five years or more – I'm speaking the last five years from my experience – but also the needs of families have changed in the last five years.

I'm wondering, with that, has the demand for spaces at Chances increased?

Nathalie Nadeau: Like, the overall demand? Yes, for sure.

Marianne Ellis: Absolutely.

K. Bernard: I could talk about this for a long time, but I need to just set it aside because it's not going to make sense to me right now; it's just not.

Getting back to one of the things that we talked – I'm drawing a lot of conclusions, and I didn't plan on saying this, and I'm not sure it will lead to a question, but the more you were talking about this, the registry, I'm brought back to our Public Accounts committee that we had this morning. Basically, it was on knee replacement, hip replacement, and cataract surgeries, and how we don't know what the actual wait times are because no one is using one formula to figure that out. It's all these different things and everyone knows they're using different things, but – ah. How would you ever get an accurate picture?

[2:55 p.m.]

It draws me back to the registry. It's kind of the same thing. Different topic, different issues. I know that's something that you see government needing to take the reins on. Are there any jurisdictions that you know of that are doing a child care registry well?

Marianne Ellis: Not that I know of, no.

Nathalie Nadeau: We could look into it. I do think that, from a health system standpoint like what you've mentioned, they do have separate – we're starting on the right foot because we have one registry for the Island. It's not starting from like, 10,000 and everybody has their own. At least we have one. It's just a matter of having a true data collection and being able to pull the data correctly. It's more that kind of management around input and output of that data that needs to be severely cleaned up to be able to have an actual representation.

So, maybe the need is not as high as we think. We know that it's a need, but it's really important as a service provider to know exactly the need, because what I don't

want to do is open up lots of space and then close it after.

K. Bernard: Yeah. I think this might be my last question.

I know when I asked the question about spaces and workers, the answers that you gave me sound very much from a Chances perspective. This may not be a fair question to ask, you may not have your finger on the pulse and that's okay, but I'll ask it anyway and see. I know that there are other centres that I've heard from who are struggling with being able to have enough workers or early childhood educators so that they can fill the space. Is that something that you do see as an issue in other centres?

Marianne Ellis: I can see it being in remote areas, for sure.

Nathalie Nadeau: In rural. And also, within the new regulation, there is the requirement for the director to have their bachelor's degree. That's going to be a significant barrier. At Chances, I would say that 70 percent of our directors don't have it.

Marianne Ellis: Yeah, there are only three that have it.

Nathalie Nadeau: Out of 10 centres. They need to work towards it, and that's going to be a significant barrier as well. We're trying to find ways to support them and we don't know yet how long they have. We know that they're not going to get grandfathered. These are all challenges that we're kind of anticipating as well, but definitely from a recruitment standpoint.

It's just that I compare the after school to early year centres, it would be impossible to recruit in a remote setting. It would be difficult to recruit from an ECE standpoint. This is where kind of the line – and yeah, I'm really banking on – Chances, even if we don't have staff, we're pulling staff constantly from other programs to ensure that we have proper ratio. And it might be the experience in Charlottetown, even, for some centres.

Chair: Alright, one more, Karla.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

You don't have to answer this right now, but I just want to put this on the table. One of the questions that I like to ask and sometimes I forget is – someone else usually remembers, I know there's other people on the list – I'm wondering if there's anything that you would have liked to talk about today that we didn't ask about.

Nathalie Nadeau: Around early childhood, it would be great to speak a little bit more on school-age as well. That would be something definitely that would be a big need from our standpoint.

K. Bernard: I agree.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Thank you.

Rob.

R. Henderson: I just have two more questions here (Indistinct). It's more around to get the early years designation. I know in O'Leary, we operated six months before we could get the designation. We did get reimbursed 75 percent, but you're on the hook for 25 percent. There's a fair bit of risk in that.

I want to give a shout-out to your former protégé and champion in Verna Bruce. They persuaded an entrepreneur to provide some sponsorship and support, and I think the McCain Foundation – they were very creative in coming up with that.

[3:00 p.m.]

Do you feel that that's something that should still exist, those six months before you get the designation? Is there a way that you feel that there's a strategy that could minimize that risk? I know there has to be a standard and you have to get some sense of showing that you're able to deliver on what you say you're going to deliver, but that's a big cost; six months. You've got to find ways to find help for that and fundraising. It just seems like there's a problem.

Should that still exist? Maybe it should be waived, or it should be three months?

Nathalie Nadeau: It actually was waived completely last year. They've made the

changes that we don't need to operate for six months.

The issue that we come across now is that they do call out two times a year for designation. So, they can do it tomorrow or they can do it in six months; I have no idea. So, it's not (Indistinct). Plus, you need to get licensed first, and then you need to wait for designation afterwards. So, all the time that you spend waiting on the call for designation, you don't know how many months, so you need to be strategic.

My recommendation would be to eliminate the licensing and just designate; combine both. When you want to open a centre, they evaluate you based on the license and designation, and when they give you that paper, your funding starts there. There's no wait time. So, they've eliminated that wait, but it still creates an issue for a provider.

R. Henderson: Got you, okay.

My second question would be pertaining to your food cost increases. You're saying that you're still being reimbursed on 2018 numbers. That's six years ago. I don't think there would be a household out there that hasn't seen a food cost rise, or farmers; the increase in cost to produce that particular food.

How did that happen? There's no clause in there that is a rider for inflation? Or does it have to be renegotiated at a set time? Is this just open-ended at the whim of some political party saying they're going to promise increases to that?

Lucas Currie: How the formula works – I have the formula page here – every time ECE wages go up, there's a 25 percent buffer; it's just the way the formula works out. So, if you have \$100,000 in wages, let's just say that the funding would equal \$125,000. Every time wages go up, that buffer creates a little bit of room as well.

So, the only thing that has partially mitigated the increase in groceries and everything else is just due to the way the formula is currently structured, but in my opinion, it still should be tweaked a little bit more to provide additional buffer to account for those increasing costs.

And just to kind of paint the additional picture, there: ECE wages have gone up significantly since 2018, and as a result, that buffer has increased.

Nathalie Nadeau: But it's not equal to what it actually costs.

R. Henderson: So, what do you have to do? Do you have to try to lower your food costs, here?

Nathalie Nadeau: No, for us – again, we can afford it because we have so many centres. There are centres that don't pay as much rent, that have more profit versus another, so it kind of equals.

This is where the incentive of growing, if you're a smaller organization, would not be there. After you're paying everything, I can't see people making any profit out of this. It's very challenging and there are no grant opportunities to apply for, like grants for food and extra cost for materials. It increased significantly, the materials, as well.

Marianne Ellis: Absolutely.

R. Henderson: So, I know you're Chances and you don't represent the whole industry, but has the industry got any plans to try to deal with this issue? Is it a case of trying to get a renegotiation on the formula? Or is it a case you've got to put the kids out picking potatoes or something, or what? [Laughter]

Nathalie Nadeau: Definitely, we did voice that concern from the ECDA. The director meets with them every month, I think.

Marianne Ellis: Yeah, tomorrow actually.

Nathalie Nadeau: Yeah, every month. And nutrition, the space issue – that's where our avenue for different asks are kind of put on the table. When I have opportunities to meet with politicians or government, we always raise it there, but it's something that needs to be looked into.

Chair: Thank you, Rob.

Peter.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Chair.

I just have a couple of little things to clear up. I'm interested in understanding a little bit more about the federal funding for the \$10 a day. I know you receive funding through the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the Provincial government, and private donations. Is this coming through another... Where is the funding coming from?

Lucas Currie: It all incorporates into the EYC funding formula. Currently, if you look at the calculation, the parent fees are deducted from the funding you receive. If you charge parents "X" dollars, that gets subtracted from the funding you receive. So, what happens is, now that we're charging \$10 a day, we're subtracting less from the calculation, so it evens out.

[3:05 p.m.]

Instead of receiving it from the parents, now we're just receiving it from the EYC funding.

P. Bevan-Baker: And that's coming – 100 percent of it – from the federal government?

Nathalie Nadeau: To the provincial government.

Lucas Currie: The funding comes from the provincial government, but it's my understanding that the overall funding bucket is from the federal government.

P. Bevan-Baker: So, a question on that. Has that realized any potential savings for the provincial government now that the federal government has stepped in to subsidize daycare?

Lucas Currie: I'm not sure, to be honest.

Nathalie Nadeau: That's a great question.

Lucas Currie: We only really deal with it on our side, to be honest.

P. Bevan-Baker: Further along that path that we don't perhaps know the answer to: In Nova Scotia, just before Christmas, they announced a fairly substantial change in package for ECE workers there, which wasn't just wage increases but included a pension plan paid for in part by the provincial government, and also health

benefits, again paid in part by the provincial government.

I know you said earlier that really, things have improved to a large extent when it comes to wages and encouraging people to come and stay in the profession, but is that something that you would also like to see here? Maybe you do that in Chances already – do you? – given the size of the organization.

Nathalie Nadeau: The provincial government provides pension starting October 1st 2023. So, it just started, the pension plan for ECE, but the health benefits would be something definitely that would be – each centre, we provide health benefits for our employees, but not all organizations would provide that as well. Would you say?

Marianne Ellis: Yeah. There are other ones that you could get into, but yeah, for sure.

P. Bevan-Baker: Great. I'm good.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Robin.

R. Croucher: (Indistinct) I just wanted to speak more about the school-aged children. Can you elaborate just a little bit more on what you mean there?

Nathalie Nadeau: Yeah. In terms of the after-school care, there's not a universal program that allows the provincial government to give funding to subsidize this particular program. So basically, it's something that organizations are on their own. There are no opportunities for grants to subsidize, so it's really about trying to make it as efficient as possible. There's not a lot of regulation in terms of providing that curriculum base. Quality is very dependent on each centre.

So, it needs an overall kind of strategy and commitment to be able to do similar to what we did with early childhood education to support designation, to support in terms of having the school-aged youth worker in that grid, so that we're able to provide more sustainable salaries. In terms of growth, I would say I hear lots about infant spaces and child care spaces, but I hear equally the demand for after-school care as well. In

remote communities, they're screaming for it.

It shows in our survey as well. Even if people – I had communities begging. We'll provide some space, we will not charge you anything, but it's to actually have the human resources to actually provide the services. Until there's a subsidized program from government or a grant opportunity, there's no way that it's sustainable, even for us.

R. Croucher: And from a business standpoint, understandably so. You're talking two hours in the morning and potentially two hours in the afternoon. So, I can see where there are some major challenges there. That just makes sense. That was my question.

Thank you.

Nathalie Nadeau: Thank you.

Chair: Alright. I did have a couple of questions. I wanted to go back to – you said you're looking for spaces that already exist, so I'll just throw it out here for the record. Again, MLA hat.

The New London Community Complex is a space you may be familiar with, near New London. Is that the sort of organization that Chances might work with to do an early years centre? I think it's something they've looked at – if I remember correctly – at their board meetings, but the challenge is always to find that director-level person who's going to take the reins and set things up because you have to have the specific qualifications; not only ECE, but others as well.

So, that's my question. If that's – I can help connect you.

[3:10 p.m.]

Nathalie Nadeau: Absolutely. If we have a space available and we have the need in the community, we will work with organizations to set it up.

Chair: You potentially have that magic director who can do these sorts of things.

Nathalie Nadeau: Yeah. [Laughter]

Chair: Okay, great.

The other thing was that I'm hearing more and more, I think the proper term is "family home centres," are being set up. But of course, they're not held to the same standard as EYCs, which of course is one of the reasons that PEI leads the country; we have those high standards and the funding for the EYCs.

That's been built up over well over 20 years by ECEs who really didn't earn high wages but did it because they were passionate about helping children, so it was fantastic. That's something I don't know if we want to play too much with to lower the standard, because it does benefit our children.

I guess my question is: Looking at these administrative items, whether it's red tape for expansions, or applying for programs, or human resources, or just looking after the finances – I'm just thinking outside the box here, to throw it out there. Would there be an opportunity, for an organization like Chances, to look at multiple family home centres and kind of bring them under an umbrella as distributed EYCs? I'm really going outside the box here, but...

Marianne Ellis: It's an interesting idea.

Nathalie Nadeau: Yeah.

Chair: ... I thought I'd throw that out there.

Nathalie Nadeau: We could be a sister-type model to be able to kind of – that oversight and that support. That's something that I've not thought of. I'm interested in exploring that if that's a possibility.

Chair: I'm glad to hear you say that. I wasn't sure if it would be possible.

I'm sure there are a lot of headaches along the way to make that happen, but I know I get calls from constituents who do look after children in their homes, and of course they want to be eligible for the funding from the government and get the parent costs down to \$10 a day instead of \$35 or \$40, but they can't right now because they face all those challenges you already talked about. So, thank you for considering that.

My final question. I just wanted to just clarify the funding formula. It's outlined here in our package. I won't read it, but the whole idea here was to provide that 25 percent above because EYCs are private businesses. That way it allows "competition". So, if you're better at managing operational costs, then you get more of a profit. Right idea?

Lucas Currie: Yes, that's exactly right.

Chair: So, there's nothing that's specifically tied to any operational card whether it be rent, or whether it be food; that sort of thing.

Lucas Currie: No.

Chair: So, I just wanted to clarify. You're saying that really, the current funding you're getting from the government that gives you that 25 percent buffer just isn't enough. We just need an increase in funding to EYCs. That's basically what the ask is.

Lucas Currie: Yeah, exactly. It all depends on how you're set up as well. If you operate out of a school and you don't have rent, that centre is going to do a lot better than another one that pays \$50,000 or \$60,000 a year in rent, so it all depends. I can only speak to Chances. We have centres that don't pay rent and some that have very high rent.

For other organizations, I can't speak to them. I don't know what their situation is. Maybe they are in a situation where they have a lot of rent and that buffer isn't quite there to cover all those operational cost increases.

Nathalie Nadeau: And maybe, instead of being a blanket formula, it could be looked at in terms of the rent you pay or something, to be able to compensate. That 25 percent would be enough if you don't pay any rent – you would have enough buffer even with inflation – but most people rent their space. We've had increases in space for 30 percent, 37 percent increase in rental. The buffer becomes less and less when it's that high.

Chair: Thank you for that. There's definitely – as rent and space is more expensive, I know I've heard from a lot of EYCs that are pretty jealous of your relationship with the government and the fact you get places like St. Jean Elementary

at those low costs that allow you (Indistinct) and these sorts of things. You guys know very well because you have both.

Thank you. That ends my questions.

Are there any other questions? Alright.

Well, thank you so much for coming in. It was very informative. I think you've given us some ideas for new business here as well. Feel free to contact the committee; send us a letter if you have any updates. When you're done that analysis, I think we'd love to see that.

Nathalie Nadeau: Absolutely. Thank you so much.

Lucas Currie: I'd like to say just one thing. When Susie asked about the price, I said \$14 a day but it actually increased \$14.50 January 1st. Just for the record.

Thank you very much.

Nathalie Nadeau: [Laughter] Thank you so much.

Chair: Okay, we'll take a very brief recess while you guys clear.

[The Committee recessed from 3:15 p.m. to 3:21 p.m.]

Chair: ...call the meeting back to order here.

We're on item No. 4, new business.

Did anybody want to raise new business here? Education and economic growth.

Karla.

K. Bernard: Not really new business, but just to kind of follow up on what she said, did we already add to the work plan the idea of having them back in to talk about those final results?

Chair: Not yet. I think that's a good suggestion.

K. Bernard: I think that would be fascinating.

Chair: Okay, great.

K. Bernard: That might be a strong word, but I really do.

Chair: Further discussion on that? Everyone in agreement?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Chair: And to add to that, they very clearly said school-aged and after-school care is something they'd like to talk about. When we have them in again, they could talk about that too.

The other thing is it's pretty clear to me that maybe we should have the ECDA in as well, to have them talk about things. They are the keepers of the registry, the way I understand it. If the registry is an issue, maybe they have some insights into what can be done to improve that. Throw that out there, if anybody....

R. Croucher: Yeah, that's a great idea as well.

Chair: Okay, because they're not currently on our work plan. We have the department coming in on January 30th, so that's good.

Go ahead, Rob.

R. Henderson: Just even if they wrote us a letter to say that they're working on it. Are they going to improve it, or have they identified that it's a problem? Just as long as we can get – if they are the keeper of this registry, are they doing anything?

Chair: Yeah, that's a good suggestion. I'm thinking we invite them in, but in the letter, we say: "Can you respond about the status of the registry in the interim?"

G. McNeilly: You have the patient registry, the housing registry, and different registries that are all provincial government functions for the most part in Prince Edward Island. I want to know if they are responsible, or if this should be done through the Province – should have a master list.

Chair: That's a great question to ask the department when they're in on the 30th, but I can tell you, early learning and child care is an interesting one because most of it is provided by private organizations under government influence or regulation. So, it's

a little bit different than what you talked about.

The ECDA is who they have gone to through the registry, and they are the ones who represent those private organizations as an association, but it's worth discussing. I hear you.

S. Dillon: I'm sure it's tricky. The ground is ever changing. It's hard to manage those numbers sometimes if people are shifting and changing. They're at one centre and then they're at another centre, and ages change quickly. Infants – is it zero to 12 that is infant?

Chair: Up to 22 months.

S. Dillon: Oh, 22 months, okay.

Chair: Yeah, 22 months. In fact, that was one change they were considering: lowering the infant age from 22 months to 18 months. That would actually allow more people to go into the general child care instead of taking up infant spots.

[3:25 p.m.]

I think what happened was, they said we do not want to compromise that age, because we really feel that those kids, 18 to 22 months, need infant care.

That's a great question to ask the department again, as well. That's on my list, I know that.

Peter.

P. Bevan-Baker: I found that presentation really excellent. They came so well prepared, and they had great recommendations, and identified a lot of gaps and issues. But that is just one organization, and a big organization, and not really representative of many of the child care centres that exist on PEI.

I haven't run this by the owners, and I'm sure there would be an example in O'Leary or one of the other rural districts. I know in Souris, the place recently shut down.

In my own district, Merry Pop-Ins, run by Helen Green, is the poster child for all of the issues that Chances just described. They're

currently in rented space in South Tryon United Church, which has many times come close to the end of the agreement and they've always extended it, but if that child care facility was to go, the south shore would be in tatters.

I'm wondering whether they and/or others might come in to give a perspective of a much smaller organization and the challenges that they have in – in their case, maintaining, but – establishing perhaps a new child care centre.

Chair: Any further discussion on that?

Susie.

S. Dillon: I also wonder too, Peter, just to keep going with that – the centres that are nonprofit versus centres that are trying to make a profit. If that's your business and you're trying to make money at it versus like a Headstart – that all money that goes into the centre gets turned back into the centre; they're not looking to turn a profit – whether that makes a difference for centres as well, for people to try to make them viable.

Chair: So, Susie, you're saying maybe we should have a for-profit centre in and a nonprofit? Ground-level individuals?

S. Dillon: And ones that maybe aren't quite as big as Chances, to talk about maybe some of the troubles that they're having, just to give another (Indistinct)

Chair: Okay, further discussion?

Gord.

G. McNeilly: (Indistinct) When you apply and you get this funding, you can't be a for-profit; you have to become a not-for-profit. That's what I'm understanding.

Chair: No, that's not how it works. In fact, some of them are not-for-profit, some are for-profit, but that 25 percent buffer is where, if you run your business well and get your operational costs down, that's profit. You're allowed to run a profit, the way I understand it. We can clarify with the department when they come in, just to be sure.

G. McNeilly: Well, yeah. It might not be to that extent, but it's – something is....

Chair: Peter.

P. Bevan-Baker: Merry Pop-Ins is a for-profit organization.

Another aspect of this is the licensed, home-based day cares. That's another perspective, and they can now also be eligible for the \$10-a-day day care, but that required a larger subsidy from the provincial government as well. There was a story just last week actually, about one which has had to close down.

So, it might be worth getting – again, I can provide examples from my own district of home-based day cares if you want one, or some of them, to come in.

Chair: Great. I think I can think of a couple in my area as well that might be interested.

So, we have the department coming in on January 30th, and I think we're going to get a lot of information – I hope – from that meeting to clarify some of the different things, and it could help inform us on who we want in as well, possibly, from the front line. But Merry Pop-Ins, we should put on the list right away, because that is one –

P. Bevan-Baker: (Indistinct) make sure that she's okay. I mean, she can always decline of course, but I'll let her know.

Chair: Yeah, you can ask.

Did anybody have another EYC they would like to ask?

R. Henderson: I'd like to mention one in Tyne Valley, called the Tyne Valley Playschool – Holly Colwill – and it's a nonprofit run by a board of directors. It's not under the Chances umbrella. Just knowing its numbers are, like I say, quite high, but it has a different situation. It's limited to its space and its ability to expand is really difficult, but they do have staffing issues as well.

[3:30 p.m.]

I've kind of always said that in O'Leary, I can kind of help them a bit because I can get

space. In Tyne Valley, there's really no space. So, they have to get into building a structure or expanding their structure, and they're on a very small parcel of ground. Anyway, it's got complications with it. There are things that are their issue, not so much government's, but...

Chair: Alright, Gord.

G. McNeilly: Little Ducklings in Stratford. Nicole Ford and Sarah Larter, I think, operate that one. They can come in; they've got a few different facilities. It'd be good to hear their perspective if you're looking.

Chair: Just to be clear, what we're going to say is, "We'd like you to present on any issues you're facing and recommendations of how government can help," right? That's basically it.

And Susie; Headstart.

S. Dillon: Yeah, they would be much like, Robbie, they don't have – the limited space to grow, they're at Park Royal Church. They've been operating for a lot of years. They're not-for-profit as well.

Chair: Okay.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

S. Dillon: No, they're all on they're own. They have a board.

Committee Clerk: Sorry, I just missed the name.

S. Dillon: Headstart.

Clerk: Headstart.

Chair: Alright, maybe what we can do is go out, and if there are others, we can bring them up next meeting as well. That's a great start. That covers a lot. We don't have so much the east part of the Island covered.

R. Croucher: I can name another one (Indistinct)

Chair: I'm not going to put you on the spot today, Robin.

R. Croucher: I'm going to speak to them in the coming days – not that I haven't spoken

them, but – about what their willingness would be to talk about their issues. We've got a couple of very well run centres, but obviously the challenges are the same.

Chair: Alright, any other new business?

R. Henderson: Move for adjournment, Chair.

Chair: There is one thing that I wanted to bring up again.

Recently in the news, out in Calgary, they were very close to blackouts. It was because they were short of electricity and their neighbouring provinces did have any left to give them. Neighbours came together, and they conserved energy, and they did what they could to keep the lights on, but this is the sort of situation – I brought it up, and I think Rob has brought it up before, and others –

R. Henderson: We're assured by the minister there's no problems there.

Chair: I think it'd be good – I think we're writing a letter right now to....

Committee Clerk: Department of Justice and Public Safety and Maritime Electric, on the distribution of power in the case of extreme cold weather events, if I'm remembering all of that correctly.

Chair: I think it might be good to be proactive to have Maritime Electric in and talk to them just to say that it's a real thing. This is the time of year. How close are we right now?

R. Henderson: You better get the hamster on the wheel there, boys. Keep the power running here. I'll make hay on that one if she goes out. [Laughter]

Chair: No comments about plugging in my electric vehicle.

Alright. That's what I would say. I don't know if people are in agreement. Just if we get an invitation out, it's more likely we can get them in; that's all.

R. Croucher: I'd love to hear from them.

Chair: Okay. Any other new business?

Move to adjourn.

Rob, Susie, everybody. Good.

Meeting adjourned.

[The Committee adjourned]