

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Thursday, March 4, 2004**

**Committee Room 1**

**Affordable Housing Program**

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## **COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Ms. Marilyn More (Chairman)

Mr. Mark Parent

Mr. William Langille

Mr. Gary Hines

Mr. Jerry Pye

Mr. Gordon Gosse

Mr. Russell MacKinnon

Mr. Stephen McNeil

Mr. Leo Glavine

[Mr. William Langille was replaced by Mr. David Wilson (Sackville-Cobequid).]

[Mr. Russell MacKinnon was replaced by Mr. Keith Colwell.]

[ Mr. Leo Glavine was replaced by Ms. Maureen MacDonald.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Mora Stevens

Legislative Committee Coordinator

## **WITNESSES**

### Department of Community Services

Marian Tyson

Deputy Minister

Harold Dillon

Senior Director of Income Assistance and Employment Support

Tracey Williams

Executive Director of Program Branch

Shulamith Medjuck

Senior Advisor on Federal-Provincial Social Initiatives

Vicki Fraser

Communications Advisor



**HALIFAX, THURSDAY, MARCH 4, 2004**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**9:00 A.M.**

**CHAIRMAN**  
Ms. Marilyn More

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I would like to call this meeting to order, please. The Standing Committee on Community Services is going to be meeting on the Affordable Housing Program. I would like to welcome our presenters here today, and also our observers and guests. Thank you for coming. We will start with introductions.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Welcome. We're very pleased to have officials here from the Department of Community Services. I wonder if the deputy minister might introduce herself and the rest of her staff.

MS. MARIAN TYSON: Madam Chairman, my name is Marian Tyson and I'm the Deputy Minister of Community Services. On my left, with me, is Harold Dillon. Harold is the Senior Director of Income Assistance and Employment Support, and Housing for the Department of Community Services. Behind me we have a number of officials. Tracey Williams is the Executive Director of the Program Branch of the department, Shulamith Medjuck is responsible for federal-provincial matters, and we have Vicki Fraser from our Communications group.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Welcome. I understand, Ms. Tyson, you're going to have a few opening remarks and then Mr. Dillon is going to do a bit of a presentation.

MS. TYSON: That's correct, Madam Chairman. First, might I say, thank you for the opportunity to be here today and to provide some information about the Affordable Housing Program. I would just like to comment that Mr. Harold Dillon, who is the Senior Director of a group that includes Housing, was formerly a Regional Director of Housing for the central area of the province, so he has that background. In his current position, he is in the Programs Branch,

and the Programs Branch, under Tracey Williams, includes Housing as well as the other programs that the Department of Community Services offers.

In his current role, Mr. Dillon has direct and full responsibility for the Affordable Housing Program. In that role, he is responsible for the research, the consultation with the stakeholders, the dealings with the federal government on this particular program, and the community. So, following my introductory comments, which will provide some background, Mr. Dillon is going to do a presentation with overhead slides, which will take you through the program itself and give you some of the background of the program, and bring you up to date with the details of the program, what the program is doing and is intended to do. We would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

I want to say that we, at the Department of Community Services, are committed to improving the health and well-being of Nova Scotians through the delivery of a wide range of housing programs, including the Affordable Housing Program. We share your interest and your concern about affordable housing in this province. We are working with our federal partner, with the municipalities and with the community to develop a coordinated approach to addressing the affordable housing needs in this province and to rolling out this Affordable Housing Program in the most effective way for Nova Scotians.

Nova Scotia signed the Canada-Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Agreement in September 2002. We were the first province in Atlantic Canada to sign the agreement. Shortly after the agreement was signed, the department engaged in extensive consultations with housing stakeholders across the province. Those consultations formed the basis for the development of the details of the program structure for Nova Scotia and identified the need for additional research on affordable housing in this province.

Mr. Dillon will take you through in more detail, but some of the research findings indicated that Nova Scotia's affordable housing needs are widely dispersed and they are varied. Nova Scotia is unique in that it has a high percentage of home ownership, higher than other provinces. About 70 per cent of households in Nova Scotia own their own homes. Nova Scotia also has an aging housing stock, so many of our homes were built earlier than the homes in other provinces. Finally, lower-income earners in Nova Scotia tend to be renters.

We were very pleased when the federal government announced the Affordable Housing Program, and we're very pleased that the federal government has seen fit to invest in housing once again. Under the agreement, the federal government will provide \$18.6 million, and that amount will be matched by the province and the province's partners for a total of \$37.26 million to be put into affordable housing in the province. This investment will enable up to 1,500 units to be either renovated or built in Nova Scotia over the five-year term of the program. The actual number of units will depend upon the amount of assistance provided to each of the units, and will also depend upon the proposals that we receive in the department.

Nova Scotia has already announced two projects under the agreement. A new 15-unit townhouse complex has been completed in the Annapolis Valley, that's in the Middleton area, and six new semi-detached homes will be constructed in Halifax over the next six to nine months. The home preservation component of the program has also been announced recently and will commence immediately, utilizing the department's existing delivery system through our four regions in Nova Scotia. A request for proposals for potential new rental projects is expected to be issued very soon.

This year the province will invest a total of approximately \$2 million, that is this fiscal year - prior to the end of this month will invest \$2 million in the program, and funding for the 2004-05 year, next year, is part of our department's annual budget submission. The province expects to take full advantage of the program over the term of the agreement. In his presentation, Mr. Dillon, again as I indicated, will provide additional details about the program, including what it looks like and what it will do.

In closing these brief opening remarks, I would again like to thank you for the opportunity given to the department to outline the work being done in respect of affordable housing here in Nova Scotia, and welcome any questions from the standing committee.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Dillon.

MR. HAROLD DILLON: Madam Chairman, I'm going to be using some overheads to do the presentation. There are about 35 or 36 of them. We haven't created copies for people, but what we will do later today is send an electronic version to Mora, and she will be able to make copies available to all the committee members to have in their file.

Some introductory comments. As the deputy has alluded to, or perhaps previously at PAC, the Department of Community Services and its Housing Division has a mission to be a partner to Nova Scotians in fostering healthy communities through housing. In that vein our primary objective, among several, is providing safe, affordable, appropriate and adequate housing.

To give a bit of background on the programs the department offers that influence the issue of affordable housing, as many of you may know, we own about 12,000 public housing units which we administer across the province and which house about 19,000 tenants. We also administer, through the Social Housing Agreement, an additional 9,000 co-op and non-profit housing units or beds for 13,000 residents. We operate a significant Housing Repair Assistance Program, including federal-provincial and provincial elements, where we help about 3,000 households annually in maintaining their existing homes, and we also administer about \$180 million in a federal-provincial Social Housing Mortgage Program.

A very quick snapshot - and this will only be a couple of minutes on these agreements - just to clarify for people. The Social Housing Agreement, which was signed in 1997, covers

federal-provincial subsidies supplied to about 21,000 public housing units - they are referred to in the slide here. Really, they are a mixture of public housing and social housing, so it embraces all of the public housing co-ops and non-profit, all of that material. Those agreements are scheduled to decline and expire over the next 20 to 30 years - 2035, I think, the last agreement expires.

We have the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program, which we have just signed on for a three-year arrangement with the federal government; it expires in 2006. It provides the opportunity for us to provide major forgivable loans assistance to homeowners whose housing needs substantial repairs. And you know the reason we are here today, we have also signed the Affordable Housing Agreement which will direct funding towards low- to moderate-income earners, and that agreement is currently expiring March 31, 2007. I will move to the Affordable Housing Program itself.

Before I start on that program and what's on this slide, in 2000-01 the federal government announced that it was - I guess from some people's perceptions - getting back into the affordable housing market, an area that they had withdrawn from in the early to mid 1990s. They announced two programs, one of them - and the largest, perhaps of the two - was the Affordable Housing Program; the second one, which I'm not going to talk about today but was announced in parallel with the National Homelessness Initiative, which is not delivered by our department directly, nor is it delivered by CMHC, it's delivered by Human Resources Development Canada, which has recently changed its name to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, I believe it is, HRSD. So the National Homelessness Initiative is delivered through Community Action on Homelessness group committees or community committees in major urban centres across the country, one of which is located here in Halifax, and I'm pleased to see Angela Bishop from the Community Action committee is here.

The province is required to provide funds to match that program, not directly into the program, but to show the province provides matching funds aimed at the same agenda, annually. That program is also commonly referred to here locally as SCPI, Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative, I think is the common phraseology used to refer to that program, but it's the National Homelessness Initiative.

At the time they announced that they also announced the Affordable Housing Program. This slide just indicates the initial concept that was described nationally when the program was announced. At the time in Toronto and large urban centres across the country, there was a tendency for the development business and the industry to be involved in single-family and more high-end housing because there seemed to be a large demand for it, a large market margin there, profitability, and so on. In many of the large urban centres the development industry had stopped building rental housing.

The federal government identified that as a problem and announced the Affordable Housing Program as a means to try to increase the supply of market rental housing in urban centres. It didn't have a homeowner element when it was initially announced, it would allow grants of up to \$12,000-and-change to go to individual landlords, to simply encourage them to put more market rental housing stock on the ground, and it was not targeted to low-income individuals and so on, it was simply targeted to the market.

[9:15 a.m.]

When the program was announced, several provincial departments recognized that the national initial concept would not necessarily have application in each province. In early 2002, a framework was developed between the provincial ministers and federal minister, to allow for negotiation of bilateral agreements.

This Affordable Housing Program framework set out some principles which would enable the provinces to negotiate their bilateral agreements. It allowed for a mixture of rental and homeowner, which was a change; it allowed for new construction, as well as rehabilitation; it included a 10-year affordability requirement; it increased the forgivable loan amount from CMHC to \$25,000 per unit; it included much-improved flexibility on delivery; it would allow bilateral agreements to be based on individual province's priorities; it would be directed to low-to moderate-income households, as opposed to the original notion which was more market-driven; and the framework also identified the need for a longer-term federal strategy on affordable housing.

Bilateral agreements were negotiated with individual provinces, so every province was effectively left to deal with the federal government on their own on the bilateral agreements. Nova Scotia negotiated theirs in a couple of ways. First of all we convened meetings among the Atlantic Provinces to find our common interests, with the expectation if we had common interests we would have a better chance of negotiating some of our common priorities with the federal government, in a unified way. There were some Atlantic housing officials meetings aimed at formulating a standard, bilateral agreement. Once the general concepts were sorted out, each province was left to do its own. We signed a bilateral agreement, I think, in September 2002.

The bilateral agreement - and I think you have copies of it in your file - is a two- or three-page document expressing the intentions of the program, and it has three or four appendices at the back that give a very simple outline of four programs, which were aimed at increasing or improving affordable housing, and they are listed here: New Rental Preservation, New Home Ownership, and Home Preservation.

Shortly after signing onto the agreement we recognized, in Nova Scotia, that the needs and priorities of Nova Scotia would not necessarily be clearly enunciated in the agreement, so

we embarked on a series of stakeholder consultations, aimed at canvassing from the communities, organizations, municipalities and so on, what the perceptions were of need across the province. So a series of stakeholder consultations were held; they involved community groups, individuals, municipalities, and representatives from both the non-profit and private-sector organizations who had an interest in affordable housing in general and in the details of the Affordable Housing Agreement.

Some of the things we heard from those consultations - it became loud and clear that more research was required on need. It was perceived that the Affordable Housing Program, although it sounds large at \$36 million, is not a large amount of money in the overall scheme of things and would not be a panacea, it wouldn't be able to solve every affordable housing problem, clearly, in the country or in the province. So more research was required in order to perhaps focus the program better.

There was a clear indication that the funds should be targeted to lower incomes. If you will recall, the original program design was aimed at the market. This was a significant change in the general focus of the program. It was clearly indicated that delivery capacity was limited. Part of the cause for that is the federal withdrawal from social housing generally in the 1990s, followed by 10 years of inactivity, at which time most of the delivery capacity that existed prior to that in the province pretty well disappeared. Agencies, service delivery groups had pretty well gone out of business. So delivery capacity was a problem.

There was a lot of emphasis put on the need to improve the existing housing stock. As the deputy minister mentioned earlier, Nova Scotia has about 70 per cent or 71 per cent of its housing stock already owned by people, and some of that housing stock needs to be repaired. So there was quite a bit of emphasis put on the need to improve the condition of the current stock. There were also suggestions that the program could be used as an element of urban revitalization, as a means of stimulating new and improved housing in some of the declining neighbourhoods around the province.

We made a commitment and made a decision to embark on some research.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, Mr. Dillon. I'm sorry to interrupt. I'm just a little concerned that we've allowed 15 minutes for the presentation, and I know the main focus of the members today is going to be asking questions. So I wonder if you could perhaps pick out the slides that you think are most urgent for us to have as background information, and perhaps I could give you another five minutes.

MR. DILLON: Okay, that's not a problem.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.



MR. DILLON: The deputy minister mentioned that a lot of our stock is old. Recent statistics indicate that 22 per cent of Nova Scotia's housing stock was built prior to 1946, essentially pre-war. For comparison purposes, only 14 per cent of Canada's housing stock was built prior to 1946. So Nova Scotia's stock, on a relative basis, is quite old. Dwellings in need of major repairs are typically located in rural areas of the province, on a proportional basis. There is a greater proportion of owner-occupied dwellings in need of repairs than renter-occupied dwellings.

The incidence of housing affordability - there's been a lot of coverage recently about housing affordability. The incidence of housing affordability typically matches the population shifts in the province. So in an area like metro, where around 40 per cent of the population resides, typically those people constitute about 40 per cent to 45 per cent or so of the reported incidence of affordability around the province. So affordability is a general measure of need, and tends to follow the population patterns.

I have slides on population change here; I won't get into those. Perhaps one interesting one - we've looked at patterns of population change across the province, which is an important element we will be looking at as we receive proposals. Population is generally up 1 per cent a year or better in four or five municipalities, including HRM and areas like parts of Hants East and Berwick, it's slightly up in Kentville and so on, but it's down in most other areas of the province, seriously down in municipalities like Guysborough, Richmond, and Cape Breton Regional Municipality.

Interestingly, on this slide, we're aware of situations such as in the area of Antigonish, the municipality is experiencing positive growth but the town is experiencing negative growth. Similarly in Kentville, the town is experiencing positive growth but the municipality has experienced a decline in population. Overall, Nova Scotia's population is stable. These are indicators we will have to use as we receive projects and assess their need in the long term.

I'm going to try to skip forward to the programs themselves, very quickly if I can. I will quickly go through the individual four programs, and then that should be it. There are going to be four programs. This is the New Rental Program. These are the general program details we've refined from the research we've done. The maximum contribution level will be \$50,000 per unit. It will be eligible for non-profit and private-sector sponsors. It will allow new construction and conversion in projects of four units or more. The Housing Development Corporation may be a partner for some projects. The projects will go where low vacancy rates exist, where areas are in high demand, and may include rent supplement options. It will be targeted to lower-income households, and there will be an RFP out early in 2004. In fact, I hope it will be out by the mid to end of this month.

The Rental Housing Preservation Program. Again, the maximum contribution will be \$50,000, non-profit sponsors and owners. It will allow for the rehabilitation of existing units,

particularly ones that are at risk of being lost to the housing stock. Preference may be shown to UARs, urban areas of revitalization. The largest anticipated demand is going to be in HRM. It will follow at a RRAP rental model of delivery, for those of you who are familiar with that, and it will again target lower-income tenant households.

The Home Ownership Program. The maximum capital contribution, again, will be \$50,000 per unit, although we don't anticipate spending that on every unit. It will be for individuals and non-profit sponsors as a delivery agent. Subsidy or supply of contribution will be based on income of the household. Subsidy will flow directly to the purchaser in most cases, virtually all cases. It will be new construction only, and it is a program that is currently limited to urban areas of revitalization.

The Home Preservation Program. Again, \$50,000 per unit, although we don't anticipate spending that much; in fact, we think the range will be between \$20,000 and \$35,000 per unit, actually, on the ground, but \$50,000 is the ceiling. Eligibility will be homeowners within HILS, the federal-provincial Household Income Limits table, which effectively relates shelter costs in any given area to the income of households in the area. So it's a universal table of incomes that we use for all our public housing programs, RRAP, all of our federal-provincial programs.

Ten-year forgivable loan. Owner-occupancy, must require major repairs, they're listed there, and it will again be delivered on the RRAP rental model.

Just to wrap up quickly, where are we? Next steps. The agreement is signed, consultation and research is completed. We are in the process of writing the paper on the research. It should be completed in the next couple of weeks. We have promised, previously, to make copies of that available to the Public Accounts Committee, and I expect this committee will want a copy as well.

The programs have been refined. We are preparing the materials for delivery, which includes brochures, booklets, explanations of how programs work. We're getting that material ready to send for publishing, so we will be able to provide a rollout of all the material. One of the reasons for the delay here is we're really dealing with four completely different programs, although they're modelled under the same agreement. We have virtually four times the work to do, because there are really, in effect, four programs here.

As the deputy has indicated, we have completed a couple of projects. We've announced \$1 million for the Home Preservation Program, and about 30 units will be delivered there before the end of this fiscal year. The request for proposals is going out, I anticipate before the end of the month, and I think that's going to happen. It will be for new rental only, this part, with the emphasis on households in need. We expect projects from across the province. We anticipate there will be more requests from HRM, because statistics indicate that the rental market is larger here, the population is obviously larger and so on.

The Rental Preservation Program details are being finalized. We hope to announce that program, again, towards the end of the month or early in April. It will be delivered similar to the RRAP rental model, and we anticipate take-up substantially in HRM, where there are a lot of rental properties that need substantial upgrading and in industrial Cape Breton, in some of the small towns. That's about as quick as I could go, thank you.

[9:30 a.m.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry, but I think there was some indication when your group was invited that the presentation should last no longer than 15 minutes. I apologize for making you rush there. Our practice at this committee is to keep a list of the speaking order. Members of the committee who haven't spoken before get precedence over members who have already spoken. At the moment I have Jerry Pye and Mark Parent.

MR. JERRY PYE: Madam Chairman, first I want to acknowledge some of the representatives from the Department of Community Services who are with us today, Tracey Williams, Shulamith Medjuck and, of course, Harold Dillon, whom I have had the opportunity to work with over a number of years: Tracey, 16 years; Shulamith, equivalent; and Harold, somewhere around 20 to 25 years. However, I have to tell you I am extremely disappointed with respect to the way the Department of Housing has addressed the housing issue over the years I have been both in municipal and provincial government, particularly around 1993 when government started getting out of the housing program, deciding to leave it to the private sector to build some of those homes. I'm going to try to be brief, Madam Chairman, because I know there are a number of questions around the table.

You indicated you had to do additional research with respect to finding out where those needs are, with respect to housing in the Province of Nova Scotia. I do know, also, there was a 1998 report towards new directions in affordable housing in Nova Scotia and that report answered a whole host of questions, which the department never did bring any additional funding in to do those. I believe they may have been draft reports and were never finalized by the department, but nonetheless offered some very good initiatives toward housing.

I must say this is the only government - the present government - that I know, in fact, actually had the opportunity to at least increase some housing stock, preferably seniors' housing stock - and I'm talking about a 15-unit housing unit slated for a subdivision in Dartmouth North which, in fact, the province came back with an application to rezone that and put it into single family housing, rather than continue to leave it as seniors' housing. As you know, today, we have a number of seniors in need of housing.

The other one which was extremely disappointing was the Modest Housing Program where last year, two modest homes were sold by the Department of Housing to the private sector, rather than remodel and rebuild those homes and put them back on the market for

individuals who could partake in the Modest Housing Program. Also, there is the issue with respect to the rent subsidy program which falls under the Department of Housing, that doesn't even exist and there are no additional dollars to assist individuals in the rent subsidy program.

I wanted to ask a specific question and I just jotted this down because I wanted to make sure I was correct in getting the right information back. The question I want to ask is, what is the level and nature of housing needs in Nova Scotia, both in urban and rural communities? Can I ask that first question, Madam Chairman, through you to Mr. Dillon?

MR. DILLON: Housing need is measured in two or three manners and you have to understand, I guess, the factors that are affecting need in order to determine the prevalence of need across the province. One of the common measures is a common yardstick called 30 per cent of income, or how much of your income you are spending on shelter as a measure of affordability. Some people consider that, therefore, to be a measure of need, and I think that's from a generic model or a reasonably useful tool to decide the need, generally. But it, by itself, doesn't help focus where you should necessarily spend your resources because it doesn't necessarily indicate whether the person is choosing to pay more, whether the person has a high income, a low income and so on, so it is a relative measure of need that is important to be able to gauge.

Historically, when we look at, let's say, repair programs aimed at improving people's housing conditions, we look at additional factors. We look at affordability, i.e. how much income are they paying for shelter, and then we look at the corresponding issue, what is the condition of their housing because obviously a repair program is not aimed at their income, it's aimed at repairing their housing, making it warm, safe, dry, and so on. When we combine the two measures of affordability and housing conditions across the province, we find the prevalence of that does not follow population patterns. In fact, the prevalence of two factors - affordability and condition - tend to be distributed across the province in four equal instalments, if you want to call it that.

The prevalence of that need on Cape Breton Island, the prevalence on eastern mainland northern Nova Scotia, the prevalence in western Nova Scotia and the prevalence in HRM tend to be consistent at about 24 per cent to 26 per cent. In other words, of all of the need that exists across the province, about a quarter of it is in each of the four jurisdictions and that does not necessarily match the population trend. As you know, 40 per cent of the population is in HRM so if 40 per cent of the population is in HRM, 40 per cent, I think, or thereabouts, of the so-called affordability measure is in HRM. Only about 25 per cent of the combination of affordability and condition is in HRM so it creates an interesting apparent dichotomy of numbers but, in fact, statistics show that.

When we distribute our funding for, let's say, the repair area, we don't look at population necessarily, we don't look at affordability as the measure, we look at a combination

of affordability and housing condition as the means of distributing home repair money. If we look at the rental market, it's a different situation.

Clearly, the largest proportion of the rental stock is in metro, so if we have a program aimed at rental repair, 70 per cent to 80 per cent of that funding winds up going to HRM because 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the households reporting rental repair requirements are in HRM. So the programs we have tend to measure need on two or three factors, to ensure the money gets targeted where it's needed most.

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, I'm going to take this opportunity to allow my space to be occupied by our Community Services Critic, if that's okay with the other committee members.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: To take your second question?

MR. PYE: Yes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I would like to point out also that we have been joined by Michele Raymond, MLA for Halifax Atlantic, and Maureen MacDonald from Halifax Needham. Welcome. Next on the list is Mark Parent.

MR. MARK PARENT: I want to thank you for appearing before the committee. I want to thank the committee for their support in pushing this as an issue that should be high on our agenda and particularly, Gordie, your support in keeping this high on the agenda because it's an issue that's very, very important to me. Just a little background as to why, and I'm sure it's important to all the committee members, having grown up in a country in Latin America where homelessness was an endemic part of society, I was appalled to begin to see that spread north.

I remember visiting a Baptist church in Miami and walking over the homeless people to get into the church. Then I came to Toronto, and my old church in North Toronto had to open up its basement to homeless people in the City of Toronto, and then to Halifax; now even in Kentville, the area that I represent, we have homeless people in the centre square. To me it's appalling and shocking in a country this wealthy, that we have this problem. So I'm delighted that the federal government has seen fit to come back in and the province has seen fit to partner with them.

I realize that the problem is a problem across the province, but being a member who represents Kings County and particularly the Town of Kentville, I'm going to focus in on that, because I have anecdotal evidence but I don't have statistical evidence as to the prevalence of need and how we compare in Kentville with other areas. I know it's something I have to deal with all the time as an MLA, trying to help people find affordable housing of one sort or another in my area, and being frustrated about the lack of it.

Can you tell me whether Kentville is worse off than other areas in the province? Do you have that sort of breakdown, and then Kings County per se? I have the anecdotal evidence, as I said, but I'm sure all the MLAs have that as well. What's the level of need in Kentville per se, in comparison with the rest of the province? Behind that, will this be an area that one hopefully targets for more affordable housing?

MR. DILLON: I don't have any specific information at hand on homelessness per se in small communities. I gather, through the National Homelessness Initiative, through HRSD - and perhaps Angela would have some information she could provide you on that, perhaps after the meeting - they may have gathered information on individual small communities. I know the National Homelessness Initiative, the SCIP program, in the coming two- to three- year period has some funds available to address not just HRM and industrial Cape Breton homelessness issues, but I believe it has some funding, maybe \$0.25 million, over a period in each of the three or four regions to address issues related to homelessness in smaller towns and rural communities. I'm sure if you contact HRSD, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, they would be able to provide you with how that's going to go.

Kings County, and there are probably counties similar to that but let's just stick to Kings County, I know from the Housing side, Kings County and a lot of the rural municipalities, during the social housing/public housing heyday in the 1970s through the 1990s, placed most of its focus, through council resolutions and so on, on meeting the needs of seniors. So it's not uncommon among our regions in the more rural areas, and virtually most of the province except maybe industrial Cape Breton and HRM, for the public housing to have been distributed somewhere on an 85 per cent seniors focus and a 15 per cent family focus, because that was the evolution and delivery of the program back, let's say, 10, 15, 20 years ago. The focus seemed to be that there was a clear need to support seniors who were aging and their incomes weren't as good, perhaps, as they are now.

So through that whole 11,000, 12,000 unit delivery of that program at that time, in the rural areas, outside of HRM and industrial Cape Breton, there seemed to be a predominant focus on seniors. So the seniors' communities in that area are reasonably well-served. There may never be enough housing, but generally speaking on a relative basis they're reasonably well-served. There's quite a bit of public seniors' housing. But for families there is not.

I know in some areas, as I said, family units may only be 15 per cent of the provincial public housing stock in some of those largely rural municipalities. In an area where the population then starts to grow, such as Kings County and other counties, where they've been experiencing population growth, it's largely in the family area, and there's not a corresponding current supply of public housing that would have been built during that previous generation, let's call it, or decade.

So we anticipate in the Affordable Housing Program we will get requests from some of those areas that are now under-supplied with public housing, and it will come forward from sponsors, from municipal representatives, from our own department, representatives in the region. For example we've looked at waiting lists and we do know that there's a waiting list, a bit of a spike if you want to call it that, in Kings County related to families. We're well aware of that and we're anticipating this program will help solve that. That may be a common pattern throughout much of the Valley, where there's been significant population growth in the last 10 to 15 years, and no . . .

[9:45 a.m.]

MR. PARENT: It's particularly endemic in eastern Kings, where the population spike has gone up. I've suggested to the Kings County Council that they make an application, and I hope that they follow through on that; in fact, I'm sure they have. Another quick question, if you don't mind, is one other thing that's interesting besides the need for affordable housing - and I'm glad that you recognize that for my area - and that's models of affordable housing. I noticed - and I compared notes with the NDP candidate, we talked about this and he noticed the very same thing which I had noticed previously; this was his first time running - there's affordable housing in certain parts of Kentville, where there's no sense of ownership over the housing and the stock goes down, the housing isn't kept up, it affects the value of other houses around it, et cetera, and everyone seems unhappy with it.

Then in north Kentville we have a co-op housing program; we just celebrated 25 years. The sense of ownership, the sense of empowerment, the level of satisfaction of the people involved in that is very high. So we were talking about those. So I'm really interested in what models of affordable housing you find, in your experience, as being the best models to adopt? I have been singing the praises of this co-op movement, but understand that in other parts of the province it may not be as good an experience as I've had in Kentville. I'm interested in different models of delivery. Maybe there's no one model; again, maybe we need to be flexible. I'm sure there are other models than the two I've talked about.

MR. DILLON: Yes. If I can draw some parallels between the public housing model, I'm not sure if that's the Kentville version that you mentioned earlier, on the other side of town where it seems to be more an issue of pride and decline and so on. The public housing model, historically, and it's always been that way as long as I can recall, is aimed at housing the people with the greatest need. As a result, public housing, from an operating costs point of view and from the point of view of the people housed there, tends to take on a different profile than programs like co-op programs.

Co-op programs, from their inception and their design model, are based on a mix of incomes going into the project, people who pay market rent, people who get a subsidized rent, people from all different cross-sections of society. So they have a better chance - not

necessarily do they always succeed - but they have a greater chance of succeeding in principle because of the blend of incomes. If they make wise decisions around the self-management of their stock, then the stock will look better, there will be a better sense of community and so on. So in principle and in theory, that's the advantage they have over public housing, where people don't necessarily arrive there out of some common desire to be there, they arrive there because of their incomes, and they have very little choice but to seek that form of housing. There tends to be a concentration of entirely all low income, no cross-section.

We've looked at, could you change some of the nature of public housing to put in a blend of incomes. It becomes problematic. In most of the areas where we have public housing there are waiting lists of low-income people who need them. If you replace low-income individuals with higher-income individuals, it creates another social issue. It is something we're examining. We're looking at ways we could do that for the greater good and not displace low-income people, find other avenues to find those same low-income individuals housing.

The co-op model doesn't always work. We have a lot of co-op projects - not a lot but we have some co-op projects around the province that have been built on that same model you referred to in Kentville that are not functioning well at all, either because of a breakdown of the functional relationship among the members, deterioration of the stock, bad decisions in the management of the portfolio and so on, or the overall design or construction of the project from the get-go has resulted in the project not being able to sustain itself. The co-op portfolio is a mixed blessing around the province. It works probably in the majority of cases, but in a significant minority number of cases it's not working really well either. We're working with several of the co-ops - we call them projects in difficulty - trying to find ways to bring the co-ops back into a more sustainable, viable model while still holding onto the principles of a co-op, i.e. their membership management of the program, the mix of incomes and so on.

MR. PARENT: Two very quick ones and then that's it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Actually, I think we're going to have to move on and perhaps come back in the second round. Mr. Gary Hines.

MR. GARY HINES: Thank you, panel, for coming in today. My question is, because it's a new program, a relatively new program, I would like to have the tie-in between the three specific levels of government, and indicate to me if there is a participation on the municipal level. I would like you to address such things as administration, who selects the projects and maintains the implementation of projects, and who does the audit and performance reports, and if those are shared between three levels of government? I asked that question, out of all due respect for the present Prime Minister, but I'm a little skeptical that the last Prime Minister might have been above-board in administration, if that was his specific duty. So I ask that question to get a structure and I know that will probably take my allocated time to answer that.



MR. DILLON: Generally speaking, the program is administered by the province, so it's under my responsibility - as Marian said, my full responsibility. It sounds like a rather heavy burden but I must say the burden is being shared by staff I have, by colleagues of mine and certainly, by the deputy and her staff so it is a shared responsibility, at least in the department. We are allowed to, in fact, recover some of our administrative costs as part of our share in contributing to the program but it would be a very small share.

You mentioned the municipalities, we have had excellent meetings with municipalities, pretty well right across the province about the program, explaining it to them and engaging them in how they can contribute to the program. I know regional director's staff have met in Yarmouth with the Mayor and areas like Shelburne, Queens County and probably Kings, I know in Cape Breton, and we've had some very good meetings here in HRM with the Mayor and members of his staff.

The municipalities are very interested in the program, they're interested in using it in a way to really improve their housing requirements. Some of the municipalities have indicated a willingness to put some contributions on the table, the contributions typically won't necessarily be cash but they will be in kind contributions which are permitted under the program: land, tax incentives, services, technical services and so on. We are looking forward to more ongoing discussions with municipalities about how they can both identify projects or areas in their area that need to be attended to and also a way that they can bring some money to the table.

Selection of projects you mentioned. In the new rental area, we've anticipated and our current thinking is that we will engage a committee approach to looking at projects, rather than just the department simply receiving projects and saying, okay you win, you lose. We're talking about putting a committee together comprised of housing specialists or experts, who can help us properly ensure that the projects go to where the need is the greatest. We are thinking we would probably have, at the moment, two committees, probably, an HRM committee, because we anticipate a lot of requests from HRM, so we would have staff from HRM, representatives from the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, maybe from the Homebuilders Association and perhaps a citizen at large, maybe, and departmental representatives, engage as a committee to review proposals that come in and decide which ones have the most merit against some eligibility criteria.

We would also have a committee for the rest of the province and that committee would probably include regional directors from the department and maybe some municipal representatives, again, Affordable Housing Association representatives, a committee that knows the broader, province-wide picture, as well as department staff, and look at projects that come in from across the province to try to gauge where the best decision should be made regarding those projects. That will be the process that we are currently envisioning that will be used to receive proposals back and develop recommendations to government.

Audit and performance. The agreement requires a fully-detailed audit at the end of the program. As you know, this program will be delivered through the department and through the Housing Development Corporation, they're audited every year for accuracy and the overall program, there's a requirement for us to provide an audited result to CMHC at the end of the program.

MR. HINES: So for the most part the federal government writes the cheque and the administration and most of that type of thing are done by your department?

MR. DILLON: Yes, 100 per cent in our department.

MR. HINES: Are you answerable to the federal government? Does discussion take place or do they approve the projects?

MR. DILLON: No.

MR. HINES: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Keith.

MR. KEITH COLWELL: I have questions for the deputy minister. First of all, has the government committed to the \$18.63 million, the provincial contribution and when is that going to come in place, since we are already two years down the road into a five-year program and there's been very little action taken?

MS. TYSON: As we move from one year to the next through the program, that's part of our normal budget discussions with government. The money that is being spent this year - which Mr. Dillon made reference to, in terms of home repairs - that certainly has been committed. We are currently in discussion with respect to next year's budget which will enable the projected number of activities to take place in the next year. As I said, we anticipate being able to fully participate in this agreement during the five-year period of the agreement.

MR. COLWELL: In November, the government reported that they were going to cut \$4.5 million from the Housing budget in the 2003-04 budget, and planned to renegotiate the Affordable Housing Program with the federal government. Has that happened?

MS. TYSON: The province hasn't spent and doesn't intend to spend one cent less this year on housing than it did last year, so there has been no reduction in the amount of money spent on housing projects. The \$4.5 million that you're referring to is as a result of a fund that the province has available, it's a surplus fund for contingencies interest fluctuations and so on. The province is able to draw down on that fund or to contribute money to that fund, and the province has done both. The \$4.5 million was a draw-down on that fund for housing purposes, so although the \$4.5 million was reduced on the provincial side, that was made up from the

fund, which is controlled by the province, which we are able to draw down on. In other words, the expenditures remain constant, which is the object of that fund.

MR. COLWELL: With the lack of activity we've had, a very little amount of money has been spent on this program, let's say two years into it. When are you going to accelerate it so some of the people in the community, who are so desperately in need of housing, are going to be able to get this? Is it going to be this year, is it going to be next year, or is it going to be in the fifth year?

MS. TYSON: I think we are on track with other provinces. The federal minister was in town in December, around the time of the Public Accounts and he made a public statement, I recall, that Nova Scotia was on track, that he was satisfied that we were doing roughly the same as other provinces. It takes time to get started in a program of this nature, to do the research, to identify the areas of need in the province and to identify just what types of programs are most useful to Nova Scotian clients.

As the program progresses and as you are seeing now, more announcements are forthcoming and it is being speeded up and you will continue to see additional announcements and more activity from now on, through to the end of the five-year period. We do anticipate being able to, as I said, fully utilize the funds available, we don't intend to leave any money on the table.

MR. COLWELL: I have a specific question and would ask the deputy minister to answer this, not Mr. Dillon, if possible. What special attention have you paid to the Black community in this because there is a serious housing problem in the Prestons, a very serious housing problem? What special attention have you paid to that in your department?

MS. TYSON: I'm sorry but I'm not able to say specifically, I would have to refer that to Mr. Dillon to see if he can respond to that question.

MR. COLWELL: I'm very disappointed in your answer with that, so will the community be.

MS. TYSON: Would you like Mr. Dillon to respond to that?

MR. COLWELL: Yes and it's something you should know about, actually, as deputy minister.

MS. TYSON: Certainly I will say, I am well aware of the needs in the Preston area and other areas of Nova Scotia, myself and staff involved in housing, generally. One of the things they attempt to do is to identify the areas of greatest need and to respond to those areas of greatest need through the various programs we offer. In general, I can say that we are very interested in assisting the areas of greatest need, which would include that particular area. I

know work has been done in that particular area, I don't know the details off the top of my head, but Mr. Dillon can probably tell you about some of the activities.

MR. COLWELL: Yes, if he could answer that I would appreciate it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Dillon, could I just suggest you give a short answer because we have quite a long list and we have to finish the questioning around 10:45 a.m. because we have some committee business and we also want to give you the chance to make a closing statement.

[10:00 a.m.]

MR. DILLON: The very short answer for the Affordable Housing Program is, virtually the day it was announced - and I sit on the Preston Area Housing Fund Board - I made the board aware of the program. We indicated, at that time I was regional director of head office, that we would like to engage the board of the Preston Area Housing Fund and the communities in doing a project out there. We put into head office a notice that we would like to do 10 or 20 units of affordable housing out there on land - as Keith probably is aware, that we own around Lake Eagle. So we have identified the need out there and the need to respond to it. I understand that through the Home Preservation piece there will be projects or housing in the Preston communities, like in many other communities, that will be helped.

We also spoke to Doug Sparks, who is the Executive Director of the Lucasville-Upper Hammonds Plains Association, around community development that they want to undertake out there under the Affordable Housing Program, aimed at meeting the needs of their constituents. And we had these conversations with a great many communities around the province, not just poor communities, not just Black communities, not just any particular kind of community, but I do know we've had those discussions with those two individual communities.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I have Stephen, Gordie and myself, and then we will start round two of questioning. Stephen.

MR. STEPHEN MCNEIL: My first question is, I've heard a lot about low and moderate income; what do you classify as low and moderate income?

MR. DILLON: One of my slides, I have it in here but I didn't get to show it . . .

MR. MCNEIL: Just give me a brief dollar amount.

MR. DILLON: I think I mentioned earlier that the federal-provincial housing programs have a table of incomes called HILS, Household Income Limits. They are the income limits that are the ceilings under which, in theory, in a particular area you may run into a housing

affordability problem. It's a table of incomes related to the household size, related to the area of the province where you live and what the current market rents are in that area of the province. So it's a table that sets out income limits, and those are considered by the federal and provincial governments to be the low- to moderate-income tables.

MR. MCNEIL: Here in Nova Scotia, we've developed 15 units in Middleton, six detached units in Halifax, if you have a \$50,000 income - is that . . .

MR. DILLON: For Halifax?

MR. MCNEIL: Yes, six detached units with \$50,000 - am I correct on that?

MR. DILLON: Upper income, those, yes.

MR. MCNEIL: We've now set aside \$1 million for 30 homes - \$50,000, most of those people, I'm sure, are warm, safe and dry.

MR. DILLON: Which individuals?

MR. MCNEIL: Anybody with a moderate income of \$50,000. What are we doing for the low-income earners in Nova Scotia? We have a crisis in Nova Scotia housing. We have a department that's going to take \$4.5 million, where else could we put \$4.5 million and double it to \$9 million to deal with a crisis in this province that is immediate, right now?

MR. DILLON: Okay, I need to correct the perception here. The income levels to get into the home repair program that we announced a couple of weeks ago are the HILS, those Household Income Limits across the province. The highest income limit on those programs, for a three-bedroom household in metro, makes \$35,000 a year. Most of those income limits across the province are in the \$20,000 to \$25,000 range, so it's nothing anywhere close to \$50,000.

The \$50,000 you may be referring to is in reference, probably, to the six-unit project that was announced for Creighton-Gerrish last December. It's a homeowner model in the urban area.

MR. MCNEIL: If I may, that's all we've done. Those are the six projects. We've now just put a program together of \$1 million that you're talking about, these 30 homes that are around \$35,000. We are now into almost two years getting into this project, and that's all we've done, we've built a unit which is in my riding in Middleton. That's all we've done. We have a crisis facing Nova Scotians here in housing, and we're going to take \$4.5 million out of Community Services when we could leverage that money and get \$9 million, a \$9 million value to deal with the crisis that's facing Nova Scotians.

Are we going to delay? The crisis isn't disappearing. Are we going to wait until the next budget year? What are we doing? Why would we even be entertaining cutting our budget \$4.5 million at a time when we could deal with the crisis? The federal government is already on record on matching the funds, to take it to \$9 million, easily.

MS. TYSON: Can I just clarify that there was no cut to the amount of money spent on housing.

MR. MCNEIL: Whether you cut or transfer the money, we have a program here that would leverage \$4.5 million of federal money, dollar for dollar, they would match us, and we're not willing to do it?

MS. TYSON: We fully intend to leverage this program.

MR. MCNEIL: Can you tell this committee, this \$4.5 million that's being talked about being removed, will it go into this Housing Program?

MS. TYSON: I can tell you that during the course of this agreement, which is a five-year agreement, that the province - in my understanding - intends to fully work with the federal government, and there will be an \$18.6 million contribution on the part of the province and its partners, so that we can take full advantage of the \$37 million program.

MR. MCNEIL: Madam Chairman, I don't want to take any more of my allotted time, but that's great news. What about the 300 people who are presently on the streets of Halifax looking for some kind of housing, looking for a place to live? The only thing the province has been able to do, and that's all of us collectively, is go down and chase them out of the buildings where they're trying to find "a dry, warm, safe place to live." When are we going to do it, three years from now when that 300 is gone to 600?

MS. TYSON: You're in the area of homelessness now as opposed to affordable housing. Mr. Dillon did . . .

MR. MCNEIL: When you are without a home, it's homelessness, affordable housing or not. What are we going to do with those people? They don't fit into the program. In developing this program, the basic framework, the province gets to set the priorities. Is that not a priority?

MS. TYSON: Just to clarify, you are now referring to homelessness, which is a different program than this \$37 million program, the Affordable Housing Program. Moving to your question on homelessness, I would say that you may wish to have a look at the document that was produced by HRDC, outlining 63 projects for homelessness in the last three years and the cost of that. I have this available if you would like - in fact, I can give it to you if you would like to have it. I would say again that Mr. Dillon has indicated that the province is required to

match, dollar for dollar, the funds spent on homelessness. This is done mainly through the community committee. They identify the projects that they think should go forward. But that's a different topic entirely than the Affordable Housing Program itself. I'm not saying that it isn't extremely important, it is.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Dillon, is there any plan in place to deal with that issue, right now?

MR. DILLON: Yes, in addition to what the deputy has mentioned on the National Homelessness Initiative, and that's the report of the previous three years of activity, there's - and Angela could correct me here - \$5 million to \$6 million that has been identified for the next two to three years to continue with that program. In fact, I understand that as a result of their proposal - this is not my reason for being here today, the National Homelessness Initiative, but they've just recently closed a proposal calling and several proposals have come forward to further address the needs of providing housing related to the homelessness issue in HRM.

MR. MCNEIL: So we're going to deal with that problem three years from now?

MR. DILLON: No. That group has been dealing with it the last three years. There have been projects that have been built and currently house people who would have been among the homeless population, say four years ago. There's still some indication that there are some homeless individuals in the city. The new proposals offer the opportunity to address some of those needs. Again, I'm neither on the committee or involved in the vetting of those proposals. I understand that will be part of the National Homelessness Initiative through the Community Action on Homelessness.

MR. PARENT: Could I just have some kind of clarification about the different programs? We have the Affordable Housing Program, which is administered by the province, the homelessness one is administered directly by the federal government, you said earlier?

MR. DILLON: They fund that specific program entirely and deliver it through the Community Action on Homelessness or community committees in the community. The community committees effectively create the community plan and indicate where the priorities should be and provide the information to HRSD.

MR. PARENT: And they're doing that directly, or not doing that directly, as Mr. McNeil pointed out?

MR. MCNEIL: What I'm pointing out here, Mark, is that we are desperately trying to solve our financial issues on the backs of people who can least afford it. When we have \$4.5 million that we could be leveraging to get \$9 million to deal with the housing crisis in Nova Scotia (Interruptions)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think perhaps we should be directing these questions through the Chair. I've allowed a bit of leeway, because I think the committee members are interested in the whole huge issue of affordable housing. We realize that you came here today prepared to speak about one aspect of that, but our broader concern is where that fits into this larger issue and also where the gaps are, and the relationships and bridges. We will be pursuing other aspects of that broad issue. If there's any information you can provide that comes out of the questions from the members, we would appreciate it, and if you don't feel comfortable in answering those questions, just let us know. I think the committee members have a right to ask the questions.

MS. TYSON: Madam Chairman, we've been doing that, and we are very pleased to do that. We did prepare for the program in particular, but as you can see we are attempting to answer questions in a broader sense. If there's something we can't answer immediately, we would be happy to get that information back to you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Next I have Gordie.

MR. GORDON GOSSE: We've heard a lot about the \$37 million housing agreement and it has largely gone unused for the last year, actually, with the 15 units in Middleton and the other six announced here for the HRM. Income thresholds and the rent, I guess, it is about \$600 a month for those units in Middleton, I could be corrected there on the pennies. The Minister of Community Services, the Honourable David Morse, indicated on several occasions in late 2003, that the government would be taking swift action on the bilateral agreement. Well, we all know sitting here today that's not true, by any means.

According to the 2001 Census, 60 per cent of the rental households in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality are spending over 30 per cent of their income on their rent. Another 17 per cent of homeowners are spending more than 30 per cent of their income on major home costs. That means that over 11,000 people in CBRM are at a risk for homelessness because they're spending too much money on housing. I'm glad that Mr. Dillon mentioned before, population change is a factor in this equation. Why have no projects been announced to ease the housing pressures in Cape Breton?

MR. DILLON: No specific project for Cape Breton has been announced but certainly the Home Preservation Program, that was announced a couple of weeks ago, actually, we had it started up in Cape Breton, unofficially, before Christmas, with regional staff starting to identify homes in that area that could benefit from the program. I don't know the numbers today of actual homeowners who are now being proposed to be helped under that program in the current fiscal year, but I do know as much as \$200,000 or \$300,000 or more has been provided to that region to address some of the substantially substandard homes that are in Cape Breton. I do know that is going on but I don't have a measure of actual numbers, effective today.



MR. GOSSE: These were unofficial meetings - they were not public - that were held to discuss this project, you had just mentioned?

MR. DILLON: No, well what we did is, knowing that the announcement was going to be made a couple of weeks ago, we advised the regional directors to start going through their applications, visiting homeowners they knew had major needs, and start the paperwork towards getting projects up and going that would involve major repair of existing housing, so that that money could be committed in the current fiscal year.

MR. GOSSE: Could you tell me who those officials were, the unofficial meetings or whatever, but I would like the names of the officials in on the meetings. Was that regional housing, was that the director, Cyril LeBlanc and the director of Cape Breton Regional Housing, Joan McKeough? Are those the people who were involved in this meeting?

MR. DILLON: The information on the start of the Home Preservation Program would have been relayed to Cyril LeBlanc, who is the regional director down there, and his program manager, Jim MacArthur.

With respect to the general prevalence of people paying more than 30 per cent of their income for the current housing they have, the Affordable Housing Program - when it was announced federally and it's overall objective - is to create or sustain affordable housing. It's not able to be used as a mechanism to address people who have an affordability in the current rental housing they're in. If the rental housing already exists and it's already in good condition, Affordable Housing can't address the issue that they are, perhaps, paying too much of their income for rent. The Affordable Housing Program has not been designed as an income supplement tool, it has been designed as a housing creation and fix-up tool.

So that general issue, whether you own your home or you rent your home, if the housing you own or rent is in good condition and there's nothing wrong with it, this program is not designed to be an income supplement tool, so it wouldn't be able to address households in that situation.

MS. TYSON: Could I just add that . . .

MR. GOSSE: No, I only have a second because I'm the last guy on the questions here and I just want to ask one more thing before I finish up here. I just want to know, with this program and these houses that are being built, has any thought been given to the Kyoto aspect of this and applying for some of the Kyoto money to put on this project. Would that be something that would be entertained by your department, that they make these energy-efficient homes in line with the Kyoto?

MR. DILLON: There's no question it would be entertained by us and I expect that will be a criteria that will be used in assessing proposals that come forward under the new rental

program. The projects will have to show sustainability, viability and a solid capacity to sustain themselves in the future. Certainly, Kyoto Accord issues around energy conservation, or in saving on materials and so on, would clearly be looked at as a positive in reviewing proposals. It is more problematic in fixing up people's existing, very substandard housing. The funding available in the program, in many cases, will just be sufficient to get those houses up to what I call a safe, warm, dry standard, let alone enhancing that and going beyond into a much more enhanced approach. The program doesn't disallow it, if the funding is sufficient to allow some of that, it can be considered.

[10:15 a.m.]

MR. GOSSE: Thank you. Madam Chairman, I am going to ask to step aside here and give up my seat to my distinguished colleague, the member for Halifax Needham.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just briefly, Ms. Tyson, did you want to make a brief response there?

MS. TYSON: I was just going to add that requests for proposals will be going out shortly and we do anticipate proposals from all areas and would welcome proposals from the Cape Breton area.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I'm going to ask the vice-chairman to take over because I want to ask a question.

[10:17 a.m. Mr. Mark Parent took the Chair.]

MR. HINES: Mr. Chairman, if I might. I'm a little bit disturbed at the format that's taking place today, where we're substituting and substituting throughout the meeting. I think if somebody is going to sit at a position at the table on a committee that we, in fact, should have that member for the day or for the session at least. I don't think that is the way this thing is structured, that we continually substitute so that the whole caucus can participate, regardless of which Party it is. I don't know if you have a problem with that but I do.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will take note of your concern and perhaps at the end of the meeting, after we have had our witnesses, we can discuss that, Mr. Hines.

MR. HINES: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The honourable member for Dartmouth South-Portland Valley.

MS. MARILYN MORE: I have to say one of the big shocks when I became elected was the number of calls from constituents who were in difficulty because they were having trouble with their current, or finding, accommodation. I hadn't expected to develop such a

quick, close working relationship with staff of the housing authorities and the non-profit housing societies right off the bat, but that became one of the big issues. When I did a little research I realized there's probably a good reason for that, in that 52 per cent of Nova Scotians who have an earned income, earn less than \$20,000. I'm wondering, how is this new bilateral agreement going to relieve some of the stress on the non-profit housing societies and the housing authorities?

I will give you an example from my own constituency. Within the last week, the board of the Dartmouth Non-Profit Housing Society has decided, after a long investigation, that they're actually going to have to sell approximately a dozen of their units, in order to raise enough money to keep the rest of their housing stock going. So as a result, about eight single moms and their families are being put out of their subsidized housing. This is of a huge concern to them, they can't afford to move, they can't afford the time to even look for other housing options and they're actually in a major crisis. How is this funding going to help non-profit organizations and people on very low incomes who have no discretionary money left to actually physically move? How is it going to help them?

MS. TYSON: I will make a couple of general comments and Mr. Dillon may be more specific. The money will help because it's \$37 million more than what we had and it will be going into new rental units or homes, or it will be used to repair, maintain and preserve existing rental units and homes, so it is the best thing that has happened in the last 10 years in the housing field. It won't do everything, we have many needs in the province, and it's only one program, but it will help. We understand the federal government is considering coming forward with additional programs, and we're very interested in those programs. I will ask Mr. Dillon if he has more specific comments in line with your questioning.

MR. DILLON: I'm not fully up to speed on the current situation with Dartmouth Non-Profit in the last week or two, but in my former role as regional director, I was aware of some of the difficulties Dartmouth Non-Profit was having within their portfolio, and it's not unusual. Non-profit groups from across the province that took part in the federal non-profit program 20 years ago, several of them are experiencing difficulties. Some of those difficulties stem, and Dartmouth Non-Profit is one of these, from their decisions back 20 years ago to invest in existing housing stock as opposed to building new housing stock. That was a phenomenon that was pretty common here in metro, where the delivery of the program was seen as easier and quicker if groups invested in buying existing stock rather than designing and building from scratch.

While it was an expedient and quick way of delivering the program by the non-profit groups and their delivery agents back then, and the department was never involved at that stage, it was a 100 per cent federal program. The chicken, to some extent, has come home to roost. A lot of those older purchased properties were not upgraded at the time of purchase, and they now suffer serious decline, premature aging you might say, and a lot of the non-profit groups

are struggling to figure out how to meet the needs of their tenants and the needs of their properties with the resources and the rents they have.

So a substantial review of the portfolio in Dartmouth Non-Profit, I know, took place last year. It involved the board, the department, their auditors and created a business plan, how to make the portfolio viable. The department made some important decisions that benefited the group. The group then had to make some decisions of their own around their stock. This appears to be one of the decisions they made. Again, I've been out of the region for about six months now, and I'm not entirely caught up with all of the individual decisions they're making.

I will tell you, though, that the Affordable Housing Program, one of the rules that CMHC placed on it when they rolled it out was that projects or properties that were in receipt of ongoing federal-provincial subsidies as part of another program would not be eligible for the Affordable Housing Program money. In other words, it was not intended to re-subsidize a project that already gets subsidy. Effectively they disallowed piggybacking this funding on federal funding that's already going into a program.

The province did argue that and debate that and tried to negotiate some flexibility on that. At this stage, if projects like that came forward for assistance, we would have to look long and hard at the details of the agreement to see if there is a way to provide some modicum of assistance to a group like that under this program. In principle, the federal position is federal money cannot be applied to projects that already receive ongoing federal-provincial subsidies.

MS. MORE: Just in closing, Mr. Chairman, that astounds me. To me the point is to get a safe roof over these people's heads. It just doesn't make sense to me to have guidelines and red tape in place that would prevent the voluntary sector from performing their valuable function. If the government's not going to provide housing for these people, and community members get together as a volunteer board and create these non-profit housing societies, my heavens, I would think that every level of government possible would be trying to support them and maintain what we have instead of worsening the situation.

I really plead with you to rethink that, if you have any discretionary or flexibility ability within the money that has come from the feds, because, my heavens, what are we going to do, just allow these people to go out into the street with nowhere to go? Believe me, the housing market for low-income families in Nova Scotia is so tight, they literally have no place to go. It's desperate.

MS. TYSON: That was our concern as well. We did try, but I will say that if a new program is coming along and we have an opportunity to put that view forward again to the federal government, we will do our best to do that.

MS. MORE: I appreciate that, but there are a lot of people who are in crisis now and they can't wait until a new program comes along. I just feel we all have to work together to resolve this. It has reached a crisis point.

MS. TYSON: We will take a look at the particular project that you referred to, and we will get updated information and get back to you as to what we can do to help in that situation.

MS. MORE: I appreciate that, thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Our next questioner is the member for Sackville-Cobequid.

MR. DAVID WILSON (Sackville-Cobequid): Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank my colleague for allowing me to use some of his time for a couple of brief questions here. As Housing Critic for our Party, I've done research over the last six to eight months. It's astonishing to see what's going on around the province and the need for affordable housing. I think since the federal government downloaded housing onto the province a few years back, they've realized that they may need to get back into it. I think the first agreement was signed in 2001, with British Columbia.

I have some concerns with the number issues we're dealing with here. I'm always reading about 1,500 units being addressed, either renovated or new housing in our province in this five-year deal. We're almost two years - 18 months - into the deal since we've signed it, and we do have 22 units. I'm concerned, and I'm sure many of my colleagues here, and across the province - the MLAs - and residents are concerned about how we're going to actually achieve that number in the next three years.

For example, across the provinces, just some of the examples of what other provinces have done: Manitoba has addressed at least 188 units; Saskatchewan, 207 units; Alberta, 621 units; I think British Columbia, if not in the hundreds, has addressed at least 1,000 units. So when we look at Nova Scotia and we see 22 units, that concerns me. I don't think we're going to meet the 1,500 number that we've been hearing about. It would be great to see it if we have.

One way of reaching that is to have applications from the private sector, non-profit or just the private sector. Other provinces have put out calls for proposals within months of signing the agreement. Some of them have accepted proposals, even though they didn't have the criteria. The Department of Community Services here in Nova Scotia already had a vision document on the future of housing in Nova Scotia. I'm wondering why the delay of 18 months now. I know the minister announced several weeks ago that they're going to address that and hopefully start accepting applications. I saw the slide earlier, from Mr. Dillon, about research that was done. I think the research was there, and if we didn't have it, we could have gone to other provinces in Canada.

My question is, why are we 18 months into the project and still haven't had any proposals from the non-profit groups or developers? I've heard from many levels of government that are concerned with it, the federal government recently with the Prime Minister announcing more agreements down the road, and I've heard from municipalities throughout the province wanting to get involved in this. Ms. Tyson has said that the municipalities are interested in teaming up with us on this affordable agreement. So I'm wondering, why is it 18 months, and when - do you have a date? I know you said maybe a couple of weeks, but do you have a definite date?

[10:29 a.m. Ms. Marilyn More resumed the Chair.]

MS. TYSON: I would just like to comment. I believe the department staff have taken - and I support fully the approach taken by department staff - a responsible approach to attempting to identify where we can best use this money in Nova Scotia. It did require consultation, and the consultations did shift the thinking of department staff somewhat. One example is that they concluded, through their consultations and research, that more money needs to be spent at the lower end and not at the moderate end.

In response to your 1,500 units, the number of units, that was an initial estimate of how many units could potentially be addressed. At that time, we were looking at low to moderate. The more money you spend per unit, it lowers the number of total units. So the final number is yet to be determined, but I expect it will be less than 1,500 because we have found that the needs are greater and we need to spend more money at the lower end.

In response to the number of units, the planning has now taken place, the research is now completed. We are now ready to move forward, we are on track. You mentioned 22 units, there's another 30 units that Mr. Dillon mentioned, the RFP will be going out very shortly, and you will see more activity in this area. We realize and fully agree with you that the needs are tremendous and we have to get on with this, we have to do it as quickly as possible, but we have to do it in a responsible way that ensures that we're not just taking a knee-jerk reaction, that we are addressing the needs as best we can and for the most needy areas and people in the province. The \$37 million sounds like a huge amount of money to me, but I'm told by Housing folks that in Nova Scotia, looking at what we could spend, it's not as great as it sounds. So we have to be careful in how it's utilized.

MR. DAVID WILSON (Sackville-Cobequid): The concern I have, and a lot of people have, is that there seems to be the federal government's initiative of having more agreements. I have concerns that if we don't meet this one, we're not going to be able to line ourselves up to address even more money down the road. The projects that have been announced and have been completed are important projects. Everybody agrees that moderate-income earners need affordable housing, too. As MLAs here in the committee have mentioned, the low income is where the great number of people are. There's a huge number, and there's a huge potential

number in the next year, to maybe be homeless if there isn't something addressed for the low-income people.

[10:30 a.m.]

Can you assure me that the next project announced is going to address low-income people, people who are barely making it by and not maybe a moderate-income earner project, which I think is important but we need to address the low-income people to ensure that there's not more homeless people in the province?

MS. TYSON: We fully share your concern, and you've been dealing with department staff, you know that. I can't say what projects will come in as part of the RFP, but Mr. Dillon has outlined the process that will be used and that will involve other people, municipalities and housing experts in the field and individuals. They will be looking at them all, and they will be targeting where that group feels the best project is to get the most out of those funds. That will be a public process.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Sorry, David your time . . .

MR. DAVID WILSON (Sackville-Cobequid): She didn't really answer the question on the timeline and the proposals. Is it two weeks?

MR. DILLON: The proposal is intended to be out before the end of the month. I have a date in mind, but it will be a joint announcement, federal-provincial, so we have to line up the announcers. I anticipate it will be before the end of the month. It will probably have a six-to eight-week closing response, to give the proponents an opportunity to develop proposals and send them in. I will tell you that one of the criteria that we've put in the proposal call for viewing applications is the targeting of the application towards low-income households. If no proposals come forward with that target, then obviously they will fall short of that. We also anticipate, if that is the case, that we may then have to step up and deliver some of the program directly and target it to low incomes. Maybe that will help you understand where we come from.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I have Mark, Maureen and Keith. I just want to caution you that we have 10 minutes left for this part of the meeting and then we will do the closing statement, and we have other committee business to do. Mark.

MR. PARENT: One quick comment and then a very quick question. The comment is on the housing repair, the low-income housing repair program. There will never be enough money in that, but I encourage you, I think that's a good program, particularly if there's some way of targeting homes of low-income families that need insulation. What I find with many of my people is that they're spending so much on heating costs and they're on low incomes anyway, then they get behind in the heating costs and the power gets cut off, et cetera, and it becomes a vicious circle that they can never get out of. So with that program, if even more

money could be put in, particularly if one could look at directing those funds to help make sure the homes are at least adequately insulated, I think it would save on other costs.

My quick question is on wheelchair access, because I've had problems with this as well. Many low-income people, as you mentioned, Mr. Dillon, are renters. The landlord doesn't want to put in wheelchair access where they need that. They can't access the current programs, we've found, because the owner has to access it. It's a difficult sort of thing. I don't know how many people are in that situation, where they're renting. I suppose in some of our low-income units, we can put it in, but I'm talking here in particular about people who are renting and need wheelchair access. It's just a quick question on that.

MR. DILLON: It's not a problem for us. The RRAP rental program has what's called RRAP rental disabled element, so as long as the landlord is a willing participant, we can assist a tenant who lives in a rental property, with the landlord's agreement, to modify the property to suit wheelchair access and other accessibility-related issues. Clearly, it's the landlord's property, so we have to have the landlord agree to assist. The way the program works, though, is it doesn't put an obligation beyond the work itself, it doesn't then put a long-term obligation on the landlord, like a forgivable loan and so on. Effectively the work is to benefit the tenant and if the tenant were to move, then we don't penalize the landlord and say you have to pay the money back.

The RRAP rental disabled element allows us to deal with things like ramps or door-widenings or other modifications to a unit related to disabled persons and access in a rental situation. We have the homeowner disabled, which does the same thing. The homeowner disabled RRAP allows us to do a similar body of repairs to a homeowner's individual unit, related not only to structural repairs of their house but related to accessibility around wheelchair, door-widenings, bathroom modifications and so on.

The third program we have, which is the smaller program, is called the Access-A-Home Program, which is 100 per cent provincial program that allows grants of up to, I think, \$3,000 to assist individuals in modifying their home, related to wheelchair access. So we spend money in a variety of programs aimed at the issue of access. (Interruptions)

The Affordable Housing Program allows that yes. Again, in the issue of identifying a need, I mentioned affordability, I mentioned housing condition. The Affordable Housing Program allows us to consider suitability, which is, is the housing suitable as another measure of need. In the case of a disabled person, if the housing is not affordable but it's in reasonably good condition but the person can't use it because it's not suitable, the program allows us to address the issue of suitability.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Maureen.



MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: I would like to thank members of the committee for the opportunity to ask some questions. I have to say I have some difficulty listening to the talk here today about what the department will be doing at some future time when I'm very familiar with what you're doing right now with your existing social housing portfolio. The fact is that affordable housing, social housing units are being sold off and rents are being marketized, and what you have now is contributing to the problem that we have. I have a huge difficulty with this.

The Auditor General, in his last report, said there's a financial crisis in the existing social housing stock in this province. He itemized a great number of repairs that haven't been done, and he says there's no plan to address that. This government took \$4.5 million out of a fund that's designated for those very kinds of things, to be able to address repairs and crises, and used it to balance a budget. I have constituents in my riding who are facing eviction, as you will know from yesterday's news report.

I want to put this question to you. I attended a Residential Tenancies Board hearing with members of the North Harbour Housing Co-op - a single mother who got laid off in November from her call centre job, who is receiving EI. She gets \$810 a month, her rent is \$600 a month, and she is in arrears, she was paying \$50 a month on the arrears. She was taken to the tenancies board by your department, because she had missed one of her arrears payments and part of her rent payment, right after the Christmas period. The outcome of that hearing was that she's ending up paying more money, \$600 on her rent, \$60 on the arrears. I ask you, what kind of sense does that make, when she was unable to meet her rent and the arrears agreement that brought her to the tenancies board in the first place?

She wasn't the only person that I accompanied to the Residential Tenancies Board in this situation. Another household in a fairly similar situation, went to the board, refused to agree to a payment plan that they can't meet, you know, they said, we can't meet this so we're not agreeing to it. They have an eviction notice for March 31<sup>st</sup> and these families literally are looking at being on the street, in the Infirmary, wherever, because they have no place to go.

As an MLA who has a huge amount of social housing in my constituency, I know what the waiting lists are for the existing social housing, so there's no place else for these people to go. Your department has become part of the problem and my experience at the Residential Tenancies Board was the approach was absolutely punitive, not empathetic, not understanding. These are tenants who have been in this particular housing development for nine years and six years. I have seen the computer-generated printouts of their rental payments, payments on their current rent and payment on their arrears, and they have attempted to pay their rent.

I want to ask the deputy minister, are you prepared to call the dogs off in North Harbour Housing Co-op, and sit down with me and those tenants and arrange something that's affordable, that will maintain them in their existing housing? By the way, the maintenance of

those units is disgraceful. The windows are rotting out of the place, there is mould everywhere and it just makes me really unhappy and quite angry.

MS. TYSON: We are certainly prepared to sit down with you and housing staff to discuss that situation and see how we can be of help and what we can do. Certainly, I would be happy to do that.

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Can I say that it should never come to this. These families have kids who are in the middle of their school year. One of the single moms tells me her kids come home every night and ask her, are we going to be on the street like the people at the Infirmary, is that what's going to happen to us, mom? Can you imagine trying to teach those kids and work with those children? The department has to use some common sense when it comes to the management of your existing social housing stock. I would welcome a big change in the approach that is taken.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Keith, you will be able to close the questions.

MR. COLWELL: I have a couple of questions to ask the deputy minister. Number one, what is the department doing about individuals who have lived in social housing - and I'm not saying kick them out but there should be some alternatives there - who are single people now, that are occupying two and three bedroom apartments or houses, or whatever the case may be, when there are single mothers or families in need who need that type of housing. What has the department done to correct that situation?

MS. TYSON: I don't know if you are referring to a particular situation . . .

MR. COLWELL: There are several, this is not just one person or two people occupying houses or apartments. There are a lot of people who have been there for many, many years, their families have moved on and there's one person living in a unit and then there are single mothers and others who are not getting facilities that should be.

MS. TYSON: All I can say is we would be happy to take a look at that situation, unless my colleague has specific information on that particular point, to add.

MR. DILLON: I can provide some information. There are two types of housing you are referring to possibly, social housing - which are co-ops and non-profits that are managed by their members - and they have a policy on over-housing, and at public housing we have a policy on over-housing. Generally speaking, when a household arrives at a situation where they are over-housed, i.e. they have a housing unit that is larger than they need, because of family size decline or any number of factors, we usually give them up to a year to adjust to the fact they are over-housed and then we notify them that we need to offer them alternatives that are more sized to their needs so that again, as you say, the housing unit can be provided to a family that's the appropriate size. That works in the vast majority of cases, people are understanding

that this is public housing, it's funded for those in greatest need and so they accommodate that and in most cases, they are prepared to move. Some resist and either decide to move elsewhere or face, I suppose at the end of the day, eviction, although that's a very last resort for us, we're not interested, normally, in evicting long-term tenants who have paid the rent and so on, but it does become a problem because there are families with children needing the unit.

[10:45 a.m.]

In the social housing side, the co-ops and non-profits, it's left to the non-profit group, as the owners and managers of the project, to deal with over-housing. Some of them allow people to remain in over-housed situations long term, they have been long-term members of the co-op or non-profit group, they just accept that as a part of doing the business. Other co-ops are much more understanding of situations, long term. They've been long-term members of the co-op or non-profit group. They just accept that as part of doing business. Other co-ops are much more understanding of the needs of other families, and they will, in fact, have an over-housing policy that requires people to seek other options, either within the co-op, smaller accommodations, or by moving out into the market. So individual co-ops and non-profits, there are 100, 150 of them across the province, and every one of them probably has their own approach. We are not able to interfere with that, that's a decision they make as a management. Their primary responsibility is to make sure the project is viable financially.

MR. COLWELL: One other question just in closing. Some of the affordable housing, I have a lot of them in my area, are in deplorable condition. The Housing Departments owns them. The wind blowing around the doors, the windows are leaking, there's all kinds of problems with them. What is the department doing to correct those problems? You're putting people in houses, like the other member said here, the insulation is breaking down because maybe the roof leaked at one time and the cost of heating these places and looking after them is more than people can afford. What are you doing about that?

MR. DILLON: I would be surprised to hear that the portfolio that we actually own is in what you call poor repair. If there are specific properties, you can let me know where they are and I would certainly look into those, if they're properties that we own. If they're properties that non-profit sponsors own that we support, I would be interested in hearing about those as well, because we have modernization plans and replacement reserve plans for those projects that require them to maintain the properties. So if you have the time, just jot down some specifics, I would certainly have somebody go and look and see what the particular issue is.

MR. COLWELL: I have a big list I will give you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Tyson, would you like to make some closing comments?

MS. TYSON: I will just make some brief comments, Madam Chairman. It's obvious that affordable housing and homelessness as a factor of affordable housing are of considerable

concern to the people in this room, and they are of considerable concern not only to the Housing staff in the department but also to the staff in general in the department who are in the business of providing help to people in need and who care very deeply about doing that. I suppose everyone might have an off day. I would hope that that would not be a regular occurrence and that our staff are treating everybody with the respect that they should be treating people with and the caring approach that I see on a daily basis.

Again, I think people might have an off day or a bad day, but from what I've seen of the staff throughout the department, 1,100, 1,200 staff, they feel just as strongly as the people in this room about their jobs, maybe even more strongly, because they are working every day with these people. They're working very hard, and they have a very hard job. I think they're doing the best they can. If we have a problem with a particular issue or a particular personnel disagreement, we can look at that and we can look at making a better match or a different match.

I would just say in closing that we very much appreciate the opportunity to share with you some of the information that does not seem to be out in the public domain as well it perhaps should be. We would like to do something about that. We appreciate the opportunity to describe the programs and to provide some information about the Affordable Housing Program. So thank you very much for the opportunity and thank you for your questions, which have allowed us to provide members and guests with that additional information.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We want to thank you and Mr. Dillon and the rest of your staff for coming. As you've heard today, this is an issue of considerable interest to all Parties represented on the committee. I'm sure we're going to be researching and looking at other aspects of the broader issue. Just for the sake of the committee, I ask that everyone stay in the room until the committee meeting ends in about 10 minutes. There's actually one item of correspondence that the deputy minister might be able to help us with. We found in the past that if we've allowed people to leave, it's too disruptive. We only have another 10 minutes left, so we ask your indulgence.

Committee members, I wanted to add two items under committee business, if we have time. There's also correspondence from the Children's Aid Society. The issue was raised about substitutes during the second round of questioning. The first piece of correspondence is from the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia. They've responded to our invitation to put on a forum on family violence. I think everybody has a copy of that letter in front of them. How do you want to deal with it? Do you want to give the go ahead to our committee clerk to work with the association to set up that forum?

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, I so move.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Seconded by Stephen McNeil. Any discussion?

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay. Any abstentions?

The motion is carried.

The next is a request to appear on our agenda about the Nutrition for Learning Program which, I guess, is part of the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board programs. How do you want to handle that?

MR. COLWELL: I have a question, Madam Chairman.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: First I have Mark.

MR. PARENT: Thank you. I think this is a very important program. I have written letters to the previous Minister of Education about it so anything I say is not a reflection that it is not a great need. It is provided in my community by the churches, which is helpful, but I know that is not even across the province. I'm just wondering if this is the appropriate committee to deal with it because in the green book, when I chaired the Human Resources Committee, along with appointments to ABCs was jurisdiction over education and culture. We looked a fair amount at culture at that stage but not at education. I'm just wondering if we, as a committee, might pass this on to the Standing Committee for Human Resources to take a look at this important matter, since it falls under their jurisdiction.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Why don't we hear what Keith says first and then if you want to move a motion on that, we can procedurally proceed with it.

MR. COLWELL: Just a couple of things. I don't like receiving letters that are blacked out. So it's the second paragraph, "I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with the . . .", and then it is blacked out.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That is how it came to me. I don't know.

MR. COLWELL: I think to start with, I think it is a very important topic, don't get me wrong, but when a letter comes to a committee that is partly blacked out, it asks the question, was it really sent to the committee or not. This is directed to an MLA, not to the committee chairman, as it should be and I don't think this request is in order, although it is very important to have this discussion and perhaps this is not even the committee to have it but I don't respect having things come in the improper manner to the committee.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, point taken. Mark.

MR. PARENT: I'm wondering then if we could just suggest to Mrs. Madore that she write an official request to the Human Resources Committee. Maybe Mora could provide her

with that information to facilitate that to her which would be the committee that would look at that. She is probably just unaware of how our standing committees work. I wouldn't want to see this issue lost.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is there a seconder?

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, I would so concur that it go at least to the Human Resources Committee but I would also leave the door open that should they wish to come back to the Community Services Standing Committee, then they should have the opportunity to do so, so I will concur that it go initially to the Human Resources Committee.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay. Any abstentions?

The motion is carried.

The next item is not on the table but previously you have all received a copy of the letter from John Rowan, Acting Executive Director of the Children's Aid Society. In it he suggests that our request to the Children's Aid Society of Halifax for a copy of the report concerning the caseloads of foster care coordinators, they are suggesting that they report to the minister, through the regional office of Community Services, in that they are not in a position to provide that information. So I'm wondering if we can ask our department officials here today, is there any problem with our committee members receiving the report on the caseloads of foster care coordinators in the province?

MS. TYSON: I guess I would have to find out what information we do have but whatever information we have we can provide the committee. I will just add that the reason I am being a little vague is because we don't have up-to-date technology and all of this is done manually on cards and so on. So I will see what we have, Madam Chairman, and give you whatever we can.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is that agreeable to the committee members to handle it that way?

It is agreed.

The last item, the issue of substituting for the second round of questions came up today. How do you want to deal with it?

MR. HINES: Madam Chairman, a committee is just that, they're representatives of a greater group. This committee does allow for substitutions, it allows for substitution at the start of the meeting, and in fact Mr. Colwell came in today and announced that he was representing another member of his caucus. I have no problem with that, and those are the rules. But I don't

know that the rules allow substitutions throughout the meeting, because it allows for a complete caucus to do a presentation. In fact, today it resulted in a less than amicable attack on the participants here by one member who asked to substitute. I don't think that these people should come and be subjected to that kind of attack either. Back to the initial topic, do we allow substitutions throughout the meeting? I don't think that's proper format.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Let's have a little discussion before we put a motion on. I have Jerry, Mark and then Gordie . . .

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, first I want to tell you that it was precedent setting when in fact the Liberal MLA from . . .

MR. MCNEIL: Annapolis.

MR. PYE: No, at the last Community Services Community meeting, Liberal MLA Diana Whalen asked a number of questions. I really don't see this as being a major issue, unless, as the member has indicated, it does get out of hand. The individuals who asked for the seating arrangements and who we suggested have the seating arrangements - one was our Housing Critic for the Department of the Community Services, Mr. David Wilson (Sackville-Cobequid); the other one was our Health Critic, and social housing is a determinant of health - both aptly and appropriately should have been at the table to partake in this issue.

I would say to the honourable member that we ought to watch it very closely, and if it is something that appears to get out of hand, then it's something that we should address. But I don't think that we should jump on it immediately. I think every time a committee can have the opportunity to have the expertise of the critics available at the committee table to pose questions of the witnesses, then it should be done.

MR. HINES: Can I respond?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Actually, let's hear the others who are on the list first, and then we will come back. I wasn't sure, Mark, were you suggesting that Stephen was first? Okay, then I have Mark, Gordie and Gary.

MR. MCNEIL: Madam Chairman, maybe a solution here would be to look at the entire two hours. The Public Accounts Committee does a procedure where they allow someone to come in to make a presentation, then they divide the time among the caucuses; you get 20 minutes for each caucus and then you divide the remaining time up. So that may be a solution here, regardless of who can substitute in. The critics, in my view, should have an opportunity to sit in on the meeting, as well as the members of the committee getting a chance to ask some questions. That would give them the flexibility to come in and out of the meeting and still only take up the 20 minutes that's allotted to their caucus. How the caucus divides it and who asks the questions, that will be up to the individual caucus.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That's another option. Mark.

MR. PARENT: I just want to concur with the member for Dartmouth North, that the precedent has been set, we should allow it, but we should be careful that it doesn't become disruptive to the committee proceedings and, particularly, I think, that we treat our witnesses with respect and with the dignity that they deserve. I think it's very important that we do that. I concur with the honourable member's suggestion.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Gordie.

[11:00 a.m.]

MR. GOSSE: My view on this is in the closing statements by the deputy minister herself when she said the topic today is of considerable importance to this committee. As you can see, there are six NDP MLAs around this table, and it is very important to our caucus that these issues be discussed. The precedent was set earlier on in this committee, about substitutions. I feel that unless it gets out of hand, it should be allowed.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Keith and then Gary.

MR. COLWELL: This is an important topic. I liked the member's suggestion that each caucus should have an allotted amount of time to speak. Today, when the presentations went on, when the substitutions happened, they were treated as first-time speakers and, indeed, they weren't. They were second-time speakers, because they were substituting for someone else, so that raises some issues for me. As far as Mr. Pye's suggestion that the Health and Housing Critics from your caucus should be there, I totally agree, but they could take the seat during the meeting, as is done in a lot of other meetings, when it's appropriate to do that. I think it's important that the critics are there from whatever Party is there.

I think it's very important that each caucus has an equal amount of time to address these very important issues, because they are very important issues to Nova Scotians and to all of us as elected members in the Legislature. I'm a bit concerned about this and the way it was handled, in particular, today.

MR. HINES: I agree with Mr. McNeil's suggestion as to how we should handle this, but I would add further that if there's going to be a substitution, that that be submitted to the chairman of the meeting before we start, so that we're all aware of what's going to happen. I would also suggest that when that does happen that no more than three members of each caucus be present at the table, that the others could leave the table. At one point, I think we had as many as five.

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, could I just make one . . .



MADAM CHAIRMAN: Very briefly, because we're over time.

MR. PYE: I do want to say that I concur with some of the statements that MLA Hines has made. It's important that consistency be seen to be at the table and that in fact there is no problem with setting criteria down for how we conduct the meetings with respect to alternates at the table. That should not be difficult. However, we should have that policy crafted, have a look at it, and then bring it back and see if it's agreeable to all members.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Gordie, just one quick comment.

MR. GOSSE: On the time allotment thing, if an MLA is missing from the committee, does that Party get the same amount of time, if they have two members at the table while the other Parties have three members at the table? That's an issue for us as a committee to have a look at also.

MR. HINES: In the Public Accounts Committee we do.

MR. GOSSE: Well, that's the Public Accounts Committee, but here we haven't discussed that. It was set before . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Could I make a suggestion? Actually I have a point of view on this one as well. I would really hate to see this committee go the way of the Public Accounts Committee. I sit on the Public Accounts Committee, and it is a very formal procedure. I don't think it suits the nature of the discussion or the topics that we deal with at this committee. Could I suggest that we think on this, and that we add it to our next agenda and make a decision, that we just seriously consider the advantages and disadvantages of the different approaches, knowing that it's a concern and that we try to resolve it and work out something that will be amenable to everyone?

MR. MCNEIL: I'm okay with that, provided that at the next meeting maybe we reiterate to the presenters that there's 15 minutes at the beginning of the meeting and we will then start asking questions, instead of . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, definitely.

MR. MCNEIL: We took up 30 minutes today.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Agreed. Mark.

MR. PARENT: I agree with you that I would like this committee to operate as traditionally the committees have operated with the various members having more flexibility and freedom. But we can discuss that later.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We can. Just to remind you, the next meeting date is April 15<sup>th</sup>, again the Department of Community Services. We're going to continue on with our concerns about foster care, in this room, from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Could we have a motion to adjourn?

MR. PYE: So moved.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:05 a.m.]