

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Thursday, June 23, 2005**

**Committee Room 1**

**Setting the Fall Agenda**

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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. Stephen McNeil

Mr. Leo Glavine

Ms. Diana Whalen

[Ms. Diana Whalen was replaced by Mr. Daniel Graham.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Mora Stevens  
Legislative Committee Clerk



**HALIFAX, THURSDAY, JUNE 23, 2005**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**9:23 A.M.**

CHAIRMAN  
Ms. Marilyn More

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Since we have a quorum, I will call the meeting to order. What we are going to do today is look at all the various requests that we've had for witnesses to come before us and to prioritize them so we can perhaps get our Winter schedule somewhat drafted. You have a package there from the Liberal caucus and I'm just wondering if you would like to add to the bottom of that list, just so we have everything in front of us, the two new requests. One, through Leo, The Face of Poverty Consultation group, if you want to just add that to the bottom of the list; and also from the representatives on this committee, the request to look at social assistance rates.

Then, we have had two sort of outside requests, one from the Cape Breton/Victoria Foster Parent Association, if you want to add that somewhere; also, from NSGEU, the topic of home support services. Then we have the previous items that have been discussed at the committee that are on the agenda sheet. (Interruptions) Yes, those have all been approved.

MR. MARK PARENT: So are we dropping some of those or are those are all approved?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, they have been approved but we have the option of adding new priorities above those and that would, in effect, bump them down to later to be considered.

MR. PARENT: The two that we had put on before were the KidSport Program and the Breakfast for Learning. So I would rather not lose those, if that's possible.

MR. JERRY PYE: Madam Chairman, if you don't mind my saying, first I think we ought to recognize how important these are. These are items that were on the list prior to the new items that were brought forward and I don't know if we have had any connect with the individuals, and if we have had connect with those individuals, then I think that we should be very careful on how we dissect this agenda.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That's a good point. Perhaps Mora could just bring us up to date on what communication has been held with some of these groups.

MS. MORA STEVENS (Legislative Committee Coordinator): Breakfast for Learning and IWK Mental Health Services had already been contacted. They were scheduled but then they had to reschedule. So I have been in contact with them. We are hoping to get them on in September because they had been contacted before. The other ones, once on the list, they have gotten the initial call to say you have been approved to appear before the Standing Committee on Community Services but no date has been set as of yet. I never tell them an exact date until it's a month or two away but I always let them know they have been approved so it's sort of to get ready and to let them know. Then if there is a date that is better for them, I can narrow it down but that's all that happened with the other ones.

MR. PARENT: So all of them have received phone calls, though?

MS. STEVENS: Yes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: What about the Maritime Advocates for Children in Need? That's been on the list for a couple of sessions.

MS. STEVENS: That's right. That has sort of been disbanded and that's why I left it on the list for discussion today. I'm not sure what to do with that. I have to make a few more calls to see if I can track down anybody but it's not sort of an organization because it was Kids in Need and it has now gone a little defunct.

MR. PARENT: So we can drop it off the list?

MS. STEVENS: We could if the members would like to do that.

MR. PYE: That was a relatively new one which is about four years ago now or three years ago and that's the one that actually was organized in Sackville, wasn't it?

MS. STEVENS: Yes, it was.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: And that was around the topic of youth in crisis which we have dealt with fairly extensively. So is there general agreement that we can drop that group off? Stephen.

MR. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mora, have you contacted this group?

MS. STEVENS: I've tried and I have contacted some of the people from Kids in Need, and as they told me, they are sort of defunct.

MR. MCNEIL: Okay, so there has been no contact.

MS. STEVENS: Yes, there is not really a group per se. I wanted to bring that back to the committee so the committee knew, and to let me know what I should do with that.

MR. MCNEIL: Agreed.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So do we have agreement, then? Okay.

MR. MCNEIL: Mora, can I get a sense, how far out do you think the list that you have is going to take us?

MS. STEVENS: Well, the committee members in the poll that I sent around said it was okay to book two in September because we missed - this would have been the meeting with the IWK. So if we take the first two, that's September, and then once a month we get October, November, December. Then again, things happen and sometimes groups can't appear so the more that is on the list, the better it is.

MR. DANIEL GRAHAM: Madam Chairman, I note, and I'm here filling in for someone, and I don't have much of a sense of the workings of this committee. I did have some sense that it met on a monthly basis. The Public Accounts Committee - as Mr. Hines would appreciate, and I know Mr. Parent is on the Public Accounts Committee - is my main experience and we try to meet on a weekly basis. This, by our standards, would be a very substantial backlog in terms of getting to things. I'm wondering whether any consideration has been given to meeting more frequently, if monthly was the standard, in order to clear the backlog that it go to semi-monthly or biweekly.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We have discussed it in the past and because of the resourcing of this particular committee, we have chosen not to go forward which is not to say we can't discuss it again.

MR. PARENT: We have done it from time to time but not as a common practice. I think common practice is once a month, like the other committees but if we needed to do two - are we still on the old ones or are we looking at new ones because there is one I would like

to throw in the mix?

[9:30 a.m.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think we're just confirming the approved list. (Interruptions)

MR. PYE: I think we should tidy up the approved list . . .

MR. PARENT: Agreed.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Perhaps we'll come back when we see what we've approved at the end of the meeting, to Danny's point and see if we need to meet more often. It has been a combination, Danny, of perhaps the committee being more in demand, more outside groups are actually writing to us and asking to appear before us, as well as keen interest on the part of the members of the three caucuses to bring issues to the table. That's where the backlog has developed. (Interruptions) Yes, we had two forums in the Red Room on family violence that took up a couple of extra meetings.

MR. GRAHAM: Madam Chairman, is the purpose of this particular portion of the discussion to lock in, irrevocably, or not, the matters that have already been approved? If so - I may be getting ahead of myself here - I'm wondering whether or not throwing in some of the new ones to the mix gives a more balanced sense of whether or not you're getting the people who the committee, as a consensus, most desire before you, on an early stage before you. I share the concerns that have already been expressed by Mr. Pye and others that for those the committee has already chosen to put on, there should certainly be a favouritism, if I could describe it that simply, to keeping them on and keeping them as an early priority item, but I'm not sure if the committee wants to tie its hands completely.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, and I don't think we're doing that. What we're doing is just confirming the ones we've already approved.

MR. PARENT: Then we have agreed Breakfast for Learning and IWK Mental Health will go in September.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: And we're just checking to make sure that those who've already been contacted to say they're shortly to come before us are not bumped down. That still leaves us the option of adding new items and inserting them wherever we feel the priority of demands.

MR. PARENT: On the daycare centres, I'm just wondering, we have in the subtitle, Profit and Not-for-Profit, concerning the transfer of seats. We may want to widen it out a little bit more with the new daycare program coming out of Ottawa, and just leave it concerning daycare provision.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think in the past what we've done is given them our particular focus, but it has always been open to talk about anything on that issue. The officials who come are prepared to do that.

MR. PARENT: I'm just thinking on that one, it's changing so quickly with things that are going on that I think our focus is going to be much wider than it was when we originally put it on.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It could be, and I think they'll be prepared to discuss that.

MR. MCNEIL: It won't matter, once the witness is before you . . .

MR. PARENT: Yes, but out of fairness you don't want to say this is the main topic, and then, really, your other main topic was something else. It's better to give them a wider mandate at the start, so they're at least prepared.

MR. MCNEIL: They know you guys, and they're prepared for everything. (Laughter) Mora, just so I'm clear, the September meetings are set, right? We've already booked those people in?

MS. STEVENS: The date, specifically, isn't set, but they know they're going to come in September. I just have to look at scheduling.

MR. MCNEIL: I would like to throw an idea out, and it's around the letter that everybody has received, around the social assistance rates. You brought up the Forum on Family Violence. As you're aware, there's a letter that has gone to the minister - which we haven't received a response back - from our Community Services Critic, Manning MacDonald. I'd like to make a suggestion to the committee, or hear some thoughts from them on perhaps holding a forum around the social assistance rates and bringing in groups like The Face of Poverty and other groups that are on the front lines dealing with people who are in receipt of social assistance, and giving us a general sense of what we can do as a committee to put ideas in front of the minister to improve that situation.

MR. PARENT: Can I respond to that?

MR. MCNEIL: Sure.

MR. PARENT: I'd just like to see it wider than just social assistance rates. There's a whole bunch of issues in the face of poverty that I think are important, that if we're going to do it like we did the Red Room one, the family violence ones, if we're going to do it, let's make it broader. There's social assistance rates, there's minimum wage, for people who are on minimum wage, there's health care plans, I'd like to throw into the whole mix, because we did,

as a committee, some years ago, we've looked, in the Public Accounts Committee, at the financial aspects of VLTs and what they do, the social aspects of VLTs.

All of those things, I think, tie together. I'd say, yes, if we're going to do a forum, let's do a forum, but let's make it wider than just social assistance rates. If we're going to look at The Face of Poverty, if we're going to look at issues that affect people, we need to look at a whole range of disability issues, which come into play. That's just my suggestion.

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, I just wanted to refresh the memories of the members of the committee that back in 1998 there was a Standing Committee on Community Services that toured the province looking at welfare rates, as one of the components of all the services that were provided by the Department of Community Services. There was a report forwarded to government with a number of recommendations. There was all-Party support on those recommendations. Many of those recommendations did not come to the floor. I, personally, have spoken to The Face of Poverty at the Presbyterian Church on School Street in Dartmouth and in the Valley area as well. Mr. Hubbard was involved with The Face of Poverty, and I believe he still is. We have had a number of meetings across the province with individuals on this very important issue of poverty and how to address the issue.

If we are to go that route, and we, as a political Party, have actually endorsed it, and I see it's on our March 30, 2005 suggested list. We had said Social Assistance and University - ESIA reps plus advocacy group. You will notice that's No. 5 on our list. We recognize the importance of bringing this forward to government again, but unless we as a committee are prepared, and that means all of us, despite what political side of the spectrum we're on, that means if all of us are prepared to challenge government and make sure that government addresses the recommendations, then sometimes I feel that this exercise is futile.

We can go and we can continue to meet with the groups, we can continue to send messages off to government, but at the end of the day if we as a committee don't have some kind of strength or force to cause the government to create an action, then all of that is for naught. All we are is a sounding board. I don't know if that's what we want to do. I would say that I'm in support of making sure that there is a forum or there is an opportunity for this issue to be addressed, either by witnesses before the standing committee, but at the end of the day I want to know just how strong we're going to be, to back up their recommendations or their suggestions.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm getting the sense, and certainly based on the discussion around this table at previous meetings, everyone's in favour of discussing the issue. That's not a problem. So I think what we need to talk about is how can we make this huge issue manageable in terms of discussion, and what would be the best approach for our committee to take to deal with it.



MR. MCNEIL: Jerry, things have changed since 1998. For one thing, the committee has put forward a position on autism, which the government has listened to. I couldn't agree with you more, but if we're to say, unless we think someone is going to listen to us we're not going to do anything, you're not going to get an assurance out of anybody that whatever we come up with they're going to listen to. I think, quite frankly, our job is to go out there and put it out there, make sure that their voices are being heard.

My concern with the position that Mark has taken is, let's not broaden the issue so wide that we end up actually giving no recommendations or the recommendations are so varied that nobody could bring them together. I think if we stay focused on social assistance, I think we can come up with some recommendations that are buyable by the government. It's doable.

MR. PARENT: Well, if we're going to do just one meeting, like a morning meeting, then, yes, we focus on social assistance. I'm suggesting that if we're going to do a day-long that we broaden the focus. You have education opportunities, you have employment opportunities, affordable housing, all of those things are important when you're looking at the face of poverty. Social assistance rates are too low, they should be made higher, take half an hour, maybe take a little longer to figure out exactly how high should they be, but I mean, everyone admits they're too low, no one is in disagreement there. So that's why I'm thinking if we're going to do a day-long on it - and always there's a group that I always feel really badly about and those are people who are on minimum wage, they're not on community services, they don't have health plans and I don't want that group to be forgotten. But if we're doing one morning on it, okay, let's stick to social assistance rates, but if we're doing a day-long or a travelling committee, I'd like to make it broader, that's all I'm saying.

MR. PYE: I just want to make the comment that I agree with broadening and I do know that The Face of Poverty Consultation agrees with broadening because they don't look at just one aspect of the issue of poverty, they look at it as a much more encompassing issue than just simply social assistance. I want to say to the honourable member for Annapolis that no, I did not expect that we would just simply not bring people forward, but what I did want to say in my comment to you is that we, as a committee, need to be a bit more forceful and we need to think of ways in which we can cause government to seriously look at our recommendations and bring them forward, particularly around the social assistance issue.

I have been here since 1998 and I've seen a number of recommendations go before government, many which could have assisted persons living in poverty in this province, and I have yet to see it from either government. For example, you said it changed, I don't know if it has changed that much because in 1998, the Liberal Government clawed back the National Child Benefit dollar for dollar. Then again - I don't want to get on this issue but I just want to bring it to your attention - the Progressive Conservative Government certainly did not address the issue of increased rates when, in fact, they knew that the cost of living was escalating and so on.

Anyway, I just wanted to (Interruptions) Madam Chairman, excuse me, I want to make sure that that is on the record, that's all. (Interruptions)

MR. MCNEIL: And I want to be on the record very clearly, I haven't been here since 1998. I think I have shown that I have not been partisan on any issue and your remarks, quite frankly, are partisan. If I was in government and you came forward I will tell you what I would do, I'd open the door for you, if you're going to be partisan about the issue, it's very simple. If you're going to throw out a recommendation that you know they're not going to take, it's obvious, what do you think they are going to do? I think clearly I have shown that I have not been partisan on this. My statement to you had nothing to do with Parties, it had to do with the issue.

MR. PYE: I'm just telling you of the experience . . .

MR. MCNEIL: And I'm expressing it to you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I wanted to add some new information to this. I had an opportunity to sit in with the Kendrick Coalition yesterday. It was mentioned that the Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers is putting together a couple of committees, one of them is going to focus on concerns around employment support and income assistance. So it will be interesting if somehow we could time our deliberations on this issue as narrow or wide as we decide it's going to be, at a point where we might be able to incorporate some of the information that that association has gained as well.

I just wanted to leave that with you because there might be some value in not doing this, for example, in October, just giving a few months for an organization like that and also giving some notice to other organizations so that they can do their research and their background consultations and whatnot, so the information they bring to us will be much more broad and they will have met with many more people. I just wanted to add that because I just found out about that yesterday.

Mark.

MR. PARENT: I understand where Jerry is coming from and it must be frustrating at times, I mean, even in the six years I have been in. But there are changes, like the clawback that you talked about is no longer being done. There are changes that happen slowly and sometimes maybe an advancement here is a step back on the other side, which is in the overall picture perhaps not good, or maybe it's too slow.

I think there is something that we can do as a committee. We can't guarantee that the minister, in whatever respective department, will advance the ideas that we advance but we can highlight it with the media. If we come up with good suggestions, I think we can all get behind them. I wouldn't rule out doing something just because we're not going to get everything

we ask for, we might get some of the things we ask for and certainly, it's worth highlighting them. I guess I'm siding with Stephen on that one.

[9:45 a.m.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think I agree with those who say that this issue is quite complex and comprehensive but I think in terms of the committee, we have to tackle something that is manageable, that we feel we are making some progress and that our recommendations might actually have some impact on the budget and policy improvement. We can discuss how broad we want it to be or we can discuss the method we'd like to use, and that might put some natural limitations to the topic.

MR. PARENT: I would suggest rather than a travelling committee, because the trouble that we're going to have with a travelling committee is we're going to have to get approval for that budget from the Speaker, and I doubt if we're going to get that approval, simply because I don't think the money is there. Now, maybe I'm presupposing and we might be able to but the one-day forum idea, I think, is doable.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Any other reaction to the one-day forum?

MR. MCNEIL: I would agree with that.

MR. PYE: I don't have a problem with the one-day forum, my only concern is will we reach all Nova Scotians from one end of this province to the other? Mind you, when we had the Standing Committee on Community Services go across the province before, we recognized that there were significant differences in peoples' perceptions across the province.

MR. PARENT: Why don't we ask for that, with our fallback being the one-day forum?

MR. MCNEIL: When we had the Forum on Family Violence, groups were able to get into metro for a one-day . . .

MR. PARENT: But Cape Breton, Yarmouth, I agree with Jerry, they just feel left out. We can ask . . .

MR. MCNEIL: The problem with doing a travelling committee, I've done one since being elected, you're asking a lot of the committee and then you clear off this list, we're not going to do this until some time next year, let's be honest. The one-day forum will allow us the opportunity to do it this Fall. If we're going to go on the road and do a travelling committee, we're not going to hold a meeting every week, you know that's not going to happen.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We did have representatives from Cape Breton at the forums we had on family violence. If that is an express concern of the committee, we can make sure

that we encourage the organizations that we invite to have done their consultations with their members across the province. Most of them are province-wide, but that is a concern, we want everyone from one end to the other to feel included.

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, the real face of poverty are the individuals who are living it every day. Although you have advocacy groups and groups representing them, speaking on their behalf, some of those individuals never get the opportunity to come to a forum or be before the Standing Committee on Community Services, so what do we do? Do we isolate them and say, someone is going to speak on your behalf? If they have the opportunity they should be given the opportunity for us, as members of this standing committee, or the committee that's going to see the real face of poverty, have the opportunity to see those individuals who are really faced with it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, there are two ways around that. Some of the organizations actually mandate consumer involvement on their executive. Perhaps we could have part of the forum open to individuals - and I don't know if we might be able to get a little bit of travel money to help some individuals come in from outside metro to take part in that, even if they don't have the support of an organization, but it's certainly something we could look at to overcome that. A lot of people don't join organizations, that's true, so their views would not necessarily be represented.

Do we have consensus that the one-day forum might meet our needs? Keeping that in mind, what do we want to suggest as the theme or the topic?

MR. PARENT: Well, we have how many hours in the one-day forum? It would be, what, from 9:00 . . .

MS. STEVENS: Usually 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

MR. PARENT: Okay. Well, the social assistance rates is certainly one. I would like to see affordable housing. That's a key there. Perhaps something on energy. We have different plans out there on how to help people on low incomes with energy costs. That is certainly going to be - when you look at oil topping \$60 now and going up further.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, we might want to put some of these topics down but I think some of them are going to be sort of essential, can we survive day to day, and others are going to be a little higher level.

MR. PARENT: Well, affordable housing and the heating thing go together in this sense.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, having a roof over your head. Transportation is a huge problem for people living . . .

MR. PARENT: Transportation, educational opportunities.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, training.

MR. PYE: Medication, drugs, for those who are just on the line . . .

MR. PARENT: The working poor, yes. I pushed for a while to have some sort of health care plan similar to Ontario and Alberta but the cost was too much. The diabetes - the strip program was the start of that but that is sort of what we're looking at.

MR. PYE: As a matter of fact, I believe that in the 1998 report - and we should go back and look at some of those recommendations, and give it to members of the standing committee to make sure that we all have a copy of it - I do believe that there was a recognized Pharmacare Program that should be provided.

MR. MCNEIL: Madam Chairman, as part of this forum, are we going to call in the group, The Face of Poverty? Are we going to put that out there for them to come in and make a presentation?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, let's choose our focus for topics and then we can reach some agreement on who we would like to invite.

I want to bring to the table, again, the Employment Support and Income Assistance Act. Its regulations and policies have never been reviewed. I'm not sure, it's probably three or four years old now. I think that is an important part because that sort of drives everything else. I think we really do need to look at that as well and that includes the social assistance rates, eligibility and some of those things that we are dealing with in our offices every day.

MR. PARENT: Barriers to employment.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. GRAHAM: I would echo what Stephen had said, that the bald question of poverty can be put on there. It's really at the heart of many of these things. I think having set the context properly, perhaps, in an earlier part of the day, helps shape some of those other discussions. It seems to be the ground on which much of this is sort of failing.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, there are sort of two levels of discussion. There are the root causes of poverty and then, you know, how are we dealing with them, and is that as effectively as we can deal with it? I think, too, we have to be careful not to necessarily dictate everything that we want to hear about that day because we have to leave some flexibility for the groups to identify their priorities and their topics. I think we need a mix.

MR. PARENT: You could do the causes, the lived experiences and possible solutions as a sort of flow-through for the day.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, right. They could choose which area they wanted to speak on, possibly all three.

MR. MCNEIL: Say that again, Mark?

MR. PARENT: Causes, lived experience with the present reality and possible solutions, just as a sort of overarching flow-through.

MR. GRAHAM: It may make it difficult to structure the day in those types of themes because each group may want to deal with each of them and you wouldn't want them coming in . . .

MR. PARENT: Yes, I agree with that.

MR. GRAHAM: But I think that that helps frame the discussion somewhat from the committee's perspective.

MR. PARENT: It would be nice to hear in the first part of the day of all three aspects and maybe the same group will be touching on all three.

MR. PYE: I believe that they will. It's likely that they will.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mora is going to make a suggestion. We may as well have a broader discussion.

MS. STEVENS: It might be worth having the groups in the morning make presentations and then in the afternoon have a forum, a round table, you know, the discussion part of it. Once they get the mic, you limit them to 10 minutes in the morning, you know, once they're here, they're going to want to take 20 minutes, half an hour, whatever. If you have a selected amount of groups and you say, okay, you have the morning to make all your presentations on the topics that you feel are very important, and in the afternoon there is a round table forum on this topic, on, say, the causes, the living experiences and the possible solutions, then you can get at what the committee could possibly do.

MR. GRAHAM: I like that idea, provided that people who are participating in the afternoon session are present and listening to the morning presentations and are not just popping in as experts to give their own opinions. I think that if this is intended to be a more deliberative process where people are actually thinking about what they're doing, then it will become a richer experience at the end of the day. How you cap that - there may be an action item for the committee at the end of the day where there is a closing discussion amongst

committee members about how to move forward and it just doesn't end with the final presentation. If there is something that naturally carries forward, then you may not decide exactly what it is but you may put in motion the steps that will begin to get you there.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That is very similar to the process we tried to use for Family Violence. The piece we didn't get to, because we lost our quorum in the afternoon, was finishing the discussion among the committee members on deciding what our next steps were going to be. Actually, that is still somewhat up in the air. We haven't really come back to that. But that is a nice process. We certainly asked each of the groups that were invited to have a representative at the table in that middle session where we have more of a brain-storming. Some good ideas that came out of there that built on the information that we had learned from in the morning.

To do that, it has to be a manageable size. So now we really have the dilemma of, do we invite specific organizations and sort of try to control that size so we can have a discussion where people actually feel they're involved in a meaningful way, or do we throw it open to any organization or group that wants to come in? How do we add the individuals that Jerry is concerned about, the consumers and the people actually experiencing this, in a way that treats them with dignity?

MS. STEVENS: If you're adding individuals to this and opening it up, the one thing you could do is do a Law Amendments Committee-type of hearing. That would be, say, the day before you would hear from individuals. That's the only way. In order to open it up you would have to take out a little ad and just say, the committee is doing this on such a day, use the Red Chamber, and have that type of forum the day before, and then have in other groups. That way it would be two days but it would be sort of more encompassing.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: How does that fit in with your concerns, Jerry?

MR. PARENT: For those of us outside Halifax, two days is a lot of commitment. If we have enough advance time, I guess.

MR. PYE: But I think it's important for us to be seen to the clients or the persons who are in receipt of social assistance, that we want to hear from them as well. As Marilyn has stated earlier, many individuals do not necessarily agree that agencies or advocacy groups speak on their behalf. I believe that it is important for us to fully understand the kind of life that individual recipients of social assistance are receiving, so that we can have a better grasp and a better understanding of their situation.

Although, I don't say that we don't get that through the advocacy groups and the agencies that work with them every day. But I have always found it important to make sure that those individuals who feel that their voice is really not heard through organizations - and

we had that with seniors by the way, we have seniors who feel that their voice is not being heard through the Senior Citizens' Secretariat and the Group of Nine.

[10:00 a.m.]

We need to make sure that everyone in Nova Scotia who wants to make a presentation has the opportunity to hear us. That might very well be working poor, and they might come with some very negative comments about their lifestyle versus those on social assistance and so on. We need to hear from them. Often the advocacy groups and the agencies don't speak to the issues that some working poor citizens have in this province.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Danny, Stephen and then Mark.

MR. GRAHAM: I'm not a permanent member of this committee, so these comments should be taken in that light. I'm not expecting that I will be part of these deliberations, and if it's over two days, an investment of people's time, I would just provide the observation that as Legislatures go, ours sits remarkably little in terms of Spring and Fall sittings and all the rest. Anything we can do to be, and be seen to be, more active and engaged, with our sleeves rolled up, especially with the stuff of people like this, is a positive for the Legislature, the institution, in my view.

MR. MCNEIL: Agreed. I just wanted to go back. The forum that we're going to have, if we held an all-day forum, then the following day or the previous day, however we want - probably the following day - set up in the morning and allow individuals to come in, very much like you suggested, in the Law Amendments Committee style, and then perhaps we'd need a break. Then the committee should reconvene and bring back some of the ideas that had been talked about over the day and a half, and formulate our own direction after that.

I only know the experience of the Legislature in this session but, quite frankly, the most I've sat in there has been eight weeks. If we have enough time - two days is not a lot of time to ask each of us to commit, for this issue. I don't know about the rest of you, but my constituency office is filled with 80 per cent dealing with this particular issue. (Interruptions) So two days. If we truly believe in the ideas we're going to put forward, we should give it some thought, not just I'll pull a day together, say, well, we have an hour at the end of this or we have 15 minutes, what are we going to do? That would be my suggestion.

MR. PARENT: Just going back to Jerry's comment, I'm wondering if you could augment that somehow with written submissions, because otherwise - if you've got someone who's working poor, they're not going to have the money to come in from Kentville or wherever - you'll only hear from those in the city.



MR. MCNEIL: I think that would go without saying. The Law Amendments Committee is the same way, you can send in a written submission. I think that would go without saying, in your advertisement.

MS. STEVENS: The Speaker would have to approve money for the ad, because we do not have that in our budget. We could also get it out there by putting it in every MLA's office and doing up a little poster and getting the word out to the groups. But if you're looking for written submissions - the Law Amendments Committee usually puts out a little ad saying what they're doing. It can be expensive. We could try to do it a different route.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Since we're not asking for an around-the-province consultation, I would hope the money might be available for an ad to do this.

MR. PYE: I think the government had a surplus this year, and I'm sure the Speaker will be able to find some funds somewhere within this huge budget of government, to accommodate.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm just wondering, if the members of the committee were interested, there are a number of people who would no more come and speak before a legislative committee in Halifax than - they don't have the confidence to do that. I'm wondering if some of us might be willing to set aside a half day or a day, even, in our constituency offices, and in our newsletter indicate that we're there and we would like to hear anyone who would like to come in and talk about some of these issues, and make notes. Would there be some way of us submitting those to be part of the record for that exercise as well?

MS. STEVENS: Anybody can submit anything. So as long as it came here, then it would be distributed. That would fine.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I agree with Stephen, I think a lot of us, especially the rookies, the last couple of sessions, are frustrated with the amount of time we spend on individual cases in our constituency offices when we'd like to feel that we're at a level of decision making where we can make some improvements to the system so that these people don't fall through the cracks. If there's some way of improving life for everyone, instead of dealing with it one case at a time, it would be a much more efficient and effective way of us working in our communities.

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, I just wanted to say, although there may not be many people taking up the opportunity to be witnesses before the committee or before the forum, such as the Law Amendments Committee, as you know, many people may not come forward, but at least we've given them the opportunity. That's what I want to be comfortable about, that they have at least been given the opportunity to come forward.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think we've come up with a suggestion that meets everybody's needs and everyone seems comfortable with it. Is there anything more we want to add? We'll obviously have to wait and see when we have available time in the Red Chamber.

MR. PARENT: What have we agreed to here? The afternoon to hear individuals or written submissions and the next day - or how are we structuring that?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think what we've agreed to is that the morning of day one, we would hear presentations from organizations, some of which we will have invited and perhaps we'll be approached by others to take part, but there will have to be a limit just because of the time pressures. In the afternoon the committee and representatives from these organizations would do a brainstorming. I think the next morning would be available for individuals to come before us. Then, that afternoon, if I'm following correctly, the committee would convene and take all that information, and just try to make some sense of it and see where we can make recommendations.

MR. MCNEIL: Agreed.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I don't think we need a motion. We have a consensus on that. Do we feel that using that overall title of Causes, Present Reality and Possible Solutions would be a way to frame the issue?

MR. PYE: Causes, lived experience and solutions.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: You want lived experience? (Interruptions)

MR. PYE: Now, where do we place this on the agenda?

MR. MCNEIL: Is the overall issue poverty?

MR. PYE: That's right.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, but I think we might want to put in some subtitles, employment support and income assistance, affordable housing, training and education, medical/drug needs, working poor. Those are all possibilities, and the organizations get to choose what they want to highlight. They don't have to speak on all of them. They'll probably bring in other topics that we haven't mentioned here.

MR. GRAHAM: I would throw in social assistance rates as possibly one of those subtitles, in part because this is something over which government has direct control, and the others are more general subjects.

MS. STEVENS: So who would you like to invite?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, let's talk about some possible organizations. The other option, too, is we could do a press release, and that would certainly, hopefully, get spread throughout the province, and that would alert groups that this was going to happen in advance of an ad.

MR. PYE: The first two that come off the top of my head are, of course, The Face of Poverty group and Women's Centres CONNECT Nova Scotia, I think that's the title.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: They've already done some research and consultation on these issues.

MR. PYE: That's right. Absolutely.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: They could update their information.

MR. PARENT: I would suggest some church groups were involved. Also, are there any business groups that we could invite? I know my chamber of commerce is very concerned about issues that touch on employment and all those sorts of things. Otherwise, we just ghettoize it, here are the bleeding hearts who care about da, da, da. Let's hear from all people about this issue.

MR. PYE: The advertisement will open that up.

MR. PARENT: When we're inviting them, let's try to be as broad as possible.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm just wondering, might there be a business organization that's province-wide that has an interest in this?

MR. PARENT: Like a chamber of commerce?

MR. PYE: Boards of trade are province-wide, as well as chambers of commerce.

MR. PARENT: Our chamber is province-wide in the sense that there are other affiliates. The Halifax chamber is, I guess, off by itself and then the other chambers are part of the larger organization.

MR. PYE: There are a number of other agencies and organizations. At least you should send them notification that they might want to come in, Kiwanis, Kinsmen, Lions, those organizations that contribute too.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I suspect they may see the publicity in the ad. I'm just worried if we start sending invitations to regional or local groups, that could take up our whole morning of presentations. If our invitations went out to provincial organizations at least we'd be sure to get the rural-urban mix. There's Feed Nova Scotia, for example, they're now province-wide

(Interruption) The Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers, I just mentioned, they're going to be doing some research on this.

MR. PYE: I have no difficulty with the organizations being province-wide but many of these organizations pick up the slack of government - the Kinsmen, the Lions and so on. They provide needs to families that normally they believe should be (Interruptions) The Food Bank Society.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, that's Feed Nova Scotia, their new name. Well, I'm wondering - I'd be interested in your reaction to this, Jerry - if we focus as much as possible on organizations and groups that had a fairly broad mandate the first morning, might we include smaller community and regional groups with the individuals on the second day, or do you think that would take away from our . . .

MR. PYE: No, I don't think that because we have to make sure that we utilize the time. Maybe some of those individuals might not show so we want to make sure that we get the maximum use of time so that we can absorb as much information on this issue as possible.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So if we have some special interest groups that have a smaller focus, like a neighbourhood or a community, we might encourage them to come the second morning and that way we could hear a whole spectrum. Okay, that's a starting list and I'm sure if we do the press release and an ad, hopefully, we'll be inundated with people who want to talk on this issue.

All right, let's get back to our approved list and see where we want to fit this in. Are we suggesting after our two September meetings? We want to give some of those groups time to prepare and many of them, because they're volunteer-run, don't operate over the Summer. Let me just throw out an idea, what about late November, early December, would that give them a chance to get their consultation and research done?

MR. PARENT: What day are you suggesting?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mora.

MS. STEVENS: We have to worry about the House if we're doing it then because a two-day forum when the House is sitting just wouldn't be possible. Not that we can ever get a date for the House but they might be able to steer me in a direction of either . . .

MR. PARENT: Traditionally we'd be meeting in November.

MR. PYE: Normally not the end of November. November 20<sup>th</sup> is when we're out, somewhere around that. Normally we meet the last Thursday of the month.

MR. MCNEIL: When did we do the Forum on Family Violence, was that early December?

MS. STEVENS: One was in June and the other one ended up in February; it was going to be December but we just couldn't get everybody together. It wasn't with groups, per se, that was with departments, the one we did in February. With the groups it was in June.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, I think we met with the groups first and then the departments.

MS. STEVENS: And then it was the following February.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Oh yes, June of last year, yes, that's right.

MR. MCNEIL: I like the idea of early December or late November if we can do it because . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We have the weather considerations there too.

MR. PARENT: Early when?

MR. MCNEIL: Either late November or early December. I know it's a busy time but if you're actually going to try to put something together that you want government to start buying into, budget season for them is starting shortly thereafter. All these departments, if we wanted to put these ideas in front of them and hope they're going to take it seriously, waiting until February is just not an option.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Jerry.

MR. PYE: I just wanted to say that I concur with late November, early December because there will be a lot of things that will come out of those discussions that we will be recommending through solutions to government to address this. We don't know what the consequences of those social assistance rates are going to have on Nova Scotians this Winter and we need to know - if the cost of oil continues at the rate it is, what kind of effect that that's going to have.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That will fit in then, we'd have the Breakfast for Learning Program and Mental Health Services of the IWK for September, the two meetings, then October we'd try to do the daycare and then late November, early December, we'd set aside for the two days on this.

MR. PARENT: Can I go back?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes.

[10:15 a.m.]

MR. PARENT: For the witnesses we invite, I just want to stress once again, as broad as possible. Let me use an example that hopefully won't get me into trouble. Many of the organizations involved in aid overseas, I know for certain that you give a dollar toward them - and I won't name them but I could name them - about 60 cents to 70 cents goes into the organization, 30 cents actually gets over to people to help. Some of the advocacy groups really fall into the same class in my sense. It's not that they're not doing good work, they are, but when they come before the committee they have a vested interest, in a sense, to build up their organization, and our vested interest is to actually help the people. That's why, as broad as possible. Are you following me at all on that? I don't know how you'd do it . . .

MR. PYE: I hear your comment, I find it difficult to digest.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm not sure how we could make that judgment though. If they ask to be heard . . .

MR. PARENT: That's why I'm saying, what's wrong with saying to the chamber of commerce, we'd like a presentation from you. They can say no, it's not something we're interested in. I've seen it where there is this vested interest and that's part of that, so I just want it as broad as possible. Otherwise, what we're going to end up with is not as full a picture as we need or as full a solution as we need.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm not sure who had their hands up first. Where's the code of honour here? Jerry.

MR. PYE: The only concern I have is with the comment that the honourable member made with respect to the advocacy groups having a vested interest, and I know that he didn't mean that in any real negative way, because the individuals really do and they have always had a vested interest in making sure that we address the issues of poverty in the province. Now, if that requires additional resources on their behalf in order to address that, I really don't see a problem with it. The bottom line is that we address the issue of poverty in the province and from what I heard you say - and I certainly hope it's not taken out of context at this meeting today and somebody doesn't extract it from Hansard to say that these advocacy groups have a vested interest in self-building, because I hope that that's not what you intended to come out of that. So I would want some clarity on this from the honourable member.

MR. PARENT: Let me try to put it in a more positive manner. If we're going to tackle poverty we need everybody being part of the solution, not just those whose job is 100 per cent to deal with that issue. We need everybody at the table if we're actually going to deal with it, so there's a positive way of saying that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: And I'm going to jump in here, I think we have to keep in mind, too, that as a legislative committee it's not our role to tell business they should be doing this. We're more directly responsible for what the Government of Nova Scotia is doing, so I just think we have to keep that in mind.

Danny, then Stephen.

MR. GRAHAM: I'm going to throw a bit of a curve into the suggestion that, in some respects, may address what Mark has been saying. I took it in a positive light but can see how it might be taken potentially in a negative light, as well.

Increasingly, there is a school of thought that believes that panel presentations and bringing together talking heads doesn't get you to the solutions that you ultimately need, and that there are processes that are ultimately more effective than that exercise to move things along. They're in a family of processes called deliberative processes and examples of those range everywhere from a truth commission in South Africa to Nova Scotia Power bringing together its customers, chosen randomly, back in November to talk about the rock and a hard place between higher power rates and the Kyoto Protocol that needs to be adhered to. It brings people together and helps them become fully informed participants in a process.

To give you an example of what happened around the Nova Scotia Power experience is that at the beginning of this two- or three-day exercise they said to everybody, here are the issues we face, what are your choices, and their responses were geared in a certain way. After providing them with all the information about the challenges, at the end of that two or three days, they were not completely different but they were dramatically different, much more constructive and in those circumstances, much greener than the choices they made going into the process.

It does involve some provision of resources and thought at the outset where you say, okay, we're going to bring people together and support them in a way where they take their uniforms off, they learn deeply what it is that the choices are that they make. And through a facilitated process and with not as many sort of vested interests at the table, people start to really work through to the core issues. If we want lasting solutions, frankly, I have a strong bias in favour of those and it's perhaps reflected in what I'm saying.

Deliberative processes are coming one way or another and this is potentially an opportunity - it would require the Speaker's process and it would require a lot of thought to sort of work through what it is. If we don't want to be here in five years' time talking about the same kinds of issues and if we really want to move the ball, I think it's something worth considering as we expand this discussion to something more comprehensive.

MR. PARENT: The honourable member stated very well what I was trying to state in my remarks.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So do we want to go back and rethink?

MR. PARENT: No, it's a question of who we choose.

MR. MCNEIL: To cover what Mark is saying, when you do the ad, any organization could suggest that they want to do a presentation, quite frankly, if they look at the ad and it says, we're going to be talking about social assistance rates, we're going to be talking about affordable housing, transportation, and the Kentville Chamber of Commerce can suggest to you that they want to make a presentation and we'll look at it then. In terms of vested interest, if there's any group coming before us trying to slant the discussion or the solution in their favour, that's our responsibility in the last half of the second day to make sure that the recommendations we're putting forward are in the best interests of the people who are being faced with poverty.

MR. PARENT: Just getting back, though, Stephen, if you deliberately target certain groups that would not normally respond, for example, the traditional groups whose mandate this is will respond to that ad and say yes, we'll go to that, we'll send a representative, but groups like the chambers of commerce, or maybe there's an association of police officers that wouldn't traditionally respond to an ad like. But actually coming to the table in that deliberative style that Danny talked about, I think is productive and helps move things forward so that it's not a case of what you said, Jerry, where we make these wonderful recommendations but they go nowhere. Part of this thing is wider than just hearing from people, it's creating a movement.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Perhaps also each of us could take some responsibility for thinking outside the box in terms of who we notify that this opportunity is coming up, and just make sure that some of those organizations that wouldn't normally read the ad and respond to it, actually do.

MR. PARENT: You can ghettoize this issue quite easily, is what I'm saying. That's not what I want to do because if you ghettoize it what you'll have is it will continue on and we'll scream and shout, but it would be ghettoized.

MR. PYE: I think we should identify health professions as well.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: If you have some specific organizations in mind, perhaps you could give the names and addresses to Mora and we can make sure an invitation goes out to them . . .

MR. PYE: Family centres.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: . . . so they're involved in that first round of invitations. Danny, I certainly appreciate your points. Last night I had a chance to take part in a world café process around the cultural policy for the HRM, and it was fascinating. Certainly, in the sector



I come from, the voluntary sector, they're getting more into those deliberative approaches and they're so much more effective, I agree. Quite frankly, I think the jump from what we've traditionally done as a committee to something like that would be transforming, and I can't see it happening this next time but it's obviously something that we need to be looking at. If we do the same old things in the same old way, we're going to come up often with the same old answers and they're not working. Thank you for sharing that.

We have two more things to do before we leave. We still have two requests that we haven't added to the list, the Cape Breton/Victoria Foster Parent Association and also the NSGEU about home support services.

MR. PARENT: We have the lists from your two caucuses as well. Why are you bumping those two above the list from your caucus?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just that we had agreed to take a couple of top priorities from each of the caucuses the last time. I think the only one from us, for example, that got on was the IWK Mental Health Services. Community supports for adults is not listed. What about your list? You had KidSport, didn't you, for the PC caucus.

MR. PARENT: We wanted KidSport and Breakfast for Learning. The Breakfast for Learning has already been taken but KidSport is already on.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, that's very fair of you. Obviously, our next option would be community supports for adults.

MR. PYE: Where does the small options homes fit into this? Have we moved that off completely? That was one of the items already on the agenda approved.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think, in effect, we've bumped it down after the two-day forum, so it's possible that that may be January.

MS. STEVENS: I didn't really put these on the list, other than the Breakfast for Learning and the IWK in what order they had to be taken in, it's just what order they came off the list, so I just sort of cut and pasted. It wasn't meant to be in what order, I think it's just the length of time they've been on the list.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So I guess my next question is, how do you want to handle the two outside requests and then do we want to go back to the priority list that each caucus came up with and then we can decide what priority we want those remaining topics to be dealt with. We're only committed in terms of today's discussion, I guess. We've dealt with to the end of this calendar year, so we'd be starting in January.

MR. MCNEIL: Did we say in January it was going to be small options?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: If that's the priority we give it.

MR. PYE: In that case, the other two items we have here would be somewhere in February or March, then the budget is coming up soon and the Foster Parents Association. I know the request comes from Cape Breton but did we not have the foster parents before us?

MS. STEVENS: The Federation of Foster Families.

MR. MCNEIL: Weren't there reps from Cape Breton here?

MR. PARENT: I thought we had done that one.

MS. STEVENS: Yes. We did the board of governors for the Children's Aid Society which had everyone in and the Halifax Children . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: There was some confusion that they actually only represented Halifax but it seems to me there was one from Cape Breton.

MS. STEVENS: We had them again. We had the Federation of Foster Families and the Children's Aid Society of Halifax in and then we had a follow-up with the board of governors that reached all of the province for Children's Aid Societies.

MR. PYE: I really think the Home Support Services Act needs to be placed here somewhere and it should have a priority.

MR. MCNEIL: We had also submitted our list, which you have in front of you. The Crosbie House Society was one that was a priority for us that we wanted to get before the committee.

MR. PYE: The Crosbie House Society would be number one on the list. (Interruptions)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Community Supports for Adults is on both lists.

MR. PARENT: Public housing, we are going to be dealing with it in the forum.

MR. PYE: To some extent.

MR. PARENT: To some extent. We can maybe come back and revisit it later.

MR. PYE: Yes, that sounds fair.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, I don't see any other items from the PC caucus but what if we took the next priority from each of the other two caucuses and you can add one if you

want and add the NSGEU and then we can decide what priority we want to do them in. That would take us into next Spring anyhow.

[10:30 a.m.]

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, if I can recommend Community Supports for Adults. It's on at least two agendas here, the Liberal's agenda and our agenda. I'm sure that the Progressive Conservative agenda would accept that (Interruptions)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It's now persons with disabilities.

MR. PYE: We will get the new title and put that title on. And the Crosbie House?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: And you are suggesting Crosbie House? What do you want to do with the NSGEU request?

MR. PYE: Obviously I think that the NSGEU request, is this an Act that they are thinking about bringing forward in the Fall sitting of the Legislature? Were they asked to bring this Act forward? This is obviously a bill. (Interruption) That's right, to replace the Homemakers Services Act and this is obviously a bill. I don't know if we have discussed bills prior, at the Standing Committee on Community Services before being introduced in the House or what the case with this procedure is.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mora, do you know?

MS. STEVENS: We have not, in my experience, looked at bills prior to them going before the House, this committee hasn't looked at, I don't think any committee has.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, so if they wanted to come and talk to us about the general concerns or issue, that might be different from . . .

MR. MCNEIL: Why don't we table this? Quite frankly, we have a number of items in front of us that are going to take us well into next year. When we get through the Fall session, maybe some of the questions that Jerry has brought up, maybe it will be a bill, who knows? Then we will be out of there, we will have dealt with it in the Legislature as opposed to dealing with it at the committee level.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So shall we add it to sort of our continuing agenda and see what's happened by next January and then we can decide what to do?

MR. MCNEIL: Perfect.

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, if I might add, I think it's important to notify the NSGEU that we can certainly have them as witnesses speaking about home support services but not the

Act in particular. It has not been a custom of the Committee on Community Services to address issues of bills, that there is a process by which bills are entered into the Legislature.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, so did I hear earlier that perhaps we should send a letter to the Cape Breton/Victoria Foster Parent Association and perhaps we could attach the minutes from the two meetings we had and suggest if they have any additional issues they could write to us or we would consider it, but we just want to make sure that we are fair to all the menu of issues that we are dealing with.

MR. PYE: Agreed.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay. So have we left anybody out?

MR. MCNEIL: The Crosbie House and . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Community Supports for Adults. So I think the only thing left to do is to prioritize what we have left, beginning with the approved list, the Department of Community Services concerning Day Care Centres, Small Options Homes, KidSport Program, Community Supports for Adults and Crosbie House. So how do you want to prioritize those, in what order?

MR. PARENT: Well, I think the three that were already on the agenda should be prioritized first.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, so daycare would be January - just roughly, we may have to change it - small options would be February; KidSport, March?

MR. PYE: No, no. The Crosbie Centre should come in . . .

MR. MCNEIL: But you have also missed October.

MR. PARENT: You have September and October.

MS. STEVENS: October would be daycare centres.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Oh, okay.

MR. MCNEIL: So January then would be the small options.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Right. KidSport would be February and then we get to the two new items we've added.

MR. PARENT: That's going to make the Crosbie House kind of late, isn't it?

MR. PYE: No, if it comes in in February, it will still be in time for budget.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, I think we are looking at March now.

MR. MCNEIL: We are looking at March now.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is that okay if we do that in March?

MR. MCNEIL: The KidSport Program is really, unless I'm wrong - is that something that's to bring us up to date on what's available, what's happening?

MR. PARENT: To put some focus upon health prevention which I think is . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It's a bit of a good-news story, right?

MR. PARENT: It's a bit of a good-news story but also to continue to put emphasis on that which we all agree we have to do more of if we are going to . . .

MR. MCNEIL: What if we slid Crosbie in front of it which would put it in . . .

MR. PARENT: Fine with me.

MR. PYE: I have no problem with that either.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: My only concern, and I'm being partisan here, okay, after listening to people talk about the problems in the Community Supports for Adults Program for four hours yesterday, it would be really nice to get that discussed before the budget.

MR. PYE: Yes.

MS. STEVENS: Could you switch with small options . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Could we switch with small options, just in order to get some of that on the record before the budget?

MS. STEVENS: Make them in April.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. MCNEIL: Will we go in the order of January being Community Supports for Adults, February being Crosbie?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Are you okay with that?

MR. MCNEIL: If there's any problem, then Mora can flip those. If, for example, you don't . . .

MS. STEVENS: That would be a good option - no pun intended - to have because sometimes they can't make that last Thursday and remember we switch to the mornings - actually this committee is mornings - so it is the Thursday morning and sometimes I might have to switch that date in order to accommodate them. But if I can tell them this far out, that's perfect because then they can be . . .

MR. PARENT: Run by me switching the dates?

MS. STEVENS: Well, sometimes it's just a matter of switching the time if they couldn't do a morning because we have that specific last Thursday.

MR. PARENT: I prefer not to do that simply because for our sake, scheduling - I'd rather flip the groups if we have to.

MS. STEVENS: Okay. And if I can tell them now that we would like to have you in March, they are going to clear that date. It's not as if they only have two or three weeks' notice or a month's notice. If they know a specific date, they are very good that way.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, so that takes us through to next March. (Interruptions)

Who's in April?

MR. MCNEIL: Just in time to campaign.

MR. PARENT: Will we then be in the middle of an election?

MR. GRAHAM: We'll be through the election by then. (Laughter)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Sorry, Jerry, did you have a point?

MR. PYE: I guess we can have clarity now with respect to what's going on so that I know, but you will certainly send us out a message . . .

MS. STEVENS: I will. What I'm going to do is I'm going to call them and book them and then I'll send out a list of who's coming when.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. PYE: So the first three take us right up until October and then the last week of November or in December, we have this Forum on Social Assistance and then . . .

MS. STEVENS: And that might vary, depending on when the House is in.

MR. PYE: . . . and then back in December. That's right.

MS. STEVENS: So it might be more in December if they are into November or something.

MR. PYE: That's right.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So is there anything else we need to do?

MR. PYE: That's it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Does anybody want to add anything? If not, I want to thank you very much. Yes.

MR. MCNEIL: I'm not sure if it has been mentioned, but Diana Whalen will be the new committee member for our caucus.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, she had signed that letter.

MR. PARENT: Who's going off?

MR. MCNEIL: Russell.

MR. PARENT: Oh, he's going to come on our side. (Laughter)

MR. PYE: Are we on the record, Madam Chairman?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, I think the meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:40 a.m.]