

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Friday, January 12, 2006

Red Chamber

Forum on Poverty - Round Table

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Ms. Marilyn More (Chairman)

Mr. Mark Parent

Mr. Gary Hines

Ms. Judy Streach

Mr. Jerry Pye

Mr. Gordon Gosse

Mr. Stephen McNeil

Mr. Leo Glavine

Ms. Diana Whalen

In Attendance:

Ms. Mora Stevens
Legislative Committee Clerk

Ms. Valerie Osborne - Member, Face of Poverty

Mr. Alasdair Sinclair - Member, Face of Poverty

Ms. Laurel Taylor - Halifax Coalition Against Poverty (HCAP)

Ms. Jane Warren - Disabled Persons Commission

Mr. Ken McKinley - Private Citizen

Ms. Gayle McIntyre - Member, Community Advocates Network

Ms. Shirley Marratt - Private Citizen (Former Member, Welfare Rights)

Ms. Katherine Reed - Antigonish Women's Resource Centre

Ms. Corrie Douma - Member, Face of Poverty

Ms. Elizabeth Brown - Co-Chair, Face of Poverty

WITNESSES

Face of Poverty

Ms. Carolyn Earle, Co-Chair

Deacon Bob Britten, Archdiocese of Nova Scotia

Community Advocates Network

Mr. John Cox

Co-Chair

Mr. Paul O'Hara

Co-Chair

Community Action on Homelessness

Ms. Darcy Harvey, Capacity Development Officer

Mr. Wayne MacNaughton, Steering Committee Member

Affordable Energy Coalition

Ms. Megan Leslie, Community Legal Worker - Dalhousie Legal Aid Service

Women's Centres CONNECT!

Ms. Lucille Harper, Antigonish Women's Resource Centre

Ms. Rene Ross, Project Coordinator - Social Assistance Reform: Moving Forward



HALIFAX, THURSDAY, JANUARY 12, 2006

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

1:30 P.M.

CHAIRMAN
Ms. Marilyn More

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Welcome back and thank you very much for coming back. We're just going to, loosely, in the next five minutes perhaps decide or get the consensus on how we're going to operate the round table. I think each of the presenting organizations this morning was able to seat two of their representatives at the table, and we know that there are other representatives sitting in the room and if you have anything you want to add to a particular issue we hope to have the opportunity for you to come to the standing mic here, and you can make your point there.

It's important for our recording purposes that each person who speaks mention their name at the beginning of each time they make a comment, and so I would ask people to respect that. It also helps everyone else remember who we are.

Okay, so you have all been handed a list of possible topics for discussion this afternoon and, as practical as I am, I realize there is no way we're going to get through them all, so I'm thinking the first order of business is to decide perhaps on the top four that we might like to discuss this afternoon, and that way we won't leave out an important topic if we do run short of time. If time allows, we'll touch on all of them, but going around the table and giving people a chance to speak on each topic will take up considerable time, so I think we have to be careful that we're talking about the ones that you feel are the most important.

Perhaps we should just go around and reintroduce ourselves. I know Mora is making a seating plan for Leg. TV and me, thank you. So we'll do introductions first.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I want to mention, as well, that a couple of people who are here today have mentioned that they're having trouble hearing some of the speakers. So I ask each of us, as a reminder, to speak into the mic and hopefully everyone then can take part in the proceedings this afternoon. (Interruption)

Okay, we will really make an effort, and I will try to remind people to introduce themselves each time they speak. So looking at the possible topics, do we want to choose three or four to make sure that the most important ones do get discussed this afternoon? Does anyone have a suggestion for topic number one?

DEACON BOB BRITTEN: Social assistance is one topic that seemed to be common among everyone this morning.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, social assistance rates, the first one. Is there agreement? Yes, fine. Another suggestion.

MR. WAYNE MACNAUGHTON: Affordable housing.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is there agreement around the table? Another issue.

MR. JOHN COX: The Employment Support and Income Assistance Act.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, the bottom one, Employment Support and Income Assistance Act. Do you want to stand at the mic? Do you want to make a comment? Do you want to stand up here at the corner mic? Did you want to make a suggestion? (Interruptions)

I think what might help is, if a person around the table wants to speak just wave your finger, that at least gives the recording people a chance to turn your mic on. Just wait a few seconds and then you can give your name and make your comments, that way it might be easier for people in the audience to hear.

MR. BRITTEN: Madam Chairman, in terms of the topic on social assistance rates, I'm particularly concerned about rates for shelter for single employable people at \$285 a month. It's kind of interesting that if you're working at minimum wage in this province, 40 hours a week at a full-time job, at the end of the month you've got \$1,169. If you then go to unemployment insurance, you're going to get 55 per cent of that, and then if you go to social assistance, you go to 40 per cent of that. Your rent doesn't change and your food costs don't change, and the result is catastrophic for people. At the same time, we heard about the impacts on society in terms of homelessness or inadequate housing that people are forced to move into, increasing crime rates and so on. So we pay as a society for what seems to be a minor kind of issue.

I really feel strongly, because I think of all the people who I see, in terms of just dropping into my office and the situations that they're in, there's a real desperate need to have shelter rates correspond with reality, just for the well-being and the safety of our society if for no other reason.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Did I see a hand on this side? Rene, yes.

MS. RENE ROSS: On social assistance reform moving forward, I just wanted to go on record that we probably aren't seen to be prioritizing these areas. I want to take from my conversations with women, depending upon where you are in this province and what level of poverty you are in, that each one of these areas is critical. So I hope that you would find the time and the opportunity to touch on them. Transportation is one, for instance, especially critical for women in rural areas, if they don't have transportation to get their children to the IWK for instance, that this is going to impact on their medical plan. So I just wanted to say that I do appreciate that we only have so much time but I do see, from the women I've talked to . . .

[1:45 p.m.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, I think what might help us in terms of getting to as many of these topics, if not all of them, is if we try not to repeat information that has already been given today and perhaps introduce new perspectives on these issues and that way we may be able to get through as many as possible. So thank you for raising that.

Bob has opened up the discussion talking about the inadequacy of the shelter allowance rates. So are there other speakers on the social assistance rates? Paul.

MR. PAUL O'HARA: I just wanted to make a point. First, let me express that I'm very disappointed that there isn't a government representative at the table right now. That's very disheartening that there is nobody here representing the governing Party. (Interruptions) Mark Parent is not here.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, he is here. (Interruption) He has just gone to take a telephone call.

MR. O'HARA: Well, there's one of three and I think that reflects the political will to address the issues that we're here to talk about today. I mean it's very discouraging to see that and what's even more discouraging I think is the information Wayne passed around earlier today about the assistance rates where it's a fact that this government is reducing the amount of entitlement to social assistance by recipients, all recipients.

If you're a disabled adult in this province, you haven't had an increase in 20 years and they get less money than they did 20 years ago, or at least 10 years ago. There is less money now for somebody who, through no fault of their own - you can't do any value judgment or anything else - a disabled adult who has no capacity to get involved in the economy in any way is being treated as less than human by the amount of the social assistance rate. Further, there are less people now on social assistance than there were five years ago. The rates are lower. They've been lowered and when we raised this with the government, they talk numbers. Basically what the government has done is cut the rate and then use the money for special needs. We do this A, B, C, D.

Well, you're taking it away from the disabled people to do it. You're taking it out of the mouths of the poorest children in this province by doing it, it's outrageous, as was stated I think by Lucille Harper earlier today. It's very frustrating that we don't have any political will. I hope that gets on the table somehow. There is no entitlement in this province as a human being if you're unable to participate in the economy. You're viewed as less than human - no argument. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Paul. Jerry.

MR. JERRY PYE: Madam Chairman, I just want to make a brief comment and I want to pose some questions to the two individuals who might want to answer around social assistance rates. I recall through the service exchange back in 1995 that the government of the day then indicated that no one would be disadvantaged as a result of the province taking over social services, that in fact there used to be two levels of social assistance provided to individuals - one was short-term social assistance provided by the municipal units and, two, that the long-term social assistance was normally that provided by the province.

Now, I do know that Bob is very much aware of this and I want Bob to correct me if I'm wrong. There was certainly a great deal more money allowed for able-bodied unemployed individuals to receive shelter components than what is now presently available, and I don't believe there was any restriction on the amount of money that they could receive for a shelter component. As a matter of fact, I think it went up to a maximum of \$400 or \$500 - in that particular range. So I would like some clarity on that.

The other final question that I would like to know is that I do recall this morning when I was about to ask a question on the issue of a guaranteed annual income - this was actually promised by the federal Government of Canada, back in 1993, it did not happen, but then there was some provincial talk around a guaranteed annual income in some provinces - and I'm just wondering, what effect does a guaranteed annual income have on social assistance rates as well? So if I can leave those two questions, with either Mr. O'Hara or Mr. Britten responding, then I would truly appreciate it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Bob, do you want to go first and then I'll ask Paul to respond?

MR. BRITTEN: In 1995 the rate for a single, employable person on social assistance in the metro area was \$400 a month. That's a fact, okay? The other question on the guaranteed annual income, one of the things we know is that if you want to address poverty the first thing you do is put money in people's pockets. Most people act responsibly most of the time and will manage their affairs properly. I think in some experiences as I understand it from some of the European countries that do come close to guaranteed annual income is that it's one of the most effective ways of addressing poverty. I think the parallel example in Canada is the Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement program.

In 1960, if you were old, there was a high probability that you would be poor and after the full impact of GIS and Old Age Security what we see is poverty rates amongst elderly people going down and declining considerably. What people over 65 have is a guaranteed annual income in Canada, and if we extended a guaranteed annual income across the board, I would suggest it would have the same beneficial effects and would, in all likelihood, reduce costs to provincial governments.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Paul, would you like to respond?

MR. O'HARA: I think I've lost the first question. I'm not understanding what you are asking in relation to the rates and being dropped. Perhaps my comment would be that for single people, in particular, what has happened is that the government is taking money out of the housing allowance that was flexible and is giving it directly to landlords. Twenty years ago the rate was \$490 and the client had \$223 in their pocket as a single person - well, at least 10 years ago - and now they have \$190 in their pocket as opposed to \$223. So it has been reduced.

With families, the rental amount has actually been reduced. There's a clawback under the Child Tax Credit, which government says is not true but, as was mentioned this morning, the research is out, it's there, and it's evident - and it's not even a debate, the actual amount that people are given to feed their children has been reduced. Again, Graeme Fraser with the Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers has addressed that and the committee has that report.

In terms of a guaranteed income for all Nova Scotians, I think that would be great, for some of the comments made around the abuses that people on assistance take from very insensitive and disrespectful employees of the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services, who make them feel less than human and treat them in a very disrespectful way, at least we would have less of them if there was a guaranteed income supplement or a guaranteed income, and people wouldn't be forced, with all this grey area, to be open to the abuses.

I deal with this daily in my work. There are reports conducted by our organization and also by the women's centres across this province, and a common theme is the disrespect that the workers in that system have toward the clients and I think that that - I don't know how to

express this in a non-blunt way, the old plumbers' story that shit goes downhill - is the way that that system treats everybody in it, including those workers. They're given impossible tasks, and they're asked to deal with people with policies and remunerations that just don't cut it. They deal with some people who have all kinds of barriers and can be very challenging to deal with and to have a respectful conversation with when they're angry about what they are or they aren't getting.

It's hard for people to maintain their stamina and their ability to relate to people; however, they're professional people, they're well paid. They get their increases, their unions represent them quite well. This Legislature is going to get an increase, the salaries of all the MLAs are going to be increased and recognize the costs associated with doing their work or living and feeding their families. Why is it that people on welfare don't get the same kind of treatment?

The Premier said recently in the Legislature that he wishes he could do more for people on assistance, because the Department of Community Services was taking overpayments - which comes out of a food budget - for people who had special needs to fill their oil tanks last Winter. Now they're taking their food money all through the Spring and Summer, because they were paying for their oil last Winter, as an overpayment. Well, he can do more, and he should do more, and he should implement the same policy the way he went to the federal government with a fairness campaign. It's the same logic.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Paul, do you want to just finish up, please, so we can move on.

MR. O'HARA: Sorry. I'm done.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I didn't mean to cut you off.

MR. O'HARA: No, I'm finished.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: On the speakers' list, just to let people know, I have Leo, Megan and Lucille.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: One minute, is that what you're saying?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No.

MR. GLAVINE: This is an area that is really so easy to obviously be critical of. If we were in government I hope we would truly be more responsive, because \$190 just does not cut it. We are basically jeopardizing the long-term health and well-being of anybody who is on provincial assistance for any considerable length of time. Fortunately some people are in the system, and it does give them a basic existence for a period of time, until they move to

something better, but for the current government to say \$190 will look after your personal needs, but primarily the food on the table, you cannot eat even according to the Canada health guide, getting \$190 of personal allowance.

If there's any one thing that is going to help in the long term and reduce the impact on drugs and medical attention that recipients will need, I believe it's to improve the diet. In fact, the Face of Poverty gave us some information on a wonderful study that was done in New Brunswick. I think it was a Dr. McIntyre who pointed out that very fact, very explicitly, that as the supplement towards their diet was increased, the improvements were made.

[2:00 p.m.]

If there's anything that comes out of these two days, I think it should be an absolute appeal to the minister to deal with this shortfall in the short term and address it as quickly as possible. One of the really disturbing things that has happened, just twice in the past month, and it goes back, I think, to the training and especially, even more, perhaps, to the sensitivity of the caseworkers, I have been in the homes of two diabetic community service recipients who were not informed about the special diet portion that they could get a few more dollars for. I think those kinds of things are absolutely shameful, when they do occur. Again, the diabetic needs that special diet and good nutrition for their long-term health.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Megan.

MS. MEGAN LESLIE: I wanted to echo the sentiments of Paul O'Hara, much earlier, two comments ago, about the lack of political will of this government, but in keeping with why we're here today, to talk about the Department of Community Services, it's also the lack of political will of this department.

Earlier today I talked about how Community Services has really missed a good opportunity here with the Keep the Heat program. They have the expertise. They're the ones that know about low-income Nova Scotians. They should be running this program. I was a little bit positive about the way I phrased that. Let's look at it the other way. What in God's name is the Department of Energy doing running a program for low-income Nova Scotians? Where was the Department of Community Services? It appears to us as advocates at the Affordable Energy Coalition that it is the department downloading their responsibilities onto other government departments, like the Department of Energy, like the Department of Health. All of the services for Community Supports for Adults have been downloaded to the Department of Health, downloading responsibility to support single parents in university to the student loan system and private banks. The problem is that the department isn't stepping up to do the job that it's intended to do. So I wanted to just echo that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Lucille.

MS. LUCILLE HARPER: I want to just make a couple of points and one of the things that I wanted to draw our attention to when we're talking about social assistance rates, we know that social assistance rates are inadequate and this has been documented again and again. We know that this has significant impact on the health and well-being of the people who are trying to survive on those rates and therefore is a huge cost to other parts of our social systems immediately and over the long term.

One of the things I wanted to say is, when we look at who is on social assistance, many people are on social assistance for a very short period of time. For people, for whatever reasons and those reasons are many, leaving abusive situations, job loss, economic downturn, closing fish plants, many reasons why people need short-term support through social assistance. So who are the people who require income assistance support over the long term? That is a group of people who really have significant barriers. So we come up with these solutions like, well, everybody should just get a job. Well, without the kind of supports that are in place to address the barriers that people are facing - and those barriers are many and we've listed many of them today, whether it's disabilities, living in rural and isolated areas, lack of language, whatever those barriers are - we need to have really thoughtful programs in order to provide people with the kind of supports they need in order to move off the system, if that is our goal.

We also need to recognize that we are always going to have people who require support. That's just human decency that we provide people who require support with a decent standard of living, with a decent life, so that we're not saying you look hungry, so I'll kick you. We're not saying, okay, you have so many barriers, you're going to be on this system for a long time, so we're going to put you in the worst housing. We're not going to give you the drugs you need for health issues. We are going to keep you without a telephone. I mean, what is this? If we really want to be able to engage people in the larger economy - and I want to talk too about the larger economy because I think it's a false measure in many ways of how we judge somebody's participation - then we need to really have a program that is a compassionate, supportive program.

The same way with our health care. We put all this money into MRIs and all of this incredible equipment. How many ultrasounds do pregnant women have? Right. We do that because we want women to - and not that an ultrasound changes the health of the child, it just sort of gives the physicians a little reassurance. Some of these things that we do - we put incredible amounts of money in there, but when we have someone who's living in poverty and particularly vulnerable we put nothing there. So we need to really question what our thinking is around that.

The last thing I want to say - and I know we're short on time - is I think we really do need to consider the whole idea of a guaranteed liveable income. I think that's an idea that it's time has come. I say this as someone who lives in a rural area. A guaranteed liveable income would enable us to maintain our rural communities, because it allows people to stay there, and

when we allow people to stay in their communities, because people are industrious, because people are creative, because people care about their communities, they start to create community programs, they bring income into the community, et cetera.

We begin to build a social infrastructure that is the basis for an economic infrastructure. When we only focus on economic infrastructure as being the solution to a viable community, then what we do is we urbanize because the jobs, ostensibly, move to the cities, et cetera, and we undermine and cut that rural infrastructure. So a guaranteed liveable income in this province could be a really interesting experiment and way of revitalizing our rural communities, and addressing poverty as a human rights and as a social infrastructure issue.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Next we have John Cox.

MR. COX: I just need to say that I would argue that even today for people with disabilities there are two levels of social assistance still. There's the Services for People with Disabilities, which is the old Community Supports for Adults program, as well as the Employment Support and Income Assistance side. People are being turned away from the Services for People with Disabilities, because they're not disabled enough, but are able to get ESIA because they have a disability - it's just a flaw in thinking.

I'm a person with a disability; I'll always be a person with a disability. I jokingly said to Wayne earlier - if I may use this story - that I would love to see him get full-time work because then he would be able to see me more clearly. The department defines disability by ability to work, and that's it. I make a good wage, but not enough to get medication. I approached Community Services, and they've asked me to reduce my income by \$16 a month and come back on social assistance in order for me to get my medication. What that means is that I'm asking perhaps \$100 a month for medication, but in order for me to do that, they're forcing me to take perhaps anywhere between \$400 and \$450 a month - I don't see the economics in that.

Case managers, also, in the department are glorified doctors. Policy says I need a doctor's certificate - if I'm on assistance, I need a doctor's certificate for medical needs. I need a doctor's certificate for any disability needs. I go to my case manager, and the policy also says "at the discretion of the case manager". So I jump through all the hoops, I pay anywhere from \$25 upwards for a doctor's letter to get this, which is not covered, which comes out of my \$190 a month, and the case manager, at their discretion, will say whether I get that or not. They're playing doctor, they're playing God over our lives as people with disabilities.

By addressing some of the needs - and I think there needs to be something other than Community Services - Darcy or someone said earlier that they'd rather pay \$3,000 instead of paying \$500 in an institution. The economics aren't there. The effects on my health, on other systems, other departments, not just Community Services - there are health needs, sometimes Justice, Education, we talked about that earlier, too - these are all affected. Because my life as a

person with a disability is so departmentalized, they would rather send me to a hospital as a person with a disability, and spend \$3,000 a day, or whatever it is - \$30,000 a month rather than provide the right supports.

I struggle, I become a beggar, I become like Oliver Twist's "more please", trying to beg for 50 cents for my medication, or for \$5, but it's not Community Services' problem if they put me in the hospital and pay \$300 a day. It's more costly to the Nova Scotia Government to do that, but, hey, we're saving money here at Community Services because the Department of Health is willing to pay. I just don't see the economics of that. I don't see the benefits by taking me out of the community and institutionalizing me away from my home and my supports in the community.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Wayne MacNaughton.

MR. MACNAUGHTON: What I was just going to make a comment on is this discussion around a guaranteed annual income. I would point out one of the other major benefits of some kind of a guaranteed annual income program based, as was said, on something like the GIS or something like that, the same principle, where actually you make an application for this and then is done on a regular basis, basically automatically, from one central location, it would free up the caseworkers, and for that matter the employment insurance workers and everything else, who are now busy worrying about how many nickels and dimes a person gets and spending all of their time playing accountant, or a big part of their time playing accountant, to actually do counselling work and actually sit down one-on-one with individuals and figure out ways to help them get back some more independence and to be more self-sustaining and have a more fulfilling life.

Ultimately, I've known very few people who don't want that. It's interesting, we talk about the penalties that people incur when they go back to work when they're on social assistance and yet we know people who are disabled who have gone back to work even though they've actually been penalized economically for doing so because they want to work. They want to be independent. This kind of thing can be changed with some kind of a guaranteed system where caseworkers are not micromanaging every aspect of a person's life and are able to sit down and deal with the real issues of what side of training they need, what sort of supports do they need to maybe get back to being fully productive.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Darcy Harvey.

MS. DARCY HARVEY: I was glad that John brought up his point because it again reiterated the point I made this morning of the cost savings that could happen if Community Services' programs looked at individuals rather than at the symptoms, or if it was a less penalizing approach. I did a little research over lunch. Going back to the example I made this morning about the man who quit his job and then his family was deemed ineligible for

assistance for six weeks. In the Community Services policies it says, "Where an applicant or an applicant's spouse has quit a job or has been fired from a job within 4 months prior to the application for assistance, assistance shall not be granted for the 6 weeks subsequent to the date of the application if the applicant or the spouse (a) quit the job without just cause; (b) was fired with just cause . . ."

To put that into perspective, another example was brought to my attention over the lunch period of a single father in Truro who was fired from his job for taking his 2-year-old daughter to the emergency room, which he had documented, but his employer said that he hadn't incurred the sick time to let him, and lost his job. Because he was fired for that reason, his caseworker, who deemed this without just cause, cut him and his daughter off assistance for six weeks. I mean those are the kinds of choices that caseworkers are able to make in the lives of clients and it's obviously a problem within the policies of the department.

[2:15 p.m.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Stephen McNeil.

MR. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would say 60 per cent to 70 per cent of the work that comes through my office in Annapolis is probably related to Community Services, and for every person or every situation that I deal with there probably could be a change made to the policies. On a personal level the idea of a guaranteed annual income has been something that I've been trying to look at and study and understand, because I think in the long run that may be a solution - but I think one of the things that we should be doing today is what are we going to do in the short term and what would be of a benefit to everybody or the vast majority of the people that we see on a regular basis.

I think it was Wayne who spoke this morning about a percentage of the average rental in a particular community should be what's used towards an allowance. I think Wayne may have said 85 per cent, and it begins to make sense. If I'm on assistance in Annapolis and I'm also on assistance in Clayton Park, there's no way I'm getting rent for the same amount. There's just no way. If I'm in Wolfville, you know, it just does not make sense, so that money has to come from somewhere else and families are taking it out of, whether it be their personal allowance - so I think, as a committee, to have the greatest impact on the vast majority of the people who are coming in, if we dealt directly with the housing allowance, that would have an impact today. So I think that's something as a group we should banter around a little bit.

The other thing which just seems ludicrous, absolutely ludicrous, is this clawback. We're talking about a guaranteed annual income. The government is not going to come out today with that type of policy and listen to us as a committee, but perhaps what we should say is it should be a right for somebody, or anybody, to be able to earn x number of dollars over and above what assistance is allowed them before the government starts clawing any money back.

I had a young man in my office yesterday, literally sick, because his nerves were getting to him. He had been working four hours at a video store and he hadn't told anybody. He was now in his third week and he was going to possibly get four hours in another week and he was scared that someone would find out. To tell you the truth, I wanted to tell him to keep quiet; I wanted to tell him not to tell anybody. But I know what would happen, you know, six months, eight months, nine months from now - they'll come to him because they've found out and they'll cut him off completely, he'll have nothing. That's not a choice that I like making, but I tried to put myself in his shoes and the shoes of the person who was sitting with him, and that's not something that we as a compassionate society should be allowing one of our fellow human beings to have to be put through. (Applause)

So I think when we look at those two particular issues, I think they will have the greatest impact the quickest. It was talked about today, the department. I think you'd be hard pressed to find anyone who would suggest to you that the department is running well. I think in the long term that may be one of the suggestions we need to make. We do need an independent review of the Community Services Department. We need somebody outside of the government to come in and say, what's going on? Are we all crazy? Are we not seeing it? Where are the difficulties here?

I just wanted to make those comments. I've been very quiet here today and it's not because I'm not interested, it's because this is really your day and, as an MLA representing a rural riding, there are lots of issues that come in front of us. We talked about housing this morning and I know we'll talk about that later, but someone mentioned the term affordable housing. Well, do you know what, if we asked everybody in this room to define affordable housing, it would be all different. Every one of us would have a different view.

The average income in my constituency is \$22,000. More than half of the few houses that have been built under the Affordable Housing Program, you need an income of over \$20,000 to \$45,000, or \$50,000, to get into them. The people in my riding who are living in poverty are living in substandard housing. They're living in housing where the heat bill is going through the roof, where that \$190 is being spent on oil. That \$285 won't even rent them a substandard house. That is the reality that I'm faced with as an MLA in rural Nova Scotia.

I think if we look at those two particular issues, and I'll close on that and go back to them. Wayne, it was a wonderful suggestion. It was an absolute common-sense suggestion. Look at the area you are in. As a government we need to say, I don't know how much it's going to rent in Gordie's riding, I don't know how much it's going to cost to rent in Dartmouth. I'm sure it's different than it is in Annapolis, and it should be treated differently. One size does not fit all, which has been bantered around. It was a great suggestion, Wayne, and I applaud you for that.

The other one, as someone said, was called the Campaign for Fairness, when we talked to Ottawa. Well, now it's our turn to talk to government and say, let's have a Campaign for Fairness or let's have a campaign for human decency when it comes to the clawback portion of what someone's allowed to earn. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Now we've had a couple of indications from the audience of people who would like to speak. Do I have the agreement of the round table to invite them up? I think Valerie was first, and Alasdair, and then we'll move over. Valerie, did you want to make some comments? I would just invite people to come up to the corner mic here, and perhaps you could give us your name and the organization you're with.

MS. VALERIE OSBORNE: I have a son whose fortunes are recorded on Page 7 of the Face of Poverty consultation - I won't go through all the details - and who was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome when he was 26, when people didn't know much about it. He is now 39. He's in his own apartment, trying to scrape by. About five years ago we tried to get some extra help for him, because he had never seen a social worker in the whole time that he had been there. I went through the details that are listed in here, and nobody showed up. He's still there, and nobody has been to see him or to help him because there's such a shortage of social workers. He's still unemployed. He hasn't done a thing in the last several years. He would be very hard to re-employ now, in any capacity.

We have a grandson in Alma, Quebec, who is now 17, who was also diagnosed with autism when he was four and then Asperger's Syndrome. He's been tracked through school, very carefully, and he now has ambitions. He's artistically talented, which his other grandmother provided him with the genes. He knows that he wants to go to art college; he knows he wants to be an animator. He's a very strange person, but he has a lot of get up and go. He is going to be all right. I'm quite sure that one of these days he'll be paying income tax, not far from now.

I really don't know what's going to happen to Mark, because he's been left in the doldrums for this number of years. One of the problems of his trying to get a job is this dreadful crossing over between the money he gets from social services and what he may or may not get in employment. That really does need to be addressed. If you want to get people back in the workforce, you're going to have to treat them very carefully and get them back in. That's all.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Valerie. We appreciate that.

MR. ALASDAIR SINCLAIR: Alasdair Sinclair, Face of Poverty. The question was raised this morning, if we had any numbers on some of our proposals. Pauline Raven, whom you may know, does the interesting report on the Child Report Card. Her e-mail is paulineraven@ns.sympatico.ca. She has a number here - to bring families up from where they are to the low-income standard would cost \$170 million. It's a lot of money, \$170 million.

Well, there are 20,000 families involved, so it's about \$8,000 per family per year, which works out to about \$700 per month. When you put it in that context, it's not an unbelievable number. Not all these people are on minimum wage, but if they were all on minimum wage an increase of \$4 would give you that kind of money, if they worked full-time. Anyway, that's the dimension of the problem we're talking about, \$170 million would bring families with children - there are others - up to the low-income standard, which as somebody said this morning is not all that great a target anyway. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Alasdair. Did I see Gayle's hand up? I'm sorry, because of the light I can't see. I wonder if some of you might like to come and stand behind the podium, and then we can recognize you. (Interruptions) Okay. Just step up to the podium, give your name, and the group you are representing.

MS. LAUREL TAYLOR: I'm here from HCAP, Halifax Coalition Against Poverty. I guess if I could summarize what I've heard so far, it would be that we need a new social safety net. We need a new social safety net. I don't know if Community Services is that safety net. We could even consider that we don't have one, because I think if you look at Feed Nova Scotia and this huge corporation that is growing as we speak, we know that there is no safety net, because a safety net basically prevents people from falling into poverty. So what we seem to have is Community Services, where you fall into poverty and then you try to obtain some survival tickets to carry you through to the next week. That's not adequate.

I think the task here now is to implement a social safety net that's compatible now with the new economy, which is a globalized market economy, where half of the jobs now created in Nova Scotia are low-income and not adequate to give people enough survival tickets. So this is a task ahead of us. I really love hearing people talk about the guaranteed annual income, because this is the work that has already been done. In the last part of the 1970s and early 1980s, some of the biggest financial institutions in Canada recommended that this was the new way and that we have to abolish the welfare system. That's one of the points I wanted to make.

The other point I wanted to make - I know that the memo that was sent out to invite some of the organizations here today, it says in this memo - I guess what I wanted to ask is, is there any organization here that's providing services to the poor? In this memo, it says, enhancing services to the poor. "The Committee also recognizes that there are limited resources that can be provided to strengthen and enhance services to the poor . . ." I'm not quite sure if there's any committee here that's actually providing services to the poor. I think there are people here who are advocating on behalf of people living in poverty.

I also wanted to make the point that I find this language appalling. We have to lose the lexicon "poor". I can't imagine anyone who would want to be referred to as poor. As a person who grew up in poverty, my family never considered ourselves poor, financially disadvantaged, yes, and there are many people in Nova Scotia who are financially

disadvantaged. I would really like to encourage you to lose this 19th Century lexicon and maybe refer to people as financially disadvantaged. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Next. Just step up to the mic, and give your name and the organization.

MS. JANE WARREN: I was asked by the Disabled Persons Commission of Nova Scotia to attend. I'm not sure I should be representing them at the mic, however. I'm also with the Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia. I wanted to make a comment to Mr. Britten about his statement about the \$190 for personal needs. Yes, it's written out that you get \$190 for personal needs, but your telephone has to come out of that. So that brings it down even lower. Then what you're able to put food on the table and buy soap or toothpaste, and that's only for people getting the maximum. So if you don't get the total maximum amount of money per month - and even perhaps if you are - you're going to be using some of that food money to pay for your heat and lights, or buy soap or buy Tampax, razors or something.

[2:30 p.m.]

The other thing is, Mr. McNeil, thank you very much for suggesting we perhaps go back to family benefits because they had the allowable earnings. It was only \$100 a month for single recipients and \$200 a month allowable earnings if you had dependants. When that was brought in in the early 1980s, you could work one day a week for a month at minimum wage and earn approximately \$100. I think it was like \$97 you would earn. But with the increase in minimum wage, working one day a week for a month, say 4.3 days a month, you were taking home like \$175. Now I did my calculations a few years ago, so it's higher than that now. So therefore you were getting losses from your cheque because you were working one day a week during the month.

There have been 500 petitions signed by various Nova Scotians that were submitted to the Department of Community Services saying - now this was back when family benefits had the allowable earnings - that social assistance amounts should be indexed to the minimum wage. Now that wouldn't help people who have higher than minimum wage jobs, but they're going to earn more than what the cut-off rate for social assistance is. Keep that in mind please.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Jane.

MR. KEN MCKINLEY: My name is Ken McKinley. I am with the Metro Chapter of the Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia and a lot of our people, for obvious reasons, find themselves on Community Services support or lack thereof, and I was encouraged by some of the comments of Mr. McNeil a bit earlier.

A lot that needs to be said has already been said and needs to be reiterated, I think, until the point gets through. If some additional spending was done at Community Services on the

allocations, spending in other government areas would go down, notably Health and possibly even law enforcement. If you take care of people's basic needs, they're not as likely to be desperate and not as likely to go outside the boundaries of the law and they are certainly going to be in better health. So the taxing of the health system will be lessened by a simple increase at Community Services.

The logic is irrefutable. The problem is political will or lack of it. What was alluded to by the Community Advocates Network earlier, human rights, that's really what this boils down to. I have been in touch regularly with Jerry and with some of his colleagues in the Legislature and I would like to see, now that the government is in a minority position, the two Opposition Parties amend the Human Rights Act to include adequate food, adequate nutrition and adequate housing as basic human rights. I think that is doable if the Opposition Parties would band together to make that happen and would place demands on Community Services that they would have to live up to, that they don't have to live up to now, and there would have to be a rewriting of other government legislation if the Human Rights Act was amended to include those two items, adequate nutrition and adequate housing, as basic human rights.

I would like the MLAs, all of them, including the government representative here, to consider the possibility of maybe increasing Community Services' budget so that maybe the expenditures in other areas would be less. If you want to look at this just as a balance sheet item and forget the human equation, just look at it that way.

Anyway, I guess that's most of what I have to say for now.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Ken. Gayle.

MS. GAYLE MCINTYRE: I'll try to be brief. I consider myself as we go along, I adopt new language which makes it more modified for me while I'm working as a community voice person. I call myself a POW, because I am a prisoner of welfare. I'm a prisoner of warfare because I am at war. At the risk of sounding like I'm bragging, I think I'm the only person in the room that's had the longest relationship with Community Services because I used to be a ward of the court and that should mean certain things to the people in the room. Why am I standing here? Something's wrong with our child welfare that I'm standing here as an adult on the same system, but different department. It could be a whole conference all by itself, but I wanted to show that things have not changed.

I have three university degrees and I have a social work degree. When a mentor of mine who is a social worker said, Gayle, I don't know if you're f-ing crazy or f-ing brilliant. I said, well, I'll take the brilliant one because I'm getting labeled the crazy one by Community Services anyway.

The problem I wanted to bring and maybe tie together, disclosure is a powerful tool and I had a debate and we all debate whether we want to share our personal information because

sometimes it does come back against us, but I decided to do so because I think it ties some things together here very nicely.

As I said, I'm on permanent disability, but I wasn't born sick. In fact, Community Services made me sick because as a ward of court when they failed to address certain issues at that time, I had to come back into the court system as an adult to bring perpetrators to court, because they failed to respond as a child to bring these perpetrators to court. Because I had to spend four years in the criminal court system, I ended up getting four chronic illnesses that Community Services refused at the time to acknowledge. So you can imagine my rage that they created the situation: I had to clean up the mess and they're withholding the remedies for me to alleviate the pain that came out of that, and I don't apologize for my rage.

I was so sick that I could barely lift my head off the floor for about a foot, so I couldn't even write a letter, but at the time it was Peter Christie that I taped a message to and it was a 90-minute tape. I will give kudos to NDP Kevin Deveaux because he chased that man all over the place. Did you hear Gayle's tale? Did you hear it, did you hear it? I'll get a copy if you lost it. That was passed over to who shall remain nameless because the person is in the room and I received a letter saying that the minister said he couldn't do anything for me because Community Services is outlined by MSI. I wrote a letter back, as sick as I was, and I said did he forget he's the minister and he has the authority to change that policy, and that's all I could basically say at the time.

Unfortunately, despite my approaching the MLA who was in my area on public housing, despite my three-part report to David Morse over the years on the outrageous abuse in child welfare today, not yesteryear, today, the outrageous abuse from Community Services in housing and the outrageous abuse in the social assistance disability programs, David Morse to date has failed to respond to any one of those reports, not because I'm not credible but because I'm damn credible, and he has gone out of his way to ignore responding to those very serious reports.

The Ombudsman's Office, and just to answer where you're at, there is an investigation going on right now. I had to call the Ombudsman's Office in tears. I don't mind sharing with you on May 25, 2004, I attempted to take my life, not because I'm depressed, not because I am mentally ill, but because I knew, as a person on permanent disability, I had to spend the rest of my life being abused by a department that created this mess and I was not going to buy that for my life. That was not my life. I had worked too hard for my degrees and for my family. My son, while I was sick and being traumatized, had to spend more time with extended people, friends, and we had to rely on the generosity of everybody but Community Services.

Anyway, just to tie it all up, I'm just saying that Community Services is responsible for destroying families. It needs to start being held accountable. Right now the Ombudsman's Office has every one of those documents. I've been saving them for 10 years and they've had

them, they've had the papers for six months, and they just asked for an extension to the end of January. I'm hoping that their investigation is sincere and I'm hoping to see some serious employment changes in that office, but we have a serious situation of terrorism in our Community Services Department that is literally destroying people. I'm a strong woman, I'm an educated woman, I used to be a well woman, and for me to be on my knees and attempting to take my life is the only option, we've got a sad state of affairs in a so-called civilized nation. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Gayle. That must have been very painful to share and we appreciate the story. We've been over an hour on the one topic and I'm just wondering if we might move on to another topic. Is there anyone who desperately wants to have something new to say about the social assistance rates? Yes.

MS. ROSS: Gayle, you're amazing, that's it, and I'm going to go off the record right now because I do represent Women's Centres CONNECT! and I will stick to that topic, but I will say that in my volunteer capacity I am the president of Stepping Stone and we provide harm reduction to prostitutes and sex trade workers in the city. I know what happens when you keep social assistance rates low and we are actually seeing an increase in the sex trade.

When you're talking about child welfare, I travelled across the province and I went to the women's centres and heard the struggles of women on assistance who fear that their children are going to be apprehended. As a new mother, I couldn't imagine - the women feel that they are being blamed for their own poverty. I also want to say very quickly that in my opinion and based on my research, I do believe that - and there's an overwhelming response from the women that I've met - that, yes, rates need to be increased across the board to substantial levels. Right now the rates are not at a livable standard and I believe that what this is doing is actually perpetuating a legacy of poverty which is happening in our province.

I think that rates are part and parcel of something, but we need to have a full basket of solutions and recommendations, that we're not just going to talk about, that we're going to implement, and look back at why it is especially that women are more economically disadvantaged, why they're having children who are economically disadvantaged and who are going to grow up to be economically disadvantaged and continue the cycle all over again.

Just on shelter allowance rates, I also want to share that every single woman that I've met - I met with 91 of them, and I'll talk more about that tomorrow in detail - not one of them wants to be on ESIA. Every single one of them wants to live a life independent of the system and they also want, yes, shelter allowance rates need to be increased and this is throughout the province; however, they would like to have, the majority of women I spoke to, some kind of standards there. There is a fear there that if shelter allowance rates are increased, the landlords will turn around, because landlords know what the shelter allowance ceiling is, they know when they have a woman who is living with them who is on income assistance.

The discrimination and the disempowerment of women isn't just coming from one department, it's coming throughout our communities and, no, Paul, we don't have political will, but we also, I don't feel, have a public will in this province to do something about it and I think that it's the job of all of us to try to do that and to educate the public on that. So I just want to say that, yes, rate increases across the board and the new shelter rates, just be a little cautious that the landlords don't turn around and raise theirs because we want that to go into the pockets of the people who need it the most.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Rene. Three more people have indicated they want to speak. The woman in the front row, why don't you just move forward to the chair.

MS. SHIRLEY MARRATT: My name is Shirley Marratt. There was an organization at one time that worked directly with the poor regardless of what was involved and no matter what you call it, whether you call it by a fancy name or what, being poor is poor. The thing is, one of the things that comes out of this forum can be very positive. You can ask first of all, where all of you know, the Minister of Community Services should be removed. I have knowledge of working directly with Community Services. I'm retired, but I still come across a lot of people who live in senior citizens where I am and they are not classified in this 60 to 65 range. They might be 55 to 58. They don't get a big amount of money. The rent is subsidized for the simple reason the housing is only allowed a certain amount of money for the rent, but when these people get sick, they need medicine and things, that I've got to move heaven and earth to beg, borrow or steal the money from somewhere.

I'll tell you, as far as I'm concerned, the Minister of Community Services is a person who, if welfare rights were still in the making, I'll tell you it would call on every organization here and he would have been gone a long time ago. I don't say that lightly, Bob Britten knows. In the past number of years there have been a few times that we have had social workers who treated people the way people have said here and we've had them removed because they weren't doing a job, they were treating people like dogs, and you don't do that. I'm saying that this minister, right now, as far as I'm concerned, needs to be removed.

The other thing, the same as Mr. McNeil said, there should be some kind of a study undertaken to see what is wrong, what can be rectified in it. As far as the guaranteed income, my God, that was talked quite a while. I go back 35 years, at least, working and trying to make things better for people, and every day I have to look after somebody else I say to myself, my God, in 35 years, it hasn't got a hell of a lot better. Paul is sitting there and he knows that. I would say to you as a group, after this forum is over, if nothing concrete comes out of it, then you've all sat on your asses here for nothing.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Shirley. I think I have Gordie, and then Diana. I just want to remind people that I think we have to be careful when we are talking about individuals, to treat each other with respect. I think there is a difference perhaps blaming the

department for certain things, but I think the minister should be treated with a certain decorum. I would just like to suggest that we be careful not to personally attack any individual, whether they're in government or in this room today. If that's not a problem.

[2:45 p.m.]

MR. GORDON GOSSE: Gordie Gosse, MLA for Cape Breton Nova. So I can't attack my colleague in the Legislature for earlier comments? Okay.

I'm not going to live in the past, the past governments - if that's where we're going here - of the Province of Nova Scotia and what's happened to the system since amalgamation in 1995, which was forced amalgamation, I'm not going to go down that road. We're here today to look at the future and be proactive as a committee.

When I thought of some of the issues that were brought up here today about young people between the ages of 16 and 18 who have been falling through the cracks for many years, and who have gone to social workers and told them, I need a place, I'm pregnant, I'm going to have a baby. The baby comes and still can't get a place and then the caseworker threatens to take the child away by Children's Aid. This is what we're hearing here today. These are some of the issues that are facing us as Nova Scotians all across this province, and they're very deplorable issues. Myself, as a member of the Legislative Assembly - are we building a piece on the back of this Legislature to put recommendations in? I mean, what is going to happen with these recommendations here? There are boxes and boxes of recommendations that came from committees over the years that have sat in closets here for years. What are we going to do? The lady who just said - I don't know her name and I'm sorry, I apologize - how many recommendations or how many studies has the government done over the years and recommendations have come back to committees of all parts of government and nothing has ever been done?

That's what I'm saying here today. I'm a member of the Legislative Assembly, and I know where we pile recommendations. How many recommendations of every different transition house or family resource centre or youth centre or daycare have come through this government, or governments in the past sent recommendations and have not been acted on? So I think that's important today. As a member of the Legislative Assembly, I think it's important, what can I do to take some of the recommendations from the people who are sitting here today that haven't been acted on, as a member of this Standing Committee on Community Services, or will the recommendations go in boxes and be filed with the rest of the thousands of recommendations that over the years have come through government? That's just my say on this today. Thank you.

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Yes, very important comments that Gordie just made, as well. I think that maybe a suggestion might be that the committee ask that all of the

recommendations be brought to one of our committee meetings separately. Perhaps we could then ask members from the Community Services Department, representatives of government, to come and talk to us about them. Which ones are affordable? What can we do? How can we move some of them forward, rather than just accepting a report and filing it? It's just a suggestion. Maybe there are some sort of action items that we can take afterwards.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Right. I just want to mention that tomorrow afternoon the standing committee is actually going to meet here and decide on its strategy. So if today we want to concentrate on sort of the meat of the issue and then tomorrow afternoon we can talk about how we're going to handle all the recommendations and how we can take action on them.

MS. WHALEN: I think it's just because it suggests - we want to feel that there is something coming of it, but very good you reminded us we have time to get on that.

The one point I wanted to just pick up from one of the earlier speakers was, while we're talking about the shelter allowance and so on that telephones are not included, I know it's a small point in terms of some of the big issues we're tackling here but the emphasis of the department is that people should get back to work. I would like to know how you can get back to work without a telephone, because you apply for a job, you leave your phone number, you have to be able to be contacted. It's such a basic need, just basic telephone service, and I know from people coming to the office with problems that if you have a medical issue, you can get the telephone, if you're apt to have an emergency or if you have a child with some particular condition that might require an emergency response, but not for the other people. I believe it's a basic tool, a basic necessity, not only for job hunting but to keep in contact with the world and with your neighbours in your community. We're isolating people without that telephone, and a lot of people who are on Social Assistance are disabled, and that means they can't get around as easily and can't be in touch with their neighbours and their family and move about as well, and we need to give them the telephone.

As I say, I just wanted to flag it because it was raised by someone else and it's something that I have written a letter, as well, on behalf of constituents who have come to me. I think it is a broad issue that we could certainly flag again as something that should be changed. Thank you.

MR. PYE: I just want to make a comment, if I could follow on the same train of thought as my colleague, Diana Whalen. If Diana Whalen will recall, and I do know that many people in this room recall, in 1999, there was a Standing Committee on Community Services that toured the province seeking recommendations from the stakeholders and the persons who were recipients of social assistance on what recommendations they would like see done. I want to tell you that one of the 19 or 23 recommendations, one of them was to provide a telephone. This was a recommendation in support of all members of the Legislature, because there was equal representation on that committee. One of the recommendations was to provide all social

service recipients with telephone services. I just want to make that clear. While I say that, Madam Chairman, although this is not a part of this whole process in the next two days, it might be good to go back and reflect on the report that was published back then on some of the recommendations that never did see the light of day, that was stuck in some vault. So thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It's a good point.

MS. KATHERINE REED: I'm Katherine Reed, I work with the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre, I have been involved in welfare advocacy for about 20 years. Quite a long time. I had the misfortune of experiencing social assistance myself, when I was a single parent. I just am struck by all of the energy that has gone into advocating for increasing social assistance rates. I would advocate for a guaranteed annual income but, until we get there.

Social assistance rates, when they are increased, typically they are increased by - we saw the spectacle of the Minister of Community Services on the news announcing a \$4 a month increase for personal allowances. I don't know how that strikes other people but it just struck me as - I don't know, I don't have a word for it really. After knowing in the first place that the social assistance basic allowances were so grossly inadequate to begin with and then watching year after year, decade after decade now, how these increases are these minuscule little things that I don't know how they are perceived by most people, but I wondered to what extent they are announced by the ruling Party as some kind of special consideration, some sort of wonderful humanitarian gesture.

Why do we not have a social assistance Act that builds in, linking social assistance rates with some objective, realistic basis? We now have social assistance rates that seem to have been arbitrarily set. As Mr. MacNaughton said, the housing rates are the same across the province but the costs we know are widely divergent across the province, and we've seen the Nova Scotia Nutrition Council produce a document that shows the cost of feeding people in Nova Scotia. Those amounts were very rigorously researched and the social assistance food allowances bare no resemblance.

There is no linking with reality of the amounts that are set in the first place and then there is no linking to the cost of living. It would be really interesting to do an historical review of, for example, the price of a litre of milk or a loaf of bread against increases in social assistance rates. Watch how the prices go up and watch how the social assistance rates don't keep up - likewise for the cost of transportation, fuel oil, electricity, shelter, all the basic necessities of life. It just strikes me as incredible that the policy and the Act completely ignore that, completely overlook it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, that's an important point. With everyone's agreement, let's move on to the next topic and we'll just go . . .

MS. ROSS: I just wanted to say something that will supplement what Katherine just said, so it will go on the record. We've recently done calculations of the monthly income and expenses of a single parent with one child, age four, on employment-supported income assistance in Nova Scotia. Taking into account all of their income, shelter allowance, personal allowance, GST, HST, the Child Tax Benefits and basic expenses, rent, food, and telephone service, just the basic necessities - and they are necessities of life - this single mother with a child of age four is running a monthly deficit of \$262.01. So this explains clearly to me why every single one of the 91 women that I met is juggling their money and stealing from one place to pay another, and everything is suffering in the end. So I just want to say that. Monthly deficit with the current assistance rates is \$262.01, for a single parent - which is the majority of women on social assistance.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, that's an important analysis. Thank you very much.

It's almost 3:00 p.m. Do people want to take, and I really mean, a five-minute break? Okay. I'll just remind you there are washrooms downstairs as well as on this floor. So let's meet back here at 3:05 p.m., and we'll start the topic of affordable housing.

[2:59 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[3:06 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The first person to indicate that he would like to speak on affordable housing is Wayne MacNaughton.

MR. MACNAUGHTON: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman. I just wanted to talk a little bit about some of the challenges we're facing with some of the work that I've done around affordable housing, particularly with Community Acton on Homelessness and its efforts to try to build supportive housing of different kinds. It's important to understand that what Community Action on Homelessness is designed to help access is the federal Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative, and the only type of housing that this program will actually pay for is supportive housing. It doesn't pay for just ordinary, you know, turnkey affordable housing like, say, the Housing Authority.

So there are a number of people who have put forward supportive housing projects and the biggest stumbling block is in order to access this money - this money covers the entire capital cost of building units, you're not even allowed to carry a mortgage if you're getting funding through SCPI - one of the conditions in order to access this money is you must prove sustainability of your project. Well, supportive housing has a staffing component to it, so that means that the rents alone will not pay for the entire cost. It will pay for building costs, but quite often will not pay for the staffing costs as well and that has made it almost impossible because we've been told repeatedly by officials at Community Services that there is nothing in

the regulations and no line item in the budget for support services. That's the line we keep getting over and over, and over again, from officials charged with delivering these services.

As a result, a number of projects have not been able to get off the ground. The community has worked very hard to come up with actual proposals that are now, at this point, sitting on the shelf because they cannot get that sustainability. They cannot prove to the federal minister that they have that sustainability - one of which is a project that I have been personally involved in helping to put forward called supportive housing, a situation appropriate to supportive housing, housing that would help house quite a number of the individuals who are currently using the Pendleton Place emergency shelter which is costing, as I believe Bob was pointing out earlier, a very large amount per day per person to Community Services in order to keep it in operation. This project has been sitting on the shelf now because of the very provision that I spoke of.

There's also another project someone - I believe it was Mr. Gosse - was talking about with 16-year olds to 18-year olds, there's another project being put forward by supportive housing for young mothers who have had no end of grief from Community Services because their clientele, some of their clientele at least, falls in the 16 to 18 age group, and they're not eligible for assistance unless they're being supervised by somebody else. These are young mothers we're talking about. This is the future of these children that is at stake.

So there are a lot of projects that are being put forward by the community. They need support from Community Services in order to move ahead. It's oftentimes not a lot more than what would be required just merely to pay the rent, but it is more and this is a concrete way that this committee could help to move things forward without spending a fortune, without breaking the bank, but just on these projects that are sitting there and are unable to move forward because of this one stumbling block. So I ask you to consider that.

Mr. McNeil was talking about how we want to try to get some things done that can actually happen. This is something that can actually happen fairly quickly. It would require the Cabinet to change the regulations slightly. It will require a small line item in the budget allocating maybe some of the \$7 million that's sitting there now, but I would say to reallocate some of the extra money that you're getting through the sudden equalization windfall. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Wayne. Anyone else around the table who wants to comment on this issue? Darcy.

MS. HARVEY: In regard to what Wayne was saying as well, I mean it's just another excuse, I guess, that the province is giving groups like the one proposing appropriate supportive housing, is that they need more data and more information on the clients who would access this service and whether they would really access this service. When there have been

local studies funded federally, best practices presented and brought in from other areas in the country, the federal government's national homelessness initiative refuses to spend any more money on the research into harm reduction housing for Halifax because the federal government says that that has been well documented, but time and time again community agencies hear apparent stalling tactics from provincial officials and employees saying the opposite, but we don't see any money coming to pay for the research they feel that they need and we don't see policy changes reflecting the research that has been done.

Another issue, a different topic, in terms of the bilateral housing agreement, I was asked about it in the morning presentation in terms of what has been spent and one issue is that we have all these non-profit groups that have proposals on the table that aren't being built or aren't being accepted, but then a lot of the affordable housing money, much of it, I would say almost the majority, has gone into subsidizing private landlords' units. So we're having agreements drawn up with private landlords that would see their units subsidized for a 10-year period rather than putting the money into non-profit groups that have the commitment to maintain those units as affordable for as long as that agency exists. I think another concrete thing that could happen is to see the commitment to ensure that less of that affordable housing money is going into private landlords and more of it's going into non-profits that are committed to the clients that they're serving.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Paul O'Hara.

MR. O'HARA: I think what's really missing around the housing issue is the downsizing of housing as a priority by our government. When I first began my career here in Nova Scotia, there was a Department of Housing and now there's a housing division within Community Services that is significantly understaffed, a lot less people. I could give you lots of examples of projects that failed to proceed because of the lack of, I would call it political will because when you've been at it for 25 years, you see what makes things move and it's always political will, you know, it's some leadership, someone with some power in the government, usually a politician, that they can make things happen and we lack that leadership today in Nova Scotia.

I would argue with Mr. McNeil that we live in a compassionate society because if you experienced what we do through our work and the realities of the people in this room running assistance programs, it doesn't reflect a compassionate society. So if we could reinstate the Department of Housing, I think we would get somewhere.

Another serious stumbling block in this issue around housing is the unwillingness of the provincial and federal governments to work together on this issue. They tend to blame one another, and the federal government really centralizes the issue when they're dealing with Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia - the rest of us are kind of afterthoughts, I think.

[3:15 p.m.]

So the reality of our communities is not understood and I think our province needs to accept that and deal with it in whatever way they choose, but the unwillingness of the federal government to put money back into the community is blamed on the province and the province blames the feds. So the two levels of government beat up on one another, and one or the other tries to drag the municipality into the issue and they won't come willingly, at least in Nova Scotia. So we need some leadership. We need to do the best we can with what we've got instead of saying we can't do it because of somebody else.

Our province also takes no serious consideration to the agenda of community when addressing housing problems. They have their own priorities and their own battles to fight and their own issues to deal with. We respect that; however, at the local level we know what to do and we know how to do it - you know, bureaucracies are large and they tend to try to put everything in the same box so it's uniform somehow, and in community we're much more flexible.

I attended a workshop once and someone made a presentation on how to house people who are conventionally called hard to house. The line that stuck out to most was that people aren't hard to house, housing is hard to find for some people. We know how to do it. We know how to house these people in those circumstances. We're told that we don't, that we don't know what we're doing, and we don't know what we're talking about. People in the bureaucracy have very little knowledge on the ground of how to deal with people. We have the expertise. We know how to develop community - within the housing sector in particular - and I think we've demonstrated that, and there are several examples of that, but the capacity of community to contribute is not acknowledged. Everybody wants to know - if you want to be a partner, where's your money? We have the expertise. We know how to house people in a responsible way and contribute to their quality of life and, if you give us the resources, we'll do it. So that needs to be addressed somehow.

The last comment I want to make on the issue - and I think it reflects on the general social policy by the Department of Community Services - Community Services is now being run by number crunchers. MBAs are the focus of the day and not social policy analysis. I don't know this as fact, but I would say I am 99 per cent sure that within the Department of Community Services today you will have MBA students being placed there, and you will not have any social work students who are doing policy analysis of any kind placed there.

So if you could establish a relationship with the School of Social Work, particularly on social policy analysis, and have a relationship where the kinds of issues that we're discussing today, students can be utilized to do some of that analysis and make some suggestions to the senior bureaucrats within the Community Services Department on ways to make the program more effective and efficient, that will go a long way. I don't think the will is there by

Community Services, and the focus is very much on outcomes based on economics and numbers and money and not on quality of services and quality of life of people who are impacted by the system. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Paul. Next I have Gordie, then Lucille and Jerry.

MR. GOSSE: Paul is right, but there was one part of that you left out of that department, too, Paul, is lawyers. That's what they have, and no offence, Megan, but that's what they have in that department. We do need a separate housing department, we really do. The reasons being that even some of the existing stock - and I can only speak for the Cape Breton Island Housing Authority, which I represent in Cape Breton, most of the clients, and I would say 99 per cent of the people who come through my office are looking for affordable housing. We haven't had any built. We have had zero built in Cape Breton Island in affordable housing - not one unit since this money has all come down, not one unit.

So I know the fight and the argument there with that, but what I'm trying to say here is that the Department of Housing, in years gone by, with the existing stock that they had, always had a group of employees who could get out and get a unit ready, you know, in an easy manner get a unit ready for somebody to move in. Now I see, in Cape Breton, once a month at the end of the month, they put in a contract for 10 units. Now, 10 units with the CBRM means there might be two units in Sydney Mines, one in North Sydney, two in Sydney, but the majority of them, the housing issues are based in the Sydney area, the old City of Sydney. In my riding, there are over 400 people on the waiting list for affordable housing and well over 200 seniors on that waiting list for affordable housing of any kind of units in my riding - each and every week sending an update into the housing department looking for, where somebody is on the list; are you 200, or are you third, or as you go down the list, for months upon months.

I mean this delay is to do with the lack of funding within the department to get some of their existing stock up to code and get those people into that stock. I mean there has just strictly been a delay on housing. Like I said, I do agree that if we had a separate department of housing within the government, it may make it easier for us to deal with, but with the lack of funding within that department, as it stands right now, you're not going to accomplish anything because the existing units are getting in bad shape. There has been no money put back into those existing units to bring them up to code and get people into them.

So I find ourselves fighting an uphill battle in the housing department within Cape Breton. I can't speak for the metro area, but my colleague, Stephen McNeil, had said earlier, you can get a nice two-bedroom apartment overlooking the tar ponds for little or nothing in my riding. There's no cost to it at all. There's no cost to buy a home in my riding. I come up here to Halifax and see homes that are priced at \$100,000. I don't know if I have four of those homes in my whole riding at \$100,000, if you consider the area that I represent. So I do know the

housing issue in Cape Breton, but we're in desperate need of housing in Cape Breton, and some action has to be done there. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Lucille.

MS. HARPER: I'm really hoping that my colleague, Katherine Reed, will speak to this issue because she has been working long and hard and for many years on housing in Antigonish. I just wanted to make a couple of points, because I'm sure she will speak more articulately than I will. I want to come back again to rural areas. We really tend to think about housing, again, as being a need that is primarily a need in urban areas. There's a huge need for affordable housing in rural areas and, again, because it's a rural area there are particular complications that need to be taken into consideration.

So when you have a small town like Antigonish where there's no public transportation system and there is incredible competition for housing in the downtown area where you can walk to grocery stores, to doctors, to the basic services, from students, from faculty, there's a lot of competition for that, and now with the liquid natural gas operation going in Goldboro, a lot of those families are looking to situate in Antigonish. So, again, not only does that increase housing prices, but it puts huge, huge, huge pressure on that core housing, which is the most desirable place for people to live.

Now, if you're a single mom and you have to walk your child to daycare, and you have to walk your child to the physician and you have to walk yourself to work, et cetera, you really need to live in the downtown core area. Hugely expensive, very little land and so when you're looking at creating an affordable housing project, then you really do have increased costs and increased challenges in doing that. So there have been many frustrations that have happened in Antigonish.

Another thing that I want to say is that I absolutely agree that we need a separate department of housing and we need to get rid of the idea that people who are living in poverty need less of a standard of housing than people who aren't. So the money that we're allowing for units in affordable housing means that we have to build the smallest unit, we have to make the smallest bedrooms that we can. We have to make the smallest living rooms. We have to do all of that in order to even try to fit within a budget. So the idea of creating something that fits well within a residential area that is kind of more on par with what's there and doesn't stick out somehow as affordable housing and the stigma that goes along with that in some ways, it's more complicated and it's difficult to do that.

The other problem is that in these housing initiatives there is no funding that is made available for someone to coordinate the whole project. So it is expected that somehow on volunteer time that you are going to have somebody, and I don't know if anyone has been involved in building housing, but there are a million decisions that have to be made. There is

working with designers, contractors, et cetera. Trying to get town agreement. All of that stuff is a full-time job and yet there is no funding for a person to be able to do that. So you have a community committee that puts substantial amounts of time in designing a housing complex, et cetera, but you don't have somebody who can take the project and move it forward.

We used to have that with the extension department back in the late 1980s, through St. F.X. University and so the affordable housing that was created then was facilitated in a way that it's not being facilitated now and it creates this huge stumbling block. So I would really say that that's another one of the recommendations, is that we need to make it possible for community organizations to have a staff person who is going to oversee the project and actually get it built.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Jerry.

MR. PYE: Madam Chairman, two of the members at the forum have already made comment with respect to the item which I would like to bring to the attention of this forum and I think that what we should do right now is flag it and make sure that it is singled out as one of the recommendations, and I would so move now, to make that recommendation for a stand-alone ministry of housing. The minister of housing should be reverted back. If I can just say that as a suggestion in hopes that there is concurrence around this table from what we've heard that there is agreement that there should be a ministry of housing in the Province of Nova Scotia.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: What I have been doing, Jerry, is highlighting the ones that seem to be major recommendations that we'll discuss tomorrow afternoon and that's definitely there. So I would rather not put it in the form of a motion at this stage.

MR. PYE: Okay, Madam Chairman.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I have made note of it and thank you very much. Do you have another point you would like to make?

MR. PYE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The important thing is to make sure that that is flagged and it's highlighted for discussion tomorrow.

The other thing I did want to say is that there had been a report by a previous government in 1998 that was under the administration of the Government of Nova Scotia and that was the Liberal Government of Nova Scotia that brought forward a report and there were a lot of recommendations, a number of stakeholders participated in that report and again, it is one of those reports that never saw the light of day. Somewhere, it was locked up in a vault and it was left there to collect dust and nothing else. So we need to know that there are reports out there and if there are some salient points in those reports, to bring them back to the committee

to develop some of the policies and recommendations that we're going to bring forward through this committee because we need to know that there are other reports out there.

[3:30 p.m.]

The final remark here, Madam Chairman, is this morning in the presentation by the Community Action on Homelessness, I believe it was Ms. Harvey who made the comment that policies and programs are not working. I did ask that in this afternoon's session if she could identify some of those, just briefly, in capsule form, some of those policies and programs that are not working, so that we as elected officials have a better understanding of what they might be and maybe something that will cause or trigger an action to make them work.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Do you want a response from her now, or do you want her to come in the . . .

MR. PYE: If she's prepared to make a response now or maybe willing to collect some of the data in order to make a response tomorrow.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, I have Darcy down after Megan. Megan, do you mind if we change the order? Okay, Darcy, do you want to both make your point and respond to Jerry?

MS. HARVEY: I was able to, with some help, get some things together over the lunch period. One of the main barriers is that we don't have - the biggest thing is that we just need to find ways to get housing built, but I do have five points toward housing policies that do act as barriers that I can run down now. One is that clients applying for social housing, let alone private apartments, are subject to credit checks and refusal if they have bad credit ratings. So these are often clients who are funded by Community Services, being rejected for Community Services-run housing and can't get access to provincially owned units.

Clients who cannot get power restored may face eviction from publicly owned housing because they are considered a threat to the state of repair of the apartment or building, which I think is a huge barrier to individuals and goes against the prevention of homelessness.

Projects are piling up on the desks of Community Services that would save the department money in the long run because they would provide supportive services to maintain stability of people living in housing and who cannot access housing at the present time. Many of these individuals - they are individuals currently sitting in hospital beds or shelter beds or in the criminal justice system or on the streets who could be housed stably and saving money to other government departments if they were housed with support services by non-profit organizations that understand the barriers that they are facing.

Long term, the lack of housing for these individuals burdens the health care and justice systems and again, it could be prevented in most cases. I already mentioned this point of the housing dollars going to private landlords versus non-profit, so I don't think you need to go over that again. Of course, as Lucille said and it's so important, the biggest barrier to non-profit coming forward with projects is the lack of technical support and capacity to handle all the red tape and bureaucratic processes to build projects.

The provincial and federal programs have a huge maze of complications, some programs you get funding through one thing, and in the federal program you are not eligible for certain things in the provincial program, and a lot of times groups need to make a few mistakes and backtrack to figure this stuff out, when it could have been done the first time with a technical support group. The Department of Community Services has a proposal and has met with members from the Affordable Housing Association, who have a technical support group outlined, what that would look like and how much it would cost. They have met with one of the former directors of housing, Harold Dillon, on this and so far no movement has been put forward. This group would help with the building design, project management, construction, capacity building, business planning, proposal writing, housing management and, again, negotiating the government programs and what programs work best for each agency and the housing that's being built. This is something that would be so simple to do. The department really needs to create this. So those are some things I was able to come up with.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That's great, and we certainly appreciate you giving up your lunchtime to research that. Did you want to add anything to that response?

MS. HARVEY: No, because I was going to bring up the technical support group in my next comments.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you very much. Megan.

MS. LESLIE: Madam Chairman, affordable housing is a topic we're on right now, and affordable housing isn't just about what we think of as social housing - it's also about keeping housing affordable, and that in public housing, in private housing and in non-profit housing, it does have to be energy efficient. Affordable energy, from our point of view, is not just about rebates, it is about energy efficiency. Earlier I mentioned that successful heating assistance programs in other jurisdictions show that the involvement of trusted community-based organizations is integral to ensuring that those in need achieve effective assistance through rebates and energy efficiency. I want to pick up on that a bit.

In Ontario, Brantford Power, along with the Low-Income Energy Network, basically the Affordable Energy Coalition of Ontario - that's how I like to look at it - worked together and came up with a low-income energy efficiency plan. It's wonderful. They actually go into people's homes and do an initial assessment. Then they go back and they actually install the

low-flow shower heads and they install compact fluorescent light bulbs, and then they go back a couple of months later and they reassess and see how it's going, see if the energy bills have gone down. They are working towards, now, doing appliance replacements because old appliances suck up so much electricity, and they do weatherstripping to make sure that the heating bills can stay down.

I was talking to the COO, the chief operating officer, of Brantford Power. He asked what was going on in Nova Scotia, and I told them about the Keep the Heat program, with the rebates and those little energy kits. He says, so, they're giving out kits with the light bulbs. I said, yes, and he said, well, it's not going to work. You need to go into people's homes, you need to put in the CFL, and you need to take away the incandescent light bulb and never let people have it back again, because it will go back in. Like I said earlier, \$6 a day, that's what you're living on, and you're not about to go out and buy new light bulbs, especially when they're the CFL light bulbs. You're going to use whatever you have handy.

I really want to reiterate that community-based organizations do know what they're doing. The Department of Community Services and government in general does not need to reinvent the wheel, and they really should be tapping into groups like us for our expertise.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. It's been suggested from the round table, and she's also indicated an interest in speaking, Katherine Reed. Do you mind coming up to the standing mic, Katherine? And then I have Diana.

MS. REED: In my spare time, when I'm not writing briefs about social assistance or doing projects on social assistance, or advocating for better rates of assistance, I work on affordable housing, as Lucille mentioned. Lucille has made a particular effort to support me as I do this work to advance the affordable housing agenda in Antigonish, because we know from watching one woman after another walk in the door at the women's centre to see a crisis support worker, ask, can you help me find housing I can afford that's close enough to the things I need to get to that would be suitable for my family? The sad reality is that, no, we probably can't. We can try to help you cope with the situation as best we can, but the housing is just not there.

The last time I looked, public housing for Antigonish had a wait list of about 44 families, and I'm talking about just families, because singles and childless couples are not even eligible - 44 families for about 33 units of public housing. There's been no public housing stock added since about 1995. In 2000, a group of us, some women who need housing, and a couple of people I know who also have an interest, who are attached to the women's centre, we formed the Antigonish Affordable Housing Society, decided that we should do something about this, especially with the involvement of low-income women who need housing. We were supported by the Sisters of St. Martha in Antigonish, so I could work part-time on cultivating the capacity

of this group to advance this objective, even though at the time there was no funding. This pre-dates the bilateral agreement that was signed in September 2001.

We heard from CMHC, which had very little to offer. Then we heard rumour that there would be a bilateral agreement, that people were meeting in Quebec City, the federal and provincial governments. That agreement was signed. Then we waited for about a year and a half for a program to be written. We were told that we could get up to \$50,000 a unit for the construction costs. We knew that probably wouldn't be enough, but we thought we might be able to get some donations. Of course I'm doing all this work as a volunteer, in my spare time, and with the rest of the housing society. There's no support for this.

Finally CMHC comes up with what they call seed funding, which is this paltry amount of money, half-grant, half-loan, which is very restrictive in what it can be used for. It is not resource group funding. As Harold Dillon himself has said, it was a very good deal for a very good price. We got very good service, he said, from groups like St. F.X. Extension that worked in communities to develop housing co-ops - I don't know how many hundred housing co-op units there are in Antigonish from back in the days when that funding existed.

In the Province of Quebec, where they have resource group funding, the Affordable Housing Agreement, the bilateral agreement money was taken up, and they've just built hundreds of thousands of units of affordable housing. Look at what we have in Nova Scotia. We have nothing built yet in Antigonish. This is now almost six years since we started the Affordable Housing Society. We've been sort of negotiating with the province, the people in Housing Services. There is a lack of support for the development. As a community organization, when you build affordable housing, you're not just putting up buildings that you're going to rent people, you're cultivating civic participation in a community, you're cultivating skills that people develop as they serve on the board, learn about how housing is developed.

We're at the point now where the group is losing momentum, because we've been sitting on our hands for such a long time, waiting for programs, waiting to hear back from the Department of Community Services. We need a housing department in Nova Scotia, and Canada needs a national housing strategy. It's the only country in the industrialized world that does not have a national housing strategy. It's absolutely appalling, and it's appalling to see that it's not even being talked about in this election campaign.

I think that perhaps a recommendation that could be made to the Government of Nova Scotia is that when they go to these Housing Ministers' meetings, that they need to be working toward a national housing strategy. I don't know why that's not happening. Amounts of capital infusion need to be adequate; \$50,000 per unit is what we were told we would be able to access when we first started this initiative to build affordable housing. Then once the program was written and we had done all kinds of background work, the news has broken to us that, oh, it's

only \$25,000 per unit that you can get, and you'll get \$25,000 over the 10-year period as rent supplement to your tenants. Well, that means we have to borrow a lot more money. Oh, and by the way, there's still no money to pay for the development phase. So you're on your own as volunteers, or the women's centre can support you, or perhaps the Sisters of Saint Martha would like to get involved again.

[3:45 p.m.]

This is a housing program? This is not a housing program. This is a few thousand dollars thrown around, and hopefully somebody will be able to come up with something. Well, nobody in Antigonish has come up with anything except a group that my group met just this past Tuesday evening. They have put in hundreds of thousands of dollars of in-kind contributions, fundraised donations and their volunteer labour. If anybody could ever build affordable housing out of nothing, this group can. They have a track record of building a curling rink and a community centre and a fire hall, they're all retired people who know the backhoe operator and the contractor. If they need a backhoe to come to the site to sort of level something off on Saturday afternoon, they just call buddy, and he shows up, don't worry about the money. It's this kind of thing.

That's not an affordable housing program. That's a community that has a very specific capacity that has taken an initiative to do something almost in spite of the Affordable Housing Agreement not because of it. So we were very discouraged coming away from that, because we realized we're not all retired people who don't need to work for a living, we don't have the kind of connections, we're not men, and it's just not possible. There just is not the support that we need in order to make this project fly.

It's very discouraging and there is nobody else in Antigonish stepping to the plate. Aside from this group in St. Andrew's that's building housing for seniors, there's nobody in Antigonish who is even thinking, as far as I know, about addressing the incredible crying need for affordable housing there for low-waged people and for people on welfare and pensions, singles, couples and families, nothing going on. So something has to be done to change the picture because this is not working. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much, Katherine. Diana.

MS. WHALEN: A couple of points, and I'm glad that Katherine touched on it, I wanted to just throw out the idea about co-op housing again. I know in my riding there are some areas with townhouses and so on that are operated as co-ops, but nothing new has been built in years and years and you know how much new has gone up in Clayton Park and Clayton Park West. As far as I know, in the newer parts of the riding, absolutely no co-op housing at all and I don't think there has been a program active for that, but it fits very well into all neighbourhoods.

It encourages a kind of ownership because you run it as a co-operative. People are charged the rent based on their income so that it doesn't get beyond the affordable level. I think it might be 30 per cent, I'm not sure the level. It looks like Jerry might know, but it's kept affordable because it is pegged to your income. I think it's such a good model and it seems that we have stopped doing that and I wondered, particularly with the Community Action on Homelessness and other groups that are working in this area of trying to find proper housing for people, if that is something that we should be going back to and trying to promote. That's one comment. So it's sort of to throw out the idea to see if there's any discussion on co-op housing.

The other thing is to just go back to the rent subsidies again. I was so pleased to see, Darcy, that you put it in your five points and touched on it today. It might even be a year ago, it was quite a few months ago, a Public Accounts Committee had the Deputy Minister of Community Services in to talk about the housing program, the federal-provincial program, and that was the first that I realized that we've gone from 1,500 units being promised when this was first announced, this big, big announcement, 1,500 units, either new or renovated and improved and brought up to standard, and at this meeting they were down to about 800 units. When we said why are you down to half of where you started, well, the rent subsidy came up.

I was shocked frankly and I still think it's shocking that they're allowed to divert the money into rent subsidies because we don't have anything left at the end of the day. At that meeting they assured the whole committee that it was fine, it was in the federal government agreement that they would agree to allow a sizeable portion of this money to be diverted to these rent subsidies and, you know, I think it's almost kind of a philosophical difference, whether, you know, I think it's important to ensure people are housed.

One way to do it is to subsidize and let people move into the existing apartment units, but it seems so short-sighted and I would much rather see co-op housing or those types of units being built, or some public housing, all over the province. So, anyway, I think that we really need to look more at that as well because I certainly don't support that. I said so at that meeting that I thought it was the wrong way to go and I don't know if there are any public policy studies that have been done that really look at the long-term effect, but it strikes me as entirely the wrong way to go about improving our housing stock and our available housing. So that's just a comment on the rent subsidy.

The women's centres, again, I think it's worth noting a great deal, and I know Lucille could say more, but from my understanding of talking to people who work in the women's centres, a lot of their work is centred around helping people find housing and I really want to go on record as saying I think that all of metro Halifax and Dartmouth really need a women's centre, or one on each side of the harbour preferably. It serves so many needs and such a broad base of support.

It's a welcoming, non-threatening kind of environment for women to go to and get information on a whole range of subjects which would improve the community and their lives and their families, but also would help a great deal with housing because I'm not sure what's happening here in metro, we don't have a women's centre so we're relying on maybe just Community Services to help people find housing and they don't have the time. They have workloads that are too great. I think that has been alluded to. Their caseloads are wide and they don't provide the extra assistance and support that I think many families need. So those are just several items for further discussion.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I just want to mention Mora is also the clerk for the Public Accounts Committee and she tells me that the Department of Community Services is returning to the Public Accounts Committee on Wednesday, February 8th, from 9:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. in the Legislative Chamber just down the hall. The topic is housing repair and retrofitting programs. So if anyone is interested in attending, you're welcome to sit in the gallery and observe that meeting. Jerry.

MR. PYE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I want to follow up just briefly, on the train of thought around co-op housing, which was forwarded by my colleague, Diana Whalen. I just want to tell you that co-op housing funding as a form of housing stopped in 1993 when the federal government opted out of the housing programs. I would say to you that the last co-op housing unit in Nova Scotia was probably built in 1989 through to 1991, in that general period of time and if you will note, most recently, a number of the co-op housing units have actually been taken over by management and actually sold in the private sector, and there's very good reason for that.

The concept or the model that was originally designed to bring about co-op housing somehow fell apart because there was little equity for the individual persons who were a part of that co-op community to own their own co-op homes, and now if you go back into co-op housing as a form of housing development there needs to be a complete review of what went wrong, what can be done, and particularly around equity in ownership, because I just want to give you one brief example of a long-standing co-operative unit that existed in my neighbourhood where, in fact, the family had lived for some 20 years.

Actually they were the benefactors of reduced rents because the mortgage had been paid for the co-op, so there were reduced costs per unit and so on and they were the benefactor of that community, but when they wanted to leave and relocate and they wanted to pass that on to their daughter, who had a couple of children, it was impossible to do. So they had no say, they had no voice in that, and that somehow takes away from the equity of it all. So I just want to say that although the intent of the co-operative housing model is an excellent model, I think there is room for, if we consider that as a part of a housing program in this province, we do some thinking around equity.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Jerry. I have Wayne and then Gordie, and then I'm hoping that we might be able to move on just quickly to one or two of the other topics before we finish today at 4:30 p.m.

MR. MACNAUGHTON: I just wanted to, first of all, answer one question, mention something in regard to Ms. Whalen's comments about the lack of women's centres, which is a very real issue certainly - the lack of women's centres in HRM - but there are other organizations that do help people find housing. There is, for example, the Dartmouth Family Centre which is very close to, I believe, what women's centres are, in some respects at least, but on the Halifax side as well we have the Housing Support Centre that is supported by the Metro Non-Profit Housing Association, desperately underfunded, once again because there's no money in DCS to pay for support services of any kind and things like that. There are efforts that take place within the communities to do these kinds of services, but without any kind of government funding available, it's really hard to keep them operating at any real level.

I wanted also to comment on rent supplements, just a little comment on what has happened in some other places. I was at the Housing Ministers' meeting at White Point. I was one of the people who had the privilege of presenting at the breakfast meeting of the co-chairs, Minister Morse and Minister Fontana. Minister Morse, in the course of that meeting, was very emphatic about how you don't have to worry about rent subsidies: I don't foresee any Government of Nova Scotia ever, at any time in the future, abandoning these rent supplement agreements. Except there's one little glitch in what he had to say, and that is Ontario, pre-1995, had gone into a regime of rent supplements with private landlords and it was quite expensive as a way of helping to deal with the severe housing crises in a number of Ontario cities, and one of the first things the new government did in 1995 when they got into power was start to tear up those rent supplement agreements and put people back into jeopardy of paying much higher rents, or being evicted.

So it's not a guarantee. You're absolutely right when you say that the only real guarantee is to have ownership of the actual housing. Private landlords have one interest and that one interest is to get a return on their investment, and unless you have some kind of a lifetime contract that no one can abrogate - and I don't know how you can do that legally - then you have to allow for the fact that these are not stable ways to provide affordable housing. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Rene has asked to speak and Gayle, and then we will close off this topic and move on.

MS. ROSS: I wanted to say very quickly to follow with Diana. Diana, thank you, yes, we do need a women's centre, especially in Halifax. I can say that in two capacities as somebody who is working on a contract and a project with women's centres and plus I've been working with the women's centres over the years in a number of different areas, I know the

good work that these women's centres do. Also, from my volunteer capacity with an agency in the north end of Halifax, yes, there are non-profit organizations that are doing this. What is very challenging is to find housing for women on income assistance because there is a lot of discrimination there.

I was involved in that process about four weeks ago and it was a very challenging process to find a landlord because, again, the policies of ESIA state that all the slips, everything needs to be passed over to a landlord. The landlord knows when they have tenants who are on income assistance, and we're finding it very difficult. That's why it is important to have a women's centre in the Halifax/Dartmouth area that can go and advocate on the women's behalf, and that understand this.

I have no problem in disclosing this because - I'm surprised in my years of work that I've never done this before - I was homeless when I moved to Halifax from Springhill for about a month, a month and a half. I was going to do it on my own and with just fifty bucks in my pocket, don't worry about me, Mom and Dad. I stayed with a family on income assistance. I slept on couches and I went to the food banks and I wished that there was a women's center that I could have gone to. I wasn't on income assistance. I thought well, you know, I have a university education, surely when I go there all the jobs will just be at my doorstep. I was very naive. So, yes, we do need a women's centre.

Discrimination is a big part of it as well. There are no standards, especially for women. There is nothing available to ensure that women have an advocate there with them, and that they know where to find the advocates. So I think that that's very big. Again, also, as far as the discrimination, when a woman is lucky enough to get into housing, it's usually women on income assistance and their children who are last on the list for the repairs. This is not to say this for all landlords in this province. However, that is certainly with the women who I met throughout this province who told me, Rene, we're last on the list when it comes to critical repairs in concern to the health and the safety. Again, this has to do a lot with discrimination and the way people on income assistance are viewed, and I think that that needs to change. My project is up in September, so maybe I'll look at starting the women's centre up then. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That's great. Thank you.

MS. MCINTYRE: I just wanted to respond to the comments on rental supplement. I believe a community action co-sponsored the workshop, or we had a workshop a couple of weeks ago, where we were discussing some housing stock, housing issues. One of the Department of Community Services employees, Ed Lake came and spoke on various issues of the support of housing and affordable housing. Of course, one of the smaller issues was on the Rent Supplement Program. I asked Mr. Lake, does the Department of Community Services have a recruiting program? He just looked at me and went, no, we don't. I said, do you think it's

something you would consider? It was like, yes, we could. Of course we're all waiting around for his more committed answers, and we are sitting around, well, do you think you can take that back to the minister and talk about that?

There is not a lack of people wanting to find their own landlords. There are people who do want to find their own landlords because they don't want to be part of public housing. They don't want to be part of any type of housing. They want to have that dignity that comes with, even in appearance, I look like I own my own home.

[4:00 p.m.]

So there are people out there who do wish to have their own landlord, their own relationship, their own property, in a safe community - maybe perhaps back to where they're from. So there is a will to try to have that commitment with a private landlord. However, there is no program, as of yet, inside the Department of Community Services that encourages or has incentives to encourage people to go out and find their own landlords or, vice versa, have private landlords apply for this program to help alleviate some of that population that wishes to raise their families in different communities.

I am now in a rental supplement program. Mine is, again, a different situation because my physicians, when I was hospitalized and resuscitated, said I was not to return to public housing - it had been so hostile that one of us was going to be incarcerated. So the thing is I was put into the rental supplement program. Do you think the problems ended there? Unfortunately, the inspection for the home I'm in right now was fabricated and I have had weekly medical appointments for a year and half just to stay in this home. I don't have another private landlord in my pocket to say can you let me live in your house now. So even though it is an answer, there is still no ethics and integrity following through with these solutions.

This could have been avoided. I could have picked another home. I didn't have to pick this home, but because it was approved by the Department of Community Services when it shouldn't have been approved, it has caused a lot of other issues that have happened. So we do have people who do have the will to go out and find their own landlords and have that relationship. We need to maybe put into Community Services a recruitment program to allow people to have that self-determination and that dignity to find that housing for their families in safe communities.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Gayle. I would like to move on and I'm wondering if we could actually combine education and training and the employment support part of the Employment Support and Income Assistance Act, because I feel they are related. So does someone want to start the discussion on education and training and employment support? Lucille.

MS. HARPER: Well, there are many things I want to talk about in relation to both. One of the things I want to talk about with respect to education and training is that often moving somebody who is on income assistance into their own independent financial position is a multi-year process, and it's a multi-step process. Particularly where you have - again I'll talk about single mums, but it's not just single mums, it's also older women who have spent their lives raising their children and then for whatever reason often - because of a marriage breakdown, or because they finally leave a bad marriage once the children have left - find themselves on their own without the education and skills they need to be able to access adequate employment. Employment with a liveable wage, I guess is the standard that we want to use when we're talking about accessing employment.

Women's centres across the province have and, in some places, are continuing to deliver transition to employment programs. There is no funding area that enables us to continue to provide those programs, other than on a project basis. One of the things that those programs do is they are geared specifically toward the needs of women and really provide not only employment skills, but also life skills that help women come up with a long-term education and career plan and then begin to implement that. So very often we're working with women who have very different needs and very different barriers. For some women it means going through the program, going back and getting a GED and then going on to either community college or, in some cases, to university. It has been very effective. For other women, they are able to really go directly into the workforce, depending upon how they are able to re-frame skills that they have accumulated with their lives and access that.

So one of the things that I want to say is there is a real need for transition to employment programs that are stable, supported and accessible throughout the province, in rural areas as well as in urban centres, that are not attached to the community colleges - although certainly work with the community colleges - but that are community-based programs provided by women's organizations.

The other one, of course, is ensuring that women have access to community college and to university, so, again, it's reinforcing the Changes Coalition recommendation that single parents are able to maintain their benefits while they go to university. That's such a simple one. We were almost there. There's been so much pressure around that. It's like, why are we not doing this? This is not even a huge amount of money, and it's not even going to be everybody who is on social assistance who is going to go to university. So why are we not supporting the people who have the ability to do that and the desire to do that to go ahead and do it?

The other thing that I want to say around this is one of the very frustrating experiences I had - and this, again, goes back to the kind of jobs that women often end up in and the kind of jobs that men end up in. Everyone is probably familiar with the stats that a woman requires a university education in order to make the same wage as a man with a Grade 9 education,

because men go into some primary industries, and women tend to go into the caring industries or the service industries that are low-pay. So there are problems with pay equity in all of that.

The other piece of that, what it means is that when a woman goes to community college and goes through a program in which she is going to end up in a low- or a fairly low-wage job, we're not really helping her escape poverty. So when we limit women to community college we are really doing a particular disservice that discriminates against women, because we know that women really require a university education, or equivalency, in order to earn an income that is going to make them economically independent.

We need to kind of start applying a gender lens to some of these policies that we're creating, and that's one in particular where not allowing single parents to go to university particularly disadvantages women because of that. We need to turn that around ASAP.

The other thing that I just want to say, because I probably won't speak again - and I won't be here tomorrow, although my colleagues will be - is that I really want to go back to this idea of coming out of these two days with a working committee. I really want to put that on the agenda for tomorrow, that there be a working committee established that involves the standing committee, a multi-Party committee, and that involves community advocates, and that we really do that in a very intentional and serious way.

There have been many reports that we've talked about putting back on the table and the recommendations, et cetera. All those could come to that committee. We could put together, quite quickly, terms of reference, and within the next year come up with some very agreed-upon solid recommendations for how we move forward in this province. I just hate to think that we will spend two days and not come out with something that enables us to continue a dialogue in a deliberate and very real way that is moving this forward. My fear is that in two years we're going to be back here again saying the same thing. It's going to be the same people around the table, only we're all going to be a little bit older. What are we really going to have done?

I really want to make that recommendation, that we are very serious about this, and that really requires the seriousness of the standing committee. I think, as somebody said earlier, we have a minority government now, which really places a different kind of power with the Opposition to ensure that this can happen. That's it for me.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Lucille.

MR. COX: First of all, I want to start off with just the title, employment supports. I've been trying to figure out ever since this Act came into place who was the rocket scientist who thought that a phone was not a necessity in employment support. Anyone looking for a job - I know people who say they won't look for a job because the employers can't find them, they don't have a phone. Whoever is denying themselves, saying that a phone is a medical luxury as

opposed to an employment necessity or an employment support, if you will, something as basic as that is something that needs to be looked at. The policies around the Employment Support and Income Assistance Act are so limiting and are providing so much disincentive for people to work. That's just one minor point.

I am a person with a disability. I got work about five years ago. As a result, I make too much money, and I lost my drug plan, my Pharmacare card, and people I know now say that's a definite disincentive. People will not work, will not look for work, because they lose the medical benefits, they lose their Pharmacare card. I've been trying for the last four or five years to get a Pharmacare card. In order for me to get that through the Department of Community Services I was told I would have to get back on social assistance, I would have to leave my job, but the policy says I cannot quit my job and I cannot get fired. Rock meet hard place.

Policies are very limiting, people say that. People have said I was crazy to get work, and there are some days that I think they're right. There are some days I think they're full of it, because one of the best supports for me as a person with a disability is my job. I believe that if I didn't have the job I have, I would be fired. Any other employer would fire me, because they would not provide the support above and beyond what a work environment will do.

For so long we have heard reports, and I've been involved in a number of reports, focus groups from this department and others, and the same answers have been given for the last 10, 15, 20 years, and probably even more, with one notable exception, now people are saying you asked me that 10 years ago, I don't want to answer these questions anymore. I want to see results. The same things I said 10 years ago, I'm saying now. It's useless for me to say them, because nothing is being done. It was alluded to earlier today.

People know what is needed. Mark Kingwell, who is a philosopher from Toronto, came and talked to the Department of Community Services. I've quoted him since then. He said that dialogue isn't getting your own way, dialogue is having the assumption that you are being listened to, or having the feeling that you are being listened to. People in the community are feeling frustrated because we talk to groups like this, we get on focus groups, but we feel that we're just beating our heads against the wall. I feel that. I feel that nothing is being done. I think the expertise is in the community, and there needs to be a partnership between community organizations, service users and government - government at the table because they provide the dollars; community organizations and service users because they know how best to utilize that in a more cost-effective and appropriate way because I need it direct, what kind of supports I need as a person with a disability. A person who needs affordable housing knows best what they need to get the supports in housing.

You know it's sad to see that the Employment Support and Income Assistance Act is last on the list because everything that we've talked about and can talk about directly affects the Act, but the Act directly talks about that. If the Act says that people on social assistance are

only going to get \$235 a month, the Act says that this also includes energy, lights and heat. The Act says that people who need the supports for disabilities need to be on this system. You know, the supports, I'm going to be a person with a disability for the rest of my life, no ifs, buts, ands or ors, and as a result I will need some sort of support. If the supports were still in place for people with disabilities while they're working so that they can work, other than be cut off, they get cut off as soon as they make over \$729, the maximum, but there are other costs that people have in their lives.

[4:15 p.m.]

Medication is a key one. Other supports, you know, home care comes in, these costs aren't factored into people's budgets when they think of that. Transportation is very important, it was raised with this Act, but I live in Windsor now and I just think that in order for people to get around there, they need to take cabs. The Act says that the only time transportation is provided is through medical, and I don't even think medical, but at least some sort of program. You have to be involved in some sort of program that will look at you getting work. So people need to get receipts for taxis. That has to come straight off the cheque. They have to submit these receipts and policy also says, and this goes for the drug plan and the medical adaptations, that this is at the discretion of the social worker, or at the discretion of the case manager.

What I think is discretionary can be different than like in Paul's case here, or any case manager, what I think, you know. So policy they can just say, well, this isn't policy, but people are being isolated in rural communities. People aren't able to get out. I can't go out and visit my friend, Darcy, because I can't afford to get out and I'm so isolated as a person with a disability, as a person on social assistance, and the Employment Support and Income Assistance Act systematically goes through and itemizes every part of my life. These are just a few of them and they actually say, people have come to me and have said, well, social workers say this is what's covered and I'll say, no, it's not, and I will photocopy. At my office I have the Act and I'll photocopy it and say this is what the Act says.

I have known social workers who have said something completely different than what the Act says. I jokingly said at times that I'm a policy analyst because I know the Act better than most case managers. I really believe that the people around this table, the service users are the best to make recommendations on how to provide the more appropriate supports and income assistance for people on this system.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Next I will recognize Corrie at the standing mic and then Rene.

MS. CORRIE DOUMA: I would like to speak about education of the poor children. In one of the reports it says that children have less likelihood of having nutritious food, less likelihood of visiting the dentist annually, less opportunity to participate in extracurricular

activities, more visits to the hospital emergency room and, I want to talk about this, delayed vocabulary scores, low math scores, increased failure at elementary and grade schools, poor employment prospects.

I think children don't choose the home that they are born in. Children need a fair chance in life and, therefore, I am very much in favour of early childhood education. My own experience is that I've worked for several years as a volunteer in an early childhood setting. I had to take a course in order to be a volunteer. It was an excellent project and my other experience was that I did volunteer work in a corrections centre. The particular childhood education that I was involved in was a project for about 15 children and the children were referred to the project by social workers. They came from families that weren't just poor, poor people loved their children and can be good parents, but these particular parents had problems with bringing up their children, and what you see there is devastating.

There were children three years old who were so tough that I would think sometimes they're beginning their march to the corrections centre. There was also a child, for instance, that all she wanted was to be carried around, all she wanted was love and to be carried around, and I thought maybe she'll end up in the Nova Scotia Hospital from time to time. I did see one particular girl who somehow took to me, a 16-year-old, who did stints in the corrections centre, and then she was in the Nova Scotia Hospital, and then she was in a corrections centre. We need support for those children too.

It is such an incredible waste, because these children are as intelligent as other children. They have a right to protection almost from their parents. If we don't do that, then those children go awry, they don't ever live up to their potential.

So I'm looking forward to what comes out of this federal election, because if there is money available for early childhood education, I would like to see lots of spaces, and people who are the leaders are educated and can assess children. Also, when these children leave early childhood, there is some sort of guide so teachers know what kind of children they are dealing with so they follow these children through school so there will always be special attention to children who come from homes that are not very supportive or not at all supportive. I think there is a relationship to criminality and what happens in the home, and also between mental health and what happens in the home.

So I hope that the provincial government will really have a good look at that, because early childhood education is not babysitting. What I'm afraid of is that if there's money available, \$100 a month for a parent who looks after, or an aunt or something, that that's not good enough, because child education is so much richer than just babysitting. I think that that's a good start for later in life for getting jobs and getting out of poverty. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much, Corrie.

MS. ROSS: I will be mindful of the time. I also have a baby to pick up from daycare in a while. I put my name on the daycare waiting list when I was four months pregnant and I quickly discovered that that was way too late. Apparently if you want to make sure that you get on the daycare list by the time it's needed, around when she would be one, I should have put my name on the list before I even knew I was pregnant. (Laughter)

This brings me to a policy that is out there that is particularly harmful to women and that the women we met felt that once addressed, would greatly improve their situation. There is a policy in employment support that states that once a woman's child turns one year of age, she must then engage in the job searches and get a job. Nova Scotia has one of the lowest age - in Ontario your child has to be school age, you can stay on income assistance until your child turns five in Ontario. In Manitoba, the age is six. Nova Scotia has one of the lowest child age limits in the country. The only one behind us is Prince Edward Island, where I believe it is six months of age.

This is particularly harmful to women. As a result of this, women are, number one, not given the time to go and find sustaining employment. They are also leaving their children with sitters that they don't even know, and also because the majority of women on income assistance are pushed into low-wage employment, they are doing shift work, so that's also making child care very difficult, and that is also taking away time. The women we met feel that they are not allowed to be a full-time parent and they are not given that choice.

I remember discussing this particular policy, and I have to admit I was a little surprised when I brought all these recommendations forth and the women, they said no, we need people to address this policy that now women on income assistance, depending on what region you're in in this province - because that's how it works, it depends on what region you're in - the caseworkers start calling women when their child is six months old saying, okay, you have six months, don't forget you need to go to work, don't forget you need to start looking for a job. So they're getting the calls at home when their child turns six months old.

They are then going into low-wage employment, when they're not even ready - they don't feel that they're ready. It's not as if it's like me if I became pregnant again and I went on maternity leave, because there is this argument that well, it's one-year maternity leave and that's standard. No, not for these women, not considering the employment and the training that they have had to date without allowing them - like Lucille said, it's a process, they need to be allowed that.

Then, the second phase of that is we need to get rid of this ridiculous 70 per cent clawback on earnings because what this clawback on earnings is doing is that once women do get into the workforce in the low-wage employment, 70 per cent of their cheque is being deducted and they said, Rene, what this is doing is forcing women to run harder to stand still. They don't see the point. I had a woman come to me in Yarmouth and she brought her child

care bill. She got a job as a waitress at the local restaurant and she can't afford her child care that month. There was no subsidy spot available for her. She had to find a sitter, and she has to go back to income assistance.

With that 70 per cent clawback, we're actually perpetuating the reliance on welfare, because women don't have that money. They want to work - every single woman that I have met wants to work and wants to live a life independent of welfare and wants to have her dignity and her choice as to whether or not she should leave her child with somebody that she might not even know.

So that's all I want to say, but I want to say that those two policies within Employment Support and Income Assistance, forcing women into work and job searches as soon as their child turns one and clawing back 70 per cent of their wages, and we're not even talking about the clawback on the income from other sources such as tax deductions, child maintenance program, that they're not allowed to keep any of this extra money that they said would greatly benefit them and their families, which is very key. So I just wanted to say that and thank you for today.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Rene. Jane.

MS. WARREN: I'm going to disagree with the lady back here, behind me, and I'm sorry to. The Early Childhood Development programs are throwing good money after bad, because you don't take a young mother on social assistance - she doesn't have the nutritional wherewithal to provide for either her unborn child or her newly born child. So they're not going to get the healthy food stuff to begin with, as they are beginning, until they get into one of these programs. So you have to raise the social assistance rates to provide nutritional food to be available to a young mother and to the child, before they get into these childhood development programs.

I came up here originally to complain about the telephones. It's not just to contact employers or for employees to contact potential employees. It's also for calling for an ambulance in the middle of the night, or calling for a taxi to go get groceries, or come back with groceries if you are all laden down and you have one leg, you are going to need a taxi to take you back home, and that can be in a rural area or here in the city. It's also to lessen the isolation of either the parent or their children because to get on the phone and chat is wonderful to either make friends or keep friends. Where we live in a country that doesn't charge for local phone calls, unlike most other countries, it's almost a free way to keep friends. So that was my short bit.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Jane. I have Wayne and then Liz Brown.

MR. MACNAUGHTON: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just wanted to mention one other point in terms of what we were talking about in the Act and everything that I think should

be mentioned and brought forward for the discussions tomorrow, and goes back to some of what was said earlier today. I would like to see one of the considerations of this committee being to set up an independent, arm's-length appeal process for decisions rendered by Community Services.

[4:30 p.m.]

I would also like to see change made - and this happens in some other provinces, it happens in Quebec - for example, where any decision rendered by a caseworker must be provided to the client in writing, and that includes a decision even to say you're approved and you're going to start getting money. That decision should be in writing - every decision should be in writing - and that decision should be provided to the client or mailed to the client in a timely enough fashion that if it's going to cause a reduction or a suspension of their cheque the end of that month, they have time to respond and say, I want to appeal this.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, and I'm going to recognize Liz Brown as the last speaker for the afternoon.

MS. ELIZABETH BROWN: I'm just going to point out to the members of the committee that two things that have been said a number of times here are not simply Nova Scotia. I'm looking at some comments that are coming from national organizations and they are general things, something called KIROs, the Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, and something called the United Church of Canada, and something called Make Poverty History. They all ask for this thing. Will you support and work toward ending child poverty in Canada? A question to candidates. Specifically, will you boost the Child Tax Benefit of \$4,900 per child and ensure that all low-income children receive full benefits of this program? That's the essence of three national programs. It comes through NAPO. Just remember that these are national issues, people are raising them elsewhere. We're not alone.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. It's after 4:30 p.m., so I am going to call day one to a close. I want to thank everyone, especially those who are not able to return tomorrow, very much for coming today and for adding so much to this issue. I thought I knew a lot about the issues around poverty before the day started, but I have to say that you have really enriched my understanding and hopefully it's going to improve our decision making tomorrow afternoon as well.

Thank you very much for coming. We certainly appreciate you giving up so much of your day to appear before the committee and I particularly want to thank the organizations that prepared presentations. I understand and I appreciate the amount of time that goes into that and we feel it's time well spent, and I hope and pray that this is not going to be another exercise in futility. We certainly will do our best to make sure it's not, and that there will be action coming

out of our deliberations. So thank you very much and we hope that many of you can return tomorrow. Thank you. (Applause)

[The committee adjourned at 4:35 p.m.]