

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Friday, January 13, 2006

Red Chamber

Forum on Poverty - Public Presentations

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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. Michele Raymond, MLA
Halifax Atlantic

WITNESSES

United Way

Ms. Catherine Woodman - CEO, Halifax Region
Mr. Peter Doig - Voluntary Board Chairman
Ms. Kristen Crowell - Staff
Mr. Peter Greechan - Staff

Antigonish Women's Resource Centre

Ms. Katherine Reed

Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities (NSLEO)

Ms. Jennifer Powley - Provincial Coordinator
Ms. Bernadette McKeough - Assistant Coordinator

Caring and Sharing Food Bank - Elmsdale/Enfield

Ms. Margaret Johnson

Halifax Peninsula Community Health Board

Mr. Malcolm Shookner - Volunteer Member

Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women

Ms. Brigitte Neumann - Executive Director
Ms. Linda Carvery - Member, Central Region

Halifax Coalition Against Poverty

Mr. Ari Rosen - Member
Ms. Keli Bellaire - Member
Ms. Amy Moonshadow - Member

Social Assistance Reform: Moving Forward

Ms. Rene Ross - Project Coordinator

Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)

Mr. Ian Johnson - Policy Analyst/Researcher
Mr. Wayne Sitland - Alternate Board Member

Black Community Advocates Association of Nova Scotia

Ms. Dolly Williams - President

Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers

Ms. Susan Nasser - Executive Director
Mr. Graeme Fraser - Coordinator

Marguerite Centre

Ms. Bev Hickman

Private Citizens

Ms. Shirley Marratt - Former Member, Halifax Welfare Rights
Ms. Jackie Barkley
Mr. Gene Frampton - Connections Clubhouse
Ms. Jane Warren - Observing for the Disabled Persons Commission
Ms. Gayle McIntyre (Also on behalf of Mr. Ralph "Bobby" Corbin)
Mr. Ken McKinley



HALIFAX, FRIDAY, JANUARY 13, 2006

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Ms. Marilyn More

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The second day of the Forum on Poverty will now reconvene. I ask everyone to take their seats and we'll get started. Thank you very much for coming this morning. I see some new faces in the audience so I just want to repeat a little bit of the background, the rationale for the Forum on Poverty.

I just want to mention that when the committee met last June to discuss what issues or what groups they would like to have appear before them for the coming year, it was obvious that a number of them had something in common. They were all helping people deal with issues around poverty. So we thought rather than deal individually with organizations and issues, we might sponsor this two-day forum on poverty. We were very, very pleased with the turnout and the information and the exchange that happened yesterday, and we're very pleased to have so many groups and individuals wishing to present to us this morning, to the point where we actually had to extend the morning session to 1:00 p.m. Then we will take a break for lunch. The committee will come back and again it will be open to the public. We'll discuss our strategy in terms of how we're going to deal with the information and the recommendations that have come forward to us.

Everything is being recorded. It will be available on-line under Hansard, but if you wish to receive a written copy of everything that's said at the forum, you can fill out one of the forms that's either at the side or the back of the room with your mailing address and name and we'll be sure that you do get a copy of the transcript. The washrooms are down at the end of the hall or on the main floor downstairs.

My name is Marilyn More and I'm Chairman of the Standing Committee on Community Services. At this point, I would like the members of the committee who are here today to introduce themselves.

I just remind everyone that we're an all-Party committee; because of the minority government situation, each of the three caucuses has three members on the committee. We've developed a very good working relationship, and we do take this issue very seriously and we are most interested to hear what you have to say. So, Jerry, perhaps we could start introductions with you.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We've taken the list of groups wishing to present and sort of broken them up into time slots. So for the next hour we have five groups or individuals. We are going to start off with United Way - Halifax Region. Just take a seat. I'll just go over some of the ground rules. What we would like is perhaps if you could give your comments within 10 minutes or so. That will leave just a couple of minutes for committee members to ask questions. So if you wouldn't mind introducing yourselves, thank you.

MS. CATHERINE WOODMAN: Hello, I'm Catherine Woodman, President and CEO of United Way - Halifax Region. I'm joined here by our Voluntary Board Chairman, Peter Doig, and in the audience by two of our staff members - Peter Greechan and Kristen Crowell.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Catherine.

MS. WOODMAN: Well, thank you very much for this opportunity to present. As you may already know, United Way is a leading charity dedicated to helping others. We're very well known for our annual campaign which mobilizes 5,000 volunteers in over 1,000 workplaces across both the public and private sector. What you may not be aware of is that the United Way is also internationally recognized as a community-building organization, with examples of two current United Way-led initiatives, Action for Neighbourhood Change and 211. Today I would like to illustrate that the United Way is directly engaged in the issues of poverty and the role that government must take.

It's our vision to be a leader in building an extraordinary community. We're working to accomplish this by developing and investing resources, both human and financial, in ways that bring people and organizations together and build neighbourhoods that leverage strengths that already reside in any particular community.

Currently, the United Way funds 130 programs in over 50 agencies, most of which deal directly with issues relating to poverty in our community. I'm talking about agencies like Alice Housing, Leave out Violence, Elizabeth Fry Society, numerous housing associations, Boys & Girls Clubs, community centres. By measuring outcomes we know these programs provide necessary support to individuals and families living in poverty.

However, we're very convinced that issues of poverty must also be addressed at a broader community level and not solely on an individual basis. To make a significant and

measurable difference in poverty, we must address a range of issues such as education, housing, crime, social capital, but we believe they must be addressed or they're best addressed at a neighbourhood level. In 2005 United Way - Halifax Region initiated a community development strategy to work with local residents to improve their own neighbourhood. With initial start-up funding from the federal government, through a project called Action for Neighbourhood Change, our United Way has made a five-year commitment to neighbourhood development. While currently focused in Spryfield, we plan to work within two additional neighbourhoods in Halifax over the coming years.

[9:15 a.m.]

Our approach is based on successful neighbourhood work for improving conditions in poorer communities conducted in the U.K. and the States over the past 15 years. This work has shown that projects can be successful when they are focused on a geographic area, they recognize the interdependent nature of social, economic and environmental issues, and they operate with a community-building principle. Simply put, community-building principles recognize that the neighbourhood residents themselves have the skills, the strength, to identify the challenges, and they have the interest, the personal investment and the capability to develop the best possible solutions for that neighbourhood.

Experience and research teaches us that a place-based approach is more successful in the long term than any issue-based approach. You cannot reduce crime by adding police; you can affect crime by inspiring a change in behaviour. Change in behaviour requires a change in beliefs and that can be spawned by collaboration and active engagement, active participation in problem solving. Action for Neighbourhood Change is tackling poverty in Spryfield by engaging those residents to start addressing the issues they identify, such as crime in this case, literacy, employment and others. The solutions will ultimately lie within that very community. However, solutions to poverty take long-term commitment - experience tells us that three to five years of dedicated effort and funding are required. In addition, there needs to be a teamed-up support of local, provincial and federal governments that respond to the solutions proposed by residents with the wisdom and the courage to change policies that directly affect community well-being.

We commend the fact that the community development policy recently adopted by your province, our province, is also based on the principle that communities know best how to deal with their issues. Today we have complex, overwhelming needs that are not distinct and isolated, but deeply entwined and connected. Simple calls for help are getting mired in a complex maze of busy phone lines, voice messaging, a myriad of unconnected services and volunteers. Frustration feeds the assumption that we need better services or we need more services. At United Way we believe that it's wiser to invest in improving the path and coordination of our existing services. In Nova Scotia, under United Way leadership, a provincial steering committee has been working since 2002 to bring a new service to this

community - 211 is an information and referral system that connects people to a full range of non-emergency social, health and government services in their community.

Accredited specialists answer 211 calls, assess the needs of callers, and link them to the best possible information and services by consulting a comprehensive database. In Toronto, Calgary, and Edmonton, where 211 already exists, this is especially useful in addressing vulnerable groups such as recent immigrants, the elderly, homeless, physically and mentally challenged, and their families. This kind of coordinated integrated solution aligns very well with United Way's focus. It fosters self-reliance, improves local knowledge, and makes a measurable difference and reinforces the social safety net, giving hope and help through a rapid and humane response to individuals and families seeking help.

So, in conclusion, what are we asking of you today? First, we encourage you to continue using a place-based approach in solving poverty and that you work more closely with municipal and federal partners in supporting locally grown solutions. We ask that you commit to longer-term solutions with time horizons of greater than three and five years. We ask that you directly support the province-wide 211 initiative which is right now being considered by Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations as well as other provincial departments and, finally, we ask that you recognize that there is an opportunity for government to engage in a formidable partnership with organizations such as the United Way who are uniquely positioned with long-standing relationships across private, public and voluntary sectors and who are equipped, motivated and capable of helping you build an extraordinary community.

Thank you for your time and we would be pleased to answer questions.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Catherine. Are there any questions from committee members? Jerry.

MR. JERRY PYE: My question to the presenter from the United Way today, the CEO, is that I look at your Action for Neighbourhood Change, and your Action for Neighbourhood Change is obviously something that had been developed within the United Way. I will say at the start that it appears to be a positive action by the United Way. I say it appears to be simply because I don't live in Spryfield and I don't know the actions or the outcomes at the present time.

You said in your presentation that there will be two more in Halifax. I'm wondering, when you use the term Halifax, do you mean the HRM?

MS. WOODMAN: I do.

MR. PYE: So that does not mean directly the City of Halifax?

MS. WOODMAN: No, and I should have said HRM.

MR. PYE: There are other parts of the HRM that will be the recipients?

MS. WOODMAN: Yes.

MR. PETER DOIG: We'll meet in Dartmouth.

MR. PYE: Thank you, Mr. Doig. That's music to my ears, particularly . . .

MS. WOODMAN: We like to say we chose Spryfield because Spryfield chose us. We let it be known we were embarking on this project, and Spryfield was a community that really wanted to partner and get on with this task. It will be in a similar fashion that we move to other neighbourhoods. We're looking to neighbourhoods that are very interested in taking ownership because this isn't something we're managing, it is something that's happening within the neighbourhood, and we're helping it come together. There has to be a strong degree of engagement with them.

MR. PYE: Other neighbourhoods are aware of this funding program that's going to be available through the United Way and that they can make application and be participants?

MS. WOODMAN: Yes, certainly. At the point when we're ready to spread beyond this initial first start of the project, we will ensure that other neighbourhoods are well aware.

MR. PYE: My final question, Madam Chairman, is, does this program that you're offering hinge upon contributions from other levels of government?

MS. WOODMAN: It began with a federal grant. We are now committed, with money from the United Way, in order to keep it moving along, but it is dependent on partnerships that will involve funding from businesses, from donors, from levels of government. We certainly can't take the investment that we've chosen to make and expect that we're going to make the full difference.

MR. PYE: Thank you.

MR. DOIG: Jerry, I would just add that we didn't wait for other levels of government to come to the table before we made a commitment to continue the program beyond the first year. We've done that, and now we'll continue to build the partnerships to make it sustainable.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Next I have Leo.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Madam Chairman, just a question of real interest, since it's not a program that I'm familiar with being from rural Nova Scotia. Yesterday, however, we heard a lot of commentary, in fact very profound and compelling comments from people talking about poverty as deep rooted in communities, the cycle of poverty, the systemic nature and so on of the problem. I'm wondering how this is actionized, in other words, is it a contributory type of

process, or actually people on the ground who monitor work that would go on in the community? Could you just elaborate a little bit, please?

MS. WOODMAN: It's a three-step process. The first step is one of very broad-based consultation. It's about bringing people together from that particular geographic area, whether it's in kitchens or in halls, or whether it's one on one or large groups. Together they identify what they treasure about their community and what they would like to change. So that first phase is the data-gathering stage, if you want. It's both qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative comes the views and voices of the neighbours themselves, but we also found very valuable information in statistics about that particular community.

Once that information-gathering phase is over, the next stage is to identify what differences the community wants to make, what are the changes that they want to bring to that particular region. The important thing is these are identified by the residents themselves. They decide what they want to change and they also decide, themselves, how they want to measure that change.

Then the third stage is about effecting those changes, which is likely the stage where residents will most certainly turn to the three levels of government and say, here's the policy or here's the change that we feel is most necessary in our community. That's when the neighbours will be most expectant of the three levels of government to be responsive. Does that help?

MR. GLAVINE: Yes, thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Diana.

MS. DIANA WHALEN: I'd like to just get a little more information on the 211. Specifically, you've called on us to support it. It sounds like a great idea. I wasn't aware of it before either. This is something new for us. What stage is it at now in government consideration? You said it's with Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations.

MS. WOODMAN: It's with Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations. We've put together a summary paper, which is about three or four pages. We've been working very closely with the deputy minister there, and we have that support. There are letters of support coming across the community from businesses but also from health boards. The expectation is that once the input has been received from other departments, it will go forward to Cabinet, hopefully within the next month to six weeks.

MS. WHALEN: So it's current.

MS. WOODMAN: It is very current. Yes.

MS. WHALEN: Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Gordie.

MR. GORDON GOSSE: I'm just wondering, this is all pertaining to the metro area, have you ever spoken to your counterparts at the United Way in Cape Breton about some of these programs?

MS. WOODMAN: We certainly do, and I probably neglected to mention it. I am certainly aware this is a provincial committee. We work closely with the United Ways across Nova Scotia, in Lunenburg, Truro, Pictou, Amherst and Sydney. Now I have to say that they are smaller United Ways, and they don't always have the same degree of resources and abilities to effect the community differences that we strive to make in HRM, where we have a larger area. We do exchange information regularly, and we work quite closely together. We meet several times a year, and I know Allister in that community well.

MR. GOSSE: I know Allister Taylor pretty well myself, over the years, actually.

MS. WOODMAN: That's great.

MR. GOSSE: I'm just wondering now, the group in Spryfield, is that a non-profit organization that's registered under the Nova Scotia Societies Act? To work and to attain government funding you have to be registered. I'm just wondering, is that group registered?

MS. WOODMAN: The United Way attained the government funding. Action for Neighbourhood Change is a project underneath that umbrella.

MR. GOSSE: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I don't see any other questions. Thank you very much, we appreciate both your presentation today and also the excellent work that your organization is doing. Thank you, again.

I invite Shirley Marratt to come forward, please.

MS. SHIRLEY MARRATT: My name is Shirley Marratt. Right now I don't belong to any organization. I did belong, for about 25 years, and we were funded from the United Way, which was the Halifax Welfare Rights. Because of that, I still have an ongoing problem with being called on to help people who have problems. I'm glad that this 211 is coming on. Maybe that will cut down on some of the work I have to do. So many people have a problem, and then I have to go through my mind, well, where do I send them or what do I do?

I thought that when I got to my age I wouldn't have to worry about anybody else, but if you don't worry about the other people and how they're living and what conditions they're living in, then I don't think you're a very good human being. A lot of people say to me, Shirley,

why do you do it? Well, when you have people who need wheelchairs, people who need medicine, need needles because they need them for insulin, and things like that, but they're not 65, they're between the ages of 55 and 60 - 65 is a magic number for a lot of people, because a lot of their problems are going to be solved. But when you're 55 or 58 and you get put into these senior citizen complexes, one thing is people look at you and say, why are you here?

[9:30 a.m.]

Well, if you have a disabling kind of an illness or some kind of a problem and you can't afford the rent outside, well, you soon are found a spot in seniors' places. That's another problem for seniors for the simple reason that if they put somebody in that isn't very well and has an emotional problem or physical problem, then the people around them feel responsible to help them. When you get somebody that's 75 or 80, we even have people there close to 90, helping people who are 55 to 60, for the simple reason that they are supposed to be getting help through social services, having somebody to come and help them with their problem. They get stuck in these places, and unless I call and get some social worker on the ball, sometimes I have to practically knock them over the head, they don't want to be bothered with them. Once they are in there and they're paying their rent for them and they're paying their lights and that, as long as there is no confusion or anything, as long as a person doesn't have a phone to call them and bug them, then they figure everything is okay.

So I think there's a lot to be done for people who are caught in that trap, before they're 65. I am really looking forward to this 211, because there are a lot of people who will say, well, I don't know who to call or where to call. You would be surprised the people who call 911 and really what they're looking for is social services or unemployment, but that's the only number they know. You give them 211, and they'll remember it, at least.

The thing is, we have people who are 55 and 58 right now, today, who don't have much food in their house. Thankfully, we have a thing with Parker Street that they will come and pick them up, but like one person said to me, Shirley, what's a loaf of bread and a bag of potatoes going to do me? Around here, if you have a bag of potatoes and a loaf of bread, and you're not going to get any money before the end of the month, that's a pretty scary thing. I think there's a lot of things that social services should be really looking at and trying to improve for that age group, between 55 and 60. Especially if you have had to give up a job, you might get a pension, but the pension is not very much, and if you put in for your Canada Pension - that's another thing, I fight like heck for the Canada Pension for them. Sometimes it's maybe seven, eight months. I had one fellow, a year. Sure he got all his money back, but social services says - and I always warn them ahead of time, when you get that money it might look like a heck of lot, but just remember that you have to get in contact with social services and they'll give you a bill and you have to pay it.

I have no qualms with that, because if the person didn't have to put in for their Canada Pension and was getting the money from social services, that is one thing, but if social services is helping them out, I say it's just the same as the bank lending you money in the meantime. So I don't mind that. I'm damn thankful that they do that. The thing is, even people who get Canada Pension, if they are sick, if they are disabled, if they need things, even like a cane, there is no money in their budget to get that. So usually I have to call and scrounge around, either get a church or somebody, or maybe somebody recently died and maybe their family left his cane or maybe a beat up old wheelchair. Stuff like that. We save that and then we pass it on.

The thing is, why should seniors have to be responsible for other people who are falling through the loophole. I just can't believe there are so many people out there. There are an awful lot of people out there who I know that I don't reach because we're only in the small complex, then I'm helping them, but what about the people who are not? I think social services should be sending out some letters and telling people who are on a disability and that, if you have a problem call your social worker. Don't be afraid to call them, because even the social workers can help them get different things. They have enough knowledge to get them in touch with the food banks and things like that.

I had a person say to me, oh, well, I wouldn't go to the food bank. I said, well then, you only got one option, either go or starve. It might sound harsh, but I just don't have the time or patience, after so many years, for somebody to tell me that they are so self-righteous that they're not going to go to a food bank. I can remember - and Jerry Pye can help me out - I can remember a day when we didn't have any food banks. Brunswick Street was the only place that had a little food bank, but before that we didn't have nothing. People would call up and they didn't have any money two days before payday and they didn't have no groceries, no nothing. So St. Pat's Church or St. George's, or anything that I could think of, I would call them and I would say, look, would you be able to help? Well, they didn't always have food, so they gave a little food voucher. I mean even \$10 in those days used to buy a lot.

Like I say, now that we have the food bank, I think it's a marvelous thing. It's a thing that social services is just not helping the people who are disabled, and the people who are disabled, there are some of them who could have carried on with their jobs, but they couldn't put in the time frame to get paid and if Community Services would allow them to go and work for a few hours a day or a few hours a week, or a few hours a month, and get that extra money, then they would have the money for a cane, or they would have money for needles and things like that.

I really don't have any faith in what you do this afternoon in trying to make up solutions to give to the government to say, well these are the changes, because as Jerry told you, we've been through this so many times and the same damn argument has been put in boxes and I bet you, wherever they keep their old files, you go down there and you'll find them all going back

to what? Anywhere from about 1970 on. So I'm just hoping that what comes out of here today is a positive thing and doesn't get stuck underneath the bushel. Okay. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Shirley, and we hope it won't either. Stephen, do you have a question or a comment?

MR. STEPHEN MCNEIL: First of all, Shirley, thank you very much for coming in and your advocacy that you are doing. When you speak in the matter-of-fact tone, you remind me a little bit of my mother, so I'm not sure how I should address you and behave myself while I'm sitting here. (Laughter)

MS. MARRATT: Sometimes people will say, you go and see Shirley, or I'll get Shirley to go to you and when I get there they say, this and this, I say, well look, I'm going to tell you something, don't tell me that you're not going to do this or you're not going to do that because I'm out the door. If you don't want to help yourself then don't come to me, because I'm not going to do all the work. You have to be willing to do it too.

MR. MCNEIL: Well, I've learned to call my mother to see what her reaction would be. Sometimes it's better to learn a reaction from a distance than it is up close. Shirley, are you presently living in seniors' housing?

MS. MARRATT: Yes, I live at Joe Howe Manor.

MR. MCNEIL: How long have you been living in seniors' housing?

MS. MARRATT: I've been living there now for about nine years.

MR. MCNEIL: Is that run by the province?

MS. MARRATT: It's run by the province. Actually, it's all three levels of governments put their money into it.

MR. MCNEIL: How has it been maintained?

MS. MARRATT: Well, I'll tell you. The maintenance is not very good. A couple of years ago we had a little hole out the main door that was covered with a metal, I guess it must have been steel or I don't know. Anyway, it all got rusted, had a collar around it, and last Winter a couple of times it got pushed away with the plow, so last Summer I said to them, look, could you get it fixed? Oh, yes, oh, yes. So anyway, finally, I threatened. I said, look, after the New Year, if it isn't fixed, then I'm going to go to the safety people because that's wrong. If they pushed it away a little bit, your foot could have come down, you could have broken your leg, and there was no need of it. And you have to walk over it to push the button to open the door, if

you're disabled, you know. We had a little runway like this for wheelchairs to go up. It had no rubber stripping on it, it wore off. So I said that needs to be fixed.

Well, finally they came and they cut off the old and they put some new on. Then this other thing was still there. So I said, well, after New Year's - and yesterday when I came down here, I came out the door and, God, what's this? Here's this great big shiny thing, new collar, and a new cover and everything, and it looks like it's made out of stainless steel or something but, boy, she's all polished up and everything.

MR. MCNEIL: Somebody must have told them you were going to be in downtown Halifax with a microphone.

MS. MARRATT: It was really funny, you know. But we have elevators that are so old that you get in them and you don't know if you're going to get down and the door is going to open, or you're going to stand there and the door goes oomph, oomph-oomph, so finally you have to get off that one and there's another one next to it, you push for that and eventually it will come and you get on that and you eventually get down. Then you have to go find the janitor or somebody and say, the elevator is not working. Oh, yeah, we know, the fellow has been called - but, you know, it's a thing that's beyond reason to me that these places are not really looked after.

I mean we all pay our rent and, believe me, every year you have to let them know, and when you get to sign a lease they ask you to include your income and, if you made \$7, part of that is on the new increase for your rent. Well, a lot of people holler about it, but I don't really because I mean we get our heat and for an extra \$10 we get our cable. So we only have to pay for our lights and we only have to pay for our rent, but now some people - now people don't know it, but if the husband and a wife, or whether you're living common law or whatever, if there are two people living in one unit, they're both based on their income. So if one person's paying \$350 and somebody else is paying \$400, then they're getting \$700 for that unit, and I have no qualms with that either because both people are getting an income, but I mean the thing is that if the federal government gives us in our Canada Pension, or in our Old Age Pension, we get a raise the first of every year for Canada Pension, and if we're given \$10, you can bet we're not going to see that whole \$10.

MR. MCNEIL: Shirley, I think that goes back to some of the comments we heard yesterday around the clawback and I think it's something that we, as a committee, need to look at in a little more comprehensive way than we were talking about yesterday.

Just one final question for you. You mentioned in your presentation around diabetics - the province has come out with a new program for low-income Nova Scotians, a diabetic program, and I'm just wondering, have you known people who have applied? I mean I have an issue with it and I'm just wondering if you've been exposed to that issue as well.

MS. MARRATT: Well, I will tell you, I called up about it just after I heard about it, and they said they'd get back to me. I haven't heard anything, and I called just before Christmas and they said to call after New Year's because they haven't really gotten a whole pile of information, it hasn't even been sort of put on stream. So I don't know whether it has been implemented or what it's all about, but the thing is, as a senior I have to pay a certain amount of money, and once I'm paid up, as far as my prescriptions go, once I pay up that money, then everything comes free and, to me - it's an awful thing to say and I imagine a lot of seniors will say, Shirley, I'm going to knock you in the head, but the thing is from the time I get paid up in September, say, to April 1st of the next year, I get everything free. So if I have a prescription for \$100-some, I don't pay any portion of that. The government pays it all. So what I'm saying is it offsets the money that they have to pay for people who are on disability or social assistance who need that help as well. I'm saying that it doesn't hurt any senior to pay a little bit. I think we should have some kind of a health care we all pay into.

[9:45 a.m.]

MR. MCNEIL: Most people are in agreement around Seniors' Pharmacare and I think when you look across the province, you know, there was a little hiccup which we seemed to solve in the last year, but the thing around the diabetic program that I think Nova Scotians need to look at, and I think the government needs to look at, is the fact that low-income Nova Scotians are having to pay up front and then be reimbursed later on. If this program is truly going to have an impact, and an immediate impact on low-income Nova Scotians, then the government needs to do a direct billing with pharmacies back into the government and not expect low-income Nova Scotians to be taking money out of what is their food budget or their rent budget to pay up front and then send the bill back in hoping to get it back and you're kind of chasing your money back and forth.

So I would encourage you to watch that and keep talking about that particular issue. It's one of those that can be solved immediately. It's not reinventing the wheel. We already do it in the Seniors' Pharmacare Program. With a little tweaking, it could work for this program. So that has an immediate impact today on low-income Nova Scotians and especially the low-income who are ill.

MS. MARRATT: Well, I will tell you that's the truth. I'm going to tell you something, you'll be seeing us picket out the front door there because . . .

MR. MCNEIL: I'll be with you.

MS. MARRATT: . . . I know a lot of people who can't pay up, you know.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Excuse me. I appreciate that this is a very important topic, but we've had only two presentations and we're behind.

MS. MARRATT: I want to thank you very much for allowing me to come down because I didn't even know it was on the book to come. So I said, well, I'll come.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, thank you so much, Shirley, and we appreciate the advocacy you've been doing on behalf of seniors and people with disabilities. So thank you very much for coming this morning.

Could I invite Katherine Reed from the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre to come forward, please.

MS. KATHERINE REED: Good morning. I'm here to talk about the brief that I wrote called Fairness in Education for Single Parents in Nova Scotia. It's published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and it can be downloaded from their Web site which is just policyalternatives.ca. When I worked on this brief, I should point out that I had a lot of help. I had members of the Changes Coalition, which was a coalition that was formed about a year ago and our first action was to hold a press conference in Halifax at Saint Mary's University to call attention to the social assistance policy that disqualifies single parents who are in an educational program of longer than two years' duration which, obviously, excludes working toward a Bachelor of Arts degree or anything beyond that.

While we recognize that not all single parents on social assistance want to go to university and it's not necessarily the best option for every person, we know that we need a variety of career options for everyone, including people who are disadvantaged. There are a significant number of single parents, about 90.2 per cent of them are women who are quite restricted in their options because they're poor, and they aspire to get a university degree which I think is a wonderful thing, which is probably why I did it when I was a single parent and for a couple of years got social assistance.

I remember calling the worker when I was a newly separated ex-spouse and I told the welfare worker that I would like to apply for family benefits because my husband and I are now separated, but I had to tell him that I'm in university and I'm getting student loans. He said, oh, well, we don't even look at that because that's a loan, you have to pay it back, it's not really considered income. So, you know, you just tell me about all the rest of your income and we'll process your application. Well, bless his heart. So I continued on and finished my degree in music and got a job immediately following that at the women's centre and I've been there ever since. It's a funny degree to have, you know, to end up doing community development work, but anyway.

The thing is for me, university took me from a place of real disadvantage because I had grown up in a very humble family with some extremely backward ideas about women and about education. I had never even heard, as I was growing up, that going to university was even an option for people like me. Women just grew up and had babies and washed dishes for the

rest of their lives, so that's basically how it works. So I was quite shocked, you know, when I was about 25 years old and met a person who was teaching a job finders' club in Truro, where I was living at the time, and he said you just go to university, you can get a student loan. I had no idea that a person could get a student loan when they didn't already have a stellar credit history and they hadn't already graduated from high school. No, he said, basically they want your money and they'll let you in if you can prove to them that you're reasonably intelligent, which I'm sure you'll have no problem doing.

Going to university then, yes, I learned a lot about music and I also learned about sociology, history, and other things that I had paid absolutely no attention to in high school, but more to the point I learned about how the rest of the world lives. I had lived in that, I guess, roughly 20 per cent segment of Canadian society that is marginalized and isolated from the mainstream, and by going to university at the age of something like 25 or 26, suddenly this whole world of the real world opened up to me and I was no longer ignorant of how the rest of the world lives.

So now when I see this draconian policy implemented in August 2001, actually in 1998 it started - once the province took over social assistance it started to encroach and people started getting discouraged from going to university. So now we have the situation where tuition is now, I don't know, three or four times what it was when I enrolled. I think my first year was \$1,300-some and now it's something like - well, I just paid some tuition and it was close to \$7,000, and we have a social assistance program that bars access to single parents.

When the Changes Coalition did this press conference, the minister responded with, well, single parents can go to university, certainly we have nothing against single parents going to university, we just don't see it as our role to help them financially to do that - I don't know whose role he thinks it is - but he said single parents just need to access all the existing supports, they just need to get into some affordable housing, they need to get some subsidized child care, they need to get student loans and grants and things like that, and they shouldn't have any problem.

I knew that was wrong because I happened to have a very good friend, who was a single parent, and I knew that she couldn't get welfare. She was in university, and she was washing the laundry for herself and her little girl in the bathtub because she couldn't afford laundry facilities - never mind taxis to get to them - and she was regularly visiting the food bank and regularly having fairly humiliating experiences with, for instance, one food bank telling her you're a student, you shouldn't be here, and the other one telling her you're from the community, you should go to the community food bank. I don't think any intelligent, ambitious and honourable person should have to go through those kinds of experiences just so they can get a university education in Canada - the second wealthiest country in the world, I think last time I looked.

So I knew that was wrong and I knew also that since I had been working with the Antigonish Affordable Housing Society, through my job at the women's centre, we have been trying to build affordable housing. Well, actually we had been looking at the issue of affordable housing since we did a survey on rental housing in 1990 and we had been looking for ways because it became a passion for me, the idea of building new housing options for people who are poor in Antigonish. We had been looking for ways since about 1990 to build an affordable housing project and that was, unfortunately, just around the time that the federal and provincial governments were withdrawing from affordable housing.

So not only were the social and co-op housing programs eliminated around that time, but the public housing authorities also stopped building housing. I think there were four apartments, two-bedroom apartments, built in 1990 in Antigonish and then there were another two built in 1996, and that's all that was built. I don't know when the last ones were built before that but I can tell you, you can walk around Antigonish and look at them and they're very old buildings. So, you know, six units of affordable housing in something like 20 years is not exactly demonstrating a commitment to providing affordable housing for the poor.

So when the minister talked about, you know, don't worry, be happy, just get into some affordable housing, well, how on earth are you going to do that in the university towns in this province where affordable housing is at a premium? It's absolutely unavailable. I mentioned yesterday that there are 33 units of affordable housing, in total, in Antigonish Town and County. The last time I looked, there were 44 families on the waiting list. A family that has a single parent with one child is not likely to move up the waiting list very quickly because the units are four-bedroom units, for the most part, and people are loathe to put a very small family in there when there are bigger families that need it.

So I pointed it out to the minister that, first of all, subsidized child care is not free child care. When we looked at the cost of subsidized child care in Nova Scotia for the hypothetical single-parent families that we looked at for three different university programs in three different towns, we found that their child care costs were - if you had two children, seven and nine years old, you could have child care costs of about \$250 a month. If you had one child, you would have costs ranging from \$117 to \$173 a month. Then there's the problem of affordable housing, you just can't get it. So if I were just going through a marital separation now, getting on social assistance and then looking at going to university to build a better life for my family, I can't imagine how long it would take me, in Antigonish, to get into affordable housing. In fact, I may never get into affordable housing. My kids may be grown and I may have graduated years ago before I ever get the call saying we have a unit for you.

So we did a very detailed calculation of the costs of, actually, 12 hypothetical families. We took a single-parent family with one child under seven years, a child of four, and another of six; another family with two children, seven and nine years old; and one, six and eight years old. We did these different scenarios just to see how the Child Tax Benefit and things like that

shook out. I remember going through the Sears catalogue, actually, and looking at, well, what would it cost to provide clothing and linens and that sort of thing for families like this.

[10:00 a.m.]

So I was very conservative in choosing items of clothing that were very mid-range in the Sears catalogue, which is not exactly Tiffany's. Then I calculated that you would reduce these costs by about 20 per cent because most families in this situation get coats from the Family Resource Centre or donations of things. I know when I was in that situation everybody from professors to family members would say, here, my kid is not using these boots anymore. So I discounted that and then I put in a very modest amount of money for birthday gifts and a gift at the end of the school year for the children, but then I realized that I hadn't calculated in any sort of gift giving for other family members like, if it's grandma's birthday, do we just completely ignore her birthday, or do we give her a gift. What if little Mary is invited to her classmate's birthday party, does she show up empty-handed? So I didn't calculate in any of those things. It's a very conservative estimate of what their monthly costs would be. I came out with these families ending up with monthly deficits from \$180 a month to \$415 a month, depending on the ages of the children.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Katherine, I'm sorry to interrupt, but I'm getting an indication that there are several questions. So I'm wondering if you can just perhaps highlight or summarize the rest of it and we'll get on to the questions.

MS. REED: Sure.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MS. REED: Sure thing. So the three programs we chose were the Bachelor of Science in Nursing at St. F.X., the Bachelor of Social Work at Dalhousie and the BA at Acadia University. The Bachelor of Science in Nursing was the most expensive program. Ironically it's the program where you would graduate and make the most money when you start working. So, obviously, it's impossible without social assistance. A lot of people are saying when they hear about this, they say, well, I don't know why these women on welfare expect that the government is going to pay for their university degree when everybody else has to go into debt up to here. The answer to that is they are not expecting that. They would need student loans as well. It's just that the student loan is not adequate.

What is available through the Canada Student Loan Program is not adequate for a family. It's not designed for a family. There are the Canada Study Grants, which provide about \$1,300 a year for a person with two children, and that program was instituted in 1995. It hasn't been increased since it was instituted almost 11 years ago, while the cost of tuition has tripled, and the cost of living has increased dramatically as well.

So we need for this policy to be overturned. It's backward. It's not helpful. It doesn't strike me as a very smart thing to do for this rather small group of people who could benefit from having those doors opened to them, instead of having them slammed in their faces. We've heard from the minister unless there is a groundswell of support from the citizens of the province that he's not entertaining the idea of advocating for overturning it. There is not going to be a groundswell. People don't like people on welfare. People don't understand poverty for the most part. People have a real attitude, you may have noticed, about people who want a government handout, and so there are only a very few people who understand the situation accurately and will create a groundswell. So I would say this requires leadership at the political level and I don't see it happening yet. So we continue to press for this change. Questions?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Katherine. Gordie and then Jerry.

MR. GOSSE: Thank you very much, Katherine. This is a well-written document and very interesting. It's something that I've been pushing actually. I don't know if you know this but there is a Private Member's Bill as we talk in the Legislature right now, introduced by actually the chair of this committee, to deal with this issue. We've been dealing with this issue and I had once said since I got elected 23 or 24 months ago, when this issue came about it was probably the most phone calls I received in a one-day time frame, saying, Gordie, why should you support this bill, or why should you support this Private Member's Bill, when I put my two children through university and it cost me upwards of \$40,000?

I said well, my thought was that if you train these single women and men to go back to university, upon five years of graduation, all the money that you invested in their university degree would have been paid back through taxes, and they can't see that, and that's the argument that I have out in the public is that they just can't see that part of it. If we invest in their futures now, it will be better for the Province of Nova Scotia and everybody else. We'll be better off, along with their families and their children. I think this is a very important issue and I do have a list of single mothers that I support in this endeavor in Cape Breton. I was just on the radio talk show on Monday about this issue in Cape Breton that I do think it's important that we give these - these single mothers are not looking for a handout, they're looking for a hand up. They're looking to attend university and make their lives better for their families and their children.

I really enjoyed this paper. I will take this back to Cape Breton with me and I will share it with everybody at home and I appreciate it and I see that the work that went into this paper for the different family members - I see you have seven- and nine-year olds and what their needs are and what would be the cost. It doesn't seem like an overwhelming factor, but you are absolutely right that the Canada Study Grant has never increased. That has been cut since 1994, or 1993? In that range anyway. We also have to push for needs-based grants for some of these single mothers. I thank you very much for your presentation. It was very thoughtful and well researched.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Jerry and then Diana.

MR. PYE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Katherine, I want to say that very little has changed in Antigonish since the Standing Committee on Community Services met with citizens in that general area, in 1999. I want to talk to you about affordable housing in a university town. It's extremely difficult, particularly in Antigonish when we had met back then and I just want to take a few minutes to indicate that there was a presenter at the standing committee then who was a single mom on social assistance, who was renting a unit at an exorbitant rate and the landlord had increased the rent in anticipation of the students coming back to the Fall session of university. What had happened is that individual, because the rent rate had increased enormously, had to move out and as a result of that the individual even had to move out of the town because the town had no spaces available for the person, and into a mobile home on the outskirts of Antigonish. Even at that, the rate was exorbitant.

So in a university town where there are limited affordable facilities for people, what happens is that there is a tremendous cost to those individuals. It's the cost of transporting themselves to and from their hospitals, their family doctors, their places of consumer purchases, be it their grocery store or whatever the case may be, along with the exorbitant costs, so they're always finding themselves behind the eight ball, and I agree with what you say - excuse that term the eight ball, I shouldn't have used that, that's a recreational term and it shouldn't have been used - they find themselves behind the door all the time with respect to having the appropriate services.

I want to tell you, I don't know if you have spoken to the local MLA in that area or if the local MLA, who is a minister, was able to encourage affordable housing in that community, but that would be one of my questions to you. Have you spoken to the local MLA and to the housing agencies of the eastern region, who might have been able to put that on the agenda? I guess that in itself is one of the serious aspects of what I have noticed in the Antigonish area.

The other thing with respect to your tabled budgets on monthly incomes and your designations of families one, two and three, and so on, you're absolutely right. It's a very conservative budget because if people who make application to Revenue Canada because they are unable to pay their bill, they will give you a monthly budget sheet. Many of the items that are on that sheet, are not on this sheet. Particularly around personal needs and around entertainment and because someone is on social assistance, doesn't mean that they should not have some source of entertainment. So there is a whole host of items that are not on this list that could very well have been on this list. So you're absolutely right with respect to it being a conservative budget.

Also, I note that every one of the budgets that you had presented to us actually were budgets that showed deficits. So I'm just wondering if you can explain to me how are those deficits ever caught up on?

MS. REED: Well, I don't know. I guess every single mom that is in university now is making her way by hook or by crook. I know that Shaunderay Clyke, who had the well-known appeal that went forward to try to overturn this policy, as a result of the media attention an anonymous benefactor came forward and said, okay, I'll help you pay your bills until you get through university. So more power to her. She's making her way through university and her kids are in good shape. That's great. She also, I would note, is living in public housing.

One of the things about this paper is that we figured out that even if the child care were free or even if all these women were in public housing or some kind of a subsidized housing, they would still face deficits. The other thing about this paper is it doesn't really talk about what else - I don't know if it doesn't talk about it, but I don't remember writing it now - what else you lose when you lose your attachment to social assistance; you lose Pharmacare, and the dental coverage. So then you have to pay for the student coverage, plus all the co-pay that goes along with that, and the student coverage is not a real generous program.

So there are also costs like that, and there is the Assignment of Maintenance Program. If you happen to have been attached to someone who is not reliable with child support payments or who's sporadic and you're on the Assignment of Maintenance Program so that the welfare program fronts the money and they worry about getting it back from the deadbeat dad, you lose that if you don't have an attachment to welfare.

You look at the prospects. You think, if I were a single mother and I had two young children and I was going, okay, should I take this community college program so I can come out and earn \$12 an hour or should I take a university program to become a nurse or a social worker and earn \$30 an hour, you think about what are the risks involved. Well, the risks involved in my case now, unlike anybody else, are that my kids will go hungry or that I'll be threatened with having my kids removed from my home because I can't cope because we're so poor, or that kind of thing. Obviously you would decide, most of the time, not to take the risk. It's not worth the risk.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Diana, and then I'm going to close off questioning for this particular presenter.

MS. WHALEN: Thank you very much for being here again today. I enjoyed your comments yesterday, and I'm very happy to have a copy of your report so we can go through it. I've marked the Web site as well, so we can show it to others.

What I wanted to really bring up today, and I'm quite sure you'd be aware of it, but just to let you know that all Parties are very interested in this - at least both Opposition Parties are very interested in this. On a non-partisan level, the women MLAs of the province have met on two occasions, and I believe it was on the agenda. On one occasion we were invited by Stephanie Hunter, who is coordinator, as you know of FemJEPP, Feminists for Just Social and

Equitable Public Policy. Anyway, we met, it was put on the agenda, and then we met separately, just as women MLAs, sort of parking politics aside and saying this is an issue that is important to everyone.

Now, we haven't seen any change from the government side at all, but there has been a bill, as well, from the Liberal Party, April 22nd this year, again supporting exactly what the Changes Coalition was asking for, that this policy be rescinded. Again, as was mentioned, that's two Parties that showed that same support. I think it's important to mention it, that this is - as you said, it makes good financial sense.

I was very impressed by the women who came forward, who gave their own stories, who are now teachers, nurses, social workers - I'm sure you could find somebody from almost every profession - showing that with a small investment, helping to maintain the family while the woman goes back, the single parent goes back and studies so hard, and it is a huge job to be a parent and a student, let alone having all the financial worries. I think back to my time as a student, and it's a lot harder if you have a family, I know. Just thinking about the effort that those students are putting into their work, and if we can support them a little bit, to take care of their family so they can concentrate more on the effort of getting an education, that pays back huge dividends down the road.

I think you've made the point very clearly that, really, it's not the majority of people who are going to want to choose this path, because it is a very onerous, difficult endeavour. You don't set off on a four-year mission like this lightly. There are so many hurdles, child care is one of them, as you mentioned, and there are so many others - housing. On the child care side, one of the concerns I have is about the portability of child care spaces. I wonder, in any of your research, has that come up?

MS. REED: We didn't really look at that. It was quite difficult, actually, to get the numbers on child care. We had Peggy Mahon working on that end of things, and she was in touch with a number of child care centre directors. Boy, what a patchwork, a mishmash of this and that. It's \$2.50 over here, and it's whatever a day over there, but if you have two kids then it's a discounted amount, but they don't do it over in the other town - we really need a Quebec-style child care program.

I didn't answer Jerry's question about our MLA. Our MLA, as you know, is a Cabinet Minister, and we have approached him about this issue. His attitude was this is the policy and there's really nothing I can do about that, notwithstanding that he's a member of the Cabinet that instituted that policy, and that point is not lost on us.

The other point is that we also went to him for help to build affordable housing, because in the absence of development funding we just don't have the staff to do the work required to bring in affordable housing. He sent us off to try to get commitments from the two

municipal units. Of course one of them said, no, we already gave you a piece of land to build the thing on, what do you want? So being that one unit said no, the other unit said, well, our yes was contingent upon the other unit, so when we went back to Mr. MacIsaac, he said, well, I can't do anything to help you, I don't have any money anyway.

[10:15 a.m.]

What we get from our MLA, and from the Minister of Community Services is, well, you know, this is the way things are in government, this is the allocation of funding, these are the policies, and there's really nothing we can do about that. Well, they're the people who made those policies and decided on those allocations. So I don't buy it.

MS. WHALEN: I think you're completely right in saying that. It comes back to what was mentioned yesterday, political will. This rule was not in place prior to 2001. It was a change in policy, and it can be changed back.

MS. REED: It can.

MS. WHALEN: The financial picture of the province looked an awful lot better last year when the budget came down and there was money to make changes. I think we do need to keep up the pressure, even if you've been discouraged about a groundswell. Again, coming back and reminding the Legislature, reminding your own local members, wherever people live, those who support this must speak out. I think that makes a huge difference. I know from my own colleagues and myself, I'm very moved when I hear from people individually about what matters to them. I encourage you to keep up that fight and to engage myself and all of us to get involved as well. I definitely wanted to thank you for the work you've done, because it helps to clarify and really put it in very concrete terms. Thanks a lot.

MS. REED: Well, thank you. I appreciate your support. There was just one brief point that I wanted to make.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, if you think of it, you can always add comments to the comment sheet and they'll be included in the record.

Katherine, I want to thank you so much for your presentations, both today and yesterday. It's been most valuable. I also want to congratulate you on your paper. I know others helped you with it, but you certainly were the main author and researcher. Personally, I've used it a number of times as a resource. It's excellent, and I really think it's going to make a difference in moving this particular issue forward. So congratulations and thank you very much.

MS. REED: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Could I invite Jen Powley and Bernadette McKeough to appear. You're representing the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities (NSLEO). Welcome, this morning. As everyone is aware, we are running behind schedule, so I'm looking for everyone's co-operation, both the committee members and the presenters that if there's any way you can sort of highlight your points so we can get them in the official record. You always have the opportunity to add more detail in a written form, and we'll include that in the record. We'd appreciate your co-operation on this. Sorry to have kept you waiting.

MS. JENNIFER POWLEY: Thank you, Madam Chairman and honourable members. I will do my best to keep it brief. I have given a handout, so I won't cover a lot of the numbers and stuff because you can read them just as well, probably better than I can because of my vision problems. That's neither here nor there.

I'm Jen Powley and, as you said, I am representing the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities. With me is Bernadette McKeough, who is kind of my counterpart on this. What I wanted to say is that most of you know that I'm kind of a political animal, I'm certainly a watcher. I've been watching the federal campaign and the platforms as they come out. The Liberal Party - and I'm not picking on them, they were just the first Party to release their disability platform - one of the things in the platform they committed to, if elected, was putting in place a registered disability savings plan, essentially to allow family members to save money for children they were looking after, so there could be money for them in the future.

This is something a lot of disability groups have been advocating for, and I'm really glad the Liberals listened to them. On the other hand, it's really kind of a scary admission in that parents, as they get older, have been supporting their children, but when they're gone, or when they can no longer afford to do that, they don't trust this system to support their children. That's the reality, that people with disabilities are in such a bad state and the supports for people with disabilities are in such a bad state that even the politicians are admitting that we need to do something to make sure these people are supported.

So that really scared me, but it really points to a problem that is coming up with aging parents, with the aging population, that there's this huge group of people who aren't going to have supports and that the system isn't adequately supporting them, and that's something we need to address. I mean, all you need to do is go to the Halifax waterfront in the Summer and you'll see the man in the power chair with his coffee cup, hoping that passersby are generous and asked to put in a few extra coins, or the lady with the sign on the back of her power chair that says dishcloths for sale. Is this what people with disabilities should have to do in order to live a decent life?

I want to thank the Disabled Persons Commission. They were the body that supplied all the stats in the paper that I have. Almost one in three persons with disabilities in the province is living in poverty. That's 10 per cent higher than able-bodied persons, or the non-disabled as we

like to call them. The Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities has been working mainly on three areas: affordable accessible housing, affordable accessible transportation, and on a universal technical aids program, and home care. We call it our daily living kind of platform, or paper.

The key thing to all of these is affordability. It's the poverty, that people with disabilities can't afford to pay for expensive things - I don't want to say expensive things, they can't afford the actual cost. Why is one-third of the population of people with disabilities living in poverty? Probably one of the greatest things is that living with a disability simply costs more. The manual chair I'm in today, \$4,800, and then the power chair I have, \$9,000. I just put a new lift in, like a ceiling lift, so I can get out of bed, \$4,500. These are the types of expenses that people with disabilities face. Then to do my work, I have Dragon NaturallySpeaking on my computer, and jaws. I need a certain monitor size so I can actually see things. These are what people with disabilities need to get into the labour force. Yes, there are some supports, but a lot of it is just daily living kinds of things.

So people with disabilities have an average income of \$5,000 less than the able-bodied average. People in Nova Scotia, their average income is \$1,400 less than the average for people with disabilities across Canada. These are kind of scary figures. In the paper I had handed out I have some of the higher living costs.

Another reason people with disabilities are living in poverty is lower education levels. I've never seen stats where there are lower rates of university attendance because people with disabilities can't get to university, or if it's because they were disabled first, because a lot of people - 40 per cent of people with disabilities have less than a high school education. So if they're involved in manual labour, maybe there's just greater rates. So maybe we need to look at more programs to keep people in schools so that those disabilities don't happen once they are in the labour force.

There are lower employment rates for people with disabilities and some of the reasons why are employers' attitudes, and that's something we need to look at changing. The public in general often think that people with disabilities can't do the job, or if they do the job they can't do it as well as somebody who is able-bodied - they'll cost more, there will be more adaptations required, and it will just be a bigger hassle.

Underemployment is also a problem. People with disabilities have lower income rates and wage levels, and a lot of this is because there is a group of people with disabilities who can't perform at the same level that able-bodied people can or people without disabilities can. People with intellectual disabilities are often in jobs that society classes as less meaningful and, therefore, they don't pay as well. So maybe we need wage subsidy programs or top-up programs that would allow people to work but have their wages increased by an income

assistance program to a living wage, and not just a living wage level, a living wage with a disability level because it simply costs more.

Then of course there is the low-income assistance and CPP rates, and that keeps people with disabilities poorer. Not everybody with a disability can work. If they choose when they work, they lose all of their assistance. They lose all their supports and, as mentioned before about Pharmacare, those things really reduce the incentive to work part-time or do anything like that because it means that you lose everything else. It was mentioned earlier, with single parents on income assistance.

[10:30 a.m.]

One of the other points that I wanted to make that hasn't been raised is about caregivers for people with disabilities. These are often family members, parents, spouses, brothers and sisters who choose to care for their family members with disabilities, but that's at the cost of their own pension contributions. So when these people reach 65, they find they don't have enough contributions to income programs or to tax programs that they can actually get money back. The work they've been doing supporting their loved ones isn't considered work. There is no T4, there's none of that kind of stuff, and that has really been a problem. We have a couple of cases at NSLEO where - one is a wife who looked after her husband for 30 years and, because of his disability, they were getting a little extra with income assistance and through CPP. Well, now that he has passed away, she has nothing and can't claim anything because it was non-billable hours. That's a real problem and it's something that we need to look at. I know that's federal, the tax system, but really, we as a society need to look at these issues.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Jen.

MR. PYE: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and in the absence of time I'm going to be somewhat brief. I know that you asked us to respect that. Jen Powley, I do know that you get the opportunity to meet with all the political Parties, through your annual reports to those political Parties in Nova Scotia. The other thing is that you do a report card on the political Parties of Nova Scotia, and some of us might not be receptive to the responses of those report cards, but nonetheless, it's a report card and it perks our minds up to it. The only question that I have for you today is, the question around the receptiveness of the disabled community to a disabled persons Act. Is it possible for the disabled community to endorse a disabled persons Act in the Province of Nova Scotia, and I mean an Act that enshrines the rights of disabled persons?

MS. POWLEY: I would say right now the response to that is mixed. There are certain groups who support it. I know our parent organization, Council of Canadians with Disabilities, doesn't think that it's necessary on a national level. They think there are enough measures that can be taken, that there is enough legislation and of methods to go through the system. Other

groups really support and believe it will make things a lot simpler. So I don't think the disability community, as a whole, has an opinion. I was meeting with a group yesterday and they were very much in favour of it, because I believe the CPA supports that. They were very much in favour of it because they saw what the Americans with Disabilities Act did for people simply in terms of accessibility, where you could ensure that businesses were accessible to a certain one standard, and that's one thing that we lack here in Nova Scotia with the different building codes and the different ways they are applied. What's accessible in one place may not be accessible in another.

MR. PYE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would just like to close by saying that I would like to hear your arguments for or against, and if there is such a paper or report, I would certainly appreciate having it in my possession.

MS. POWLEY: That is probably something we should really look into, thank you.

MR. MCNEIL: Jen, thank you very much for coming in. We all enjoy receiving your report card. It's always a way for us to look at where we can improve, and successes. I want to thank you publicly for the work that you did and your organizations across Nova Scotia who represent people with disabilities to help us finally get past a bill for self-managed attendant care, which I believe is long overdue and is making a huge difference in the lives of people with disabilities today and it's beginning to make that happen. I know of a constituent, personally, who is doing so. As a rural MLA, one of the issues that we're faced with a lot is around transportation. I just would like you to expand a little bit on that, on the transportation side, and maybe explain to the committee the difficulty for a person with disabilities without having proper transportation.

MS. POWLEY: I wasn't able to come today in my power chair, and I'm kind of depending on Bernadette for help. I couldn't get transportation here for nine o'clock this morning, so I was here at 7:45 a.m., because my boyfriend had an eight o'clock meeting and it's the only time I could get here. It's really hard, a lot of people don't have boyfriends with cars who are able to lift them in and out of the seats. Essentially, the lack of transportation has really limited people with disabilities the ability to participate in society. I'm lucky that my work is flexible and it's okay that I get there at 10:00 a.m. and leave at whatever, 4:00 p.m., and do some work from home. A lot of jobs you can't do that. Even in Halifax, to get somewhere for 9:00 a.m., you're looking at getting picked up at 7:30 a.m., and then you need to get home care before that.

I know I'm one of only, I believe, two clients with Red Cross who gets service to go to work. Hopefully, this self-manage bill will change that and allow for that. That's the situation in Halifax, and Halifax is the best-case scenario in the province. Only half the province has any accessible transportation service. They could get a Dial-A-Ride service or something that is a community-based transportation system. The rest, you depend on your neighbours and friends.

In some communities you need to get an ambulance to go to the dentist because that's the only transportation system there is that will accommodate people who use wheelchairs. Does that answer your question?

MR. MCNEIL: Perfect, thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you and I just want to congratulate you, Jen and Bernadette, for your brief. It's extremely well set out, very well organized, and has lots of important information in there that I know we're going to be able to use in the future as well. So thank you very much. Thank you for coming today.

I have been asked to have a five-minute break, and because we are so far behind on our schedule, I ask people to really try to be back here in five minutes because I'm going to start in five minutes and I'm sure you don't want to miss out. Thank you.

[10:39 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:44 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, could I ask you to take your seats, please. Margaret, thank you very much for coming in this morning. The other committee members will join us as they get back in the room, but I think we had better start because we are running a bit behind schedule. So if you would like to make your comments now, we would really appreciate that. Thank you for coming. Everything is being recorded and there will be a written record of all your comments.

MS. MARGARET JOHNSON: Good day, everyone, from Caring and Sharing in the corridor area. As soon as you hear that term, you're going to freeze up and say it's the fastest growing area there is in Nova Scotia and practically in eastern Canada. Yes, it is. We live with the construction trucks, the sand trucks, the cement trucks, all the rest of it that's going through, and that's fine, and I'm not complaining about that at all. The fact is I'm not complaining, period, because we are well blessed in our Caring and Sharing program there. I used to, 22 years ago when we started it, even down as far as Maitland and, of course, into the HRM area, too, as well as Oldham, behind the airport, all those familiar areas that you people would know in your geography.

The only thing that I'm concerned about, and I want to leave you to think about it, I'm wondering actually - you see, I've got the fastest growing business that there is, that's very unfortunate; very unfortunate, with the usual things that happen to people. Not necessarily the homelessness, we have a little of that, not a great deal, but we look after that as well.

The municipality has wondrously given us a provision to house our health services, we are attempting to get more from our DHA, eventually from the Health Department, naturally. You know you're never satisfied with what you have, but you really are, a \$5 million building to house those services, yes. I'm very concerned that I can run a business for 22 years and I can get to the point of 170-some family units; understand now, I'm defining this - family units. I don't care whether you're one and two children, or one and one, or one and five, or two and five, or what your numbers are, if you're over the line and you've left us and you're not on somebody else's computer, we'll look after you. Like I said, we're not in desperate need. We have both money in the bank and food in the cupboard. Can't complain about that, can we? I'm wondering, and my bottom line is actually are we going to come to the end of this or has this become an acceptable - and I'm not downing the idea - way of life, because it's part of our mission.

The mission started with the Riverview United Church, the Elmsdale pastoral charge, that's where the mission started. Now it has become a community mission, which it should. I'm very concerned. I don't expect you to answer me right now. We're probably running, an average family unit, two adults, two children, run-of-the-mill style, shall we say, we're running probably something like \$100 a month short. When I'm laid off - I'm not laid off but - when I come to the end of that month, I'm just about \$100 short, because I can't rent a place for less than \$500. I can't possibly pay my power bill for less than \$100 a month. I can't possibly pay my water bill for less than somewhere around, every two to three months, \$50 or \$60, broadly speaking.

If I have an ordinary phone, which I do - I'm blessed with two offices, because the church gives them to me - an ordinary phone is between \$35 and \$40 a month, broadly speaking, and then I haven't covered the heat bill. The trouble is that my power bill is more than \$100 a month because I live in an apartment and most apartments are electrically heated and not oil-heated. I am never at the house - some of you would say that if you tried to get me on the phone, it would be impossible, I would be someplace between here and Halifax. And I do not carry a cellphone, because it's too expensive. And I do not carry cable, but you see these are expectancies of the average person. So I leave you with the thought, I wonder what we are doing.

Yes, we are members of Feed Nova Scotia, certainly, but I'm very concerned about what we are doing, and how we are doing it. I think if we were to visit my food bank, which is courtesy of the Enfield Legion, rent-free - can't go that one wrong, can you - with all the accommodations that are necessary to have it. I've told you all the pluses of where I live and the accommodation of an office within the church, free of charge. I've told you the free ones, to me. The car isn't free of charge, but that's all right. I would probably run someplace else. Grant you, I don't go to Florida and so on, personally speaking, because I have real things about that. If there are people out there in need, and I really believe in the program, if we were doing something that was the right thing to do and I leave it with you to think about it.

What are we doing with no EI, or EI in six weeks? We hit this just around - guess when - Christmas. Don't we? Because we're part-timers, we haven't built up a professional "pension" scheme, and we certainly don't have money enough to pay into it on our own. Now understand I'm not speaking for myself, I'm speaking for other people because I want for nothing - thank the good Lord above - a little common sense maybe occasionally would help.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So, Margaret, you're basically talking about some of the challenges of people who volunteer and work at food banks, and the rhetorical question you are asking is, are expanding food banks going to be the new reality in Nova Scotia? Is that sort of the essence of your presentation?

MS. MARGARET JOHNSON: I'm wondering.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, I believe Jerry has a question.

MR. PYE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I guess I can go right on your train of thought. You had indicated that food banks are the fastest growing industry in the province. There is no question about that. I do believe that the government's agenda of believing that it is the avenue of last resort is an area of concern, but my question to you is this, do you believe that government's dependence on food banks, clothing depots, churches and charitable organizations has been responsible for government's inaction on bringing about progressive social services change?

MS. MARGARET JOHNSON: No, I think we have to realize that these things will always be there - it's to the extent that they are there. Particularly the food banks. We have a clothing bank, we have a "new to you" shop, and I have no problem with those things. We have a transportation thing, but I'm concerned that the food bank part of it is growing continuously.

MR. PYE: Can I put it this way then? Do you think because of the services that you provide that government does not provide those services?

MS. MARGARET JOHNSON: I don't know if it's necessarily the government or if it's a combination of all of us. I'm not really "damning" any one particular area. I think maybe it's a combination of all of us because certainly - and I'm not downing big business because I do a lot of business with big business, I won't name the concerns, but they use me very fairly. There's only about two or three in this province that you would be doing business with anyway in that regard, as far as food bank business is concerned, I'm talking about. I'm not just sure whether it's big business, it's not just government, it's the general set-up. Sure, we had the first one in our area, I did, in December 1984.

So I'm not really blaming anyone. I'm just saying that we need to go through our routine of living and examine ourselves as to what we are doing. Are we stressing enough education? I'm not talking about quitting school in Grade 10 because you've got a job. I went

through that, too, you know, because I raised young people. Now, that person didn't quit in Grade 10, you can bet your life on that but, you know, sometimes we have to stress that a little more, making sure you go out with a Grade 12 and an extra business course of some description, like real computer knowledge, know how to run a cash register, know how to manage people as they go by you.

I'm not blaming any one particular group. I'm just saying we need to bring it to our attention, and very shortly, because we've got another generation coming on. You realize that I'm going through probably the fourth generation in my life, to be honest with you; 35 years of teaching, 22 years at the church. Well, do your own addition.

I'm concerned about the fact that it's taking about \$100 a month to meet your need, or your need, or your need, beyond what you are getting. You see, when you add it all up, you're getting \$1,200 a year short. That's what's happening with it all the time and, of course, as the \$100 grows, it becomes \$125 next month.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We really appreciate you coming in today, Margaret. We want you and your colleagues with Caring and Sharing to understand that we appreciate the work you're doing in your community. We don't have any quick, easy answers for you today, but certainly we've taken note of your concerns and your comments and they'll be part of our consideration later. Thank you very much.

MS. MARGARET JOHNSON: Thanks very much for your time. I'm just leaving the thoughts with you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you for coming. Could I invite Malcolm Shookner to come forward, representing the Halifax Peninsula Community Health Board, please.

MR. MALCOLM SHOOKNER: Good morning. I'm pleased to be here today as a member of the Halifax Peninsula Community Health Board to present to you some of the findings that are included in our community health plan which was just completed in 2005. I'm going to present those aspects of the plan that relate to poverty and health and solutions to reduce poverty.

Just as a bit of background, the Halifax Peninsula Community Health Board is made up of 15 community volunteers from all parts of the peninsula. Our brief explains exactly what those locations are. We are the eyes and ears and voice for the community's health. Our main task is to consult with residents and organizations about the various initiatives that affect health and to advise Capital Health about the various factors that affect health and what we can do to meet the needs of the community.

It needs to be stressed that health is a lot more than just health care services. People create health in their everyday lives, where they live, work and play. Health is a shared responsibility that includes caring for yourself, your family and your community.

[11:00 a.m.]

We spoke with hundreds of residents over the course of many months in 2004 and 2005 to identify their top health issues and suggestions for dealing with these issues. Because of the diversity of the community, we decided to address the plan from the point of view of four age groups: maternal, infant and children; youth; adult; and seniors. We did what we could to learn about each of these age groups, and we collected information in many different ways.

We looked at research and about these age groups. We used the results of a community-based telephone survey that was conducted across the Capital Health District. We had a community dialogue with over 100 people and 70 organizations to discuss their interests and concerns. We had over 300 youth surveys completed and 80 on-line surveys. We held 20 focus groups with various populations, including about 80 residents, to hear their concerns on their own turf. We collected data regarding health issues. We put all this together and, in the course of that, we spoke with people who were experiencing homelessness and poverty, people with disabilities, single parents, educators and many others. The variety of methods we used gave us passionate and thoughtful insights about concerns and what could be done to make our community a better place to live, learn, work and play.

So the community health plan presents the results of these inspiring discussions and maps out the steps that we will take over the next three years, both as volunteers at the community health board level and working with Capital Health District Authority to address priority issues in our community. One of those priority issues, of course, is poverty, because it's such a powerful determinant of health.

So I'm going to give you the highlights, which are in our brief, of the actual points in our plan that address this issue: advocate for affordable, flexible child care services, especially for families that need more support; we request that government provide financial help for licensed daycare, preschool and after school programs; support low-income families by advocating for minimum wage to be increased to a liveable wage. In fact, this particular recommendation resonated so much with the seven community health boards in the Capital District, which not only incorporates HRM but goes out Hants way, out as far as Windsor. The seven chairs of those health boards have decided to take up the issue of a liveable wage as an advocacy issue that they're going to pursue across the district. So you may well be hearing from them as well.

Advocate to government to increase transportation benefits for those receiving income assistance to improve access to services; join with other community health boards across the

province to advocate to government to move from the current minimum wage system to a living wage, and for more benefits for people receiving income assistance. In fact, we are starting to have meetings with volunteers and other community health boards, and we've looked at all the community health plans that have been produced and the issues of food, security, problems with income, transportation, a lot of the issues you've been hearing about over the last day and a half are reflected widely across the province, as you would know as MLAs.

Advocate for more affordable housing options, support projects that improve equitable access to meaningful employment and those that assist new immigrants to gain employment in their trained professions; advocate to the Department of Health to freeze the premiums for the Pharmacare Program to ensure that the cost of medications will remain affordable. That one is specifically for seniors.

Those are the elements in our plan. Since that time, we've had further discussions about, more specifically, what we could be doing to address this big scary monster called poverty. So we are looking more specifically at raising social assistance rates to a level that would enable residents to meet their basic needs, remove barriers to the development of affordable and adequate housing options for people living in poverty, revoking the regulation that prohibits social assistance recipients from pursuing more than two years of higher education, and surveying people who live in poverty to ask for their idea about what can be done to make their lives easier on a day-to-day basis.

So this presentation to the standing committee at this Forum on Poverty is a great opportunity for us, as well, to add our voices to those you've already heard about the problems faced by people living in poverty and solutions that can be pursued. Having listened to the presentations yesterday from anti-poverty advocates, we would like to add our support to some additional recommendations: in the clawback of the child tax credit for families receiving social assistance, significantly reduce the clawback of earnings from part-time work for social assistance recipients; extend access to subsidized child care, housing and drug benefits for people leaving social assistance to enter the workforce; expedite the development of social housing under the federal-provincial agreement by eliminating regulatory and financial barriers, and advocate for increased funding for child care, social assistance and other social support programs through the Canada Social Transfer.

You've heard in more specific terms, yesterday, in the testimony about these so we're not going into that detail again today, but we want to add our support to those voices you heard as committed and interested volunteers in our community. We want to join with the volunteers across the province to improve the health of our communities and we want to advocate for solutions to reduce poverty. We have found that this forum is a great opportunity not only to present our views, but to identify allies in our quest, and we thank the committee for creating that opportunity for us to do so.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Malcolm. Are there any questions or comments from committee members? Well, perhaps that indicates how comprehensive your recommendations and brief are. I just have one . . .

MR. MCNEIL: Madam Chairman, I apologize, I should have spoken up at the time, but it is the work that the community health boards are doing, not only in the peninsula here in Halifax, but all across Nova Scotia . . .

MR. SHOOKNER: That's right.

MR. MCNEIL: . . . they are committed Nova Scotians who are committing their time in stepping up to their communities, and I guess on behalf of the people here, and I'm sure the people you are representing and serving, thank you very much and this certainly does bring together a lot of what we had heard around the issue of poverty and the fact that you're coming forward and showing the determinant that it has on health is important. So thanks.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I just have one question myself, Malcolm. Is there any kind of mechanism for the community health boards across the province to work together on shared issues, or concerns, or initiatives?

MR. SHOOKNER: Not yet, but we're working on it. There is no established mechanism and so we are working on the poverty issue, starting with Capital Health, to meet with volunteers on the other health boards, and then leading to working with volunteers in the other health boards around the province that also have identified these kinds of issues in their health plans. So we're going to try to create a mechanism in the course of doing the work on this issue that perhaps can be used in the future as other common issues arise.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think it's obvious to all of us, as some of the presenters have already said, that any sort of provincial strategy has to be community based and I see the community health boards being in an excellent position to help with that as well as sort of talk in terms of improved policies and regulations. So thank you very much. We're delighted to have input from the community health board and to hear some of those voices. So thank you very much for coming today.

MR. SHOOKNER: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I now invite Linda Carvery and Brigitte Neumann from the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women to come forward.

MS. LINDA CARVERY: Thank you and good morning, everyone. I want to start off by saying the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women has as its mission to advance equality, fairness and dignity for all women of Nova Scotia. The agency works with organizations inside and outside of government to achieve equality for women in four areas:

inclusion in decision making that affects women in all their diversity; economic equality; equality in health and well-being; and the elimination of violence against women.

Now, these goals are universal among women's equality seeking groups because equality gained in these areas will create the most profound improvement in women's lives. Nearly everything we do at the Advisory Council on the Status of Women touches on reducing women's risk of poverty or removing barriers that keep women poor. Reducing poverty is a critical factor in achieving the other goals. It excludes women from society and decision making, harms their health and that of their children, and increases their vulnerability to violence. Women are more likely to live in poverty than men and poverty affects women differently and more profoundly.

In 2003 more than one-third of women and less than one-quarter of men in Nova Scotia earned less than \$10,000 per year. What increases a women's chance of being poor over a man's? Women are less likely than men to be in the paid labour force, and women who do work are more likely to work part-time or in casual jobs that offer low pay and few benefits; in fact, more than two-thirds of Nova Scotians who work part-time are women. A significant underlying factor is unpaid caregiving.

Women trade income for the flexibility they need to raise their children or to provide unpaid care to other relatives, and I can speak to that. This is evident in statistics about part-time work and choices of lower-paying work. Women's child-bearing and child-rearing years are the same as their most productive income-earning years. Statistics Canada shows that nearly three-quarters of women in Nova Scotia between the ages of 25 and 54 are in the paid workforce. Close to 30 per cent of women between the ages of 25 and 44 spend 60 hours or more per week caring for children. That's two and a half times as likely as men to be putting in these hours on these types of unpaid work. These are the most productive years of a person's life, and most women have significant unpaid responsibilities outside of paid work.

Having begun paid work, many mothers choose either to leave the workforce during the early years of their children's lives, or to reduce their paid workload. Either decision has long-term economic consequences for themselves and their families. Women care for others besides children, and again, it's unpaid work that can reduce their income. A woman may be the only or simply the best person to provide that care - care for an ill, or aging parent, or other relative, for example. However, she may have to reduce her hours of paid work by working part-time or taking unpaid leave, or by quitting a job or retiring early. These choices mean lost income immediately and in the future. If pension contributions have not been made, pension income is also reduced. Care is costly to the unpaid caregiver, in terms of health, in terms of social relationships and in terms of money, and the caregiver is overwhelmingly likely to be a woman.

People who live alone are also more likely to be poor than those who live in families, and this is particularly true for older women. While rates of poverty are higher for all unattached persons, unattached women are worse off than unattached men, and this difference is especially evident for those aged 65 and older. In 2000, close to 40 per cent of unattached women aged 65 or older in Nova Scotia were living before the low-income cut-offs. Compare this to 25 per cent of unattached men the same age. Low income is a fact of life for many women, especially those with low levels of education, lone parents, women of African or Aboriginal descent, or women with disabilities.

I'm sure some of the presentations yesterday and today will touch on the effects of poverty on people's lives. The most horrible effect of poverty upon women is, that having fewer options, they're more vulnerable to violence. They also have fewer options for escaping poverty - women who become poor tend to stay poor. Those are the reasons that women's economic security is a fundamental and ongoing goal for the Advisory Council. So what are we doing about it? I will touch briefly on three policy efforts.

In 2004, our Round Table on Women's Economic Security commissioned a research paper titled Building Transitions for Good Jobs for Low-Income Women. That paper detailed what has been shown to be the best way to support women with low levels of education and work experience to better provide for themselves and their families. It's a guide to best practices in this area. The paper has been presented to representatives of several provincial and federal government departments and is available on our Web site. I have also brought copies of the highlights report today.

Last February, we responded to a Department of Environment and Labour request for input on the minimum wage. The Advisory Council is concerned about the minimum wage in this province because women are over-represented among minimum-wage earners and because the minimum wage acts to anchor other wage categories. In 2003, more than 66,000 women earned less than \$10 an hour. A woman working full-time, full year at such a job would earn only \$17,500. The low-income cut-off in 2000 was \$18,200 for a family of two.

Our minimum wage brief makes two recommendations I want to share with you. First, that the minimum wage move back toward a living wage, where basic needs can be adequately met and, second, that the province index the minimum wage to the cost of living and to a proportion of average wages.

In November 2005, we submitted a brief to the federal Department of Labour which was reviewing the labour standards that make up Part III of the Canada Labour Code. The Canada Labour Code was written in 1965, and has long needed to be updated to better reflect the current Canadian labour force. Our brief provided background information on the most significant of those changes and discussed how gender is related to the workplace issues the department was reviewing. Again, the brief is on the Status of Women Web site, and I have

copies with me. Three important recommendations are for better enforcement of the standards, for legislation that promotes a living wage, and for extending labour standards to non-standard work arrangements.

[11:15 a.m.]

In addition to recommendations to government to reduce poverty, the Advisory Council supports community organizations dedicated to reducing women's poverty. For example, a staff member participates on the research committee for Community Action on Homelessness. This year the research group sponsored a conference, Homes First: Opening Doors to Supportive Housing. In addition, it sponsored Struggles for Access: Examining the Educational Experiences of Homeless Young Women and Girls in Canada. Researcher Jas Dhillon investigated this issue in Halifax, Saskatoon, and Vancouver, and her study found that young homeless women want to attend school as a means out of social, political and economic forms of deprivation.

Women Unlimited is a project of the Advisory Council and partners to support the fuller participation of women in science, trades and technology training programs, and workplaces in Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia Community College campuses in Halifax and Bridgewater are acting as pilot areas. The goal is to move 20 or more women for each of three years through each pilot site, through a continuum of services, including recruitment, the application process, course selection, gender/diversity training, placement to a job, mentoring, and successful retention of workplaces in Nova Scotia. Other partners are the Nova Scotia Department of Education, the Department of Community Services, Human Resources and Social Development Canada, the Status of Women Canada, and two community organizations - Women's Economic Equality Society and Hypatia Society.

To address the overwhelming financial hardships and employment barriers women with disabilities face, we are structuring forums for such women, leading off with Amherst. To help immigrant women bring forward their economic and social concerns we will be holding a second round table for immigrant women, in conjunction with the Office of Immigration and the Gender/Immigrant Women domain of Atlantic Metropolis, in mid-February.

These initiatives will allow us to hear from women with disabilities and from immigrant women, and bring to government their concerns and perspectives and the recommendations for positive change. Many factors contribute to women's poverty, and poverty makes women's lives worse in many ways: increased violence; reduced participation in their society and in decision making that affects them; worsened health status; and vulnerability to violence.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that poverty isn't just about having satisfying employment and adequate income, it's also about being excluded from participation in the

community, finding it impossible to take part in health promotion, recreation and leisure activities or supporting your children in doing that. Eliminating the daily humiliations, worries, stress and discrimination that are part and parcel of poverty, need our close attention to fulfill our mission, and to extend it to future generations.

If you have any questions I would be happy to answer them. Again, I invite you to visit our Web site, the address is on our brochures and the other reports I brought with me today. Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Linda. Are there any questions from committee members? Jerry.

MR. PYE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm just wondering, through you to the presenter, Linda Carvery, when you presented your papers and your reports and your findings too, to government, you obviously presented them to a number of governmental departments because the Status of Women would fall into Health, Education, Justice and so on - have you received any responses back from government, with respect to your recommendations, and if in fact government has set an agenda whereby it will support or endorse some of those recommendations?

MS. CARVERY: I would like to direct that question to Brigitte, who may be able to answer that better than me.

MS. BRIGITTE NEUMANN: Okay. I always call it Building Transitions to Good Jobs, just for short form. It has been circulated and is of particular interest to the women's centres of Nova Scotia, who have used it in a number of settings to try to advance the cause. It has also been presented to ministers in a federal-provincial-territorial forum since many of the issues that it addresses are in fact federal-provincial-territorial issues. On the minimum wage brief itself, we did receive a letter of thanks, particularly expressing appreciation to the fact that we do some analysis as opposed to simply saying we want more, and we have not yet heard back from the Canada Labour Code Review.

I would like to say that one of the reasons why we do spend some time and effort to address an issue that is in the federal domain, namely the Labour Code Review, is that invariably that also has some impact on other labour codes, provincial labour codes, in the country and we felt at that point that it's most important to surface the issue of precarious employment. That is an increasingly important issue. There are so many people including, and perhaps especially, younger people who after finishing a course of education, nevertheless are caught in contract work, in casual work, where they get no benefits and have to spend a very long period of time, and in a way, economically, live in a house of cards - you miss the next contract and you're in serious trouble.

So the point, I think, that we want to make with that is that we need to start thinking about how the economic benefits that accrue to business and industry as a result of having flexible workforces, how the less positive consequences of that can be more equitably shared in society, and government obviously has a key role in that one. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I want to thank you both, Linda and Brigitte, for your excellent presentation - sorry, I didn't see your hand, Diana.

MS. WHALEN: Thank you. First of all, I would like to thank you both for being here. I was really pleased to see the Nova Scotia Advisory Council stepping forward and being part of this debate, because as you can see, it's a very broad-based group that we are hearing from and I do think that you have a lot of information, a lot of background and knowledge to add to this debate as well, and I think the figures that you bring forward are so important and really show that there is a feminine face to poverty - unfortunately, it is more feminine than otherwise - and I think we need to recognize that because of the financial and, I guess, economic vulnerability of women. I believe the average wage is something like 70 per cent of a male's wage, regardless of age and education. So there is a real gap in wage and there is also a gap in responsibilities that women bear in those prime years when they could be earning their best money - as you pointed out, they are often occupied with child care.

I wanted to just ask on your issues with child care, is that an area that you will be researching in any way in the near future or have done any studies on?

MS. NEUMANN: On the child care issue, we've been engaged quite significantly in the debate, and advocacy basically, for developing a child care system as opposed to a patchwork of services in Nova Scotia. We continue to work with groups such as Elaine Ferguson's Child Care Connection Nova Scotia, Sue Wolstenholme and others, to continue working toward what is called a hub model of child care, where you have sort of a central facility that's complemented by family child care arrangements and that would provide, in the end, a seamless early-childhood education and care experience to do away with this business of - you know, at 7:00 a.m. the child has to go into some kind of babysitting arrangement before they go to school and then after school there's this and that. I was a single parent, some years ago thank goodness, and I remember thinking, oh, goody, my baby is starting school, child care will become easier - ha! It gets much more complicated, because instead of having a nice routine system, now you have a million exceptions to take care of - it's an in-service day, it snowed, and so on and so forth. The other point, if I may, Madam Chairman . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: A really quick one because we're running so far behind.

MS. NEUMANN: The other thing that I've been involved in is a community links project on community-based transportation. Every time we hold anything having to do with women, the transportation issue raises its head and is never dealt with. It's a really hard one. I

think it's extremely and increasingly important to address that. Community-based transportation has to be a priority if we're going to address issues of social exclusion and poverty in this province.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: That issue has come up several times, so thank you for reinforcing that. Again, we commend the council and staff for the excellent work that they're doing. Thank you.

Now I would invite Ari Rosen and Anna Hunter to come forward on behalf of the Halifax Coalition Against Poverty.

MS. KELI BELLAIRE: Anna was unable to make it today so I'll be sitting in for her. My name is Keli Bellaire.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Would you like to start?

MR. ARI ROSEN: Hi there, I would like to thank you for this opportunity. The Halifax Coalition Against Poverty is a local grassroots anti-poverty organization. It does direct-action casework, and campaigns to address the injustices within the system. Daily HCAP works to fight for the rights and dignity of people who are most oppressed and affected by the social assistance system, the Residential Tenancies Act, inactive governments and a fundamentally-flawed, globalized, capitalistic system.

We at HCAP see and hear real stories from real people on a daily basis. We're advocating and assisting the public with no government funding whatsoever. What the people need is more government-funded services, not cutbacks. Our Halifax community will continue to diminish into poverty even more rapidly without some real changes to the Department of Community Services. We need action now - not meetings and promises. We need stuff to be done tomorrow - not next week, next year.

MS. BELLAIRE: You've asked today for service providers and organizations to address the question of how you can support and ensure that the programs and services provided can be strengthened and enhanced without the expenditure of more government funds. So, basically, you are asking organizations to tell you how they can do more with less. Service providers and NGOs exist because the supposed Community Services social safety net has holes in it. People are slipping through the cracks of government social services, and all of the groups present here today are trying to fill these cracks. Rather than asking us how we can do more with less, why don't we talk about what more government can do to fix the social safety net themselves?

HCAP is here to say that local service providers and NGOs should not be responsible to do more with less, and we want government action now. In HRM, over 30,000 individuals are living at risk of homelessness, yet new housing is not being built. The child poverty rate has

risen to over 40,000 in the last 15 years from 36,000 and continues to rise. More and more children are growing up in unhealthy environments and continuing the cycle of poverty. Food bank usage is on the rise, and more families are making sacrifices every day about whether to pay the rent or feed their kids. People on social assistance and people with disabilities are constantly challenged to make ends meet while they receive hardly enough money to survive, let alone get ahead.

[11:30 a.m.]

So what do we want from Community Services? We want immediate spending of the remaining bilateral housing agreement money for affordable housing. We want you to raise the social assistance rates for all recipients, so that people aren't forced to choose between paying the rent or feeding their kids. We want you to stop the overpayment policy and cover all additional heating costs for all social assistance recipients. HCAP recognizes that the Standing Committee on Community Services is a toothless body that, in the past, has not impacted in many meaningful changes. HCAP, as well as many other groups, has been telling government what we want them to do, and what they need to do for years, but you don't listen and our recommendations aren't heard and nothing changes. So how can we know that this forum is any different?

MR. ROSEN: So HCAP would like to know the agenda of this standing committee, why has this Forum on Poverty been organized? It's very clear that the Department of Community Services had many discussions and meetings with regard to poverty in Halifax and all I've ever seen is a bunch of people standing around talking, and they make suggestions but nothing has followed through. There's a huge surplus of money sitting up there ready to build houses, and if you go down Creighton and Maynard you can see all the boarded up places where we exercised Bylaw 100 and closed the place down. Get a local contractor to put in a bid, an estimate, for the repairs to be done, so that we can put low-income families into affordable housing. Those places sit there for years and years and the government is doing nothing about it.

What is the standing committee willing to do to ensure these recommendations will be adopted? We do not need empty promises, we need real change, and HCAP wants to see action now. We will continue to work with our community and our allies to fight for justice and to point out the inconsistencies within the system. We don't need government funding. The people out in the community need the government funding. We'll work for free. The government needs to put the money back into the community without these promises that hold no water. That's what we have to say.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I just want to mention something. We really appreciate your frustration, but actually this committee has nothing to do with the Department of Community Services, we actually are almost an advocacy body of the Legislature and our mandate -

because I think some of the confusion is coming from our name, the Standing Committee on Community Services - actually we're an all-Party committee that looks at issues that come under several departments - Community Services, I think it's Municipal Affairs, Health, Education, and there may be one or two others.

So we have a very broad sort of social mandate to look at services in the community - that's where our name comes from - that serve the population, the citizens of Nova Scotia. We have no authority ourselves as a committee, but what we can do is investigate, to research and learn about issues and make recommendations in the form of motions that go to Cabinet and to specific departments. We have the ability to try to convince and influence the decision makers to improve their policies or to change something in legislation, but we don't have any decision-making ability ourselves. So I don't want to mislead you that way.

So the point of our forum - we realized that a lot of the groups that asked to present to us over the past year and the coming year all had something in common. They were dealing with people who had inadequate incomes and so we thought rather than talking to each of these groups individually, one by one, it might make more sense to bring everybody together so we could hear their message loud and clear. We've set aside this afternoon, as our committee, to decide our strategy. So we're going to decide how to deal with the recommendations and the information that we've heard, both through our constituency offices, through our individual caucuses, through our work on the standing committee and also through this two-day forum. As everyone has told us, and we recognize ourselves, nothing we have heard over the last two days is new. It's been studied endlessly, and we agree with you that it's time to stop talking about it and to take some action. So we are going to brainstorm this afternoon to see what we can do to encourage that action to go forward.

MR. GLAVINE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just wanted to thank you, certainly, for that challenge, that action is needed. There is no question about that. I do want to point out that the standing committee, I know in minority government, has been effective in a number of areas of presenting a motion and then getting it brought to the Legislative floor. I will just use one quick example, if I may. My colleague, Stephen McNeil, introduced a motion that autism support become a line item in the budget. It was one that our colleagues were pleased to second and move forward, and it got the endorsement of the entire committee that all three Parties would push for that, and it was achieved.

I think it's a really important point for me - I have taken my blood pressure pill, so I will say it all in a very nice way, this is an absolute scandalous situation that we have as government MLAs who are paid to listen to you people. Yesterday, we had one government member here, and today three seats are absent. Your voice is not being heard by the people who need to hear it and take it back to their Cabinet colleagues to push for the kinds of actions that you absolutely need to see happen in this province.

I just want to go on record that I'm sure I speak for all the MLAs here that this is a situation that is unacceptable. This is the kind of area that should be brought out publicly, and government castigated for their lack of representation and the inability to hear from Nova Scotians who are most in need. If that's not what government is about, then I see an enormous failure here. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I just want to clarify in case people are confused, because of a minority situation each of the three caucuses has three members on the committee, and attending today are three caucus members representing the Liberal caucus, and three representing the NDP caucus. We're not part of government. Government is the Party that has the most members elected to the Legislature. So just to clarify that in case there was any confusion.

MS. BELLAIRE: It sounds like you are agreeing with us that we shouldn't be spending this time talking and that action needs to happen. You are also saying that the only power that you have is to make these recommendations to government, right?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, but this forum has been very helpful for us in terms of updating our facts and figures and information so that we will be better informed and more knowledgeable in terms of making recommendations about how to move forward with some kind of provincial strategy.

MR. ROSEN: I don't know if everyone here follows the news, but they should. Last year we had a shopping cart rally. We called it our National Housing Strategy and we blocked Spring Garden Road for a few minutes, but we got the attention of the media. We parked ourselves in front of I think it was 5675 Spring Garden Road, David Morse's office. Maybe we'll need to get more carts this year to show him what we mean, what we need.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think we have another question from Gordie.

MR. GOSSE: You're absolutely right, it's a minority government, but realize that the Progressive Conservative Party still controls the finances of the province. It's a minority government, but they still control the budget. They still control everything else that deals with finances. So this committee makes recommendations to the government, and there have been all kinds of recommendations. I've been elected for 23 months and there are all kinds of different things that came through this committee that were acted upon by the government because it's an all-Party committee. I had made a point yesterday that recommendations to this government, in the past and future - I hope that these recommendations are not put in boxes and stored in closets and never acted upon.

Government spends thousands and maybe millions of dollars on recommendations and studies, and I'm quite familiar with the tar ponds agency spending \$52 million on different studies and everything else and the tar ponds are still there with not one ounce of anything

taken away. So this is what I had mentioned yesterday in this committee, and I hope that these recommendations that came from so many very concerned citizens, people who work on a daily basis with people with disabilities, housing, Community Services and all those things, what they've told us over the last day, yesterday and today, what is wrong with the system. And we are sitting here listening as MLAs to say that, you know, what can we do to make recommendations to the government, to help fix the system, and that's what I would like to say on that issue. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, I think we're going to have to move on. I want to thank both of you for coming today and making your very passionate presentation. We appreciate this very much.

Now, I just want to remind everyone (Interruption) Excuse me, we need you to speak into the mic because otherwise your comments won't be recorded. So just stand at the mic in the corner, if you want to.

MS. AMY MOONSHADOW: Is this committee one that is ongoing or is it just for when there are - does it continue to stand throughout the term of the House, or is this just when you have these cute little meetings?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, we meet on a monthly basis. We start at the beginning of a session. We continue on throughout the year.

MS. MOONSHADOW: So is the time of those meetings known to the constituents at large, so that people can continue to give input to the committee, and are they closed-door meetings? Do they meet somewhere that somebody can sit and listen like the House, at large?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: All our meetings are open to the public. They usually take place in Committee Room 1, which is on the third floor of the Dennis Building, just across the street. I believe the notices are published both out here in the lobby, but also on the Web site, or available through MLAs, or through the Committees Office. We invite people to come. There are usually research staff and media there, and there is no restriction at all. Leo.

MR. GLAVINE: I just wanted to add to the chairman's remarks and that is, you can write to the chairman of the committee, which is Marilyn More, and have your group come and make a presentation to the standing committee. So as you gather new information, new evidence, and you want to strongly present your case, you can write to come back in and be heard.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Now, just to remind committee members and presenters that we are really running behind time here and we want to make sure that we hear from everybody before we break at 1:00 p.m., so if there is any way you can highlight your comments and pass in your written details, we would certainly appreciate that. So, Jackie,

welcome. Jackie Barkley is presenting as a private citizen, and we appreciate you coming today.

MS. JACKIE BARKLEY: Okay, I will try to go quickly. Thank you for the opportunity to be here. I have just a small comment perhaps all of us here could challenge the three government members to hold a hearing with just the three of them and I'm sure all of us would be happy to come back and tell them what they haven't heard.

Okay, so first of all, I want to make it really clear that I do work as a social worker in the public mental health system for the CDHA, but I am here presenting my views as a private citizen and not representing the institution that I work for.

[11:45 a.m.]

One small comment. I want to start by saying that I am here in solidarity with low-income Nova Scotians and not as a low-income Nova Scotian, for three primary reasons. One, I am educated; two, I am of European descent; and three, I am unionized. I want to point this out because there really are three major determinants of income status and I am privileged to benefit in all three categories. Number one, I am an individual who did benefit 25 years ago from the formerly progressive Community Services policy of allowing single parents on income assistance to attend university. So I have a social work degree as a result, and I am grateful to the people of Nova Scotia, my fellow citizens, and hope the department will return to that policy.

Secondly, racism and discrimination are a significant predictor of being marginalized economically in Nova Scotia, and because I am white, I have not had to suffer the systemic barriers to employment and education faced by African-Nova Scotians and people of Mi'kmaq descent.

So, for starters, I am suggesting that we change the current regressive policy on university attendance for income assistance recipients; two, undertake a serious redress of historic racism in Nova Scotia; and three, support and encourage unionization and respect for collective bargaining and stop the contracting out. I don't know anybody who is unionized, who calls their job a dead-end job. As soon as it's unionized, it actually stops being a dead-end job.

I want to say that right now, as a citizen of this province, I am ashamed of the dramatic increase in wealth, high-end housing, offshore development, huge corporate buildings dotting the shoreline of the harbour, while the conditions of many Nova Scotians remain appalling, hidden and sometimes worse than 36 years ago.

In the 1990s, our political leaders - three of whom are not here at the moment, but three of whom are - were able to convince us of and promote a mantra of cost-cutting and deficit

reduction, which has resulted in the now broadly accepted view that new resources can never be allocated and we must always reconfigure service delivery to marginalized groups within current resources.

To the statement, well, there's just no money, as professionals and as citizens we often respond like sheep, I guess you're right, and we beg for crumbs at the table. So the first thing I want to say is it is about the money. Money and resources are allocated by decision and by choice, by social and economic priorities and if we need higher or redistributed taxation and changes in our priorities, so be it.

My focus today is to use just a few minutes to talk in particular about the services or, more accurately, the lack of services to some of the most vulnerable and poor persons in our society - those suffering from chronic, severe, major mental illness. The Department of Community Services has clearly been instructed by its political directors to use every form of baffle-gab, distorted and evasive language, and sheer misrepresentation to mask the fact that it no longer provides, and has not done so for approximately three years, the housing and support services required upon discharge for severely mentally ill persons. I have been to meetings. I have read the reports. I have heard the explanations and heard the political doublespeak, but the reality is that there are now two tiers of services to mentally ill persons in Nova Scotia: those who were in the Community Supports for Adults program until approximately 2001, and those who have needed new service delivery since that time.

I will make it very clear and simple because I certainly respect and I don't mean to patronize that the details of service delivery can be very complicated to those of you not dealing with it on a day-to-day basis, but here it is, very simply. It has taken me three and a half years at my current job to even grasp this.

The Department of Community Services, under the auspices of the agency formerly known as Community Supports for Adults - which now has a new name I can't remember - used to provide reasonably decent, supportive housing, often through group homes and community helpers, and services to enhance quality of life to the chronically and severely mentally ill. The same department also provided long-term residential institutions for the most severely behaviour disordered persons in the same population, many of which have been shut down in this province, under the misguided notion that deinstitutionalization is always good and that an expensive institution is okay, as long as it's called a hospital, and it is in the Department of Health budget and not the Department of Community Services budget.

The deinstitutionalization and shutdown of all of these facilities in the Halifax region, and the preposterous waiting lists in the remaining facilities in this province, have created a process where there are now only four options for newly diagnosed severely mentally ill persons not requiring acute medical care: one, stay in the hospital; two, get an apartment alone

and live alone with no supports except from health care providers; three, go to a shelter; and four, go to the street.

We need to be very clear here. I'm talking about vulnerable, ill citizens that we have abandoned because they have no voice and, frankly, whether they are called consumers or clients, or patients, the fact is they have no influence and no friends in high places. The only people they have contact with are their exhausted families or front-line health care and community service workers, or doctors or nurses who are not allowed to take a public political stand on what is really going on - often because of confidentiality. These persons are living in the hospital - I repeat, living in the hospital - unwillingly and through no fault of their own, leaving a desperate insufficiency of beds for acutely mentally ill people who would benefit from some time in hospital and subsequent discharge.

We have a combination of incompetence, neglect, avoidance of the problem, and a non-willingness to spend money on those most in need - the last I knew the latter was called greed. All of the solutions not requiring money have been tried and it's time to cough up the cash. It will cost a lot. We need to spend it. It's certainly what I pay my taxes for and it is our collective social obligation. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Jackie. (Applause) You certainly have provided a very effective voice for the people whom you're discussing. I'm just wondering, are there any questions or clarification from committee members before Jackie sits? Okay.

MR. GLAVINE: I was wondering about having your name and address and so on associated with your presentation.

MS. BARKLEY: Yes, I'll be sure it's there.

MR. GLAVINE: Good, thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: And perhaps you could, Jackie, I'm not sure if you've already given it to Mora, but before you leave we would appreciate that. Thank you again very much.

Gene Frampton from Connections Clubhouse.

MR. GENE FRAMPTON: Hi, I'll try to be as brief as possible.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MR. FRAMPTON: The handout passed around, on it you can see that I put down that I'm presenting as a private citizen, which is what I would prefer. The other things that I'm mentioning there, Connections Clubhouse and TEAM Work Cooperative, are organizations that I'm involved with and a lot of my role and experience with them informs what I have to

recommend. Now in terms of Connections Clubhouse, if you don't know what it is, it's a community mental health facility that's part of the QE II Hospital system, and within it the Clubhouse model is really an internationally recognized best-service practice and is based on the idea that work is very, very important to people's psychological and social rehabilitation after suffering from mental illness. TEAM Work Cooperative is a bigger co-operative of organizations that are all working on employability issues - so fighting poverty through employment - and Connections Clubhouse is a member of that co-operative.

As you see on the first page, I have put the policy recommendations right down on the page. I was here yesterday and I was listening to a lot of the recommendations, and a lot of them are really key for the people who I work with, in particular things like being able to keep Pharmacare coverage and that sort of thing. What I wanted to do was focus more on bigger kinds of issues that the committee might be addressing in its report. I will come back to the policy recommendations.

Firstly, I just wanted to get you to turn to Page 2, which shows you a little bit about Connections Clubhouse. That first graph, Connections' Employment Menu, is our approach to employment at the Clubhouse. All those things people can get assistance with at the Clubhouse and the reason that I'm putting it down is that it shows - there are several reasons I'm putting it down, to show several realities about what it's like for someone who has had a persistent mental illness to try to get back into employability and, thus, completely off the welfare system. It's often a question of stages, where they have to start at smaller things, part-time work, volunteer work, that sort of thing, and then move on up towards independent and competitive employment. One of the things that has been very interesting, working at the Clubhouse, is the difference between our members who are supported through CPP and our members who are supported through Community Services income supports.

I wanted to just take a few minutes to talk about that. With the way the CPP program works, they have very clear limits that you can make a certain amount of money over the year, and within that, it works out exceptionally well for us as employment support workers because as we talk to a member about employment options and that sort of thing, we'll say, okay, well, working this number of hours at this type of wage, you're going to earn this much money, which means you're going to start having to pay more taxes over this particular limit, which is about \$4,000. Sometimes they'll let it go for higher than that. In any case, the clawback in that system is through the general tax revenue system.

One of the other major differences for us in working with CPP as opposed to the Community Services system is that we're usually dealing with two or three people who control the eligibility of people for CPP. I can't tell you how much time we've spent with Community Services staff trying to explain to them the actual situation with individuals who we're working with. With CPP, because it's fewer people, we've been able to sensitize them to the realities of mental illness, and of returning to work with a mental illness. With Community Services, we're

just dealing with all kinds of people, and they change often. One of the big problems with persons with mental illness is that often they present fairly well, and if you didn't know better you would think that they're quite an able person, but scratch the surface a little bit and you would know that it's a tremendous hardship trying to hold work.

Anyway, that being said, I don't know if the idea of eliminating the clawback through Community Services is just a totally naive, wacky idea or not, but I don't see why it couldn't be considered. I can't imagine, from our experience, that the clawback really amounts to all that much money, and in the process of talking to Community Services about the idea of the clawback - originally we were talking about the necessity of having it more graded.

So you know how people talked yesterday about how after you hit a certain amount you are clawed back at 70 per cent and that's too much and it's a disincentive. We were talking with them about, could you reduce the clawback rate. One of the first things that Community Services came back with, well, possibly, but it would have to be very administratively light. Which made me think, well, what is the cost of clawing back the money anyway? Maybe the cost of policing it is so high that it's much greater than any clawback could possibly be, and the clawback is going to happen anyway. So if that's a very naive idea, that it has already been costed out, excuse me.

The second part of that presentation is just a quick thing about member income at the Clubhouse, and that the program of supported employment is really working for us. Member income has grown exponentially over the last 10 years.

[12:00 noon]

If you flip over to my last page, I've mentioned two reference points, and these are reference points that are both important to us, at Connections, and also to TEAM Work Cooperative. The first one is the NEEDS Project Report. I don't know if you know very much about it. I brought my one dog-eared, coffee-stained copy with me. This is almost the 10th Anniversary of this report. As the byline states, it's "A Comprehensive Disability Service Strategy for Nova Scotia", and it was published in October 1996.

In it there's a lot of information about income support systems and some very revolutionary ideas for how to manage them. The key thing about the report is that it involved a lot of consultation with a lot of disability groups right across the province, and it looked at the whole service strategy area from the point of view of the disabled. For example, in terms of income support, one of the things it proposed is that all of those income support programs be managed in one central location, so workers' compensation, CPP, income support through Community Services, I'm not exactly sure what part of the silo system that ended up derailing - I think it's an idea worth thinking about.

The other part of it that was important to us at Connections Clubhouse was because it was written from the point of view of someone with a disability. It was talking about centralizing, simplifying and all of those good things. So TEAM Work Cooperative actually grew in large part out of the NEEDS report. Again, it was the idea of a one-stop shopping for persons with disabilities. Instead of this vast array of all kinds of organizations to help, you go to one spot, and that group can fan you out to whoever can best help you.

There's a quick list there of the TEAM Work Cooperative members, so our little organization, Connections Clubhouse, is just one of many organizations. What we've done through that, Team Work Cooperative now has an intake system for all persons with disabilities who need employment support services, and they can take them in and then fan them out to whichever organization is best suited to help them.

The other thing it has enabled us to do is through TEAM Work Cooperative, we've helped create or sponsor something called the Business Leadership Network. The idea of the Business Leadership Network is that corporate leaders within Halifax get together and they market to each other the value of having persons with disabilities employed, and it's just entering its second year; it has been very successful. None of us are particularly involved in it, it's the corporate people and their HR people who are leading it.

If I had a dollar for every time one of the business groups that we work with said to us, you know, you don't realize how valuable your people are to us. The things they often mention are much more loyal, much more open to what the organization is about, just so glad to be working, and they all say that disabled people are a tremendous asset to their organization.

One of the things that got me thinking about was, when we look at the whole poverty issue there's all this talk in government about how we're going to have this human resource shortfall, nobody out there to fill the jobs. Well, there are thousands of persons with disabilities who have tremendous ability and things to contribute, and I think it's really important to look at them as a resource, not only them but also their children. Maybe this committee can play a major role in fostering that kind of mindset change. So that brings me full circle to my policy recommendations.

The first one we've talked about, eliminate or minimize the income clawback role of Community Services. Related to that, and this is also related to some of the presentations from yesterday, is I really think the idea of having Community Services as policemen who claw back money is so totally contradictory to what they should be doing - their role should be service to Nova Scotians - if we don't take that role away then they can't really play the positive role that they should.

Related to that, and this is also talked about in this disability NEEDS report, is to have them play the lead role in the fight against poverty in a very proactive way, where they partner both with individuals and with the organizations that are working with the poor.

The last thing is in terms of establishing accord between the department and voluntary sectors. The accord I mentioned in that key resource section - you probably heard of the accord - this was signed about three years ago between the federal government and the voluntary sector; it was a big national accord, and it took three or four years to develop. What it essentially did was set out a framework, and I'm just going to read its byline because it's more articulate than I'd be: "A framework that represents a public commitment by the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector to more open, transparent, consistent and collaborative ways that the two sectors can work together."

While I've been sitting in the back for the past day listening to all the presentations, it just reinforces in my mind that there is no way that the government can really attack the problem of poverty without benefiting from all the knowledge and expertise that the voluntary sector groups have. It's really an attitude that has somehow gone out of the bureaucracy, but all these volunteer groups know better the needs of the people we are trying to serve than anyone else. I think the accord would be a model for some ways that Community Services could be reinvented.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Gene. As someone who comes from the voluntary sector and was quite involved with the national accord, I think your suggestion would be very appropriate at this level as well, so thank you for those comments. Stephen, did you have a question?

MR. MCNEIL: Yes, and thank you, Gene, for your presentation. During your presentation you mentioned that you had already spoken to the department around the clawback, and I think you said you talked about them reducing it, and they said providing it didn't increase any more administrative burden?

MR. FRAMPTON: It was a committee of TEAM Work's board actually that went to meet with the lady who looks after that program. Her big worry was that if we complicated it more than what it was - it's very simple in a way, the way that it is now, but we were talking about a more gradual, say for the first \$150 people can keep, the next \$150 would only be clawed back at 30 per cent, something like that, just some incentive to keep working and getting out there.

MR. MCNEIL: So you weren't talking about changing the 70 per cent or lowering that percentage as much as you were talking about redoing the complete system itself?

MR. FRAMPTON: We were just talking about lowering the 70 per cent after the first \$150.

MR. MCNEIL: Maybe I'm missing something. How is changing 70 per cent to 50, to 20, going to increase anything in terms of administrative responsibility?

MR. FRAMPTON: Administrative costs?

MR. MCNEIL: Yes.

MR. FRAMPTON: I'm not sure. It doesn't seem like it would be much more.

MR. MCNEIL: That's just nonsensical. How do you rationalize even that thought coming from the department? It just doesn't make sense. Anyway, thank you, it was a great presentation and you're a great spokesman. I'll just mention again that that's one of the things that I've been so pleased about, the self-managed attendant care bill being passed, because it will provide people with disabilities the opportunity to go back to work and control their own destiny. Thanks very much for coming in.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Jerry.

MR. PYE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I want to say to you as well, thank you very much for the presentation. Two recommendations - the single most important with respect to the clawback and the other recommendation with respect to establishing an identifiable person in the Department of Community Services with whom you can communicate about the issues around persons with disabilities.

The final issue is I'm very pleased to see that the business community has come onside and is looking closely at employing persons with disabilities, and I want to say that the Human Rights Commission has recognized that by providing at least two breakfasts, which I attended, where members of the business community have spoken about their experiences in employing persons with disabilities with much success. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. So, once again, thank you for making your presentation. It was most helpful. I now invite Rene Ross to come forward. Rene is the Project Coordinator for the Social Assistance Reform: Moving Forward.

MS. RENE ROSS: Thank you. I will be e-mailing my full presentation to the committee when I get home this evening. I understand and I appreciate the time constraints. Before I start, I just wanted to say that those who know me here in the audience know that before my baby, Zoe, was born, my focus on women's equality was from an international perspective. I have worked at the United Nations with the Human Rights Commission in regard to women and girls as victims of war and conflict. A year later I travelled through minefields in Bosnia and Croatia on behalf of the Government of Canada, yet the most upsetting experience of my professional career was when I travelled through our own province, the province that I have called home my entire life, to talk to women on income assistance.

When you talk to women on income assistance, you realize the realities of the poverty that they endure, you go through a series of emotions. First you get very angry. When I came back and I travelled to those 11 towns and cities, I wanted to chain myself outside the plywood of Province House and go on a hunger strike, but then I decided, well, I would probably starve out there. So then I got very sad. Sad that we let this go on as long as we did, and sad that so many women are losing hope right now. They say, Rene, we talk and we talk, and nothing is being done, and it is my personal opinion that if we continue to perpetuate women's poverty the way we do, Nova Scotia will not only be a have-not province, it will be a third world province.

I am currently the Project Coordinator for Social Assistance Reform in Nova Scotia: Moving Forward a Woman Positive Public Policy Agenda. This project is a partnership of the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre, Pictou County Women's Centre and Every Woman's Centre, Sydney. This initiative, funded by the Status of Women Canada, builds upon the work of two previous initiatives, Social Assistance Reform in Nova Scotia: Is It Working for Women?, and Social Assistance Reform: Making It Work for Women. These two projects made a number of important recommendations that were identified by women living in poverty as critical to improving their lives and the well-being of their families. Based on the realities of women, the Moving Forward initiative will prioritize these recommendations and develop a collaborative approach toward implementation.

Our intent is to work with economically disadvantaged women, as they inform and influence social assistance policy in Nova Scotia. By informing and amplifying the voices of women and presenting their issues to forums such as this, it is our hope that women's economic security and well-being will be improved.

To further our analysis of women's experience with the Employment Support and Income Assistance program or ESIA, I recently travelled to 11 regions throughout the province and met with 91 women who have extensive experience with this program. Based on our conversations, specific actions that will loosen the grip of poverty seen as priorities by the women whom I met include: increasing the allowance rates, eliminating the 70 per cent clawback of earnings and changing the current policy that pushes women into the workforce when their child turns one. Overall, our findings confirm the desire of women to gain sustaining employment, provide for their families and live a life independent of the ESIA system.

Women are more vulnerable than men to income assistance and poverty. We all know this, we've heard this over the past two days; yet, I really do believe that we need to say it more and not just talk about it as we are talking about policy development, but implement this reality. They also face more intensively the anti-poor bias with discrimination that remains in our communities, and face multiple challenges and barriers specific to women that prevent them from escaping poverty.

[12:15 p.m.]

During one of my focus group sessions that we held in the Valley - and I'm not using real names to protect the dignity and confidentiality and privacy of these women. I will call her Joanne - I met Joanne. Joanne and her husband led a happy life in rural Nova Scotia and made their living working at the local mill. Last year, Joanne's husband passed away. With no income and unable to return to work due to health reasons, Joanne applied for income assistance. For what would probably become her last large purchase, she used her tax refund to pay for a headstone for her husband's grave. What Joanne did not know is that when you are in receipt of income assistance in Nova Scotia you are not allowed to keep other sources of income, including tax refunds. The amount \$2,500 that Joanne used to purchase the headstone, is being deducted from her income assistance cheques until the money is paid off. She now receives \$20 a month in assistance, which is to cover all of her basic needs.

Flipping through detailed documents from the Department of Community Services regarding her case, Joanne began to cry, and through her tears she stated, I am 48 years old and living with my mother. I am unable to work and will probably never have my own home again. Joanne's mother sat quietly by her side and she also began to cry silently. She did not have to say anything. We all sensed that worry for her daughter now consumed her.

According to the National Council of Welfare, 56,300 Nova Scotians were in receipt of income assistance at March 31, 2004. At that point in time, according to the Department of Community Services, 57 per cent of individuals in receipt of income assistance were women, and that trend continues today. The women who we met told us that a life on income assistance is fraught with depression, anxiety, despair, stress, and fear. They are constantly prioritizing expenses and going without what many consider the necessities of life. They told us that this affects their children as well as themselves. The majority of the mothers we met are extremely concerned about their poverty and their resulting discrimination and exclusion that their children endure. Mothers cannot afford the extracurricular activities for their children, nor can they afford the computers, books or clothing that their children see their friends accessing.

The Canada Child Tax Benefit, which is the only allowance provided for children from low-income families - and I would also like to say the Nova Scotia provincial benefit of this as well, which I am a full recipient of, is very low, my benefit is \$36 a month, enough to cover a couple of cans of formula - must help out with food and shelter and, after that, very little is left for a child's social needs. Women have told us that they feel they are being blamed by society for their poverty. They are being judged as lazy, immoral, and incompetent, and are targets of suspicion for fraudulent and criminal activity. The women are hurt and shamed by these allegations and feel they constantly have to defend themselves against them.

For single mothers, their primary responsibility of raising a family presents significant challenges to furthering their education and to securing gainful employment. As we heard from

the many single mothers that we met, inadequate policies and programs of the provincial and federal governments further compound the challenges they face. In particular, the single mothers we met spoke of the disturbing trend in our society to relate economic wealth with a mother's ability to parent. The misconception that women on assistance are poor parents can make women on income assistance vulnerable to anonymous calls from community members that result in assessment and intervention from child protection services. I would also like to say that I did meet women, as well, who voluntarily gave their children up into government care because the poverty that they endure while on income assistance is just so unbelievable, and they can't survive.

Poverty is time intensive. I learned this by talking to the women. Women spend hours of every day arranging transportation, walking to the grocery store, walking to child care, walking to hospital appointments, and waiting for the bus, if they can afford public transit. In addition, those who have never lived on income assistance do not realize how much time and effort is required on the part of the recipient to retain their eligibility. Being on income assistance requires women to spend many hours reporting, providing documentation, budgeting, juggling money and interpreting policies. This work increases significantly during an appeal process or when women must take a series of lengthy steps to defend their entitlement.

I have a little story to share with you here about the discrimination of women. It was during our focus group in southwestern Nova Scotia where we met Doris - again not her real name - a single mother who told us about the time she had her oil tank filled. Happy that she could afford the oil that month, Doris waited for the knock on the door when the oil truck pulled into her driveway. When she went to pay him, the oil man looked at her slyly and said, an hour for me for an hour on the tank. His infrequent visits to the house and the little oil Doris purchased throughout the year set a pattern of poverty evident to the driver. This is also a small town, and in small towns, as I know from personal experience, people know when other people are on welfare. So he told Doris that he would eagerly accept payment in sexual favours. Doris paid him his money and closed her front door.

Fearful that he would return after his shift, she called a male friend and asked him to stay over that night. Seeing that Doris' friend arrived for the night with a packed bag, her neighbour called the Department of Community Services. The following day department investigators were at her door. What is your boyfriend's name? How long has he been living here? What is his income? These are some of the many questions Doris had to answer. If she refused, she feared her assistance would be cut off.

Given the expectations placed on women, the relationship between the Department of Community Services, namely the caseworkers and employment support workers, and women, is one of extreme importance. A positive relationship with a caseworker can help women to feel supported to deal with the difficult and challenging situations they face. A negative

relationship adds to women's stress and builds distrust between the woman and her caseworker. Women told us that these relationships could vary greatly from worker to worker.

Women want to be treated respectfully and as competent decision makers able to decide what is right for themselves and for their families. While they appreciate the support they receive from the Department of Community Services, they often do not feel that their perspectives and life experiences are valued. In addition, public education must be part of the strategy in which the government engages with women on income assistance, women's equality-seeking organizations, anti-poverty organizations and the broader community, to challenge statements, attitudes and actions that perpetuate bias towards people living in poverty.

Poor-bashing behaviour, social exclusion and the further marginalization of our most vulnerable women and children must be stopped. Identifying and combatting the myths and misinformation about women and about women's poverty are necessary steps in helping to eradicate it. Governments must create policies that address the root causes of poverty, while addressing the immediate impacts that poverty presents. A critical need exists to reform the policies of the current system to adequately address and lift the barriers facing women on assistance.

Our five recommendations:

1. That the committee recognize the extent of poverty and its unique impact on women in our province and be aware that women are more vulnerable than men to poverty as indicated through extensive research and current statistical information. Also, very quickly, all these recommendations are something that this committee can do.

2. Considering the barriers that disproportionately impact women, such as child care access and the furthering of education for single parents, that the committee recommend to the House of Assembly that a women-centred approach be adopted in any and all efforts to reduce poverty in our province. It is critical for all groups, organizations, advocates, elected officials and governmental representatives to acknowledge that by addressing the poverty of women, we are addressing the poverty of everyone.

3. Recognize the expertise that exists through women centres in regard to the causes and consequences of women's poverty, and that women-specific indicators guide policy development.

4. That the committee recommend to the House of Assembly that all MLAs unanimously condemn the anti-poor bias towards welfare recipients that exists throughout our communities and recognize the dignity of women who are forced to live on income assistance.

5. Increase the support and participation of women in the development of policies that affect them and that specific attention is given to the needs and priorities of women. Allow women who are most impacted by policy and who have extensive experience with the ESIA program to have a voice at the decision-making table. Thank you. (Applause)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Rene. You have certainly given us a real sense of the stark reality of women living on social assistance and we thank you for sharing that with us. Are there any questions? Actually I wanted to introduce Michele Raymond. Michele is the MLA for Halifax Atlantic and she'll be joining us for the rest of today's forum. Michele, I believe you had a question or a comment.

MS. MICHELE RAYMOND: I just wanted to thank you very much, Rene, for pointing this out. Now, I wasn't here yesterday, but I was very interested to see your comments on the reality of women's poverty. Two things: of course the fact that women's poverty is almost inevitably children's poverty - I mean the fact that there are so many studies that tell us that it is a woman's educational level which is one of the major determinants of her children's ultimate educational level; the fact that women actually set the cultural norms for their children and when we have so severely constrained the culture in which women live, then we severely constrain the culture in which everybody lives for at least, I believe, three generations is usually the comment on educational.

One of the things that I was also very glad to hear you comment on was your story of Doris, because I really don't know how widely recognized it is that women in this province are being asked on a regular basis to make up the deficit in the living allowance which is given to them in sexual favours in one way or another and that's why we have women on the street and there are people who come to my office (Applause)

MS. ROSS: I would like to comment quickly on that. I am here, as I mentioned yesterday, in my paid employment. My volunteer employment, I am president of Stepping Stone and we work with sex trade workers and prostitutes in the city, and I can speak on Stepping Stone's behalf and say that we are seeing an increase of prostitution, especially coming in from the small towns to the city and, despite what the media and others may say, we are seeing a growing number of women who are not prostituting themselves for drugs, they are doing it to pay the rent and to put food on the table. So thank you for your comments.

MS. RAYMOND: No, I think that's a very important thing and what we call prostitution is not always the way it's manifested - I mean, it can be in the case of a landlord offering to keep a roof over your head and that's something that I think really speaks to the shame of this province that it is allowing its women and its children to force themselves to live this way. You're right, it's a Third World condition and thank you for bringing that up.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Rene, both for yesterday and today. We appreciate your involvement.

MS. ROSS: Thank you for your time.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Leo.

MR. GLAVINE: Rene, as an MLA, if I come out, and I have in a couple of my articles that I have written, in support of changes to the income assistance program, I will get back some e-mails and calls that if these girls had stayed in school they wouldn't need extra income and so forth. Could you just destroy that myth a little bit with your own experience going around the province, Rene? I know there are some elements related to education but, as a general thing, I don't believe that.

MS. ROSS: You mean as far as - I don't understand.

MR. GLAVINE: Educational, yes, they blame their predicament on the fact that they didn't stay in school and, therefore, they're lifers on the system and so on.

MS. ROSS: Oh, yes, and it's not just a lack of education that brings women to income assistance, it can be anything. Sure, I have a university degree, but there's nothing that is really holding me back from having to be on income assistance. With my university degree, I came quite close to it. Look at Joanne who, by the way, lives in your riding - what brought her to income assistance? The death of her husband. The thing is that women should be the breadwinners, not seen as lacking men who are the breadwinners and, yes, almost every single woman that I've met, they are talking about furthering their education, and that is a big myth that needs to be tramped on right now, that women are lazy and incompetent and that people on income assistance are not and that is clearly not true.

I did not meet one single woman of the 91 who did not want a better life for herself, who did not want to go out and get a job and they are trying too, and quite frankly, I don't know how they are doing it. I could not with my baby - and I have a partner - go out and find a sitter, number one, all night while I work the backshift at a bar and then come home to see that 70 per cent of my deductions are clawed back, and I'm sorry, The ChronicleHerald this morning was wrong and I have problems with what the Department of Community Services said, that is not a top-up that is a clawback. So I just wanted to say that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Rene. Now we have five presenters left before lunch and I know everybody is as hungry as I am and we don't want to shortchange any perspective. I just remind people that even if you just have a chance to highlight your comments, we will take your full written report and add that to the record, so if there is any way that people can keep their comments brief so that we can include all five presentations, we

would certainly appreciate that. So next I invite Wayne Sitland and Ian Johnson from the Nova Scotia Government Employees Union to come forward.

[12:30 p.m.]

MR. IAN JOHNSON: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. My name is Ian Johnson, Policy Analyst/Researcher with NSGEU, the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union, just to be clear on our name.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I should have known that.

MR. IAN JOHNSON: It hasn't changed, at least not since three years ago, and my colleague beside me, Wayne Sitland, who is an alternate board member and also a very active community person as well, in his community. We appreciate this chance and I respect your request to be brief. We certainly intend to do that. I have to first though, give regrets on the part of our President, Joan Jessome and our Acting President right now, Martha Brown, who could not attend.

I just wanted to remind you though, as other people have said and we do share the frustrations that we've heard, that you've heard, I guess, probably throughout the two days, but when I look back and when we spoke on something like this, it was eight years ago almost, in 1998, when this committee sought input as the department did, Community Services, on social assistance restructuring, so I'm not sure a lot has changed since then, regrettably.

We as an organization are the single largest union in the province and we have the privilege of representing more than 23,000 Nova Scotians from one end of the province to the other, who work in the broader public sector. Among those members are about 1,000 who work in the Department of Community Services and of them approximately 350 or so are caseworkers and I say that because many of our members know first-hand, from their own experience or from their work, the many impacts of poverty. We are also very active, or have been active members and supporters of a number of other organizations, some of whom have already presented to you, the Community Advocates Network, the Nova Scotia Office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Feed Nova Scotia, the Kendrick coalition, and Nova Scotia Citizens Health Care Network. All of these organizations are tireless advocates for progressive solutions to poverty.

In general, and you have heard this from others, we are as distressed as many others at the levels to which poverty in this province has grown. CCPANS outlined in its most recent child poverty report, the child poverty rates have worsened for the fourth year in a row, more than 20 per cent. That is at least one in five of our children and I would assume their families live in poverty, despite a strong national and regional economy, and Feed Nova Scotia reported in November that food bank use has increased by 7.6 per cent over the previous year, even though the same figure decreased marginally nationally. I think it's interesting that they noted

at that time that 62 per cent of those persons were on social assistance and 33 per cent of food bank recipients were children.

What we want to highlight and the main thing I want to talk about - and maybe others have covered it, we haven't been here for all of it - is at the long-standing need for an overall anti-poverty strategy for Nova Scotia and some specific elements or areas for action that should be part of this strategy. Madam Chairman, I am just going to highlight a few of those that hopefully will be of interest to you. In our view, Nova Scotia has not taken serious and concerted action against the continuing rise of poverty in this province. What this means is that there is a tremendous level of personal, family and community hardship, as you have heard already, deprivation and loss of human potential. As it's often said, we are only as strong as our weakest link. As a result, we as a province are definitely suffering, especially in terms of ill health, addictions, family violence and justice costs with the current levels of poverty, no matter how it's measured.

Surely the most important resource we have is our people, and if many of them are not able to enjoy a decent standard of living or participation, we all suffer. In our view, poverty is not the result of individual inadequacies or failings, but rather the outcome of systemic barriers to full participation by all citizens in the social, economic and cultural life of our communities and province. Poverty solutions cannot be found in charity, but in social justice. We therefore strongly believe that a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy needs to be developed as a matter of highest priority. Such a strategy should include specific goals and targets. It must be an interdepartmental initiative, coordinated by a senior deputy minister's committee and not just the role of the Community Services Department, although I appreciate the comment by the previous person about the department playing a leading role in that. We also believe a legislative framework must be developed to assist with this development and implementation, as has happened, we understand, in Quebec.

As stated by Feed Nova Scotia in November, the current band-aid approaches for solving the problem of hunger in this province are not adequate. A meaningful change will only occur when a comprehensive strategy is created to deal with hunger and poverty. So I remind you, as well, if the government can set specific targets and goals for deficit and debt reduction, we can surely do the same thing for poverty reduction and elimination. It's surely the least we can do for the people of this province.

As I mentioned, we believe there are several parts to that strategy, including adequate income, what we call updated social assistance policies, affordable utilities, affordable housing, accessible child care, protecting and expanding public health care, accessible post-secondary education and training, and participation by equity-seeking groups. I'm not going to go through all those. I just want to highlight a couple of them and then turn it over briefly to my colleague for a comment.

Adequate income, clearly, is the most obvious consequent of poverty. When 62 per cent of food bank recipients are on social assistance, this is surely a clear signal of the inadequate social assistance rates, even with the most recent modest increases. Social assistance rates must be increased to at least establish poverty levels for different family sizes and communities. The same thing applies to minimum wage rates, which are woefully inadequate. We believe there should be systematic multi-year increases of both social assistance rates and minimum wage rates.

We also need to provide secure retirement income for all our citizens. With only approximately 40 per cent of Nova Scotians currently part of a workplace pension, as reported last year by Statistics Canada, such income is not assured. We need to ensure that all Nova Scotians have access to defined benefit pension plans. The government, itself, we feel could play a leadership in terms of providing adequate income. My colleague is going to talk about that in terms of salaries and benefits for persons who are hired on a casual or temporary basis.

Updated policies in terms of social assistance, other presenters have described in detail the problems with the current social assistance and employment support policies. Our members, especially caseworkers, fully share these concerns. They, of course, have to explain and implement them as the front-line workers. Those include clawbacks, overpayments, and limited employment support policies, but our members are not pleased with them and generally oppose those kinds of policies. Besides those policies and procedures, our members face daunting caseloads and workloads, which effectively prevent them from serving their clients and cause many to be sick - and that is a serious problem - and even to leave their positions.

As you may know, we conducted a study about three years ago called Caseload Overload: Ready to Explode. In our view, the department is yet to seriously consider the results of that study and its principal recommendation. All we asked for was a joint labour-management process to review and establish appropriate caseloads and workloads.

I want to just briefly distinguish between caseload and workload. Caseload is obviously numbers of people who we have to see. Workload is what is required to serve or assist a particular person. Our members report that the caseloads may be going down in certain programs, but the workload is dramatically increasing. The complexity of the work involved has changed even in the last few years.

Regrettably, the human resources situation of the department has deteriorated to the point where our members asked us to set up a separate working group of our members across the province representing all the programs to identify and deal with many issues of concern. This group, now, has been in place for almost three years.

Just one last point I want to make, because I don't think I heard it, was the concern about, for us, the protection and expansion of public health care. We believe that is intimately

involved in terms of poverty. The rise of for-profit health care across the country and in this province seriously affects persons on low and fixed incomes. Already Nova Scotians have the highest levels of ill health as measured on almost every health indicator. It is vital, therefore, that direct action be taken by federal and provincial governments to stop these for-profit facilities from opening or to move them into the public sector. We also need to stop the rise of uninsured physician services and to expand the range of insured services to include catastrophic drugs, dental services, long-term care and home care among many others. So I'm going to conclude at this point and turn it over briefly to my colleague because I know you're pressed for time. Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ian. Wayne.

MR. WAYNE SITLAND: Yes, I won't be as eloquent or as articulate as Ian. I just wanted to recognize though the excellent presentations, the presenters who delivered them and the organizations they represent, and the great work they're doing in trying to eradicate poverty in this province.

My direction - I was doing a little presentation and I came with Ian to present it for the NSGEU - is the Province of Nova Scotia and its perpetuation of poverty for some of its employees. I would just like to first say that there are a number of employees who are employed by this province through temp agencies. They employ university students and disabled individuals. They pay them from \$7.50 to \$8.50 an hour which works out to \$13,650 to \$15,470 per year. Not only is it not a living wage, I don't know how people can even exist on that kind of a salary. We also have well over 1,000 casual workers, some of whom have worked for 10, 12, 15 years for this province, who started out at around \$8.25 an hour and never see more than \$10 an hour. Well, \$8.25 an hour works out to \$15,015 and, you know, it's just not a wage that somebody can live on, especially when they have been working for this province for years. The province has casualized our workforce and they are not paying a living wage and I think they are contributing to the poverty in this province.

About 2 per cent of our unionized workers, their starting pay for their positions hovers around the poverty line. Most of them are clerical, you know, in female dominated positions. I think we've already heard about how poverty affects women in this province, disproportionately so, there are far too many women living in poverty, far too many children living in poverty in this province. One in eight civil servants retires into poverty in this province - one in eight. Several hundred, maybe a few thousand, I don't know the exact number, utilize our food banks on a regular basis.

I am the vice-president of an organization that runs the largest food bank in Dartmouth. I have seen many retired civil servants utilizing that food bank and, you know, they're ashamed to be there, but they have no choice because they have to live, they have to survive, they don't want to starve, and it's not a very pleasant experience for them. I think it's sad and pathetic that

this province pays a number of its workers a wage that they cannot live on, that is not a living wage, that they can barely exist on, and that's pretty well my presentation. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Are there any questions from the committee? Jerry.

MR. PYE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Just one question to you, Mr. Sitland. As a presenter, you had made mention of numbers, particularly in the ranges of \$15,000 and \$13,000. I would assume that those numbers that you are talking about are gross and not net dollars?

[12:45 p.m.]

MR. SITLAND: Those are gross.

MR. PYE: Absolutely. So the numbers of dollars are not a true reflection of the actual burden that is placed upon those individuals. Secondly, to Ian Johnson, I would want to say, once again, thank you to the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union as one of the union movements that, in fact, make presentation to this committee. It's unfortunate that other unions do not make the same presentation. We are all here for the best interests and well-being of all Nova Scotians rather you represent them in an employable manner or not, and I think it's most important to recognize that trade union movements in themselves are social entities and ought to be making presentations to this group. I know that that's just a general statement of mine and it's just a statement in recognition of your contribution as a union member and the union movement within Nova Scotia. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We appreciate it very much, thank you both.

MR. IAN JOHNSON: Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Next could I invite Dolly Williams who is the President of the Black Community Advocates Association of Nova Scotia.

MS. DOLLY WILLIAMS: I'm going to try to be brief, but I don't know whether I can cut anything out. Madam Chairman and members of the committee, first of all, I would like to say thank you for having this forum, realizing that there are many who are not aware of this forum taking place today. Madam Chairman, again I thank you for giving me and others the opportunity to present today with such a short notice.

The struggle of living in poverty is a very lonely experience. Most people I know living in poverty today had no idea they would be living in such situations nor how difficult it would be to get oneself off the system, as many of them refer to it as a "box" or "hell". Living each day with embarrassment, self-doubts, blamed by societal attitudes, this leaves many women, men,

youth, elders, persons with disabilities feeling hopeless. Then again, I do know of some positive cases and families who are doing well from being on the system.

They feel hopeless because they believe that some of their workers within Community Services and housing are constantly ignoring their thoughts and needed requirements, and they too discriminate against them. They are being ignored in many cases by their elected officials - be it the municipal, provincial or even federal - the larger society, and sometimes even their own friends and families.

These statements came out loud and clear when I did focus groups in the Black communities of HRM in 2004 and 2005 around homelessness. In July 2005, BCAANS held a forum, the Black Community Advocates Association of Nova Scotia which represents all of the province. It, again, was one of the top issues of poverty that came out loud and clear along with racism, health issues, as has been mentioned already, the mental health of Black people that carries because of the racism that's in power. We also talked about affordable housing, education and transportation.

To go back to education, education was one of the major issues of how the school systems across the province allow children to be expelled from school. Children who go to be educated into a daycare centre and all of a sudden they go to school, get into Primary, and then be a focus on being medicated with drugs because the teachers are saying how can a child go to a daycare centre, come out fully educated, and all of a sudden they go to a public school and being told the child is not educated or cannot read. So there are many things in our system that I think we need to look at and I'll come back to that.

Many living in Nova Scotia say they are not aware of poverty. I believe the people are aware, but do not want to face the reality that we live in a society today that does not care about the wellness or the economy of their neighbours. We do not want to be our brothers' keepers. We should be accountable to our neighbours and we need to be accountable to ourselves. We need to make all government accountable. Let's stop playing the "blame game".

We have a country rich in resources, but yet according to the United Nations, Canada falls in the list of the top 10. As you know, the United Nations, when they did this thing, Canada falls in one of the 10 countries that are failing to take care of their own. Nova Scotia falls into third place. With the Canadian survey that was just done last year, we are third in Canada as one of the highest poverty levels in Canada. Again, Nova Scotia has got an F. According to the dictionary, the definition of poverty is a lack of comfort and the essentials of life and many others, but I won't go into that, we all know what poverty is about. This is shameful that we have one of the worst rates of child poverty among the industrialized countries. We live in a country with all these resources, but yet we're included in that whole survey of the stats where we're failing our people.

With such poverty comes hunger; inadequate clothing; unequal opportunity for education; having to choose between food, dental care, or eye care - glasses - for yourself or your children; increased maternal mortalities; escalated health problems; substandard housing; and increase in violence. A number of those falling under the classification of poverty have continued since 1989.

Who defines poverty? When I hear some large businesses, government officials, and even people from the broader community say there is no poverty in this province, well, I say to them, wake up and take your head out of the sand. When one works in an environment that serves the public on a day-to-day basis, you see it, you hear it, you feel it. For anyone who is in the category of poverty, every day is a nightmare. I work and see it every day.

I retired from government in 2000, but I kept my job working at the shelter for homeless women because I felt it was something I really wanted to do. I see women coming in there who have been abused; who have been denied their financial upkeep, men who do not pay assistance; many other reasons why women come to shelters; and again, safety.

There are many people in Nova Scotia who cannot provide the basic needs of all the necessities of life for their families. They depend on some of the following groups to help them get by on a weekly, or sometimes daily basis, such groups as churches, food banks, homeless shelters, and many service clubs like the Lions, Rotary Clubs, Salvation Army, and many other organizations that help provide their needs - and I'm rushing being we are on a timeline.

As people, we sometimes like to blame the victims of our society, it is easier to blame them than to fix it. We need to look at the broader picture, how poverty impacts on our communities: it creates low self-esteem, violence, racism, stress and poor health. As you all are aware, there are more sick people living in poverty than there are in the middle class and rich communities. The reason for that? They cannot afford to buy the required food, medicine, and other essentials that are required to live a healthy lifestyle. Many can't even afford to buy real milk - and when I say real milk, I'm talking about them buying powdered milk - or juice for their families. I know of elders who are eating cat food and dog food in Nova Scotia, it's sad.

Community Services staff need to know that when someone on assistance goes in to purchase products or produce, the merchant does not ask them, are you on assistance? We will give you a discount today; it does not happen and will not happen. The person on assistance has to pay the same price tag as the person who is in a CEO position. There is a major difference in the two paycheques. Community Services and housing have to educate their staff to respect women, men and youth coming into their offices across this province. They need to stop talking down to people on assistance, they have rights.

One of these rights, according to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, under Equality Rights, Section 15, reads: "Every individual is equal before and under the law and has

the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race . . . colour, religion . . .", and so on. It also tells us that disadvantaged individuals or groups fall under this category.

People are living on the streets and we have empty buildings owned by government. For example, look at Shannon Park sitting over there with all of those empty buildings and we have people living on the streets of Halifax and Dartmouth, under boxes or under benches. Who is part of the problem? Therefore the government needs to re-evaluate how it services people who they are responsible to. It is not safe on the street, there is not a safe place to be in, that's not a healthy environment. Poverty creates violence in our communities.

Who's responsible for many of these problems? It was mentioned yesterday that as people, we are responsible for our brothers and sisters. According to the Bible it states - and some of you may not believe in the Bible, but I do - that we are our brothers' keepers. If you have two coats and someone needs one, we are to give one of them to our brother. We are then taking care of our brother. If you have hunger in your community, we are responsible for feeding them. Let's become the caring and sharing department that we used to be, it's about building bridges to help prevent sick communities and build healthy environments.

Some of the comments from individual focus groups that Community Services and housing need to follow up on - and this is what I heard loud and clear when I did focus groups in Nova Scotia - being cut off service because you speak out against your worker; put in unsafe housing or areas infested with drug dealers; not allowed basic telephone service, being told, it's not a right but a privilege - what do they do in an emergency? Women not allowed to go into training of their choice but forced into secretarial, dead-end training; they need to put more subsidized seating in community colleges and universities, but again, it should be the career of their choice, not Community Services. More dollars for better housing, stop putting victims in slum housing being paid for by Community Services and the department of housing; look for good housing for these people at an affordable price, stop paying slum landlords - and if I seem upset, I am upset.

Clients being threatened to have their income cut off if they don't respect their workers; will not give money for transportation to people living in a rural area, can't get home from work or education and training if there's no bus system in the community. If you live 20 miles away and get off at 12 o'clock and you have to take a cab home, what's the point of working? So they stay on assistance. How do we benefit the woman who goes to work for minimum wage and has to take her money and pay it out on a cab? Where are we going? And shift work where there's no transportation, like I mentioned earlier.

Being clawed back on their finances. I know a woman who went out to work, got a job on assistance to buy her child a pair of sneakers. No money, goes out and gets a job to make \$50 and what happens? Clawed back. The child got his sneakers but the mother ended up

paying back that \$50 because Community Services refused to pay for those sneakers for that kid. This is Nova Scotia we're talking about.

The system does not allow for seasonal costs such as heating in Winter. I had a woman who called me a couple of weeks ago when we had snow, in an apartment, no heat and Community Services told her, we already gave you your cheque. I said to her, if you can't get the heat and Community Services already paid you the cheque for the month, then go to a shelter, and if they have a problem tell them to call me and I will come to Community Services with you, or my association. This happens all the time in Nova Scotia.

The system is based on a person's weakness and not their strength of the human spirit. Community Services assumes that everyone wants to stay on the system. Some of the workers have made inappropriate comments to their clients - and I heard it earlier, sexual - hello, these are government employees that we're talking about and it does happen, not only the guy who drives the gas truck, but also within our government, the people you work with. Lack of compassion or empathy; no respect given to clients. Black women, youth, Black men, et cetera, and if you're Black and in a wheelchair, God help you because you are double, if you're a woman - I'm telling you, it's scary.

Funding needs to be adjusted to the cost of living. We need to have staff trained to deal with persons with disabilities or mental health needs, it's not happening. We need to pay for all drugs and dental care, et cetera. Community Services should have a regular, yearly round table discussion for clients' input in policies that affect them, that's what needs to happen ongoing, like the last two days.

There needs to be an emergency shelter for families in crisis, and I heard yesterday, when Community Services tells me on the phone that you can't put a woman in an apartment and pay her rent for \$600, but you can take her and stick her in a motel for two weeks, so where's the rationale - it happens. Community Services needs to look at and evaluate what it does to women, men, children and youth.

Ensure inclusion and diversity in the workplace. Have consultation with all communities: African, immigrants, disabilities, women getting out of prison who can't find housing or are refused it because of their past history, women in prostitution. As it has been said already, they're not out on the street because they want to do drugs, they're on the street because they have a kid at home - when you get a 17-year-old mother on the street because she's got to sell her body to get food to feed that child because Community Services refuses to give her other money, then we have a problem. We need more funding to assist women improve their lives through long-term programs that will make a difference - stop the band-aid approach, it doesn't work.

[1:00 p.m.]

Should fund all basic needs when client is moving - that's like going from the Annapolis Valley, or wherever. This is supposed to be a provincial organization, is it not? Government is supposed to be looking at the mandate across the province to get workers from the Valley, or from Sydney say, but I can't do that because you've got to talk to the Halifax worker - well hello, it doesn't matter. If it's a universal organization, no matter where you live in Nova Scotia your basic needs should be looked after.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Dolly, this is a very powerful . . .

MS. WILLIAMS: I'm almost finished.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, I was wondering if you can sum up.

MS. WILLIAMS: I'm almost finished.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MS. WILLIAMS: We also talked about Children's Aid. This is another thing that people need to be aware of. Children's Aid need to help clients, Community Services and Children's Aid need to evaluate their response to allowing schools to dictate to parents that their child is ADD and Community Services pay for that medication that that child goes on and ends up coming out of school and going on drugs. Those are issues that Community Services needs to look at also, and that's happening a lot with bi-racial and Black children - not just bi-racial and Black, also poor kids.

I've got a poem, and you can read it yourself, but also I want you to look at - I'm just about there, and you can read the poem on poverty - Canada, as a country, has much wealth and, therefore, there's no need but, anyway, in your program you will see that I talked about Canada and where we are.

In closing, I would like to say part of the time we see in the communities and community groups committing themselves to social justice, issues of social justice and so on. If a family in Nova Scotia loses a home by fire, we all run out and we bring money in to help that family. If a woman is abused, we go out to help the family, yet when people of our nation, if abused, we help them. If people in other nations are hungry, homeless and flood victims, we find money, but we can't find money for people living in Nova Scotia who are homeless and poor, but whenever there's a major crisis, and no matter where it is, and I think we should help, but what about home? We've got to look after home first.

Yes, feed the outside world, but if we look after Canada - it's a shame, Canada is one of the largest industrial resources in the world, but yet we're running number 10 in the world on

the United Nations' lack of caring for people in Canada and I just wanted to remind you quickly - and at the bottom, you all saw the things written by Oxfam about Enough to Eat, yet 900 million people are severely malnourished. Clean water, yet 3.7 billion have no access to safe water or sanitation. A home, yet one person in seven in the developing world is either homeless or living in extremely substandard housing. Health care, yet 3 billion people have no regular access to local services. Education, yet over 160 million children have no access to Primary education. A livelihood, yet one in three persons live in poverty unable to meet their basic needs. A safe environment, yet pollution and environmental disaster threaten millions of the world's poorest. Protection from violence, yet 7,000 men, women and children are killed, blinded or disfigured by landmines every month. Equality of opportunities, yet women own a mere 2 per cent of the world's property. A say in the future, yet poor people are last to be heard and first to suffer.

It need not be this way, basic human rights for all, it is time. This was taken from the Oxfam Campaigner, and I put after that, is this what we want for Nova Scotia, to be a Third World province? I would hope not. So I hope that this committee today will go back and look at right now we are a Third World country, believe it or not. We want to say we're good and we're taking care of our own, but we're not.

Also I have given you excerpts from the HRM report and I think that if you haven't already read it, you need to call HRM, all of you, and get a copy of those books, the one for 2005 and 2004, the documents on what's going on in HRM. HRM is the largest county in Nova Scotia and, yes, there are a lot poor people running around and we need to help each other. I thank you very much and I'm sorry I took up so much time. (Applause)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Dolly. If you'll just wait a minute, I think Jerry has a question or a comment for you.

MS. WILLIAMS: Yes, sure.

MR. JERRY PYE: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and I want to thank you, Dolly Williams, for the powerful presentation, as Madam Chairman had made comment, but I want to clarify with respect to one particular issue. You identified an area in the constituency that I represent of Dartmouth North by making the statement of the vacant number of buildings in Shannon Park. I want you to know that I am a member who does not believe that people should be designated to a particular site on where to live.

We also know that Debert, Nova Scotia, has a number of vacant Armed Forces buildings as well. I think the most important thing that we can do as a society is make sure that people have adequate dollars for shelters so that they can choose where they want to live and us not allocate them. As you know, by allocating or designating defined areas in which people will or should live, then what you are saying is that you're ghettoizing and stigmatizing

communities as to the way communities ought to be developed. I don't think that that was your intent or the intent of any other member of this committee, other than to make sure that we as elected representatives in this province make sure the people have decent, adequate funding so they can make the choices themselves.

MS. WILLIAMS: That's true, and I say, for example, Shannon Park. I sat on the homeless action association and I know for a fact that homeless people have asked for that area, if they could use it. Therefore, it's not just me coming - that was one of the designated areas. Yes, we have places down in Debert, but I'm saying that the Nova Scotia Government owns property - there are people sitting on the streets, sitting on Spring Garden Road, wherever they may sit, or women with children sitting in the Dixon Centre, under a bench or in a box. I would rather see somebody sitting in Shannon Park, 50 people living in a home that's safe, than telling me that we don't want to ghettoize. No, we don't want to ghettoize anybody, but if the houses are there and people are saying, and the homeless are saying we want to be there, government needs to open up their ears and listen. That's what I'm saying.

MR. PYE: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, I think we have both points of view on the record. Thank you for that. Dolly, you and I have known one another a long time and I just want to say . . .

MS. WILLIAMS: Yes, and I want to thank you for this session today.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, it's the committee. I just want to say, don't lose your passion and your sense of caring. Thank you very much.

MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Now I will invite Jane Warren. She is here observing for the Disabled Persons Commission, but she is presenting today as a private citizen.

MS. JANE WARREN: I am going to talk specifically about ESIA and almost exclusively about the disabled on social assistance.

In 2001, the assistance rate for the disabled, which had remained the same since the inception of family benefits in the early 1980s, was \$714 per month. Now I calculated that \$714, which was the maximum monthly amount, as being only worth 54 per cent of the 1981 dollars. No wonder there was an increasing need for food banks and shelters for the homeless. Nobody can live on 54 per cent of what was the bare minimum to live on in 1981. The social assistance rate for the disabled has since risen to \$725, which is still not 100 per cent of the 1981 dollar value. Single parents, I've been told, are living on less money now than what they were previously on family benefits. I mentioned this loss of real dollars to a German

sociologist shortly after I had calculated it, and he shook his head and said that that wouldn't be legal in Germany.

I will just go skipping from point to point; like I say, they are not in any particular order.

A specific special need that is not covered. Social assistance from Community Services does not cover psychological consults outside a hospital, which means a person has to get so sick that they have to be admitted to a hospital before they can afford to see a psychologist. That's called preventative medicine, to prevent suffering, family breakdown, crime and injury.

ESIA cheques. A cheque stub for ESIA mentions changes to income that must be reported to your caseworker - a change in rent, a change in earnings, for example. It also states that a receipt of a student loan must be reported as well, or at least it did. If it still says that, it would be referring to a student loan for the purpose of attending a program of learning less than two years in length. A loan, student or otherwise, is not income. Accounting 101 teaches that revenue is a credit, and a loan is an expense which has to be paid back.

Disabled or not disabled. Services for persons with disabilities - which replaces the old Community Supports for Adults - has different disability criteria than ESIA. So a person can be rated as disabled by one program and not by the other. This happens unacceptably with federal and provincial programs, such as CPP disability and provincial disability assistance, but it should not ever happen between two programs within the same province.

Loss of language. The combination of municipal assistance and provincial assistance, which I believe occurred in 1995, has meant the loss of language concerning support for the disabled and assistance for the disabled.

Annual review of special needs. It is not widely known that there is an annual review and renewal of a person's special needs. The recipient may be required, at their own expense, to resubmit medical reports that enabled them to receive the special-needs money in the first place. A permanent disability is a permanent disability. Now although I don't like to use the United States as a better example of health care than Canada, one of their social security administration programs, which is disability related, reviews the beneficiary once every seven years when improvement is not expected. We could perhaps take this as an example of how things could be done.

An annual renewal process is both degrading to the recipient - to have to go through the whole process again and again - as well as indirectly costing the whole medical system in time and money. Appointments have to be made, doctors have to write up - it lengthens wait times for people who really need to see that specialist or doctor. This annual renewal of special benefits can possibly be accomplished on the word of the caseworker if he or she knows the recipient's

medical situation has not changed. Given their huge caseloads, such knowledge does not happen frequently. This is an example of an inconsistent application of ESIA regulations.

Now those caseworkers or case managers, who are not likely to be trained social workers by the way, make these quasi-medical decisions, such as the above, or as I previously mentioned, which is against the law.

Insufficient accessible shelter allowance. As has already been mentioned, the availability of accessible housing is insufficient. I think the committee agrees with this statement. It is also too expensive, I've been told, by various recipients. Well let me put it another way, the money provided by social assistance for accessible housing is insufficient. When ESIA was brought in for the disabled in 2001, a year after it started for able-bodied assistance recipients, the maximum money provided for shelter, accessible shelter, and utilities, \$535, didn't pay all their rent and accessible apartment buildings in some areas of the province. In the four years since then, rent and the cost of utilities has gone up, unlike the maximum shelter allowance. This creates shelter insecurity and more homelessness.

Need to rewrite the ESIA. The ESIA Act, itself, needs to be rewritten regarding who is eligible to receive disability assistance. As it currently stands, to the best of my knowledge, those disabled who are mentally challenged or mentally ill are the only people mentioned who may be entitled to receive ESIA. Nowhere does it mention persons with brain injuries being considered disabled. Instead, these people have historically been classed as either mentally challenged or mentally ill, neither classification being true.

David Morse, the current Minister of Community Services, has told me, oh, yes, brain-injured individuals are now eligible to receive disability assistance. Those new words are not in the Act. If Minister Morse was telling me the truth - and we were warned yesterday not to cast aspersions - have all caseworkers in this province received training about brain injury? Brain injury survivors may have problems with orientation to time, place and/or person. They may have problems with a breakdown of comprehension, even though they look like they "get it"; problems with reasoning and problem solving; problems with impulse control, perseveration; problems with generalization, that is transferring skills learned in one setting to another; lack of organizational skills, like how to do something like making a cup of coffee, for example, or washing up the supper dishes is impossible for some people I know; and/or memory dysfunction.

Does assistive technology qualify as a special need - for example, an adaptive driving device, or automatic faucet controls, even for such simple things as a pill reminder box, or a daily planner, or a battery-operated toothbrush? More importantly, does the caseworker know to suggest such things, and when do they suggest it - during their annual visit. Most importantly, where does the money come from to pay for these things?

[1:15 p.m.]

Leisure time. There was no mention yesterday of leisure activities because there is no separate allotment of ESIA money for such a thing. The isolation caused by not having enough money to go out to socialize with others, at Tim Hortons, for example, can cause depression, physical pain, and a host of other costs to society in the long run. A disability of some kind should not preclude an individual's participation in activities that are not only fun but therapeutic. The word "social" has been removed from "social assistance" in Nova Scotia.

It says in the Employment Support and Income Assistance Act - this is another rewording thing - that social assistance recipients are cut off when in an education program of greater than two years, except those disabled who are covered by or qualify under EAPD. Well, EAPD doesn't exist any longer. It has been replaced by the LMAPWD, Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities. A short note, the ESIA breaks 11 of the 12 federal determinants of health, basically because its rates are so low and it is so restrictive.

Thank you to the committee for listening for the past two days and we hope to see something done.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Jane. Are there any questions or comments? No. Thank you again very much.

Susan Nasser and Graeme Fraser from the Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers.

MS. SUSAN NASSER: Hello, I'm the Executive Director of the Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers. This is my colleague, Graeme Fraser, who is our coordinator. We thank you very much for the opportunity of coming today. We realize it's really late and we are going to try to scrunch up our remarks to make them quite short.

The Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers is both the professional association and the regulatory body for close to 1,600 social workers in Nova Scotia, and we also have a mandate to pursue social justice. As individual social workers, we're also called upon by our code of ethics to engage in social action. That's why we feel compelled to come and share a few ideas with you today. Of course, many social workers are working on the front lines with people living in poverty, and that's another reason that we feel it's really important to come along.

We have a handout we're giving out. We've also prepared a package of background information, of which we only have one copy, but we've left it with your staff person. So I'm going to ask Graeme, first of all, to say a few words about why we think it's really important to address poverty and the need for sort of a systematic plan for addressing it.

MR. GRAEME FRASER: Thanks, Susan. Since you have the copy, I'm not even going to refer to all of it, but as we've heard, certainly poverty is a big issue. We know about the importance of dealing with it. The Child Poverty Report Card indicates that Nova Scotia has not been doing well, with increases in poverty rates. Even Canada had not been doing well, being 19th out of 26 OECD countries, and Nova Scotia low within Canada. So, obviously, there's extensive research which is well-known about the detrimental effects of poverty, and we're seeing its effects nationally and internationally in terms of poverty and exclusion in relation to crime and violence and so on. The determinants of health have been referred to before and, obviously, they're very relevant to this whole issue. So that's very pertinent.

It's not only poverty itself, but one of the things that's really problematic and of great concern is the growing gap between rich and poor. I think we need not to forget that. We've included in our packet a report from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities that is related to that particular issue. So I think that's a point that I would certainly like to highlight.

The other thing is in a survey conducted earlier, not quite a year ago, to a particular group of people and they were given choices of 17 potential government priorities. The top three were health, education, and child poverty. I guess from our point of view one of the most important things is to have a plan. We've been dealing with poverty on an ad hoc basis. Poverty has complex causes, multi-dimensional consequences, and we need a comprehensive and planned approach, and some governments are moving in that direction.

The United Kingdom has been involved in a plan for the last five years or so and is making some progress that is identifiable. Newfoundland and Labrador has recently indicated they're beginning a process to develop a plan. Quebec, I believe, already has one, but I don't know the details of it. So we need to make poverty a higher priority and we need, as part of that plan, to identify measurable and keep a record of measures of key indicators related to poverty.

MS. NASSER: To cover just a few of our suggestions of what might be included in such a plan - many of our recommendations have already been covered probably by many of the groups that have presented. These include higher income assistance rates, child care, better attention to the social determinants of health, support for education for people to help them move off assistance, and things like that. I think what I'd like to focus on are a couple of other things. We think it's really important for the government to take a leadership role in making poverty reduction a higher priority than it seems to be right now; it just has to be a top priority if we're really going to live in a just society. I'd also like to say that we have included in our package for you a copy of the provincial alternative budget that has been prepared by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which we've heard about previously this morning from Katherine Reed.

The alternative budget is a wonderful document because what it allows us to do is move outside the box that allows us to think we don't have any money to spend on improving

our social programs. I think that's maybe the kind of leap we need to take right now, to step outside of our thinking that we have to do something with the current amount of money. The reason we don't seem to have any money is because of choices that have been made over a number of years in terms of social policy. We can make choices now that will allow us to generate some kind of income that will allow us to make some of these improvements and follow some of the recommendations that you've been hearing over and over again for the past couple of days.

So I really urge you to take a look at that and, again, take that leap to think of things in a different way so we don't have to be constrained by the amount of money that seems to be available now, and maybe we really can make it possible to bring about all of these improvements that have been suggested. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Are there any questions or comments from committee members?

MS. WHALEN: Thank you very much for being here. I really just wanted to acknowledge what you said in the beginning, that as professional social workers, social action and justice is really one of your tenets. I wasn't aware of that and I think it's an important thing to do because you are very knowledgeable after your studies and the work that you do. Like many of the people who have spoken here today, you work front line and you can appreciate the causes and the problems that we're dealing with. So I just thank you very much for coming and the figures here are very good and we'll review them as well.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Graeme, I don't remember the particular context, but I want you to know that some other study or analysis that you had done was referred to a couple of times yesterday.

MR. FRASER: Yes, and there is a copy in the packet that we left.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Great, thank you for that as well. Thank you both.

Rod MacNeil presenting as a private citizen. Is Rod MacNeil here?

With the committee's indulgence three people have asked to make very quick points before we break. Are you okay with that? We do ask these people to respect the fact that it's late for all of us and we do want to continue these deliberations after the late lunch break.

Gayle McIntyre, and I understand you're making comments for Ralph (Bobby) Corbin?

MS. GAYLE MCINTYRE: I always run the risk of when you're on Community Services you tend to have to be an advocate for yourself, and then you look like you're working

full-time and you're afraid someone's going to call your disability worker and tell them that you're working full-time, so I won't say too much.

I am speaking on behalf of Bobby Corbin, and he and his wife were here yesterday and today, but they had to leave to go to the hospital so he asked me to pass on his concerns. We heard this yesterday and today, but his concerns were that both he and his wife are in a social housing situation, they are both on disability and, as you've seen, his wife is permanently in a wheelchair. They have applied several times within the metro Housing Authority and they keep getting rejected for accessible housing.

Where they are living right now doesn't have accessibility to the front door and he's stating that every time they ask - and it's not just him, I know when I lived in public housing there were a lot of people who were not being put in homes that are closer to the street or closer to the bus stop despite their many requests to have accessibility. He just wanted to make sure that you know there are two issues - there is a lack of accessible housing and the fact that when you do have them and you request them, you're not given consideration because of your special needs. So that is on behalf of Bobby Corbin.

My other one is, just to touch on some things here, I want to go back because I didn't want anyone to feel uncomfortable - Janet Mosher, the person I referred to yesterday, she has those two papers on PDF, on the computer, and she's a very approachable woman. I've spoken to her and communicated via e-mail. She has no problem if you want to communicate via e-mail with her to get a hard copy of both those things. She has given us copyright permission to print off as many as you want to disburse them how you please, so we do have permission to do that - and if you get in trouble, you can say, Gayle told me. (Laughter)

I just want to tidy up some things. I just want to go to Jerry Pye, in support of something Dolly had mentioned about the area of Shannon Park. It is part of the platform and discussions of Community Action on Homelessness to have included the fact that whether it's Shannon Park or any other, the point was we do have empty buildings. The excuse we've always heard is there is never enough money to build new houses. Our argument is we don't necessarily have to build new places, we have empty places now and we should be utilizing them.

Nobody wants to promote ghettoization, but we're already doing it. I can speak because I work front line with these people, and they would much prefer to be in a building that is somewhere, rather than on the streets - so I wanted to make a point of that. I do realize you may have some sensitivities being it is your riding, but people need to be housed regardless of where it is. (Interruption) If I could just finish my comments, thank you.

I just want to point out that I'm here speaking as a private person, but today I'm switching hats and I'm actually with the Nova Scotia Assistance Health Care Network and, Marilyn, were you going to do that announcement or should I while I'm sitting here?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: If you have it there, why don't you do it.

MS. MCINTYRE: Okay. I want to openly invite the public, as well as the Standing Committee, on January 19th we're hosting a public discussion on health care privatization. We are going to have some guest speakers, someone from the AIDS Commission, Breast Cancer, and we have various other guest speakers coming. What we want to do is have an open debate on what privatization is going to mean to Nova Scotians, particularly those people who are already very vulnerable and can't afford it. So I invite you to come, we are having a nice, hot breakfast, it's from 8:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at St. Matthews on Barrington Street. That would be January 19th, St. Matthews on Barrington Street. Feel free to come by yourself or as a group to participate in the discussions that day.

[1:30 p.m.]

The other thing is there are a few things I can say but I'll end up with some recommendations that do come out of discussions with people in poverty, people on disabilities with Community Services, as well as people with the Nova Scotia Citizens Health Network. I know I'm speaking fast, but I'm just trying to be cognizant of the time.

The recommendations that have been part of discussions that we would like to see implemented in the Pharmacare Program of Community Services is - and some of these have already been mentioned by John Cox yesterday - allow persons who have disabilities, who can work, to continue to have some type of access to the medical programs that are already being provided, or they already had prior to finding employment.

The other one - Jane had mentioned in her excellent presentation today - is that I think it's shameful that even the United States has a seven-year policy, and we put people through the degradation every year to prove that they are permanently disabled. Permanent means permanent. That doesn't mean you change somewhere down the road. It almost implies that your medical team and your medical supports are somewhat being dishonest saying you're permanent today, but that's negotiable tomorrow.

I think we need to start respecting - which is another recommendation, right now the policy is Community Services has their in-house doctor who overrides the decisions of many specialists, and the qualifications aren't there. I have had situations where I have had five specialists write five specialists' letters to Community Services, but they've all been overridden because their one GP said no. Just doesn't fit, and that needs to be a recommendation as well, to include that it is worthy. These specialists are specialists for a reason. These for people who had ongoing relationships with clients. Not the doctor, the doctor in Community Services has

never met the clients. I think we need to start putting back the respect into these medical certificates that people sometimes have to pay for out of their own grocery money.

Finally, with that one, is to include choices in medical modalities. We totally ignore cultural differences. Everyone in disabilities doesn't have the same disability, but we're processed through the same thing. Just to use myself again as an example, I can't use synthetic or man-made medications, so that means everything I put into my body, or treatment, has to be holistic or naturopathic. Community Services refuses to pay for that. In one year and a half I had to spend \$23,000 on medical things. Where did I get it? I'm already in poverty. Oh well, I had to go over and fight with the Department of Justice for nine years to get medical monies because I was a victim of a crime. Why am I having to do that? Why am I having to work so hard for someone to look after the disability needs that I have which is not due to any fault of my own?

So the situation with that is to give people that dignity, that they can choose modalities that are recognized. Naturopathic medicine is growing in Nova Scotia. People recognize that the way traditional medicine is working is not good. There are a lot of terminal illnesses that use it. It is substantiated all over the place that some of these non-traditional modalities are actually only maintaining pain for people but actually improving their state of life because they are non-intrusive financially and they are non-intrusive that way. Thank you very much, if you can consider those recommendations.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much.

MR. PYE: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I just want to make the statement once again, for clarity purposes. As an elected politician it is your responsibility also to develop what is called healthy communities. It is significantly important to recognize and I think that you should be aware, Ms. McIntyre, that I did have the Minister of Community Services in my automobile for approximately one hour. The minister was in my automobile to tour the constituency of Dartmouth North in respect to hoping to assist and helping to address some of the social issues that exist within our entire community. I want you to know that adjacent to the Shannon Park community is a community called Wallace Heights, where 30 per cent of the multi-unit developments are vacant. Also, there is an area within a kilometre distance called the Highfield/Pinecrest area which in fact has boarded-up buildings and so on. So it's not as though we don't recognize and we don't understand the very real need that there is there.

I do want you to know that we cannot ask particular parts of the municipal unit to be the parking lot for all the social entities in a community. It has to be diverse, it has to be dispersed, and it has to be healthy and done right. Although there is a visibility apparent there, it does not mean that you're going to do it right by just simply filling the vacant units that are there now. Thank you.

MS. MCINTYRE: If I can just comment very fast, you're preaching to the choir. As I mentioned, maybe I wasn't as clear as I would have liked to have been, but people who are on the street prefer to still be in a home that has a roof, that be the priority front-line response and then let's look after all those things. If I can, very fast, everybody has ignored this issue of Shannon Park until it became open for Halifax to bid on the Commonwealth Games, and then all of a sudden everybody wants to discuss this issue. So let's keep it in perspective. When people want to talk about Shannon Park because it's to their benefit for the Commonwealth bid, then it gets discussed; when it's about the poor and the homeless, it never gets discussed. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Gayle and Jerry. Ken McKinley, presenting as a private citizen. Ken, just another reminder, if you can keep your comments as brief as possible, we would like to get them on the record. Thank you.

MR. KEN MCKINLEY: I have had many communications with certain MLAs, notably, Jerry, and to some degree, some of his colleagues in the NDP caucus. There are so many things wrong with the system that it couldn't be more dysfunctional than it is now unless someone deliberately designed it to be as dysfunctional as it is. You could not possibly make something more of a nightmare, unless you designed it to be that way.

I have spoken with Jerry about people in prison. They don't have to worry about where their next meal is coming from, they don't have to worry about accommodation either, and they've broken society's rules. People who are sick enough to be put in hospital, they don't have to worry about adequate nutrition because the hospitals would lose their reputation as a place to get better if they didn't adequately feed their patients and they have adequate accommodation there, too. But if you are on Community Services support for adults, or welfare, or whatever, and trying to live an independent life out of your own home, they will, number one, not give you enough for shelter and, number two, even worse than that, not give you enough for food.

I get \$126 a month on disability from Community Services for food. I am brain injured. I have lots on my plate in the way of health problems to deal with without being starved by the Province of Nova Scotia and I just use my own case as an example. So any references to myself are simply meant to extrapolate from that to everyone else who's in a similar position to what I'm in.

I don't think I fit most people's image of someone who is on assistance. I'm educated, university educated. I come from a comfortable background. My father was a chartered accountant, he's now retired. He was a partner in Doane Raymond, a national firm, for a while. So I come from a comfortable background, but I also come from a family-abusive background which is where I got the brain injury. My brain is numb every second of my existence. I am every day of my life fighting the desire to just end it all and on top of chronic pain, the

numbness in my brain, if you've ever had your gums frozen at the dentist, you know what that's like; try to imagine that numbness in your brain and it never goes away.

On top of that, I'm struggling just to eat. So my loving father not too long ago - well, a few months ago - contacted The Herald and got a flyer delivery route. There's an Out & About flyer that they deliver on weekends. Anyway, on weekends he and I deliver that flyer for about four hours. That nets me about \$25 a week to add to my \$126 food budget from the province. So I get about \$100 a month from flyers and that brings my food budget up to \$226. You still can't quite eat on that if you're a single person living alone. If you're living with one or more people, there are economies of scale in food preparation that bring the daily cost of food down a little bit that you can live on.

I saw a naturopath, Dr. Alexander McLellan, who said if you want to appeal the \$126 at Community Services for food, I will write you a letter saying no person living alone can be adequately nourished for less than \$10 a day. So \$10 a day translates to \$300 a month, and that's a long way from \$126 and it's still a fair way from the \$226 that I have now doing the flyers.

There has been a lot of talk here about the clawback - 70 per cent being unfair. It's extremely unfair. It's totally unreasonable. If you want to give people any incentive to get off the system, this is not the way to do it and people should be allowed to gradually get off the system in increments instead of either you're on it or you're off it, you know, black and white. People should be able to gradually work their way off it and that goes back to what Mr. Cox was saying earlier about how when he found full-time employment, he lost his health benefits, drug coverage, and so on and so forth, and that was alluded to by the lady who preceded me. People should be able to gradually get off the system.

If I were to find full-time work, if I was well enough to do it, at minimum wage tomorrow, I would lose my drug coverage as Mr. Cox did and I'm epileptic for starters. I was epileptic before my father did this to me. I am now on some other drugs because of some health problems created by what the brain injury did. I now have a hiatal hernia which some doctors say is probably a secondary result of the brain injury because the brain . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ken, I'm just going to interrupt you here. It's not that we're not interested in your personal situation, but if you could perhaps point to some of the difficulties.

MR. MCKINLEY: I'm trying to keep it as brief as possible, but the point is the only drug that works for my hernia is a drug called panteloc and the way the system is set up now, I had to try every proton pump inhibitor, PPI, that was cheap before they would let me go on panteloc, and if I were to go off the system tomorrow, if I was well enough to work full-time

tomorrow at some low-paying work, I would lose my drug coverage for the panteloc and my anticonvulsants.

So Mr. Cox is absolutely right. People should be able to gradually get off the system and as far as the clawback is concerned, what my suggestion to this committee is, is take a look at income tax rates. Income tax rates, marginal rates begin at around 30 per cent and the highest rate is just under 50 per cent - 48 per cent, 49 per cent, somewhere around there. So if you want people on assistance to get off the system as their circumstances allow them to, give them the incentive to work by not taking any more than half away from anything that they earn. Start at the 30 per cent level and then work it up to 50 per cent, but don't ever take more in a clawback than 50 per cent.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: You've made some excellent points and we thank you very much for reinforcing those and bringing them to our attention. I want to mention to other people, if you want to clarify anything or make a point, you can write it on the comment sheet at the back and on the side and we'll make sure that that's added to the record. So thank you very much, Ken, we appreciate you speaking today.

MR. MCKINLEY: One final point I would like to make and this goes back to what I said yesterday. If we allow the bureaucrats at Community Services to reform things, we're going to be waiting until eternity ends. If the Human Rights Act were to be amended to include adequate nutrition and adequate housing as basic human rights, Community Services would be forced to change the way they operate by that change in legislation and with two Parties in the House on the Opposition side outnumbering the number of government members, they can introduce legislation, and indeed pass that legislation, without the government necessarily agreeing to it.

Now, it's true the government would have to introduce the bill, if it's on the order paper, you know, it's up to the government what gets introduced for debate in the House, but I do know that there are people in the media who, if such a bill were to be drafted by the Opposition, adding that to the Human Rights Act, I know people in the media who would say why are you, the government, not calling this for debate in the House? If you really want to put some pressure on the government, someone in the Opposition should draft this kind of legislation and if the government will not call it for debate, I know some people in the media who would be very interested in that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you and those are some of the strategies we will be discussing this afternoon. Are there any questions? Any comments? Thank you very much, Ken.

Last Bev Hickman, representing the Marguerite Centre.

MS. BEV HICKMAN: Hello, I know they say save the best for last, but I don't know if I'm going to fit that bill or not. As one of the organizations that is actually working with women who are coming from addictions and abuse, I wanted to speak a little bit to a couple of points and I do appreciate the time, I will be very brief.

[1:45 p.m.]

The Marguerite Centre is the only long-term residential facility for women in the Province of Nova Scotia who are recovering from addictions and abuse. Many of these women are also women who are dealing with issues of poverty and homelessness. Ninety per cent of the women that we see at the centre are on Community Services assistance. So they have come from the drug-ridden neighbourhoods. They have come from neighbourhoods where their abuser lives. They have come from neighbourhoods where prostitution is very paramount. So for these individuals to come to the centre, which is a long-term residential facility and have the ability to stay up to a year to really work on and deal with issues of recovery and healing, so that they have a chance to be reinstated back into a healthy community, end up in about 80 per cent of the cases having to go back to those same drug-ridden neighbourhoods that are unsafe.

When we heard people speak about affordable housing, I've been surprised by the fact that the word "safe" hasn't been in the same sentence very often in the last two days, because it's not just about affordable housing, it's about safe housing, and if we're going to take the time to work with these women to empower them, then what we don't want to do is to have them return to the same neighbourhoods from which they came, because that results in the cycle continuing.

Many of the women that we also work with are mothers who are trying very much to get reconnected with their families. So, again, if they are forced to raise their children in poverty-stricken neighbourhoods, with no choice to find affordable, safe housing, then the cycle again gets perpetuated and continued. So I really want emphasis that it isn't just about affordable housing, it's about safe housing.

For an organization like the Marguerite Centre that is a not-for-profit organization, we work really hard with this clientele to give them a second lease on life. So we advocate, while they are at the centre, to let them know about the benefits that they are entitled to and so on, in terms of their special dietary needs and what not, but it becomes very frustrating as part of our process, which we will work with a woman to find appropriate accommodation when they are getting ready to leave the centre, to then come up against this continual wall, in terms of just lack of appropriate social assistance, so that they can continue on that positive path.

The other one little point I just want to mention is, as a not-for-profit organization and since there has been much talk about the need to overhaul Community Services, one of the areas that we need to really look at as well is to establish criteria to determine guidelines for all

not-for-profit organizations that are trying to work with people who are dealing with poverty, homelessness, addiction, abuse, women, et cetera. To really have fair standards criteria put in place so that for organizations such as the Marguerite Centre, which provide programs, supportive counselling 24/7, and programs a minimum of five days a week to help these women get on a positive path, are not struggling at \$35 a day, per diem, to work with these women. So that's all I will say. I thank you for your time.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, Bev. Any questions or comments? Again, we congratulate you, your volunteers and staff for the work that the Marguerite Centre is doing. Thank you very much.

Well, this brings to a close the morning session. I want to ask the committee members how long we plan to break for lunch. Can we be back in an hour? Leo.

MR. GLAVINE: Madam Chairman, this afternoon's format will again have some interaction around the table or is it for the committee . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, it's for the committee, but it's an open session, so people are invited to come back and I would like to suggest that because of the amount of information that's come our way over the last two days that probably if we focus this afternoon on the strategy or the process we want to use to move forward, rather than deal with the actual content of the presentations, because obviously this needs to be - some sort of strategy needs to be developed at the community, regional and provincial levels, and I think we're going to have enough on our plate, at this stage, then we can perhaps devote a full meeting of the standing committee at a future date, to fit in all the various recommendations, but I think we need to look at the framework and the process that we might want to use this afternoon. Leo.

MR. GLAVINE: I had received a letter just as the forum started from a constituent dealing with an issue of poverty, which has not been addressed too much here today, but she became impoverished as a result of her ex-husband being an addicted gambler, and it was a different perspective and she made some very poignant comments and I was just wondering about reading them into the record or just submitting them or whatever.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We have a whole pile of written presentations here that will go into the record, so I don't think there is a need to actually read it and we don't need that kind of detail, I think, for the general discussion we will have this afternoon. Stephen.

MR. MCNEIL: Thank you, Madam Chairman, my concern about talking about process this afternoon - and, as you know, I'm all for process - there are some people who have been here for two days and one thing we've heard over and over again is the fact that this has been studied and re-studied and we know there are some obvious flaws here. We're coming into a budget season, for us to talk about process and then meet again, we're going to miss the budget cycle. If we want any hope to have any power on what is going to take place in the next budget

cycle, we need to kind of move relatively quickly and the longer we delay on some of the recommendations then . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm not suggesting delay, but I mean part of deciding the process might be to pull out some of the financial items that we see as doable in this coming Spring budget and move them forward quickly. The process is how we're going to handle it and what we're going to recommend. There may be some overarching recommendations.

MR. MCNEIL: Okay, we'll debate that this afternoon.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Michele.

MS. RAYMOND: I don't know if this is okay to ask, but is it going to be possible to debate a process, will we have representatives of the governing Party as well? Is that okay to ask?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, I begged every caucus to make sure we had full representation from the three caucuses for the full two days of this forum and everybody had fair warning and you are sitting in for Gordie Gosse because we knew he couldn't be here this afternoon, so I don't know what we do about government representation.

MS. RAYMOND: Okay. Maybe we should isolate three or four recommendations. Maybe that's what we need to do today.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: See, the discussion we're having right now is exactly the discussion that we're going to be having this afternoon. I just need to know how long we're going to break. Can we be back in an hour? I'm not cutting you off, it's just this is what we're meant to discuss this afternoon, that's all. Jerry.

MR. PYE: Just briefly, Madam Chairman, and I want to make this clear before we come back this afternoon, with respect to process. In the absence of government representation, that should not be a reflection on what we do with respect to process. We are a standing committee. We happen to have the quorum and we ought to go on and do the business that we are assigned to do. That's the clarity that I want to make, and I don't think that we should have this particular hang-up if government has chosen not to present its representation to the committee, that's not our concern or issue. The concern is the presentations that were made by the witnesses before this committee, to make sure that we do what is requested, to make government aware of the issue.

MR. GLAVINE: I want to concur with my colleague, Ms. Raymond. I think this afternoon we owe it to those who presented and presented so profoundly, to try to isolate three or four top recommendations that would come out of our work immediately.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Leo, that's what I'm saying. We will discuss this and make those decisions after lunch.

MR. GLAVINE: Okay.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I just want to thank everybody for coming. It's been a long two days and I encourage you to come back at 3:00 p.m., we would really welcome having you here in the audience, so thank you very much. We appreciate your time and effort.

[The committee adjourned at 1:55 p.m.]