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NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Thursday, March 29, 2007

Committee Room 1

**Department of Community Services
Child Care Connection Nova Scotia
Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada**

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COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Ms. Marilyn More (Chairman)
Hon. Ronald Chisholm
Hon. Leonard Goucher
Mr. Patrick Dunn
Mr. Gordon Gosse
Mr. Trevor Zinck
Mr. Keith Colwell
Mr. Leo Glavine
Mr. Stephen McNeil

In Attendance:
Ms. Rhonda Neatt
Legislative Committee Clerk

WITNESSES

Department of Community Services

Ms. Judith Ferguson
Deputy Minister

Mr. George Savoury
Executive Director - Family and Community Supports

Ms. Virginia O'Connell
Director - Early Childhood Development Services

Ms. Jane Breckenridge
Director, Early Learning and Child Care

Child Care Connection Nova Scotia

Ms. Elaine Ferguson
Executive Director

Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada

Ms. Margo Kirk, Nova Scotia Board Member
Ms. Karen Geddes, Director - Alexander Children's Centre

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, MARCH 29, 2007

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

8:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Ms. Marilyn More

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I am going to call the meeting to order. The Standing Committee on Community Services is meeting this morning on the issue of child care and early learning. It's an unusual three-hour meeting because of the significance and complexity of the topic. We are very pleased to start off with officials from the Department of Community Services, but before we begin I would invite the members of the committee to introduce themselves.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We are very pleased to have the new Deputy Minister of Community Services with us, Ms. Judith Ferguson. Congratulations, Judith. I wonder if you could perhaps introduce the members of your group.

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: Madam Chairman, thanks very much for the opportunity to come this morning. I have the privilege of being the new Deputy Minister of Community Services, and part of that is that I am lucky to be part of a team of tremendous people who are experts in this area and I have brought a number of them with me this morning.

I think a lot of you will already know George Savoury. He is the Executive Director of Family and Community Supports. He has held this position since 2003 and has extensive knowledge in early childhood development which includes child care, which is under the umbrella of George's division.

I would also like to introduce Jane Breckenridge. She is the project director for the 10-year Early Learning and Child Care Plan. She is leading the policy development and subsequent implementation of this "made in Nova Scotia" plan.

Also with me is Virginia O'Connell who is the Director of Early Childhood Development Services. Virginia manages the licensing, monitoring, policy and standards for all licensed child care centres in the province. She also oversees the subsidy, early intervention and supported child care programs.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I believe you are going to begin with a presentation.

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: Yes, I have a few introductory remarks. First I would like to say thank you very much to the committee for meeting at this hour of the morning and for the opportunity to come to talk about child care. So thank you very much for that opportunity.

As most of you know, Early Childhood Development Services offers programs that support families and foster healthy child development between the ages of newborn and 12 years. In accordance with the Nova Scotia Day Care Act and regulations, Early Childhood Development Services is responsible for the licensing of child care centres. This includes monitoring child care facilities, the development and implementation of policy and standards for child care facilities, staff training and support to operations. There are currently 375 licensed child care facilities with a total of 13,099 spaces. All licensed child care centres are required to follow the same Act and regulations.

Early Childhood Development Services provides financial support to parents who require child care while attending education, training programs or working, by paying full or partial child care fees for their children enrolled in full-day licensed child care facilities. There are approximately 3,045 subsidized child care spaces across our province, and we are pleased to say we will be adding another 400 portable subsidized spaces over the next four years through the child care plan.

Early Childhood Development Services provides funding to early intervention programs, supporting approximately 661 children and coordinates and funds the child care stabilization grant, coordinates the supported child care program, and coordinates a range of programs inclusive of partnerships for inclusion, building block strategies for inclusion, the child abuse protocol training, and reviews and approves the curriculum for early childhood educational training institutions.

In recognition of Nova Scotia's commitment to quality child care, government created a 10-year Early Learning and Child Care Plan for Nova Scotia. In developing the plan we took into account consultation sessions where we asked Nova Scotians, including child care centres and parents, to identify their priorities for child care in Nova Scotia - we also consulted with both the commercial and non-profit sectors regarding their specific issues and priorities.

The Early Learning and Child Care Plan provides a foundation for licensed child care in Nova Scotia that will promote a more inclusive, accessible, and equitable system. The Nova Scotia vision for early learning and child care is that all Nova Scotia children enjoy a good start in life and are nurtured and supported by caring families and communities. To achieve this, we will be focusing on the needs of Nova Scotia families.

I would now like to take a few moments to provide some highlights from the child care plan. We will be investing \$137 million over the next 10 years in early learning and child care; in fact the recent federal budget provides an additional \$7 million per year to support the creation of child care spaces in our province, and will complement our made in Nova Scotia child care plan to further help our families access quality child care for their children. In addition, we will provide the opportunity through capital funding for the creation of at least 1,000 child care spaces; however, with the additional federal funding investment, this number will be higher. The plan will also create 550 additional portable subsidized spaces for low-income families - in September we announced 150 of these spaces and we will implement the remaining 400 over the next four years. Funding for children with special needs will double and help approximately 530 more children.

We also, as most of you know, recently announced the child care operating grant funding. This funding is available to all licensed full-day child care centres and streamlines our existing grant system. It provides \$3 per day per occupied space for children 18 months to school age and \$8 per day for occupied space for infants under 18 months. This grant is a key component of the plan that will help stabilize the system and facilitate enhanced recruitment and retention of staff, while allowing centres to continue future expansion. The application deadline is April 1st and we anticipate the cheques will be issued to the centres by mid-May.

We have also provided over \$600,000 in repair and renovation funding to 30 child care centres across the province, and this funding is to make improvements to their facilities like replacing windows, installing accessibility ramps, and adding energy efficient furnaces. In addition to these investments, we've made other program investments. Other program investments in 2006-07 include almost \$4.2 million in the Nova Scotia Child Care Stabilization Grant - this supports the wages, benefits and training of licensed child care staff, and these funds helped 1,231 full-time staff in 229 full-day child centres; and almost \$9.5 million in the Child Care Subsidy Program - providing financial assistance to low-income families while they take steps to increase their self-sufficiency through work, training or education.

On January 1, 2005, the subsidy per diem was increased, representing an additional annual expenditure of approximately \$1.1 million. In addition, in 2004-05, a one-time operating grant of \$200,000 was provided to child care centres to provide care to children whose families are eligible for subsidy. Over \$2.4 million on supported child care, which is building capacity of licensed child care centres to provide quality inclusive programs for children with special needs - this served 553 children in 128 child care centres.

We have embarked on our long-term vision for quality and sustainable child care in the province. While we certainly recognize that we have more work to do and we realize that the sector would like additional investments, we have to spend within the resources that are available to us. Having said that, we are committed to continue to work with our partners in the sector, including operators, staff, advocates and families, to make this vision a reality for our most precious resource, for the children of Nova Scotia.

In closing, I would like to thank Child Care Connection - the child care working group - for their insight and input around improving child care in our province. I would also like to express my thanks to all of you for the opportunity to provide you with information on child care in Nova Scotia. We are always looking for ways to improve our programs and services in the department, and we look forward to the opportunity to provide you with more specific information in response to the questions you will have today. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Members of the committee, this is a little unusual in that we will focus primarily on questions you may wish to ask officials from the Department of Community Services for the first hour. We'll have opportunities to expand your questions and ask other aspects as the other witnesses come before us throughout the morning, so I'm wondering who would like to start the questioning now.

MR. TREVOR ZINCK: Good morning and thank you for taking the opportunity to come in and talk to us about a very important issue to many Nova Scotians - and congratulations on your new post as well.

I'll go right into the most recent announcement on March 8th - the funding, the \$5 million - and I'll do a two-part question. The first question - a lot of calls were coming into my constituency office from child care workers in recent months around the federal wage subsidy, and of course that was going to finish up at the end of March. We had the announcement of the \$5 million and that was, from the department's standpoint, to go towards retention and recruitment.

It is a great step to take, as far as wages and to balance that out. Was that mainly to maintain what we weren't going to get federally from the wage subsidy to balance that off? It's a great way to retain workers or to bring the levels up to where they could possibly or should possibly be today, but I'm just questioning, as far as recruitment, how are those dollars going to help the recruitment factor?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thanks for the question. Jane, do you want to . . .

MS. JANE BRECKENRIDGE: The child care operating grant is distinct from the stabilization funding that had been provided historically and will continue until 2008. We have every indication that it will continue past that, but in the meantime that has been funded based on previous agreements that do expire in 2008. We've continuously said that if they do not continue, we would have to re-look at everything that we're doing, but we would expect those to continue based on the federal budget that was just announced.

[8:15 a.m.]

How the child care operating grant will address recruitment and retention is that as part of the criteria for the child care operating grant, 75 per cent of that money has to be spent on salaries and benefits and we know that is a key indicator for recruitment and retention.

MR. ZINCK: The rest of the money, the federal grant that came down - there's been a question posed to where the balance of that money has gone or what kind of programs would that money fall into. The additional \$15 million of that \$20 million - where would that be dispersed?

MS. BRECKENRIDGE: Of the funding that was provided?

MR. ZINCK: From federal . . .

MS. BRECKENRIDGE: From the federal . . .

MR. ZINCK: Yes.

MS. BRECKENRIDGE: The plan, the \$137 million investment in early learning and child care, is a culmination of funding sources. There are the funding sources through the federal investments of ELCC and ECDI 2003, there is also from two years of the previous federal plan funding that we were enabled to maintain, as well as the provincial investment in the last five years of the plan. The plan - you almost see it as a puzzle, that there are many different pieces to it, one of them being the child care operating grant. As Deputy Ferguson mentioned, there is also 1,000 spaces to be created and so the plan is being rolled out as we speak. What we've done with the child care operating grant is lay the foundation for us to be able to then enable increased spaces. What this does is it provides support to child care operators to be able to say this is the funding that we will be receiving, from here we may be able to entertain to create new spaces because it is a sector that creates the spaces.

MR. ZINCK: I want to turn - now Judith you'll have this this afternoon, I don't know if you have it in front of you - the business plan for this year's budget. Under opportunities in the business plan, and I'm going to quote here, under child care it says,

“Increased federal funding for child care spaces. The federal budget for 2007, in response to consultations with other governments and service providers, has committed additional funding to support the creation of more child care spaces, while terms and conditions associated with the additional funding have yet to be determined.”

What kind of communication have you had with the federal government in response to future funding and where would that put - if we don't have any guarantees in place from the federal government, if promises aren't kept and funding doesn't come down, where does this province stand as far as child care? Where it wants to take it - perhaps on its own?

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: Well I guess the first thing I'll answer and then if Jane has anything to add she can jump in. We were very pleased to receive the money, that additional funding, through the federal budget. We are currently having discussions in the department to look at ways we can expend that money within the parameters of our existing child care plan as quickly as we can. I think the thing we've looked at all along, in terms of developing the plan, is that we develop a sustainable plan. So whatever we do with the money and however we roll out the plan, that we lay the proper foundations so we know that we are going to be able to sustain the plan in the future. That's the philosophy we've had all the way along and we would apply that to whatever we are able to do with those federal funds.

MR. ZINCK: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you. Stephen.

MR. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and congratulations on your new position and thanks for coming this morning.

In 2005, there was an agreement in principle between the province and the federal government. The province had a comprehensive child care plan - actually I believe you displayed it on your website and Nova Scotia had an opportunity to view it. Now there is a one-page description of this plan that the province is talking about. What happened?

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: Well I think - as everybody knows, the department did have a plan. The plan changed in our federal government. Subsequent to that, we went back, re-evaluated our plan, looked at options for the province, again from the point of view of being sustainable and being accountable, and then in May of this year actually started rolling out the plan.

A lot of the aspects of the plan, in terms of the operating grant, in terms of the repair and renovations, in terms of the recruitment strategy, in terms of family home daycare, are pieces that we heard from the previous consultation which we did prior to the development of the first plan. So we are very pleased at this point in time to actually have a plan which we feel reflects a lot of what we heard through a very extensive consultation process. I mean we heard from almost 2,700 people. So while the plan is different, we feel that the

parameters of the plan still meet the main priorities we heard through the consultation. It is a multi-pronged approach.

We have spent some time laying the foundation - I think as Jane talked about, it's a five-year plan. There needs to be a logical sequence to the plan, we need to make sure that we've put the pieces in place, like the operating grant, to lay the foundation for recruitment and retention so that as we begin the expansion piece, I think which we are going to be able to start in mid-May or sooner than that, if we can get going on that, but as quickly as possible, that we know we're going to be able to sustain what we do through the plan.

So I guess in terms of what happened, we had to go back, re-evaluate, look at where we are, and assess priorities. We feel we've been able to do that within the existing funding that we have and that we know will flow over the next 10 years of the plan.

MR. MCNEIL: Considering most people were describing your former plan as a comprehensive plan and the new one is a one-pager, considering the change in direction by the federal government in terms of child care, is it your view or not that it is now more difficult for the Province of Nova Scotia to provide the quality child care that they could have under the old plan?

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: I think what we have tried to do, again, is look at the priorities and be able to assess and maybe have to go back and reevaluate what those priorities are a little bit. I think our goal is to take the financial picture that we have and say what is the best way that we can provide quality child care to families in Nova Scotia. I think we have been able to take and make some significant inroads on that and we have some pieces of the plan that we think are going to make a significant difference in terms of providing support, choice for the families of Nova Scotia. So we are pleased to be able to roll out the plan that we are able to roll out now. As we get additional investments, as we have heard, the additional investments from the federal government - we are already looking at that in terms of looking at what we can do sooner, as opposed to later, in terms of actually delivering services related to those dollars. I don't know, Jane, if there is anything you want to add to that.

MR. MCNEIL: Under normal circumstances I would accept that answer but you had two pictures. You had a financial picture from a federal government that has now been defeated. You now have a financial picture from another federal government that is sending money in. You had a plan in place that was comprehensive that most Nova Scotians could view by just clicking onto your Web site. You now have a one-pager and you are saying, well, now we are working within the finances that we have. That wasn't the question. The question was, is it now more difficult for the Province of Nova Scotia to provide the children and the families of Nova Scotia with a proper daycare plan under this new government?

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: I think what we have had to do is go back and make sure - we are doing things differently, there is no question about that. Like I said, we had to go back, we had to reevaluate our plan but I think the main priorities of the plan are things that we are going to be able to address and deal with through these new pieces that we are rolling out. As we said, we are going to continue - some of the things that we weren't able to do now, we are going to start to look at again. They are things like part-day child care that we know that we are going to look at and we will continue to evaluate as we go along. So I acknowledge your point - the plan is different. You are right, it is different but we are focusing on the priorities. The priorities are the same and we are going to continue to roll those out as best we can. I don't know, Jane, if you want to talk specifically to the differences in the plan.

MS. BRECKENRIDGE: The new child care plan, the investment of \$137 million, still does focus on quality child care. So our ability to meet that is still there. Is it easier with additional funding, yes it would be easier with additional funding but the target is still the same.

MR. MCNEIL: Who, in your department, articulated to the new federal government how difficult it was going to be for the Department of Community Services of Nova Scotia to deliver the child care plan that you had in place under the old government?

MR. GEORGE SAVOURY: Well, I think it is fair to say that there were discussions that went on collectively among the ministers when there was a change in government. I mean some provinces had, in fact, made announcements, like Ontario, based on the previous funding that they were expecting. I think we were fortunate, in our province, that we were doing all the legwork and had done the consultation. Some of the other provinces now are concerned with the issue of sustainability which we, fortunately, are in a position now where we are committed with provincial and federal dollars to the plan that has been announced. I am sure, and I do know, that discussions went on collectively among the ministers responsible for social services and at the officials' level as well, in terms of how to reduce funding available would impact the child care plans in the various provinces.

MR. MCNEIL: How much federal money have you received to date?

MR. SAVOURY: We were given the \$39.4 million which had been provided. We were permitted to keep that and profile it as part of the plan of \$137 million that we are going to be spending.

MR. MCNEIL: How much of that have you spent?

MR. SAVOURY: Jane, the actual?

MS. BRECKENRIDGE: In this fiscal year, we do estimate that the funding would be approximately \$4 million, between \$3 million and \$4 million, but I think it is important to go back to comments we made around the need to shift gears when funding changed and

what we have been able to accomplish since that time, in this fiscal, is that we have rolled out the repair and renovation plan, which provided over \$600,000 worth of funding to child care centres. We have introduced 150 new subsidized spaces since that time. We have introduced, as you know, the Child Care Operating Grant, which will be retroactive back to January 1st, which is an investment into the child care centres, as well as working with the community college to offer EC training online.

So what we have done is create that foundation so it allows a logical sequence of the future investments to be able to flow. The amount of federal funding remains the same. We will be able to spend those in future years, but what we will do is spend it in such a way that it will be able to sustain itself.

MR. MCNEIL: You have \$35 million of federal money in the bank. Is that what I'm hearing?

MS. BRECKENRIDGE: That is committed to child care, that will be utilized for child care and it cannot be used for other sources.

MR. MCNEIL: What do you say to Nova Scotia families who are struggling to find child care, when we know that the Department of Community Services has \$35 million in the bank for child care?

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: I think what we say is that we know we have a five-year plan, a 10-year plan, that anytime you are developing that kind of plan, it's important to do it right from the beginning. So we took time at the beginning, we have met with the sector on numerous occasions, we had an extensive consultation, which I think, actually, is the best practice in government. So we did take some time on the front end to make sure we knew what the sector was saying, to make sure we were going to be able to put pieces in place that were sustainable, to make sure that we laid the framework in terms of the recruitment and retention piece to meet with the sector. So I guess what we would say is, part of the plan is getting ready to be able to actually roll out the plan as opposed to rolling out the plan and not knowing whether we were going to be able to sustain it, whether the sector was ready. So we did take time on the front end to make sure we were going to be able to do that.

What we are now able to say is we have done that. We have the pieces of the plan in place and we are now ready to go on that. So what we are saying now is we are ready to move forward with the significant pieces of the plan; but it was important that we had a plan that we knew we were going to be able to sustain and that we could be accountable for, that would help low-income families.

MR. MCNEIL: There have been two plans. There was one under the old federal government. There is a one-pager under the new federal government. There obviously had to be consultation to create the old plan, so we have now taken our time to do more consulting for the new plan and we have \$35 million sitting in the bank and Nova Scotia

children are still waiting and families are still waiting for child care. At some point they are probably going to say, when are we going to stop consulting and when are we going to deliver? If you are one of those families looking for child care at any community in Nova Scotia- I can tell you when they come into my office, it's pretty hard for me to say and defend what the elected officials are doing.

[8:30 a.m.]

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: You make a good point and I guess what I would say is we are done that phase. We are done the consultation phase and we now are in the process of, and have been in the process of, rolling out the plan. We will continue and we are ready to roll out the plan and we are rolling out the plan with the confidence that we are going to be able to sustain the plan, that we have the plan targeted in the proper areas, that we have laid the foundation in terms of the sector, in terms of leveling the playing field with the new operating grant, that we are going to be able to sustain the plan. So we are now ready, excited and keen to begin to roll out the plan.

I don't want to apologize for the consultation. I think that's a huge significant part and I think that the department, the sector - I give a lot of credit to everyone who was involved in that process. It was a very good piece of work and it will guide us through the entire plan. So it was a important piece of work but we are ready to move forward.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I have Pat and then I am going to leave the Chair and ask the vice-chairman to take over.

MR. PATRICK DUNN: My first question is centering around special needs kids, how the program helps special needs children. There seems to be a growing trend in the province of children diagnosed with autism, for example. So I guess my question is, does this program support special needs kids and how does that work? Maybe you can elaborate on that?

MS. VIRGINIA O'CONNELL: In essence, we have been really supportive (Interruptions) With respect to children with special needs, we have been very committed to supporting them. Since 2001, we've actually truly enhanced the number of children who we are serving and as was said earlier, we're actually going to be almost doubling the number of children with special needs who we will be supporting. Not only are we providing funding through our program called Supported Child care, which funds child care centres to enable to best includes those children, but over the last couple of years - since 2003 - we've not only had an opportunity to implement training programs for staff who are working in child care centres and we're also supporting a research base program, where we are not only working to support centres for inclusion, but we're working to enhance the quality of child care in those programs as well.

So this is what we are doing and are really finding that not only from the staff and child care centres, but from our staff who are actually licensing those programs, we are

certainly seeing that the level of quality care provided and understanding and appreciation of not only the staff in the programs, but of the other children in the programs. Even the parents of children who do not have special needs are very supportive of this work.

MR. DUNN: Thank you. The second question is maybe a two-fold question - do all centres that requests funds receive it, and how do you determine just how much a centre gets?

MS. O'CONNELL: Are those questions with respect to supported child care?

MR. DUNN: No. The request funding that comes in from the centres across the province, how does that work? Do they all receive the same amount, or how do you determine who gets x-number of dollars?

MS. BRECKENRIDGE: The stabilization fund is based on the staff in the centre. I'll speak more to the child care operating grant. The child care operating grant that was just released is available to any full-day licensed child care centre; the amount - and we will be receiving applications. The day after we announced the program, we started receiving the applications. So in the application, what they have to do is identify the children who are actually in the child care centre. So it's based on their enrolment. So what we'll be providing funding for are full-time equivalent amount of a child who is enrolled in a child care centre. So it's based on children in a child care centre, and every full day child care centre across the province would be eligible for it.

MR. DUNN: Okay. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Dunn. The member for Dartmouth South-Portland Valley.

MS. MARILYN MORE: Mr. Chairman, I've said this many times before and I'll say it again - our child care sector is in crisis and I don't have the assurance that this plan is going to resolve that issue. I admit that some of you are new working on this file, but there's a legacy here that goes along with your plan and I think it's one of secrecy. We've been asking for a couple of years to have the results of the consultation made public, so that we have the confidence that your plan reflects what people actually said during the consultation and that hasn't happened.

There's no assurance that the non-profit component of early learning and child care is going to be protected under this plan, and without that as the foundation piece, we'll never have stability in Nova Scotia because before profits, I mean, someone can retire or sell the company and the child care centre closes a week from then. The only stability piece is going to be the non-profit part - and I'm not saying, don't support the for-profits, but there has to be special recognition of that critical role that the non-profit child care centres have.

I don't see any support there for children in school who need before and after school child care. We have to accept the fact that a caregiving parent, whether it be the father or the mother, are mostly working these days. We're not going to say pull all the female doctors out because we don't have adequate child care in this province, or pull out all the female plumbers. I mean our economy, the immigration policy, all these essential policies depend on affordable, adequate child care and we don't have it. The sort of baby steps that we're taking with this plan are not enough - it's too little too late.

That's why I think all of us around this table are really disappointed that there's not going to be more of a financial investment from the federal pool of money that came down, and the delay in using up that federal money is really discouraging because we have child care centres going under all the time. They needed the help a couple of years ago and it's very difficult - I'm finding it very difficult to get any sense of progress or movement in this province because we don't seem to have the public baseline data. I took a look through the 2005, which is the last report coming out that seems to talk about how money previously from the bilateral agreements came down and how that was being used, and I can't get any sense there of where we are now, so how can I see how this additional money is going to move us forward?

So this is the legacy you've inherited and now you come out with a one-page plan and this new investment, but you have to recognize that you have to rebuild the trust with the people who are working in this sector, with the parents and, I think, with the politicians in this province. I guess I'm concerned there's a huge wait list. You talk about adding more subsidized spaces but people are coming into our offices, and even with the subsidy they can't find the space to use the subsidy. So there seems to be a lot of inconsistency.

I realize I've just perhaps thrown a lot of different issues at you, but let's take for example children in school. How are we going to ensure that they get the adequate care before and after school if the child care centres, if that's not included in their formula?

MS. BRECKENRIDGE: Just back to your initial point on the child care, the consultation, in January the consultation summary was made public and it was sent to all child care centres throughout the province.

MS. MORE: I have not seen that, so could I get a copy, please? I would like to get a copy of that.

MS. BRECKENRIDGE: I would be happy to provide you with a copy of that.

I think it was mentioned earlier on that as we're implementing things - we are also looking at what we can do further so as we looked at the child care operating grant, when we did introduce that, school-age children are not included in the calculation that a child care centre would receive under that grant. We've said as we are implementing it, that's an area that we need to look at and to potentially revisit under the plan. At this point in time, we need further information on how many children and how many families were actually

impacted, so we are asking that child care centres provide us with that information so that we can make the decision based on evidence.

We are looking at that and so we understand the challenges the families might face in being able to obtain school-age care, but it is definitely something that we have considered and will continue to consider under the plan once we receive the information from the application - and that was made clear to centres when the information was sent out.

MS. MORE: Mr. Chairman, if I could ask just one more specific question? I think we all realize that we're not going to have sustainability in the child care worker sector until we significantly increase the amount of money. It's my understanding that, for example, the head of a child care might make the equivalent of an orderly at the QE II. They work out of their love for children, certainly not for the amount of money they get to support them and their families.

When you look at the early childhood education teachers in the Pre-Primary Pilot Project, which comes out of the Department of Education - I recognize they have similar training to a lot of the workers, the staff in the early learning child care centres, some of them are making up to \$36,000 a year, whereas our early learning child care specialists in the child care sector operating with some funds from the Department of Community Services are making considerably less than that - considerably less. How can we rationalize the difference? Are we perhaps suggesting to the child care sector that if we shift that entire program over to Education, that's the way we're going to get adequate wages for staff?

MR. SAVOURY: I appreciate your comments and we, as well, recognize that child care is extremely important. Most of the graduates who go to the Mount, for example, it's a four- year program, if they go to community college, it's a two-year diploma program which, Jane mentioned earlier, will be available on-line so people can access it anywhere.

We recognize that the whole issue of wages and benefits is an important area; in fact it was the main rationale behind our saying that 75 per cent of the child care operating grants should go to wages and benefits. We realize there's a significant difference between what they can get in other areas - you've mentioned, for example, the pre-primary pilots and some of them are earning significantly more, and we know that if the wages don't continue to improve, the centres will be continually faced with a turnover in staff, in terms of good, qualified staff.

We realize it's an area we have to keep working on. Obviously we can only allocate the resources that are available and we want it sustainable - we'd wouldn't want to see us do something that we can't sustain the next year or the year thereafter, but we do see it as a priority and we will keep working on it and keep trying to make improvements in this area.

MS. MORE: I don't think we should be building our child care and early learning system in Nova Scotia on the backs of the workers in that sector - I think they've borne too much of the burden in the past and they deserve to have the recognition for the good work they're doing. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The member for Kings West.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: I'm pleased to have you here today, Judith, and best wishes in your challenging role. We'll be able to ask some questions of the department and I guess we'll be continuing this with estimates on the budget.

I guess in this whole area, first of all I just need to get a little bit of a basic picture in terms of the early childhood learning component, early childhood education. When you say we have 13,000 spaces that are monitored, I'm just wondering what criteria, in terms of an early childhood education framework, would be part of that requirement in the monitored sites?

[8:45 a.m.]

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: Are you referring to the regulations?

MR. GLAVINE: Yes.

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: The Act and the regulations? Ginny?

MS. O'CONNELL: Your question relates to, from the point of view of the level of training of staff or are you looking at the delivery of the early childhood learning . . .

MR. GLAVINE: . . . yes, early childhood delivery. You know, what are some of the criteria, the expectations that would be required from your department?

MS. O'CONNELL: As you know, we do have our Day Care Act and regulations. From our perspective, when we look at quality care, there is a range of components within the delivery of the program that must be met, but from the point of view of looking at the fact that of major concern to us is the health and safety of the children, so what is of critical importance, of course, is the fact that the environment is safe. As well, we look at staff/child ratios so, depending on the ages of the children in the program, we require a certain number of children with a certain number of staff.

We also require that two-thirds of our staff who are working in any facility meet our training requirements. We also require that the actual program has so many square footage with respect to the delivery of the program, whether that relates to the building or even actually to the actual playground.

We also certainly require that, with respect to the environment itself, whether it's an infant room, a toddler room and whether it is for children three to five or school age, there are many significant requirements to be met. So as an early childhood development officer, that is the name of our staff who go into the facilities to license and to ongoing monitor if necessary.

They have a significant number of items, which is part of annual licensing inspection. At the completion of that, a licensing inspection report is actually given to the operator of the centre. That licensing inspection report is posted on the wall of the facility for an entire year. We then forward an actual paper license to the centre that indicates either whether or not this centre has a full license or whether there may be conditions on the license.

MR. GLAVINE: If we are talking about a centre that is primarily age oriented - let's say three-year-olds, four-year-olds - is there any school readiness elements within the requirements of the program being offered by the child care centre?

MS. O'CONNELL: Well, when in essence, when you look at the whole concept of child development and early childhood education, the majority - in most any activities that are occurring in any child care centre - actually do promote learning. When you look at all of the research on how children best learn, one of the key criteria is the quality of the training of the staff. The reason that is so critically important is the fact that the activities that are presented to the children, the manner in which they are presented, the teacher-child interactions - all of those components very much reflect what is best practiced and all of those components that reflect best practice enable a child to be ready for school. So there are many components.

I don't know if any of you have had an opportunity to visit any of the pre-Primary classrooms by the Department of Education, but if you were to walk into a pre-Primary classroom and if you were to walk into many of our early learning and child care centres, you would find them very similar with respect to the program, with respect to the program delivery, with respect to the activities, with respect to the expectations for the children, with respect to the assessments of the children. They are very similar environments and yes, in essence, having had an opportunity in my years in work, when I have had an opportunity to meet with Primary teachers, they all have said that the children who - whether it's a part-day program or a nursery school setting - have had an opportunity to attend a child care centre full day, those are the children who are most ready when they enter Primary. So, yes, I would like to certainly say that many and all of our programs, actually, provide those opportunities and all of the delivery of the program enable a child to be ready for school.

MR. GLAVINE: As a natural consequence, then, of what you have said and certainly feel very strongly as well about what you have said, because I do have one of the pilot sites. We have some outstanding child care centres in the area of Kingston-Greenwood, one just winning an award of excellence recently in our area.

MS. O'CONNELL: Yes, that is correct.

MR. GLAVINE: When you say 13,900 spaces, how many children don't have the opportunity now to take part in what you just described as certainly some good programs?

MS. O'CONNELL: In essence, when we look at the number of spaces that we have in Nova Scotia, we have higher than the average across Canada from the point of view of families having access to child care. Across Canada, about 12 per cent to 15 per cent of children have access to licensed child care spaces. In Nova Scotia it is closer to actually 20 per cent of children. When we say 13,099 spaces, that is a combination of our full-day facilities, which is over 10,000 spaces, and our part-day programs that are primarily for children three to five. So about 20 per cent of children may have access to child care.

In essence, I also want to say, it is actually more than 13,000 children because in many centres we have children who may really occupy one full space. I know this sounds complex but it is really not. In one centre, you could have a child attending two days a week, another child attending three days a week, so that space is really occupied by two children. So in essence overall, we probably have 15,000 for 15,500 children having the opportunity to attend licensed child care.

One of the initiatives of the plan, which we are incredibly excited about and I'm very excited about, is the fact that across Canada, family home child care has been a really integral piece of supporting families and supporting family choice.

When we look at our very rural province, especially areas like Cape Breton where we have large areas where really and truly and honestly a licensed facility would not be the best thing to have because you may not have the means for that centre to really be viable. But, what we will be implementing, and which has taken time to implement, and I really want people to be aware as well, we did do a family home consultation in the Fall which was very well attended. The reason we did that is that we are in the process and very soon will have brand-new family home regulations and we know in Nova Scotia that this will enable families to have choice for child care. This is another whole piece of enabling more families to have access to child care. So this is definitely a part of our plan.

MR. GLAVINE: Thank you. I guess that's my time but I'm going to come back to that area as well.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I just want to remind members we have about nine minutes left. I have two new speakers and three people who would like to speak for the second time so we may not be able to squeeze everyone in. Next I have Gordie.

MR. GORDON GOSSE: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you for being here this morning at such an early hour. Congratulations on your new position and I wish you well. I guess I'll start off, the last speaker's comments there, Ms. O'Connell, was about

non-profit and profit daycare centres. I live in Cape Breton and I'm very familiar with the non-profit sector because it's very high in the region that I represent in this Legislature.

I looked at this plan and I looked at the operating grants and what they call a child care operating grant. People who have been in the non-profit sector for many years understand a grant because you operate from grant to grant. You've never had stabilization funding to keep staff, so you train somebody and the grant is over. You're fighting constantly to get that money back to get that person back and you spend 90 per cent of your time in the non-profit sector looking for good people to work in your centre. You're constantly fundraising or doing something to bring those people in. Again, I like the word, operating grant. So I'm just wondering, when I read this, it seems like the new funding scheme favours for-profit sector over the non-profit sector. So I'm just wondering, is the department moving towards a profit child care sector?

MS. BRECKENRIDGE: The child care operating grant is available to both commercial and not-for-profit as I mentioned earlier. We know that the vast majority of not-for-profit centres will receive additional funding as a result of this child care operating grant. What it does, as was mentioned earlier, is level the availability of funding and support that the province provides. When we look at what the province's relationship is to child care centres, it is that we do provide various grants and opportunities for funding sources and that there are multiple different sources of funding, one being parent fees, but I said that child care centres would apply for that and these funds - the 75 per cent - need to go to staff. So the challenges in recruitment and retention is something that's evident throughout the sector. So these funds are targeted towards the actual providers that we're talking about who are difficult to retain.

MR. GOSSE: Yes, and it's just the wording of grant. For many years these sectors have been living from grant to grant. I mean there's no stability when I read this to keep the staff and retain the staff. If you want a high-quality good daycare in the Province of Nova Scotia, you must have these professionally educated people to work. When I read that and being in a non-profit sector myself for 20 years or so, I look at it and say, boy, they spend a lot of time just fundraising and how are we going to keep it open.

My second question would be, is there any funding in this new child care strategy that we have in the Province of Nova Scotia for children who are school-aged children who go to daycares? Is there any new funding earmarked and upcoming for centres that provide child care, after school programs or before school programs?

MS. BRECKENRIDGE: As I mentioned earlier, once we receive the information on the numbers of children, as well as the number of spaces for school-aged children, we'll be looking at how and if we can include school-aged funding in this. So it is definitely a huge consideration but to look at the plan in total, there are over 20 different projects and initiatives under the plan. There are a number of different components, one is repair and renovation to child care centres. So all children that are within that centre would benefit from any of those repairs and renovations that a child care centre would operate. The same

as expansion, expansion would allow greater accessibility for not just toddlers or infants but also creating after-school programs.

MR. GOSSE: Child Care Connection is a non-profit organization, community organization. I'm just wondering, what is Elaine's role with the Department of Community Services? Does Child Care Connection receive funding from the department?

MR. SAVOURY: Child Care Connection is an organization that represents all, and I think Elaine is speaking later today, it is an organization that is made up of both the commercial and the non-profit sector, in terms of membership. We do provide a small amount of funding to the organization. She is on the . . .

MR. GOSSE: Would you know that amount?

MR. SAVOURY: We can get that for you, in a few minutes actually, and she is also a member of the child care working group that's been meeting with the department over the last several years, as we worked on the plan, along with representatives from the non-profit, as well as the commercial sector. The amount is \$45,000 annually that we provide to Child Care Connection.

MR. GOSSE: What is the purpose of that funding?

MR. SAVOURY: It is to assist them with being able to maintain their operation and to do the work that they do on behalf of the child care sector in Nova Scotia. They organize training, events, conferences, they do research and in fact they probably, over the years, have managed to get the bulk of their funding through research and training grants, as opposed to funding from the department.

MR. GOSSE: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, we don't have time for a second round of questions, I'm sorry. I'm going to give the deputy a chance to add anything that perhaps didn't come out that she'd like to from her perspective, but before I do, I realize that we didn't make this clear in setting up the meeting but it might be very helpful to us if someone from the department could stay behind for the rest of the morning, in case there are specific questions that only a representative from your department could answer. I'm sorry to sort of spring that on you at the last minute but would anybody's schedule permit that?

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: Madam Chair, we'd all planned to stay anyway because we wanted to listen, obviously, to the comments and we're interested to hear, so we'll all be staying.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Oh, fabulous. That's an ideal situation so thank you very much for that. So would you like to just close at this hour?

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: I'll be very quick, I'm mindful of the time and I don't want to take away anyone else's time. I guess I'd just like to say first of all, thank you very much for your words of congratulations. It is very much a privilege to be the Deputy Minister of Community Services. I look forward to speaking with you over the next little while on any issues that you may have.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to be here today to provide us with the opportunity to talk with you about the plan. I'm sure you may have other questions. In the future, down the road, we would be happy to meet with any of you at any time to talk about the child care plan. I guess I'd like to say that we have very knowledgeable staff and, as everyone knows, we're continuing to work on this. So I very much extend that offer to talk about the plan. If there is information we can provide, we would be happy to provide that.

I'd say in terms of our one-page plan, the plan is actually 20 projects. We have additional information on that. We need to make sure we get that information out to people so that people understand what's going on, so that people are fully informed and we'll do that. We'll get on that and we'll make information available.

As I said, in terms of our consultation and our relationship with the sector, which I know everybody has been working tremendously hard on, I want you know that we're committed to continuing that relationship, to meeting with the sector, and that we're very excited that we're at the stage today to move the plan forward.

So thank you very much for your attention, for your interest and I'm sure we'll have further opportunities down the road to talk about the plan as we move forward. Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Just before you move, I forgot - Minister Chisholm had wanted to ask one question and . . .

[9:00 a.m.]

MR. CHISHOLM: No, that's fine, I'll pass. I just - I'll talk to Ms. O'Connell later, after the - I'll get an opportunity. It was just on rural Nova Scotia....

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you. Sorry, I meant to come back to you.

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: Madam Chair, I do have an extra copy of the consultation summary, so I'd be pleased to leave that with the committee for you, or get as many copies as you may like.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, perhaps we could copy it for the members and also if you have more details on that 20 per cent figure of children who are in licenced child care in Nova Scotia, we'd like to see that rationale. It's very difficult to get that kind of baseline data. So, it would be very useful to get that.

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: I've been studying a fair bit myself, so I understand that. I'd be pleased to get that for you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, we would appreciate it. So next we invite Elaine Ferguson from Child Care Connection Nova Scotia.

Welcome, Elaine, and I'm just wondering, did you want to begin by giving us some opening remarks, perhaps explaining a bit about Child Care Connection. That would be very useful, so thank you.

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: I just want to say thank you for the opportunity to speak to you. When I was contacted, I was asked to speak to you about how Child Care Connection fits into the infrastructure in Nova Scotia, so that's what I have prepared.

Child Care Connection is a nonprofit, community-based development organization for the child care sector in Nova Scotia. We have been in existence since 1989. We provide services, resources and build capacity in the child care sector in Nova Scotia, and I will be giving specifics later on in the presentation. Throughout the presentation, I'll use the material that was submitted from Child Care Connection to you earlier - specifically, our annual report to stakeholders, support of a professional child care delivery system and as to ensure quality child care above licensing standard, and our Caring at Work Campaign. I assume that you have those and if you don't, I have extra copies.

To define the infrastructure that supports the deliver of child care, we have to start with the question, why is there child care in Nova Scotia? How that question is answered, determines the shape of the infrastructure to support child care services. How Child Care Connection answers that question, determines how we provide our services, to whom and how we fit into the child care infrastructure. To quote from the National Research Council's publication, *From Neurons to Neighbourhoods*, they say, how can society use knowledge about early childhood development to maximize the nation's or Nova Scotia's human capital and ensure the ongoing vitality of its democratic institutions? This is the future goal speaking to societies economic, political and social interests and how can the nation use knowledge to nurture, protect and ensure the health and well being of all young children, as an important objective in its own right, regardless of whether measurable returns can be documented in the future. This is a present goal that speaks to our society's moral and ethical values.

As a community-based development, non-profit organization, Child Care Connection sees child care existing in Nova Scotia to provide children with high quality child care - a present goal that speaks to our society's moral and ethical values. Exercising this moral and ethical responsibility as a society, will result in gains that have political, economic and social implications that are of benefit to all Nova Scotia. However, in Connection's eyes, these gains are not the reason for child care in Nova Scotia. Although they are powerful reasons for investing in an infrastructure to support high-quality child care.

Connection's role in this goal is to support child care practitioners in providing a high-quality program to Nova Scotia's young children. As such, our ends are investments in children will be maximized through recognizing, valuing and supporting the development of an effective quality early childhood community in Nova Scotia. There will be a comprehensive, coordinated early childhood community that maximizes resources. Early childhood practitioners in Nova Scotia will be self-confident, skilled and professional and there will be a favourable public image of early childhood practice.

To meet our ends, we have three broad goals: building capacity in the child care sector, promotion of the value of child care, and sustaining an infrastructure to support the child care sector. So, I will be talking to you about building capacity.

At Child Care Connection, we provide support to child care organizations; we provide meeting space; we develop and sustain Web sites; we maintain registries, we manage finances, mail outs and conference and professional registrations and other administrative tasks for the Certification Council of Early Childhood Educators of Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Child Care Association and the Partners and Practice Mentoring Group. Both Nova Scotia Child Care Association and the Certification Council of Early Childhood Educators of Nova Scotia appoint representatives to the Child care Connection Board of Directors. Our board of directors are representative of administrators, of full- and part-day programs and post-secondary early childhood educators and education programs.

Also included are representatives from the Certification Council, the Coalition of Non-Profit Directors, the Child Care Association, and the Private License Administrators Association. Other appointed board members provide the prospectus of women's issues and unions as they relate to child care. With this makeup, the Child Care Connection Board is well equipped to set the direction of the organization and establish relevant and practical ends for the organization to support the child care sector.

We provide community development projects to build capacity. Over our 18 years of operations, we have conducted a number of national projects including retention and recruitment, licensing, the role of owners and boards, mentoring and certification of administrators. We have had provincial projects include retention and recruitment at that level, causes of stress in child care, inventory of administrator professional development opportunities, anti-bias project, infant project, salaries and working conditions survey, professional project, et cetera. Currently, we are developing a process for recertification of early childhood educators.

In the promotion of the value of child care, we have established some awards and recognition - the Caring at Work Awards - which is awarded by centres or peers who nominate people for the Caring at Work Award and they present it to them. Then, I believe as mentioned earlier, the Early Childhood Learning and Care Awards for Excellence in Practice and Program. Then we also have the Child Care Awareness Day Spirit Award.

We also do media promotion. We provide local perspective to the media on child care issues and findings of national research projects. Our resource library contains a good sampling of these reports plus other statistical and demographically relevant information that is used by media researchers. We provide accurate, relevant information on child care in Nova Scotia and connect the media with practitioners and parents for their perspective.

Another promotion of the value is our advocacy activities. We have an ad hoc network called Circle Time for Child Care. The results of the January, 2006, federal election activated the child care sector in an attempt to salvage the agreement in principle signed between Nova Scotia and Ottawa. Child care groups came together in a petition campaign resulting in over 9,000 signatures urging Prime Minister Harper to honour the agreements. MPs were lobbied and the petition was tabled in the House of Commons. Child Care Connection supported the efforts through facilitation, funding and coordination of mailing and information sharing.

We also are involved in participation in groups. I am the co-chairman of the Child Care Working Group, which serves as an information sharing forum for the ELCC director and other members of the ECDS portfolio team regarding aspects of the government's plan. It's not a decision-making group. Sector members in the group are members of the Nova Scotia Coalition of Non-Profit Directors, Private License Administrators Association, Acadian Child Care and Family Home Child Care. In addition to the sector memberships, the working group includes members from the Department of Community Services.

With sustaining an infrastructure to support the child care sector, we have communications services and these are basically all of our services. These include a 800 number, network access, connection mini journal, connection newsletter and Web site. A diverse network of members of the child care sector is kept informed of and consulted on current issues and trends affecting child care in Nova Scotia, Canada and other countries through e-mail, mail outs and faxes. Consensus is built when time and resources are available.

We also have program and organizational services. We provide services to child care programs and organizations such as board development, strategic planning, development of promotional materials, resources, consultations, meeting space, mailing and assistance and operational needs. We have a Web site that includes an online resource library, a job posting bulletin board, a centre listing that includes three Web pages per centre, resources for practitioners including our mini journal publications, professional development opportunities, advocacy campaigns, organizational information, relevant links and a calendar of events. We also host the Web sites for the Certification Council of Early Childhood Educators and the Nova Scotia Child Care Association.

We hold professional development activities, administrative workshops on the topics of recruiting and retaining, participatory decision-making, leadership and effective meetings, and a mentoring skills development series, offered in both Bridgewater and Halifax in this past year.

Other professional development services include our resource library, mini journal presentations and consultations. Staff and board members participate in national and provincial consultations, projects and organizations. We also provide support service and collaboration given to the numerous child care organizations and post-secondary early childhood education programs in Nova Scotia in the form of information distribution, consultation, meeting space, use of office equipment, mail drops, maintenance of data bases of members, membership services, brochure development, Web site postings, handling and routing inquiries. We also provide assistance regarding quality child care to government departments, political Parties, media, businesses, parents and community agencies.

This gives you a sense of the modest infrastructure that we provide to support the child care sector. That is what we are able to provide, given the resource available to us.

In our community development role, we also have to have a sense of what is needed to build capacity within the sector so we can focus our community development projects to develop the vehicles and structures that need to be in that directions. In 2001, Child Care Connection brought together the provincial organizations that focus on child care practitioners and resources and support services to them to flesh out a 10-year plan to develop a professional infrastructure and child care delivery system. That was included in your package.

The plan's purpose is to enhance existing vehicles and structures that support high quality child care and to develop those vehicles and structures that are needed to provide and sustain a professional infrastructure in a high-quality child care delivery system. The first part - the development of a professional infrastructure - advanced child care as a profession and the ingredients in a profession is that it credentials its members. It's a vehicle to ensure that members' practices are ethical and it defines and strengthens itself by uniting all aspects of the profession and letting society know the contribution that the profession is making.

A professional infrastructure is one of two components. The second one is accreditation - that is about the quality of programs in which the professional practitioners work and the proposal includes a plan to develop an accreditation process. Estimates in the plan show that in year one, to get this started - this is Page 13 of the proposal that was included in your package - \$100,320 in year one, increasing to \$114,000 in year 10. These would have to be adjusted somewhat.

In earlier years, there are more development costs than maintenance costs. Year one requires heavier outside funding because of the inability to collect high fees from the members and the start-up costs of aspects of the infrastructure. So, \$67,599 of funding is required with the bulk of the costs being met by the members' fees which can be raised to \$100 with the visibility of the profession and what the associations can provide their members. It virtually would be self-sustaining and the accreditation of centre programs'

costs of a three-year development budget of \$75,800 which after the three years would be sustained by fees.

Implementing the Infrastructure Development Plan would begin to address some of the issues identified by the sector in our Caring at Work consultation of 2004. We went across the province and consulted and the vision that emerged was that the Nova Scotia child care sector wants a comprehensive framework that supports quality child care and the implementation of this infrastructure is a partnership between government and the child care sector. Five priorities to advance the vision were identified: developing a strong professional infrastructure, building relationships and working together within the sector, obtaining increase in sustained government funding, alleviating recruitment and retention problems, and increasing awareness within and outside the sector. These priorities have provided us, as Child Care Connection, with clear directions for our services and activities which will take us to 2010.

So coming back to the initial question, where does Child Care Connection fit into the child care infrastructure, we probably are the most visible aspect of a child care sector's infrastructure. We are the only sector organization that is staffed, that has a provincial mandate for the whole child care sector. All other provincial organizations are volunteer organizations or cater to a specific aspect of the sector. Over the past 18 years, we've seen the development of a more sophisticated knowledgeable and committed child care sector and are proud of the part our organization has played in that development. Each year brings many challenges, some presenting setbacks and others presenting opportunities.

In 2006, the disappointment of a cancellation of the Early Learning and Child Care Agreement-In-Principle was a major setback limiting what could be done to develop the system. In addition to cancelling the bilateral agreement, it also has stalled the funding for projects to develop the sector which has accounted for approximately one-third of our funding base and our current project is finished in September of this year. True to form, the sector responded by rallying around a petition to Prime Minister Harper and diverse groups within the sector came together around a common cause. The Department of Community Services responded with a 10-year ELCC plan using the reduced federal dollars and committing provincial dollars to sustain the plan.

In 2004 the sector identified relieving retention and recruitment challenges as a priority. In 2006, it is more of a problem. It's a symptom of a complex of challenges including staff wages, standards and recognition, access to continuing education, competition for a dwindling work force pool, succession - all challenges faced by other occupations in Nova Scotia.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, I'm just going to stop you there briefly. I'm just wondering how much more do you have?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: One minute.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, because we do - some of these issues may come up in the round of questioning as well.

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: I guess what I'm saying is it's crucial that there's a healthy professional infrastructure that supports the sector and as we build in a growth system, we have to ensure there are ways and means that the child care sector itself can be accountable and responsible through professional regulation, vehicles and structures. This has increased demands on us while at the same time we are experiencing diminishing resources to support our modest infrastructure. Our fixed costs are increasing and our income is decreasing. The future of our organization is in jeopardy. We continue to search out ways and means to address our vulnerable financial position while being able to maintain our services. So, thank you for your interest.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I just want to remind members of the committee and witnesses that the microphones do not amplify, they just record. We have more than our usual number of people in the room and we have some outside competition from the street. So I just encourage everyone, including myself, to speak up so that everyone can hear. Stephen.

MR. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you for coming in this morning. How long have you been the executive director?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Eighteen years.

MR. MCNEIL: Do you operate, or have you operated, a child care facility?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: I was the assistant director of St. Joseph's Children Centre for 10 years and prior to that I worked on the floor at Wolfville Children's Centre for three years.

MR. MCNEIL: You mentioned that the child care sector rallied during the last federal election to try to save the provincial-federal agreement that was in place under the former government, a 10-year plan, a plan that had been laid out. I'm wondering, is it more difficult, in your view, for the Province of Nova Scotia to deliver that level of quality child care that was in the old plan, under this new government?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Well, when there's a difference of \$100 million, yes.

MR. MCNEIL: Thank you, that's it. Thanks.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Do we have any other speakers? Trevor.

MR. ZINCK: Elaine, thank you for coming in. I'm not sure if you can answer this or not. If you can't, no problem, but I'm going to pose it anyway. I didn't get to ask it at the last session.

Portable spaces - you're talking about promoting the sustainability of the sector. If you can answer it, how do portable spaces help sustain the sector, especially in rural Nova Scotia? Can you answer that?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: I don't think I can answer that.

MR. ZINCK: Okay. I'll go on to communication, communication and promotion of the sector. Now maybe you don't even deal with it but in the past, with inspections of child care centres, how do we communicate that to parents? If there are incoming families or immigration into the province, how do families go about finding a qualified child care centre?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Well we have - and, of course, this is what Child Care Connection provides around that - on our Web site is a listing of all of the child care centres in Nova Scotia with the particulars about ages served, hours of operation, how many spaces, how big it is, where its location is, and who to contact. That is maintained by the centres themselves, too. So they can go online and search by the county that they are in and it'll give them a listing of what centres are available.

Also included on that site are articles and suggestions on what to look for when you're looking for a child care centre, of what things you need to know. Also, about what the Act and regulations say and what they need to look for in order to assure that their children are safe. Also, too, is our 800 number; they call us. There are also child care information services throughout the province, too, which are geared to providing services to parents, that we would refer people to if they wanted more information.

Then also, too, during our Child Care Awareness Days, the media campaign that we would do would talk about quality child care, where you can find information about it, how to log onto our Web site, that sort of thing.

MR. ZINCK: One more quick one. In the past you've stated, and this was previously discussed by my colleagues, that you lobbied the Harper Government. Are you continuing to lobby the Harper Government? Are you happy with what's come down in the most recent budget? Will you continue to lobby for more funding?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: What Child Care Connection does around lobbying is we support the organizations that do more of the lobbying and probably Margo would be able to address that question better for you because she's with the Child Care Advocacy Association and their Code Blue Initiative would look at what's been happening at the national level.

We were involved in speaking to our Members of Parliament about the child care bill that was brought forward by the federal NDP members. You are sort of asking me a political question in that I'm not quite sure of . . .

MR. ZINCK: Would you continue to support them if they made an effort, through the Code Blue process, to lobby the government? Would your organization continue?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Oh, we support the Code Blue and we support other initiatives, too, because we want to have quality child care and what are the vehicles to do it. I am not quite sure how effective, I guess what I am doing now is that given the limited resources that Child Care Connection has, we are focusing our resources primarily at the provincial level right now and lobbying at a national level is an expensive - well lobbying is expensive, period. Both in time and money.

We have 2.4 staff, one of them being me, and a national conference coming up that we are organizing so we don't have a lot of time and energy to put into that, although it is very important so we are sort of leaving it to Margo's group and supporting her where we can.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Leo.

MR. GLAVINE: Thank you, Elaine, for coming in today. I was wondering what is your budget. We heard that you receive \$45,000 provincially.

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Yes.

MR. GLAVINE: I am just wondering, what other sources of revenue do you have to run your organization?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Well, over the past 10 years, our budget has been like a third/a third/a third. It's been a third that we've received from the provincial government, a third that we've received from project recovery from our federal projects, and a third we raise ourselves. The third given the current situation and the current attitude towards child care at the federal level right now - this is why we are in serious jeopardy in this upcoming year. Previously, there would be an ongoing request for proposals for development grants that would sort of be staggered, so like in a three-year period you would be operating on a grant but then in year two you would be applying for another grant to take you. So it is sort of like a leap-frogging kind of thing.

Well, what has happened is that those federal grants - they are not really dried up but they are stalled, and so there is a worry that we are sort of dying a slow death because that is a third of our income and I don't think we are going to be able to provide our support services without that third of that income to our core. This has had really shocking impact because I don't know if you know of Martha Friendly. Martha Friendly has lost her resource centre and I am sure if any one of you have done any research on child care in Canada, you have gone to her Web site to get your information. Well, Martha doesn't have a place now. She's on the street. That is pretty frightening to me, that that is happening, and that's happening because, of course, U of T - she is not bringing in money, so therefore no space.

[9:30 a.m.]

This is why this next year coming up for Connection is going to be a tough year. The national conference is sort of carrying us through because we are operating on cash flow and, of course, we will be able to recover a fair amount from that national conference that is in June, but after June, I'm very worried.

MR. GLAVINE: Just to continue getting your observation on one of the programs that fit in the context of early childhood education care in Nova Scotia and that is the Pre-Primary Pilot that is done with four-year-olds. Would you be an advocate of a stand-alone four-year-old program delivered through the Department of Education or do you have a different model of how, from infant care through to five-year-olds, that would be somewhat different, I guess. I am just wondering how you and your organization kind of have somewhat of a model in place because certainly you do have, in your work, a comprehensive look, from the litany that you presented here earlier, of what you are involved in. So I'm just wondering about a viewpoint.

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Well when the Pre-Primary Pilots were announced, what we did was we brought - and having the board that we have, it is like a mini-sector council - so we were able to quickly rally people from the sector together to sort of say, what are we going to say about this? So we put together a committee, we developed a discussion paper on it and the areas that were of concern were around having the same requirements that Virginia shared with us about ratios. It was a whole quality and the risk factor towards children, that was one of the areas.

The other area that was of concern was the disparity around centres that were already providing that care and then losing basically their program because it would be in the school and it would be free. We were concerned around other safety issues, like it was ratios, initially the ratios were not going to be the same ratios as what child care centres have for four-year olds, also around the whole thing of transporting children, that wasn't the same, around the health and safety, around the square footage requirements and all those kinds of things.

So we put together the position paper and then we were able to arrange a meeting with the deputy minister. At that meeting, we were able to put forward the case on ratios, which changed the numbers of people who would be in the room and the qualifications of the people. So we did have an effect that way.

As far as our position on the Pre-Primary, it is really difficult to talk about that for me because we're dealing with an inequitable situation. We're dealing with the Department of Education which has - it's an established institution, an established public program, it is publicly-funded, it has a lot of stability. Then we're dealing with the child care sector which is not an institution and doesn't have the same stability, doesn't. You alluded to the fact that in the Pre-Primary the lead teacher is getting up to \$36,000, I think it was, and in a

child care centre probably they would be making maybe \$20,000, and that's good, and that kind of inequity. So we're dealing with elephant and mouse, in those kinds of situations.

We're also dealing with a marginalized sector, which is the child care sector, and we're dealing with an institution. So when you have that kind of, how are we going to meld this together or how do we make a seamless approach and how do we focus on what is best for the children because we also have very different approaches as to learning and we have very different approaches to what the images of children are and we have very different approaches to why we exist.

So the difficulties that there are to try to make that seamless, which we want to do which is best for the children. But how to do that, I think it'll take a lot of discussion and a lot of respect and a lot of - it has to be on equal footing and I don't think it has been so far.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Gordie.

MR. GOSSE: Thank you. I'm just wondering about the Caring at Work Campaign in 2004, the strategies that were used to all the MLAs and MPs, how do you feel that campaign went over across the country?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Well, each - I have the five priorities right on my bulletin board in front of me and whenever we're going to do something, I look to make sure that they're going to address those priorities. As I go through them, there's been small steps that have been taken on each of those priorities. Not huge, they're not resolved and that kind of thing, but I think maybe one or two of you were - I did present to the Liberal caucus. I did present to the NDP caucus, and I did present to the deputy minister of Community Services too, with our position paper that we had formed on it.

I think it has had some effect and, of course, you know I'm an optimist. I think that it planted seeds and I think that we've moved some steps forward and recognizing that with child care, we need to take giant steps. I had hoped that with the \$139 million, we were going to take a giant step but we don't. You know child care people can live within their resources and try to make the best out of what we have, which is our blessing and our curse.

MR. GOSSE: Well I think it's a curse at times because you're always begging, borrowing and doing whatever you can to survive. So I think that's the hard part of that sector. It's like everywhere else.

I'd like to discuss the funding part because I think when you broke it down, it was like 43 per cent that you raised from your own organization, 29 per cent from the provincial and 28 per cent from the feds?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: That's what it was in 2005, yes. It's roughly a third, a third and a third, depending. Now, it's going to be very different this year.

MR. GOSSE: The reason I asked if it would be very different is because it seems like when you became a lobbyist and lobbying for child care, and change of government, did that not hurt?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: The federal government went down.

MR. GOSSE: Yes and it looks like that to me when I look at the situation that you're in now, that you're lobbying on behalf of child care nonprofit and profit organization and it's cost you dearly within your organization, because now you're going to be struggling because the federal part of that money is going to be gone and you're going to be turning to the province looking for the rest of that a third that you're going to lose from the feds, and hoping that somebody's going to bail you out, and this is what always happens. I just want to know your feeling on this and that will be my last question. Did you feel that by lobbying so hard that it might have cost you?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: I don't think that Connection received any special targeted thing any more than any other child care centre did around that. I think that child care across Canada was shut out - for whatever reason, I'm not sure. As far as looking for more money, we will look for more money - however, we also have a contingency plan that if we can't raise that amount to be able to provide a reasonable amount of services, we'll close. We've always had that over the 18 years. We've recognized that that third/third/third, operating that way, puts you in jeopardy and that you know that you're always going to have to have a contingency plan. The problem that we have is that we've had a contingency fund, but that's been tapped out.

MR. GOSSE: So and knowing that over the 18 years you've run your centre realizing that, you know, maybe the hard lobbying that you did with over the 350 centres, within the list that you sent packages to and all the MLAs and everything else - that it might have cost the centre in the end and cost your organization your one-third funding, which you find yourself in today.

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

MS. MORE: Elaine, I wanted to talk a little bit about the lack of a single common voice for the child care sector in Nova Scotia. Perhaps you could just update us. I believe there are, I don't know, 15 or 17 different organizations, representing different aspects of the sector. What's the current status of that?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Well I stopped doing salary and working condition surveys because what that did was set the market value which really defeated the purpose of having them. I've stopped counting the organizations. There's a lot. However, when we did our 2004 cross-province consultation, people from those organizations were included in that and there's a remarkable consistency about what people are concerned about.

I guess I'm a person that says we have diverse voices and that there are times when the voice sounds the same and there are times when it sounds like harmony and there are times when it sounds out of tune. I don't think that's any different from any other sector. Because, the nurses, you hear that, doctors you even hear that kind of thing. I don't think that we're all that different.

MS. MORE: I'm just curious, how do those different interests give voice to the Department of Community Services, for example, during their decision-making process?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Well, specifically about the Early Learning & Child Care plan - the 10 year plan, which is distributed through the child care centres - the Child Care Working Group has representatives of the Private Licensed Administrators Association, The Coalition of Non Profit Directors, Family Home Child Care and the Acadian Child Care.

That's more of a committee that's saying, here's a form, what's going to be the problems with it. It's not a decision-making or recommendation-making kind of group, it's more of a smoothing of the waters of here's what's going to happen, how can we do this smoothly with the least amount of effect. We know there's always going to be an effect and there's always going to be fall-out, but how are we going to do that? That's what the Child Care Working Group does.

I'm not sure as to how the other groups would voice their - maybe somebody from Community Services can say whether people meet - I'm sure the groups will ask to meet with the deputy or with the minister.

MS. MORE: You seem to have within your organization the same make-up. I mean, you have representatives from various parts of the child care sector. So, how do you resolve the different interests around your board table, for example?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: It's quite interesting around - we operate on a policy governance model so that the actual board meetings are not a lot of technical and our minutes are very short kind of thing because it's through the monitoring that the board keeps aware of what's going on.

Half of our board meeting is spent in discussing issues around the table from the various perspectives. Because it's policy governance, we don't necessarily have to come to one conclusion because we have our ends established and whatever falls within those ends, is what I'm able to do.

So, what happens around the table is that discussion, it may not be that we come to a consensus or come to a resolution of things. However, the voices are heard by other groups where they may not have been heard because they aren't around the table. The perspectives get broadened.

[9:45 a.m.]

MS. MORE: But how, for example, if you or your council chair are presenting the views of CCC to the department - how do those come down into one common perspective? I guess what I'm intrigued about is, you have on your board representatives from both the non-profit and the commercial child care sector. From my experience, they come at different issues from a very different perspective and I'm just wondering when CCC presents an opinion to the department, how do you mediate the different concerns around your own board table? Is there a common conclusion? Common recommendations?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Well, we go back to our ends. Our ends are investments in children will be maximized through recognizing values and supporting the development of an effective community in Nova Scotia. It goes back to that, to our ends. The perspective that Connection would present to the department would be within those ends, plus through the consultation that we did, like through those five priorities, it would also be that, of what the sector has said to us.

MS. MORE: Let me give you a couple of examples. I had the opportunity to be involved, as you did, for much of the process on the YWCA Early Learning and Child Care Task Force here a few years ago. That was the first time that I was actually exposed to international research that suggested that the non-profit child care centres actually provided better quality child care and early learning experience than the commercial. I don't remember all the reasons but part of it was because there were better-trained educators, there was higher interaction between the staff and the children and the parents, the parents served on the board or the advisory committee involved with the centre, and other reasons like that.

So I'm just wondering - obviously we're talking about public monies here and it seems to me, from my perhaps very limited perspective, that if we can invest public monies into non-profit child care centres that provide generally higher education, higher standard of child care experience and early learning experience, and all that money goes directly into staff and programming and facility and not into profit, some of it being siphoned off into profit, doesn't that achieve the ends that you're quoting for your organization more than continuing to invest public money into commercial enterprises?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Well, I think what we can do is we can invest money into those ingredients. For instance, one of the projects that we did nationally was called, Maximizing Child Care Services: The Role of Owners and Boards. So if we look at highly trained staff, that staff get trained well, that staff get paid well and that the governance structure is such that there's openness and accountability and that parents have access and influence in the direction of the centre, if we can invest in those things then we also would have quality and it wouldn't necessarily have auspice tied to it.

However, there has to be the accountability to it. I understand the point that I believe you made about what happens if the centre could just close down and that the whole thing

of how it is easier to close down a commercial centre than it is for a non-profit centre. I think that probably in the accountability that those kinds of things can be built into that; if that happens then this money gets returned. So I'm not sure.

Research is a two-edged sword and research is - I guess what's happened is that I've sort of been converted from modernism to post-modernism over the past couple of months. I've been working on a project that's about outcomes, which is something I've been trying to work through as to, where does research stand in the whole thing about quality and how do we measure the intangibles and that kind of thing? There is research out of the States that says that the motives for getting into child care, as far as quality goes, will trump the auspice, so I'm not sure.

Child Care Connection has always focused on that we're here for the entire child care sector and that we don't have membership because membership dues would compete with the other organizations who need the dues, too. So we serve the entire sector and we serve the practitioners who work in the entire sector and that the practitioners, where they work, usually they - it's the practitioners and there are practitioners working in commercial centres, there are practitioners working in non-profit centres, there are practitioners working in Family Home Child Care and there are practitioners who are working in the License-Not-Required piece, too.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The honourable member for Guysborough-Sheet Harbour.

HON RONALD CHISHOLM: Thank you, Ms. Ferguson, for being here today. Your information is informative. I guess what I want to concentrate on a bit is rural Nova Scotia. I come from a large rural constituency. I take in all of Guysborough County, the Towns of Mulgrave and Canso and up the Eastern Shore up to East Ship Harbour. A lot of our areas are very remote, sparsely populated. People have to travel great distances for child care or most services. It is of concern. I see other areas of the province as well, like Victoria County, parts of Inverness County, Shelburne County, down in Yarmouth County, areas where child care, early childhood development is hard to find. It's easier to find in an area like Halifax, Bedford, the Sydney area - there are child care facilities available.

I am not sure that there are child care spaces in Guysborough County that I can recall.

I know there have been times that different people have tried to set up daycare centres and have failed because of probably the difficulty of getting children to these daycares. Your organization, Child Care Connection Nova Scotia - how connected are you to rural Nova Scotia, like Guysborough County, like Inverness County, Victoria, just to name a few?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Once or twice a year, we do our check-in and call-around to just sort of make sure that we are on the right track. So we use the telephone a fair amount to reach rural Nova Scotia and plus we have our 800 number where rural Nova Scotians can meet us. So in the call-around, we will just call to chat and the isolation that the centres in the rural areas experience, they don't get a chance to chat that much. So we

find out what are the issues and their issues are quite similar, about enrolment, about getting staff, about keeping staff, about parents' fees. They are pretty similar to what we would hear. We also have offered our workshops; for instance, we offered it in Bridgewater. We are going to be, in 2007-2008, offering it in Greenwood.

What we do is people who come in from the rural areas to our professional development, for instance with our mentoring series, they go through the process and then what we do is we say, would you like to provide this in your community? Then I go and for a year I mentor them through the process of the workshops and then they present it themselves so it is that kind of development that we do.

MR. CHISHOLM: I guess the other issue is, I have heard comments this morning about the federal government and the changes and the different way of maybe spending money for child care development right across the country. Absolutely right, there was a change of government in Ottawa and different governments come in, they do things differently. One of the things that I've seen, and is good for me in rural Nova Scotia, in the riding that I represent, I would imagine in other parts of the province as well, is that there is also a \$100-a-month component to that child care process that is given to every child, is available to every child in the Province of Nova Scotia as well as right across Canada for children under five years old. So that is \$100 in the pockets of parents, of single parents, that is very helpful, I can assure you, in rural Nova Scotia. So, you know, I don't think things are always as bad as some people might lead us to believe. Anyway, what are your thoughts on that part of the program?

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Well, there are no problems with the fact that parents are receiving a family allowance. That's something that is a good thing to happen. What the problem is, is that it pitted providing a child care system against that. I think we need both, and I think that's what the problem is. I don't think that there is any advocate that says that parents should not receive that family allowance. It's just the fact that it was an either/or kind of situation that's the problem for us.

MR. CHISHOLM: I guess the point that I want to make is that for a lot of rurals, especially our rural areas, the remote areas, that this \$100 per month allows them to be able to access better child care, I think.

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Yes.

MR. CHISHOLM: And maybe get into programs that otherwise wouldn't be available to them. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Stephen.

MR. STEPHEN MCNEIL: I just wanted to respond to comments made by the previous speaker. It was suggested to you that child care was not available in many parts of rural Nova Scotia and yet \$100 a month from the federal government is supposed to be

a child care plan. It may be a tax break, it may be an election vote-buying scheme, but I do not consider it a child care plan.

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: I don't either.

MR. MCNEIL: And I would like to hear your comments on that.

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: No, I don't either consider it a child care- that's why I called it a family allowance and that families - I don't think there's anybody who would have a problem with families receiving assistance in raising their children, but it's not a child care plan.

MR. MCNEIL: There's no guarantee that that \$100 a month is even going towards child care. Many Nova Scotians who are receiving that \$100 a month are going to be needing it to pay the very basic necessities of life and what they're going to be using, not paying for child care. So for anyone to suggest that \$100 a month is replacing a comprehensive 10-year child care plan is absolutely wrong.

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: Yes, I would agree.

MR. MCNEIL: Nova Scotians are in a worse situation today than they were two years ago when it comes to child care; \$100 million less to provide child care to Nova Scotia children means they're worse off. It means Nova Scotia families are worse off today. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ron.

MR. RONALD CHISHOLM: I guess on a point of order, that's not what I said. What I said is this \$100 a month was helping rural families in Nova Scotia to provide for daycare for their children. I know it's helping in my riding and I know it's helping in other ridings across the province as well.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Elaine, thank you very much for coming along this morning. We appreciate the work that you and Child Care Connection are doing.

Next I'll invite Margo Kirk to come forward. Margo is the Nova Scotia board member on the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.

[10:00 a.m.]

So Margo, would you like to make to make introductions and just tell a little bit about your association as well as perhaps give an opening presentation.

MS. MARGO KIRK: Thank you again for this opportunity. My name is Margo Kirk. I am the Nova Scotia representative on the board of directors for the Child Care

Advocacy Association of Canada. Sitting beside me is Karen Geddes. She is the executive director of Alexandra Children's Centre here in Halifax. One of the other hats I wear is being the executive director of the University Children's Centre here in Halifax.

I've been working directly in the child care field for about 25 years and I've been a centre-based administrator for 18 of those years. By way of credentials, I hold a Bachelor of Education degree from Dalhousie University, and a Masters Degree in Child and Youth Study from Mount Saint Vincent.

Where to start? I think I could have put together a three-part lecture series on all of this material, but, obviously that's not feasible. What I would like to do this morning is try to separate some of the myth from the reality, to give a community perspective, a grass roots perspective, an on-the-floor perspective, with a couple of examples of what is actually happening.

Despite what you might have heard, Nova Scotia does not have an early childhood education and care system. In 2000, Nova Scotia did sign a communique with the federal government on early childhood development and I think that was referred to earlier. They thus formally committed to develop a system. As a result, the government produced a document, and I think this is the document that was referred to earlier - Our Children... Today's Investment, Tomorrow's Promise.

It clearly articulated a vision for an integrated system, one that was - this was quoted from the paper - one that was "comprehensive, integrated, universal, accessible, inclusive, high quality, accountable, community-based and respectful of diversity and regional variations." I think I should note that this came out in 2001 - that was long before there was any thought of bilateral agreements and the cancellation thereof. I'm not too sure what the connection is between removing this from the Web site, as I think you were referring to, and the new 10-year plan.

This came into effect, it was put on the table as policy long before we even heard of any bilateral plans. So, I too have similar questions. What is the policy? What is the new vision for this province? Are we still trying to form a coordinated system?

The current reality in the field says no. Effective action plans are key to developing coordinated, accountable child care systems and they are important elements in public reporting. This is an area I feel that Nova Scotia fares very poorly. The goal is to support families - that's a legitimate one, yet I am unclear how that translates into a comprehensive vision for early childhood development in this province. I have no doubt that the Department of Community Services believes it is committed to the families of Nova Scotia, but their actions speak otherwise.

What is the reality we are facing? The answer is rather complex, however, the simple answer is that we're facing a crisis, a crisis which is intensified by current government policy and practice. The implementation of the new child care operating grant

is an example. We are told that \$5 million in extra money is being provided to licensed full daycare centres to enhance salaries and benefits. But, as we know, the proof is in the detail because we are also told that 30 to 40 non-profit centres will not benefit from this new grant. If the goal of the grant is to improve salaries and benefits, why are some centres excluded?

Is it assumed that the salaries and benefits in these centres are at reasonable levels now? Do these centres not need any operational support? Do the families at these centres not need any support?

The North End Community Daycare Centre, certainly in an area of high need, will receive no new funding. Centres in Cape Breton, again an area of high need, will receive no new funding. Town Daycare is one of them and they've been in the news recently facing strike action with wages and benefits the main cause. They will receive no new funding.

One of the glitches in this process has to do with the historical grants that some non-profit centres have received and the clawback the department has imposed. They've called it streamlining. The argument - or the myth - is that these centres receiving historical grants have unfairly benefitted from this revenue in the past. What is the logic? Where is the proof? What are the facts which resulted in the cancellation of these historical grants?

First of all, the notion that a non-profit centre can unfairly benefit is rather illogical - unfair to whom? After all, we are talking about a non-profit system where 100 per cent of the revenue goes into the organization. Secondly, recent research, using Department of Community Service data, has clearly demonstrated that historical grants do not give non-profit centres a revenue-generating advantage. Let's face it, that is the bottom line: the ability of a centre to generate revenue.

This is the same conclusion, that the grants do not provide a revenue generating advantage, that was reached six years ago by a sub-committee of the government's own Round Table on Child Care. Why was this evidence ignored now? Why was the decision of six years ago reversed? There are several non-profit centres who will benefit from this grant and that's wonderful. It should have happened a long time ago. But there are centres that will be destabilized and will be disadvantaged.

To look at revenue, we need to look at fees. We cannot hope to support families without addressing the cost of care. Other provinces recognize this. If the department is truly committed to helping families and promoting quality in the workplace, historical grants would not be clawed back. A non-profit centre on the South Shore charges \$21 a day. When the historical grants are added in, the total revenue generated for a space there is \$25. Down the road, you will find another centre which charges \$30 a day. According to this plan, the centre charging a family \$21 will receive no new funding and, indeed, might have their funding reduced, while the centre that is charging families \$30 a day will receive \$3 more. The disparity thus increases from \$5 to \$8 a day. Would it not seem logical to want to raise the revenue of the non-profit centre to parity with the other? We are talking

annually a difference, given these figures, of over \$49,000 a year. Unfortunately, the opposite is true.

This is not an isolated case. Examples can be found all around the province. A parent reported that a local child care centre planned to charge her \$40 a day for an infant space. A few blocks away is a non-profit centre which receives, in total, \$35 - that is the parent fees plus the historical grants. Already we are looking, again, at a disparity of \$5. Under the new scheme, the first centre will add \$8 to their revenue while the second centre will receive no new funding. The disparity jumps to \$13 a day. That is over \$33,000 a year in an average infant classroom. Who exactly is this grant serving and where is this level playing field?

Those centres excluded from new funding will have to raise fees in order to survive but that is not supporting families and that is not even an option for some centres in areas of higher financial need. The disparity will grow and communities will suffer.

This plan does not look at communities, it does not look at neighbourhoods or their families in those neighbourhoods. As I said, some non-profit centres will benefit from this grant and, again, that's wonderful. Not all centres get the grant, not all centres get the same amount but if the historical grants, indeed, are clawed back, the shortfall will have to be made up somewhere or the centre will close.

This government has said it is not its job to set fees; I understand that. Some other governments do but if a centre can charge and expect to receive \$40 per day for a space, do they really need public funds, tax dollars, to boost that revenue? We need to ask where that \$40 goes. Other centres have balanced their budgets with far less and paid better salaries and benefits to their staff, with similar expenditures.

If I were a suspicious type, I might conclude that this funding model is a political response to a lobby group. It certainly cannot be considered as a plank in building a community-responsive child care system. The government has taken the stance that funding private businesses with public dollars is fine but not at the expense of community-based centres. However, the matter of accountability for this new operating grant is a huge issue and I would be pleased to answer any questions on that further.

As we look at the further details for this new grant, we see further contradictions and further loopholes. What we are faced with is a list of maybes. To add insult to injury, the new grant is not stable funding. It is based on enrolment and it will be assessed every six months. Funding, including those for the so-called grandparented centres, can decrease and decreased enrolment does not necessarily translate into decreased staffing costs. Isn't that where this grant is supposed to go?

Ratios must be maintained. In a two-teacher program, class enrolment would have to drop 50 per cent before staff layoffs could occur. The reality is that centres will be penalized for serving seasonal workers or students on an eight-month to 10-month

schedule, or indeed holding enrolment at less than capacity for a whole list of legitimate, usually based on quality, reasons. It certainly seems logical, also, to anticipate that a centre might not be as flexible in offering options other than full-time attendance, if it means funding cuts. How does that support families and our centres, to set salary scales based on a six-month reevaluation?

The portable subsidy plan is another case in point where myth and reality don't meet. Serving families and providing choice was the mantra. By the way, all centres with the new grant do have to sign on to the portable plan and previously that was not the case. In HRM there were approximately 25 centres previously that were not participating in this program. Of course, signing the program does not mean a centre will actually have to accept families on subsidy. A centre could decide that the paperwork or the cash flow challenges, of which there are many, are not for them; but here, again, parents' fees pose an issue.

Is it supporting families when subsidy or per diem rates are a mere fraction of the price? No. Is it reasonable to expect a family eligible for full subsidy to pay \$20.25 per day as would be the case in the example I mentioned earlier, the difference between what is charged and what the government will support? No. Is it supporting families when they are faced with uncertainty that a portable subsidy may or may not be available when they need it? No. Can you say you are supporting families when the eligibility guidelines have not changed in some 15 years and without the guarantee of subsidy seats, would a centre open or expand in an area of high financial need? No.

The government has failed to see that there has to be a connection between all of these initiatives. One component cannot be successful in isolation and to develop a system, something sustainable, giving away money to centres, which have no long-term community ties, is no more than giving away money and boosting someone's revenue. Where is the investment in the future? You can't support families if you don't support those centres that are truly community based, community responsive and community driven.

Finally, I find it difficult to gage how serious this government really is in its goal to support families in developing a system where their own financial commitment to the process is in question. Despite having a surplus, the last reports indicate that provincial funding has actually decreased by over \$2 million in early childhood development. This is from a 2004-2005 report that was just published. I think it was referred to earlier. If it were not for the federal funds, I'm not too sure where we would be.

There are plans out there - very well-thought-out comprehensive plans, even made-in-Nova Scotia plans - which have been developed based on true evidence and community involvement. This government has chosen to ignore the research and even ignore the messages, I feel, from their own consultations. This made-in-Nova Scotia plan, as it is now being implemented, will not result in any real change. We will not progress towards the development of a system and no real support for families will result in the long term - that's the reality. The rest is myth. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you Margo, and welcome Karen. You've certainly given us a lot of food for thought and questioning. Who would like to start? Trevor.

[10:15 a.m.]

MR. TREVOR ZINCK: Margo, it's nice to see you again. It was almost a year ago that I first sat down with you and I can say today that you were as passionate then as you are now. It's real interesting to see, and I think that you do actually have a keen interest in seeing this sector be successful and how important it is to all families in Nova Scotia.

I just want to go back to the portable spaces in the hopes that you can help me better understand, as an elected official. It's a big component of this 10-year plan and they're going to attempt to roll out 100 seats every year, or 150 seats every year, to the maximum of, I believe it's 1,000 seats. Do you have any idea of what kind of waiting lists we have in Nova Scotia for child care in comparison to how many seats this plan will actually create?

MS. KIRK: That's a very interesting question. In some places, there are wait lists. However, the wait list is not necessarily for the subsidy, the wait list is for the space in the first place. That is one concern I have with the portable system. The way it is now set up is that families go on wait lists at the centre and then families also have to register in the region for a portable seat. Now, the probability that one will come to the top at the same time as the other is facilitated - that's a very big question.

The flip side of that is what is offered in the portable system anyway? You don't have to earn a lot of money in order to qualify. A two-parent family earning just more than minimum wage will not qualify for the full subsidy. There are a lot of families who should qualify who don't qualify. That's where the eligibility guidelines come in. They haven't been changed since 1989 or early 1990, something like that. So very few people qualify. I believe in the HRM at the moment, there is no waiting list for portable subsidy and I would suggest that is partly because those who do want to access it can't find a space to put it and others who want to access it aren't eligible.

Increasing the number of spaces is not going to answer the question. You have to look at the whole package and how you can communicate with families, how you can facilitate them getting into the centre when they need it. I have had calls from parents who have said, I was just given a portable subsidy space, when can I start with my infant? My response is maybe next Christmas at the earliest. So the two systems are not jelling together. There has to be a way to pull that together.

One very easy way to solve that problem, of being on two different wait lists and trying to coordinate two different systems, is to remove the cap. Right now, there is a ceiling on how many spaces it will be increased but there is that ceiling so there is the possibility - all those maybes again - of somebody actually finding a space in a centre but not being able to access the portable. Or, as I said, the reverse, accessing the portable space but having nowhere to put it. By removing the cap, what that does is it means if someone

comes to the centre and I have a space, then all I have to do is make the phone call, make the appointment and you know they are in. We do not have to wait to find out whether it's an if, or whether it's a maybe or- if it's a maybe- how long are we going to have to wait? It's a done deal. New Brunswick has that system, Nova Scotia does not.

MR. ZINCK: When the rollout of the portable spaces came, along with it were several advertisements - Something Good Is Happening in Nova Scotia. Part of the frustration for me, I think, would be in particular in rural Nova Scotia because, as I understand it, I may be allocated a portable seat and basically it's attached to the family of the child. In rural Nova Scotia, I think this is crucial because we see a lot of out-migration, whether it is to outside the province or to the inner core, the urban core into metro. If an individual is allocated that portable space in a rural area and for job relocation reasons moves to the metro area, I see a huge problem if they can't get a space. Then the funding for that centre that had that portable space being used, correct me if I am wrong, they no longer have that funding coming in. Is there a portion of that, unless someone comes in and actually takes up another space but who is moving to rural Nova Scotia? I guess that's my point.

MS. KIRK: That's a very great concern. Again, the way the program is currently implemented, it does cause great concerns to centres, especially those in areas that do cater to high- needs, financial - need families. To use sort of an example, I will use the metro area just because that is what I am more familiar with but exactly the same thing happens here. Portable seats here are assigned, across the province, they are assigned by the region. So there is some jiggling around. If you find one is a little too high, they will do that. However, within the region, there is no accountability toward individual neighbourhoods or communities.

So, for example, if the North End Community Centre, which as I said is in a high-need area, if a parent there with a portable subsidy left, the child turned five, they are off to public school, no longer need the space. Well, what's to say that the next person on the portable subsidy list is going to want to pick up that space in that centre? It might be that the next person on the list lives in Musquodoboit so you're not addressing the needs of that community.

Now that space may be filled but it won't be filled by someone from that community because we know that's really not financially feasible. It may be filled by someone coming in from Bedford, on their way downtown, but then that centre is not meeting its mandate to serve the families in its community. So it does add very much, a lot of uncertainty to centres, the way it is set out now, and you're right, you do end up with comings and goings. Because of the way - I mean I know it is supposed to allow choice but I think that's really a false choice because there are so many centres with waiting lists that if I go find a space, I might be driving all the way across town anyway for it. So again, it's not - there are complications, there are definite issues with the way it is being implemented right now.

MR. ZINCK: Do I have time for two questions or - just one? Okay. Do you think, with today's work force, in today's economy, that there is a need for parents to have - my colleague touched on after-school programs and whatnot. In today's economy a lot of families, in particular single-parent families, are working shift work, usually part-time, it's very unstable; it is not 8 to 4 usually, it's not 9 to 5. With the Sunday shopping, sales trends have changed now, it is not Monday to Friday the bulk of the sales, it's Thursday to Sunday.

So for a parent who needs after 5 child care, maybe 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., or weekend child care, has there been a need in the sector for that? Have there been parents approaching different centres for that type of care?

MS. KIRK: There has. Also, being at Dalhousie, I get calls from nurses, doctors again - 12 hour shifts, that kind of thing. There have been centres that have offered extended hours but it boils down to dollars and cents. It is very expensive to provide sort of "after regular hour care". Obviously you have the staffing costs but you may only be serving a few families and that won't cover your expenditures. So without some kind of support, without some kind of infrastructure already built in, the bottom line is that it is just not financially feasible to do so.

MR. ZINCK: So would that go along with looking at the needs of the community then?

MS. KIRK: Absolutely, absolutely.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Stephen.

MR. MCNEIL: You mentioned the cap. Is the cap on portable spaces or on subsidized spaces?

MS. KIRK: The portable spaces are the subsidized spaces. There is a fixed number, a limited number of subsidies that can be had in the province. I don't know what the total is now, I know it was going to increase over the next several years as part of this plan, but there is a finite number, that if you're the next one up, you have to wait for somebody to withdraw from the program before you can sign on.

MR. MCNEIL: So there are no subsidized, fixed spaces to individual daycares?

MS. KIRK: There are, those are being converted to portable. There is a scheme in place that's going to start April 1st, to convert all fixed spaces to portable. That, again, may put some neighbourhoods in jeopardy if there is a cap and if those people in those neighbourhoods are not going to be able to access the portable system, portable seats when they need it.

One of the advantages of having fixed seats in a centre is that the wait lists and the families and their needs can be managed by that centre so you're not looking at it

regionally, you're looking at it in the community. We've had families that get a really good summer job, are bumped off the subsidy program but then go back to school in the Fall and things change or whatever, and the contract ends.

School age is a perfect example - we had a huge discussion about school-aged children. Their schedule changes, they may use only two-thirds of a full day space during the school year. They may only use one-third of the space, after school only, during the school year, but they will need a full space during March break, July and August, that kind of thing. Having the fixed spaces in the centre means I can manage that, balance the numbers and make it work for the families.

If the conversion is going to go through the way it was described to us yesterday, to use my university children's centre as an example, we have been using 29 full subsidy spaces - average - for the last little while. However, I have 36 children on a list, so there are actually 36 children using those 29 spaces. Come summer, that 29 will jump up to 36, because everybody will be attending full time, the school age children will be attending full time.

With the conversion, the department is telling me if I'm only using 29, then they're going to take away and turn into portable those seats that, theoretically, I am not using - although I do have names in them, I'm just not using the full quota. In June, I may be faced with looking at some families and saying, I can accommodate you, you and you on a full-time schedule, but that's my limit, so you, you and you are going to have to go regionally and apply for a portable space.

Yesterday, I could not be guaranteed that portable spaces would be available for those families. Long-range planning also is very difficult when you're looking at that kind of thing. We set up in May and June, we make commitments with families to start in September within the portable system. As it is now - that's not to say it's not fixable - but as it is now, that would not be possible.

MR. MCNEIL: So is the issue the cap? Or, is the issue the portability? In your mind.

MS. KIRK: If you want to go with a portable system, then the issue is the cap. Yes.

MR. MCNEIL: Okay. Just from a person on the outside looking in, portability seems like it allows flexibility to that family and child. Every presenter today referred back to what's in the best interest of the child and family. I guess portability and flexibility in that family to provide child care to their child - how is that bad, if we remove the cap, if we take away the cap.

MS. KIRK: If we take away the cap, then that's fine. The problem with having a cap- again it's a little more complicated than the simple statement of flexibility. Because we are in such a crunch as to availability of spaces anyway, a recent survey was done here

in the HRM and the average length of a wait list is 109 names. I do recognize that people do go on several different wait lists, but even if we figure one-quarter of those names are duplicates, you're still talking about quite a few families around HRM.

[10:30 a.m.]

Yes, it can add flexibility, however what cuts down on that flexibility is the availability of space in the first place, so it's really a false economy unless you look at as a whole package and address the issue of accessibility because of cost and availability because there aren't any spaces to be had anyway.

So, it is complicated.

MR. MCNEIL: Everything around child care is complicated, trust me. But the issue is- I just, for my own sake- it's not the portability, we could say the issue then is the cap or the issue is about the lack of spaces across the board.

MS. KIRK: If the cap was removed, then a family applying to any centre who is in need of a subsidy, would be able to access one.

MR. MCNEIL: There still would be the regions with inside removing the cap. Right?

MS. KIRK: Well, if you remove the cap, I guess it wouldn't matter where you were. That would eliminate the concerns of one neighbourhood having a higher need for subsidy than another neighbourhood. That would eliminate the problem of wait listing and trying to balance and getting a subsidy at the same time as I find a space. If the portable system is the way you want to go, then the only way it will work to best meet the needs of choice and accessibility for families is to remove the cap

MR. MCNEIL: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Gordie.

MR. GORDON GOSSE: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you for coming in today, Margo. I enjoyed your presentation. It was bang on. I remember advocates within the child care field for many years, back in 2003, called this Canada's newest social program - child care.

MS. KIRK: Yes.

MR. GOSSE: I remember how everybody was so happy and then, a year later, it's like they pricked the balloon and everything went poof. Here we are today in this situation where, you know, the words you used today were crunch and crisis - all of those things - and that's the way to describe the child care system in the Province of Nova Scotia, from

the delays and for all kinds of reasons, and it is a very complicated issue. So my thing would be to you, will this force non-profit day care centres to raise their fees, this new program?

MS. KIRK: If the implementation of the new child care general operating grant stays the way it is, the answer is yes.

MR. GOSSE: Young families, this is going to make it twice as hard - for making it affordable for young families today, young families, the young, single people who have stayed out of the workforce and waited until a child turned five to go back to school, they're the ones who are going to be hit the most in this program, because there's no child care for them, non-profit child care, there are no spaces or anything available for them, is that correct?

MS. KIRK: That's right. Ironically enough, the average, or a reasonable tuition to expect to pay for a 3-year-old, for example, in this province, is between \$5,000 and \$6,000 a year. Ironically enough, that's about the tuition at Dalhousie. Yet, when you get to Dalhousie, you've had 20 years to save up in educational funds and those kinds of thing to save that. There's no such support for young families.

MR. GOSSE: My final question would be, code blue, is that still on the go . . .

MS. KIRK: Yes, it is.

MR. GOSSE: . . .and still working hard to . . .

MR. KIRK: Yes, it is.

MR. GOSSE: Okay, thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I will call upon the member for Dartmouth South-Portland Valley.

MS. MARILYN MORE: Thank you Mr. Chair. Margo, I was disturbed to hear you suggest at the beginning of your presentation that you sensed a bias in this new plan of the departments towards the commercial for-profit child care centres, because it hasn't been raised today. I know probably a year or two ago, there was a lot of concern about the possibility under some of our international trade agreements of commercial big-box centres being able to move into Canada because some public money seemed to be going into the for-profit centres. I'm just wondering, from your perspective - I know on the Child Care Advocacy Association that you're involved with, nationally, that you must hear what's happening across Canada. Is that fear of the big-box commercial outfits still there? Now that we're pumping even more money into our commercial sector in Nova Scotia, are we opening the door, are we putting our child care sector at risk even more?

MS. KIRK: I think we certainly are. Child care is an interesting field. You can consider yourself in child care if you have a few children come to your home, and that sort of thing, but there is definitely a business, and money to be made. For those who don't think there's money to be made in child care, I'm not too sure Eddie Groves in Australia - who is a Canadian by the way, who is one of the youngest multi-millionaires there, who made his money on child care - would agree with you. It is very difficult to separate the small community initiatives that may be commercial, from the bigger ventures, but a line has to be drawn somewhere. Accountability is also a major question on these funds. Obviously, a centre would not be in business if it wasn't profitable, that is the business model.

I think it needs to be understood that when you look at commercial and when you look at non-profit, they are two very distinct entities. Their legal structure is different, their accountability structure is different, their funding structures may be different. They are legally and financially very different bodies. So to try to mesh the two and call it the same - it is just not possible. But by putting money into not necessarily the private sector but the commercial sector for the businesses, you are opening yourself up to major commercialism, which may or may not be something that - it is something I don't want in this province - but that is a definite threat.

There are so many studies that show that quality was mentioned earlier. Yes, there are commercial centres that have reasonable quality, but if you are looking at a system, if you are looking at pulling together a system, then you can't do that if it is at the whim of a business and we will be facing that in the future.

MS. MORE: We had a tremendous opportunity with the influx of federal funding that came in between 2005 and 2007 - the \$39 million, essentially - to actually create a system instead of the patchwork model that we had been operating under. I have seen that money, even though it was two years only, used to considerably improve the systems in other provinces. What needs to be done in Nova Scotia to help the department and the government better respond to the needs of those who want to develop a sustainable, quality, affordable system in Nova Scotia? It appears that we are still on different tracks here in Nova Scotia. Do you have any suggestions as to what we need to do to have that common vision and understanding of how that public money needs to be invested here to help our children.

I think everyone wants the best start possible for children in Nova Scotia and especially now that we have fewer and fewer of them, we have more invested in them in terms of how it's going to impact on the rest of us. We can't afford to get this wrong, so what do we need to do to bring this 10-year plan back on track?

MS. KIRK: I think one of the things you need to do is look at the communities. Non-profit, in itself, is a community development model. They are managed by boards of directors - many are parents, but many are also people in that community. So if you want

to develop something sustainable that can be integrated into other systems, you have to look at the community and look at it as a community development model.

There have been discussions and well-written papers about looking at hub models. A paper just recently released from the Council for Child Development in Ontario, by Fraser Mustard and Stewart Shankar, looks at schools as a hub and then resources are accessible by that. It's a question of communication, of coordinating the infrastructure and coordinating the communication systems so that one system does feed into another. I don't see anything in this new plan that provides that coordination, that provides for that community development that will eventually have the responsibility in the community to decide what resources they need, if a parent centre is needed. Maybe not a parent centre, maybe they need to build more children's libraries or a drop in or whatever, but that's where community development comes in. I don't see anything in this plan that will truly support community development to expand and to really promote an integrated system.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The honourable member for Bedford.

HON. LEONARD GOUCHER: Thank you for being here today. I am going to make an opening statement and say that, although I am at this point in time in my life, I am not removed from the issue of child care, having a grandson who has lived me for the last nine years of his life.

First of all, I just want to touch on the issue of private sector. I don't view the private sector as something that is negative - never will. The private sector has filled in my grandson's life in education, recreation and many other areas where the public sector wasn't able to provide the facilities. I can look at HRM and many of the things that they provide that just aren't possibly - they can't provide within the tax base. So sometimes the private sector will fill in and fill the void. I think the case of daycare, that is not a bad thing. I know the challenges that you have and, my goodness, I don't even pretend to understand half of them, but I still view that as not a negative thing.

Madam Chairman, I would like to, if I could, ask the deputy just to come back, because you mentioned that they were here to ask a question and I would like to get a bit of a clarification on the issue of portability and the cap, if I could, and if that is okay with you. I would just like to ask the deputy if there is any clarification that the department can provide with regard to- there has been a lot of conversation with regard to the issue of portability cap and different issues. Could I ask that through you, Madam Chairman?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Could someone from the department perhaps use the standing microphone ?

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: Thanks very much. I will start and Jane will rescue me if she needs to fill in here. I guess, to start, I would certainly share the perspective in terms of this being a complex issue, which is why we spoke at the beginning about how important

it is for us to get the plan right and to take the time to do what we need to do to make sure that we are getting the plan right.

Margo and I haven't officially met yet, so I guess I would just like to say thank you very much for your comments. I appreciate your perspective. Certainly, I know that we have heard that within the department and obviously appreciate your passion and dedication for the children and the families who you serve. Certainly we are lucky to have people like you involved in the sector and that makes a tremendous difference in the work that we do. The department's role - Margo presented, obviously, a perspective today and I know those are issues that we have grappled with in the department. We have heard a number of perspectives through the process, from providers generally, from families and our job is to balance those in terms of providing a plan.

[10:45 a.m.]

So what we have tried to do, in terms of developing the plan, is focus on choice for families, maximizing the spaces that we have and doing that in a way that provides a provincial plan. Now having said that, we know that we have to look, in terms of our staff, on a regional basis and watch what's happening over this period of time in terms of the spaces, to keep an eye on how the spaces are being allocated, what the movement is like, so that we know how to exactly be able to look at some of the issues that Margo raised today. We know that. We have talked to our staff internally about doing that and we are going to do that.

We know we have to do things like have a better wait list management process and we are going to do that and have better opportunities for families to find out where the spaces are, particularly once we get the new spaces, and we are going to have another 400 portable spaces. Part of the discussion that we have around the conversion of the spaces from fixed to portable, is so that we can maximize the spaces that we have, so that we can insure that the low-income families who need those spaces have access to those spaces. That's a key element of this plan that is very important and that goes hand in hand with having the spaces, having the conversion to the portable spaces.

I also know, in terms of some of the concerns that were raised around the four months, six months and the seasonal, my understanding - and if I am wrong here please correct me - that we have time lines in place. In particular, a four month period exactly to compensate for seasonal workers for summer, so we have thought about that. We've looked at that, and I know those are things that we've considered in the plan.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: If I may interrupt, just to get back to Mr. Goucher's point about the cap and the portable - did you want to comment on that?

MS. JUDITH FERGUSON: Well, we are going to - part of the plan is to introduce 400 more subsidized, portable spaces. So those spaces will be in the system and they will be available for low-income families. Part of the goal around the conversion of the spaces

from fixed to portable is to ensure that the maximum number that we can sustain within the plan of portable spaces are available for low-income families.

MR. GOUCHER: Madam Chairman, thank you very much, deputy. Again, I don't want anybody to misunderstand me with my comments, but I'm not foreign to this whole issue. I've had it for a large part of my life, and we're still dealing with it even at this point in time, because I have two teachers in the family now and that's why I was late this morning, to be quite frank with you, because of my grandson.

I appreciate the work that you do, I appreciate your comments. I know that everybody in this room probably has a prospectus on the issue and we could probably have 12 different ones in the room, but I do appreciate the work that you do and your efforts and your commitment to the new child care sector. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

MS. KIRK: Could I make a little comment on that?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Certainly.

MS. KIRK: You're perfectly right, the commercial sector has played a very important role over the last quite a few years, that is partly because of the difficulty in organizing non-profit - there has been no infrastructure, there's been no support at all for a non-profit structure, so the commercial sector has come in to fill that void. You are absolutely right.

Having a commercial sector is not a negative thing. I mean, we have the elementary school system, we have public schools, we have private schools, that is not the issue at all. The issue is the use of public funds, first of all, and the accountability of those funds.

There were several plans. I know the Child Care Advocacy Association have put forth - they have a paper called From Patchwork to Framework. That was developed a few years ago and it was pulled together as a plan, as a framework for developing a system of early childhood development.

I know that many members of the department actually participated in the consultations that were here in Halifax a few years ago. One of the things that the Child Care Advocacy Association has said is, yes, recognize the commercial centres that have filled the void because of government policy development over the years, but then draw the line, because if you don't draw that line, as we mentioned before, you will be leaving yourself open to a very high, commercialized-type of system that I don't think will meet the needs of Nova Scotia. That has been proved in other provinces, definitely proved internationally, in the States, in Australia, in New Zealand - I could go on.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I don't have anyone else on the list, and we do need approximately 10 minutes to do some housekeeping items that are on the second page of our agenda. Karen, did you want to add anything to the discussion?

MS. KAREN GEDDES: I guess I came primarily to support Margo today, but one of the things that is coming across clearly in the non-profit community right now - we've been in several meetings over the last week or so - is the frustration of some of the centres that historically have developed child care in this province, centres that have been in existence for 30 years, have long-term staff, don't necessarily have the issues of staff turnover, because we have staff who have been with us for 15 to 25 years and, at this time, it's going to be very difficult to explain to those staff why they're potentially going to be overlooked with any increases in a time period where recruitment and retention is key.

The other piece that I will just briefly speak to is, there cannot be expansion in this field until we stabilize what we have now. We don't have the staff and the resources to expand, so all this talk of spaces may be for nothing.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I guess we have one quick question and then Margo, I'll just give you a couple of minutes to finish up if you want, and we'll move on to the rest of our agenda.

MR. GOSSE: I just had one quick question. I just wanted to know what the income level was for the subsidy for the spaces? I just want to know what the income cut-off level is, whether it is the department . . .

MS. KIRK: It's a sliding scale. It's not an all or nothing kind of thing. It is based on the size of the family and the adults and the number of dependents.

MR. GOSSE: A single mother with two children, what would that be?

MS. KIRK: Under \$30,000?

MR. GOSSE: Yes.

MS. KIRK: Is it under \$24,000?

MS. O'CONNELL: If you are a single parent with one child, you would be cut off at \$24,900. But, from \$16,000 to \$24,900, you'd have an opportunity to have some access with respect to the subsidy program. A single parent would be cut off completely when the single parent reaches the salary of \$24,900.

MR. GOSSE: Would that scale be available to the committee members?

MS. O'CONNELL: Certainly, it's a public scale.

MR. GOSSE: Okay.

MS. KIRK: What that means is in real terms, because those guidelines - that's what I mean when I say guidelines, the ceiling and the eligibility requirements for a subsidy -

what that means is that single parent, with an income of \$24,900, is probably looking at out of that \$24,900, they're going to be paying \$5,000, \$6,000 out of that in child care.

MR. GOSSE: That's what I thought.

MS. KIRK: So, as I said, very low.

MR. GOSSE: Thank you very much.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Margo, do you have any closing comments before . . .

MS. KIRK: I think the issues are very, very complex. I think, very frequently, there is a disconnect between what the actual policy statement is and how it hits the floor in a child care centre.

As I said, the proof is in the detail and unfortunately, the concept may sound very good, but when it's getting to the implementation stage right now, whether we're talking- and I could go through any of the components of the plan, when it gets to the implementation stage, we have major, major problems and concerns that puts stress on families and on the centres who are trying to implement those programs.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much and we appreciate the two of you coming this morning. I want to thank all our presenters this morning. Obviously, we want to put our children's interests first and I think that's why we allotted three hours to this particular topic. There's still a lot to be done and I can only pray that we get the coordination and the collaboration in place that allows us to move forward on creating a quality, inclusive, affordable child care and early learning system in Nova Scotia. Our children deserve it and we are in positions of responsibility to make this happen.

For 30 years, we've been waiting to do this and now we have some federal funding, let's make sure it's invested in a way that's going to move this forward. So, thank you to all our presenters.

Committee members, if you could look at the second page of your agenda, I'm just going to jump to the last item first. Our next meeting is going to be an afternoon meeting on Thursday, April 19th. We're going to come back to our list and it's going to be the Services for Persons with Disabilities. Please make note that it's in the afternoon.

MR. GOUCHER: Madam Chairman, can I just - with regard to the meetings, can I ask a question?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Certainly.

MR. GOUCHER: This may not be a popular question to ask, but I'm going to be honest with you. Between everything that's happening in the House, between Cabinet,

between caucus meetings - when the House is in session, I really believe we have to look at restructuring when these meetings are held. That's just my own opinion, I don't know how other people feel around the table, but to call a meeting - I had a Cabinet meeting this morning along with the other minister, I'm sure there were caucus meetings here.

I think these meetings are great, but we've got to deal with the timing and also the whole issue of when the House is in session. It does create a situation where I don't get to my constituency, I don't get to some of the meetings and I really think it's critical, because we all have a job to do outside of this and maybe we could schedule the meetings, or if we have to schedule a couple of extra ones outside of the normal period. It is just my own personal opinion, but I find the timing a little bit difficult.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well it certainly doesn't happen very often, but let's add it to our next agenda to discuss in a little more detail.

MR. COLWELL: Actually I would like to discuss that today, because number one, how do we get to the meeting at eight o'clock this morning? How was that decided? I wasn't contacted about it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, we received information from the Progressive Conservative caucus that they needed to be out of here by eleven o'clock so we bumped it earlier to accommodate their . . .

MR. COLWELL: Well I'd just like the courtesy in the future to contact us and see if it's appropriate for us.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I understand that the three caucus offices were notified and asked for some input.

MR. COLWELL: Researchers don't make a decision when we have a meeting, we do as MLAs.

MS. RHONDA NEATT: They were going to check with the MLAs to see if it was okay.

MR. COLWELL: Yes, well, check with our staff and I don't know who you contacted, but I think it is a very important topic we covered this morning and three hours was probably not even enough time to do it. We've got to have these things structured so we can attend.

I missed the caucus meeting this morning, so has my colleague . . .

MR. GOSSE: We all have. I miss my constituencies on Sunday. What are you talking about?

MR. COLWELL: But anyway, I would just like a structure and the courtesy from the Chair to make sure we're contacted and we can come up with it. That is what happens on all the other committees I'm on, every one, if there's going to be a change.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: But the issue - I mean I've explained to you what happened about today, okay. The issue that we're now discussing, though, is whether or not we want to schedule committee meetings when we're in session - right?

MR. DUNN: Yes, and that's another question. That's a comment I wanted to make and actually before putting this meeting to an end because talking with various members of all three Parties this past week and a half, there seemed to be a consensus that we don't, that our lives are already pressed enough with all our duties and responsibilities and so on, that perhaps during that span of time we just wouldn't meet.

[11:00 a.m.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, depending on how often we're in the House, that could severely compact what months were available to meet. Stephen.

MR. MCNEIL: Yes, Madam Chairman, I think - I don't know if we should say a blanket policy every time we're in the House, but I think we do have to be mindful right now that we're in Budget Estimates and two members of this committee are ministers. In preparing - whether or not they're on call, to be pulled in, who knows, all of those things, to prepare for the estimates and all of us are going to want to have questions answered around their budget portfolios.

I think to be fair to them, and really to be . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm not disagreeing, but I'm just saying we all knew a month ago that this meeting was scheduled during the session.

MR. MCNEIL: No, no, I'm just saying around - I don't mind having meetings during our normal House sitting. It's during the Budget Estimates issue where I think, because for me, there's a lot of work to do as well, in terms of preparing for - and for everybody - this is just a heavy workload time to cover it all. So I would suggest that if we're going to look at - and particularly on the 19th, I don't know whether we'll be in the House or not but I assume the budget will be over with by then. I think it is just something for our committee to be mindful of around . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Exactly, and perhaps it's something during organizational meetings that we can build some flexibility in, especially around the Spring budget session. I don't disagree. Believe me, it's impacting on me as much as it's impacting on the rest of you, so this is not (Interruptions) Yes.

MR. ZINCK: I mean, maybe it's something that we can all check with some of the other committees. The Public Accounts Committee meets every week. They have a lot. Some of us saw the books that were rolled into the House the other day that they would have had to gone through. You had to put it off yesterday, the questioning, because you didn't have time to prepare. Maybe it's something we can get together with the other committees on and see what kind of response they're having. If it's twice a year that we sit, well, maybe those two months, maybe we just shouldn't - but we should check with the other committees to see what they're opinions are as well, and then have it as a general consensus of all.

MR. COLWELL: Just on the Human Resources Committee, we made a resolution the other day that when the House is in session, the only thing we're going to do is appointments to Agencies, Boards and Commissions, no other business, because that usually takes anywhere from five minutes to an hour, we're finished. We still keep the business going, but we're not going to have anybody come forward as witnesses. That was uniformly approved by all members, all caucuses. (Interruption)

MR. DUNN: Just on the Resources Committee, we didn't go into any detail, but the feeling was roughly the same with regard to what Keith was saying.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, let's take this issue back to our caucuses and develop a strategy that covers all the standing committees. That makes a lot of sense. Listen, can we just move on. Remember we ran out of time at the Forum on Poverty, and there were additional motions that Gordie was bringing forward. Do we have copies of those? I would at least like to get those into the formal record of our meeting, at this meeting. So we're going to pass those around.

As a committee, we developed three motions, and one of them went forward in the letter to the Premier. The Premier's Office has acknowledged - okay, so the package that's coming out to you has the letter to the Premier, it has the motions from Gordie, and it has the three motions that we voted on as a committee on the third page, only one of which was sent in the letter to the Premier. I think the other two go to the department.

MR. COLWELL: Which one are we talking about first?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Let's do the one we've already voted on. That's the three, the recommendations from the Forum on Poverty, there are three of them. It starts with reduction of clawback.

MR. COLWELL: So that has already been done?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, we voted on it, but only one of them has been communicated to the Premier. Two of them go to the department. So if it's your wish, we can send them in a letter to the Minister of Community Services, because we just haven't taken any action on them yet. So I need to get a sense from the committee as to how you

want to handle those two. It was number three, recommendation three, that we sent to the Premier. We still need to take action on recommendations one and two.

MR. MCNEIL: I would say, Madam Chairman, I would forward those to the minister. Those would be just to let her know what the recommendations of our committee were.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay. Gordie, what do you want to do with the five recommendations that we didn't have time to put on the record at the forum?

MR. ZINCK: Sorry, we're missing a committee member. Is Leo still around?

AN. HON. MEMBER: No he had to go.

MR. ZINCK: Okay, I thought I heard him there.

MR. GOSSE: We can delay for another - I don't want to overburden some of the members here with the workload that we have. I've seen the stress all week, because this is the second time this week that they've asked in two different committees that they not have to have presentations by members because the workload that we carry as MLAs is overburdening on them, and I can see that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Do you want to defer (Interruptions)

MR. MCNEIL: Madam Chairman, I don't think that's quite fair. I think what was suggested here was whether we should be holding meetings during - and what I had suggested was during budget season. Whether the member opposite acknowledges it or not, ministers have a greater responsibility in terms of preparing to answer questions to all of us in the House, the remaining members of the House. That's all that was being suggested, so, not that we were overburdened.

MR. GOSSE: I'm simply pointing on the trend, this is the second time within the last week that this has happened.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, but we finished with that topic.

MR. GOSSE: Well, you asked me a question about those recommendations and I gave you my opinion.

MR. MCNEIL: Since the member wants to put those on hold, I would agree.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Why don't we defer them to our next meeting.

MR. GOSSE: Simple as that. (Interruption)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay. Now, we've had some correspondence. The Valley Autism Support Team have asked to come before this committee. They presented to us in October 28, 2004. Still on our agenda we have the disabilities which may be next month, we still have the National Welfare Council Report on our agenda. Do you want to add autism? Obviously, if we're going to talk about that issue we would have to include more than just the Valley, we'd want to cover the province. Do you want to add autism to the list?

MR. ZINCK: Because I'm new here, do we meet right into the summer? Is there a break, do we stop for a month in particular or do we continue on, every month have meetings? April, May, June, July, August? (Interruption)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think we usually go from June to September.

MR. MCNEIL: So on the schedule now, do we have something for May and June?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We have something for April and I'm assuming May would be the next topic on our list, the National Welfare Council Report, the national chair is from Nova Scotia. I believe that is the end of our list, so we do have room after that.

MR. MCNEIL: Can we look at moving the autism towards either June or September.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: June would be okay?

MR. COLWELL: I'll stress again, you are going to have people in that we will balance the presentations from different places in the province?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Definitely, yes. We'll look at the previous Hansard record and see what groups were invited at that time to make it province wide - that's a good point.

MR. CHISHOLM: Madam Chair, I was wondering on the disabilities groups, would that be NSLEO?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, it's the department. To have the department come and talk about their programs and services for persons with disabilities.

MR. CHISHOLM: I would like to see at some point in time maybe have NSLEO come in.

MR. COLWELL: I'd like to see a balance because today there was one lady here for all non-profit daycare centres. That's fine, I have no problem with that, and she was reasonably balanced with it, but I would also have liked to see someone here from the profit sector so we get both sides of the story instead of one side.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I don't disagree with you but we have a huge disability sector. How are we going to choose who comes to represent?

MR. MCNEIL: Is it with autism, Madam Chairman?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, we're talking about next month's meeting. It has been set up with the department. The other thing we could do is have a second meeting and invite representatives from the disabilities world to come after we've heard from the department, because it will be just a two hour meeting and believe me, I think there's going to be enough questions for the department, so if we wanted to after that we could have some representatives from those various organizations like NSLEO.

MR. COLWELL: That might be a good idea, Madam Chairman, because I like to get the balance of what the department says and the organizations say because sometimes they are saying the same thing and sometimes they are not. If we hear the whole thing, I think it's a lot better for us to make decisions and to move forward ideas.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So also, start to list additional agenda topics that you want because probably in September, we'll have an organizational meeting and we'll move to create a new list of witnesses and topics to bring in. Anything else from our committee business?

The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:10 a.m.]