

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Tuesday, February 5, 2008**

**Committee Room 1**

**Early Learning & Child Care Plan**

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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. Manning MacDonald

[Mr. Keith Colwell was replaced by Mr. Harold Theriault.]  
[Mr. Leo Glavine was replaced by Mr. Wayne Gaudet.]  
Mr. Manning MacDonald was replaced by Ms. Diana Whalen.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Charlene Rice  
Legislative Committee Clerk

## WITNESSES

### Child Care Advocacy Association of Nova Scotia

Ms. Valerie Blaauw - Chair  
Ms. Margie Vigneault - Vice Chair

### Private Licensed Administrators Association

Mr. Shane Richard - Co Chair  
Ms. Heather Hansen-Dubar - Co Chair

### Child Care Connection Nova Scotia

Ms. Barb Bigelow - Co Chair  
Ms. Elizabeth Hicks - Co Chair

### Non-Profit Directors Association

Ms. Margo Kirk - Member  
Ms. Laurie St. Amour - Secretary  
Ms. Susan Willis - Co Chair

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2008**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES**

1:00 P.M.

CHAIRMAN  
Ms. Marilyn More

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon. We'll get started because we have a number of presenters today. I want to thank everyone for coming. I know you have very busy schedules and heavy responsibilities, so it's wonderful to see so many of you out for this topic.

The Standing Committee on Community Services is going to be discussing the Early Learning and Child Care Plan this afternoon. We have four organizations presenting to us so we're going to use a slightly different format. What I'd like to suggest is that we ask the presenters, each group to perhaps speak for about five minutes, then we'll take about 20 minutes for questions. Then we'll move on to the next set of presenters and whatever time we have left over at the end we can continue with our questions.

We should stop around 2:50 p.m. because we have some committee business to do. So I ask the committee members to co-operate. We have a lot of information that we want to receive this afternoon so keep your questions focused and we'll move along.

Now we have a number of substitutes so I think we'll start off by introducing the members of the Standing Committee on Community Services and perhaps we'll start with Trevor.

[ The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Our first presenters are from the Child Care Advocacy Association of Nova Scotia. Perhaps you could introduce yourselves and any other members of your group that might be in attendance today. We'd like to hear your presentation, thank you for coming.

MS. VALERIE BLAAUW: Thank you for inviting us. We're very happy to be here and I have with me Margie Veniot. I'm the Chair, Valerie Blaauw, and this is Margie Veniot, she's the Vice-Chair. So we do thank the committee for the opportunity to speak on the Early Learning and Child Care Plan.

The Child Care Advocacy Association of Nova Scotia is an ad hoc group whose purpose is to improve the availability and quality of not-for-profit child care. We have a specific interest in improving the salaries and qualifications of early childhood educators and the cost and availability of not-for-profit child care.

The Early Learning and Child Care Plan has attempted to improve salaries by initiating the operating grant, of which 75 per cent must go to salaries. We feel this is an admirable initiative, however, our concerns are with the accountability of this grant. At this time, there is no check on how much of the grant actually reaches staff.

As we have seen with the stabilization grant, the \$15,000 annual salary quoted before the grant was established is still being quoted five years later, which indicates the grant is not necessarily reaching staff in some cases. It is our position that accountability of the spending of the grants be more thorough, to make sure that early childhood educators benefit from the intention of the grant.

Recruitment and retention of trained personnel is a major problem. Trained staff will not stay in the field without the recognition of the importance of their work. This includes salaries and benefits such as important long-term benefits like pensions. We would like to point out that the average salary of a long-term, five years or more trained early childhood educator is approximately the same as the starting salary of a teacher in the school system who also has the guarantee of an adequate pension.

Recognition that their training has more value than the equivalency designation that the department still allows is important and certainly worth more than the new amount suggested for the stabilization grant. This designation was intended, when it was originally put in place in the early 1980s, to allow people who had been working for some time in the field to obtain training while still working. Twenty years later, people are entering the field without official training and are able to take workshops in order to become equivalent to

trained even though accredited training courses are available. It is our position that the original intention of equivalency has been lost. If we are serious about providing a proper education for young children, we must eliminate this policy. The department will finally be adjusting the income levels for applying for subsidy and have also adjusted the minimum payment. We welcome this as a necessary support for parents. We would, however, look for the annual adjustment to the per diem rate that was in place until 1993. To increase the per diem rate on an annual basis would benefit parents.

Centres would not need to increase fees at the same rate they have been forced to do since the annual increase was cancelled in 1993. Since that time, centres have increased fees in order to keep up with costs. These fees are affordable for some but for others, especially subsidized families, they provide a budgetary challenge. We feel that all families should have equal access to quality, affordable care as is accepted in the school system.

Once again, we thank you for this opportunity and appreciate that the committee is interested in the child care system in Nova Scotia and how the Early Learning and Child Care Plan affects children, parents and staff.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Committee members, any points you want to clarify or questions? Wayne.

MR. WAYNE GAUDET: Madam Chair, I have several questions. I want to start off, is there a provincial scale or a provincial rate where early child educators are paid the same across the province?

MS. BLAAUW: No. Each centre sets its own salary scale individually. There is no requirement by the government to set a salary across the province.

MR. GAUDET: I'm just curious, what are we looking at in terms of, let's say in Yarmouth versus Halifax, or Cape Breton?

MS. BLAAUW: It's very hard to say without doing a study on it. It seems to run anything from \$15,000 up to \$27,000, \$30,000, it just depends on the centre and on where they are in the province, I guess. I think there was a recent survey done on some non-profit centres in the metro area and the average salary was around \$27,500 which included the stabilization grant.

MR. GAUDET: Do we have a sense of how much people outside the metro area are making?

MS. BLAAUW: No. The department has those figures, but I don't think they actually put them together because there is a requirement to report on salaries when you apply for the stabilization grant. They do have those figures, but I don't think they actually compile them to be useful to us.

MR. GAUDET: The reason I'm raising this, I know some centres in Clare right now, some of the educators are making approximately \$7.30, \$7.60. Some of the centres are actually having difficulties in retaining these educators, because of course it seems everyone else is paying a lot more. So people who have gone for training, who are coming back to work in these child centres, end up working in credit unions and banks - anywhere and everywhere, except child care centres.

Madam Chairman, I guess my final question is, has there been some pressure or requests made to the department, trying to address the need to have a provincial pay scale established, in order to maybe make it easier for child care centres to retain the educators?

MS. BLAAUW: Well, over the years we have suggested this to the department and we've always been told that it's not a requirement of the government to set those salaries, because centres are operating as individual organizations. So we don't really come under the governance of the department as far as setting salaries.

I mean there are some requirements that in order to receive the operating grant - 65 per cent of a centre's budget must go towards salaries and then 75 per cent of the grant, which is \$3 a day per child, must go towards salaries. So the aim is actually to improve salaries. I guess our problem is whether or not the department is actually going to make sure that happens.

MR. GAUDET: Can I just ask one last question?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, just let me get a feeling on how many others want to ask a question of this set of presenters.

Okay, I think we'll have to move on. I'm sorry, Wayne.

MR. GAUDET: Sure, thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Trevor, then Diana.

MR. TREVOR ZINCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman, I have just one question. Last year we saw the department roll out their family daycare program, the one it operates in people's homes but it's not really licensed directly. Is that of some concern, as far as recruiting workers for the non-profit sector, in your opinion?

[1:15 p.m.]

MS. BLAAUW: Well, I think just by its nature, family daycare is somewhat different to a child care centre. I'm not sure how far ahead they are with that particular plan. I know it's sort of - they've tried to establish contracts with some people in different areas. I'm not even sure what the requirement is for the people operating the family child care, whether they would require people with training or some experience in child care.

I think my real concern is that if you think of people earning \$7.60 an hour when they've taken maybe two years post-secondary training in order to work with young children and have all the skills required, I mean it's a question of respect for what they're doing. I think a lot of people leave child care, because they feel they don't get the respect that they should be getting for the kind of work they're doing.

Part of respect does come in salary, it's just one of the factors of our economy; you reward people monetarily and you also acknowledge them with benefits. So I think the reason we lose a lot of people is just because people can't afford to stay in it, for one thing, and it's sort of a lack of respect for what they're actually doing.

MR. ZINCK: I believe that it's actually the government's idea that this type of program will help rural Nova Scotia. Would you have that same opinion?

MS. BLAAUW: There's a place for family child care, both in rural areas and in the metro area, but I don't think it's the be-all and end-all. I think for children, there are some benefits to being in a child care centre that you definitely don't get in a family home, because of the education that they would be receiving, plus the fact that they would be with many other children that sort of brings a lot of - you know, it sort of improves the quality of what they're learning, because they're with other children. I think it has already been proven that the family daycares that have been in operation for some time, for many years actually, have a really hard time getting people to actually be family home care providers, so how successful that particular plan is going to be, I don't know.

MR. ZINCK: We'll keep an eye on it. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Diana.

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Just a couple of quick questions if I could. I did want to ask how the stabilization grants are decided upon or on what basis they're given. Could you explain that?

MS. BLAAUW: It's kind of an interesting process actually, and anybody here who actually has to go through it will back me up on this. We're required to apply for it annually and it's based on ratios according to ages of the children and it's also based on training of the staff. So there are trained personnel, there are equivalent personnel and there are untrained.

Up until this year, the amount for trained and equivalent people was the same amount and for the untrained it was quite a minimal amount - I think it's \$2,000, and \$4,000 for trained people. They are changing that to \$4,500 for trained and \$4,200 for equivalent, and I would say there's not a big enough difference there to make it worthwhile for trained people; \$300 a year as an acknowledgement of the fact that they're trained is really kind of pitiful in a way.

MS. WHALEN: Could you explain the untrained category? Are there people who are working with no classes and training?

MS. BLAAUW: Yes.

MS. WHALEN: What percentage would you be allowed to have of that?

MS. BLAAUW: You're required to have two-thirds of your staff trained or equivalent, so one-third of your staff can be untrained.

MS. WHALEN: I just wanted to ask you about your cost on the figure that you gave to Mr. Gaudet. You said an average salary was around \$27,500, or you've seen that figure in . . .

MS. BLAAUW: It depends on the area.

MS. WHALEN: Maybe metro?

MS. BLAAUW: Maybe metro, and that was a very small survey of some not-for-profit centres.

MS. WHALEN: It seems higher than I would have expected. I do believe people should be paid a lot more, it's just that I know you're not receiving those higher wages.

MS. BLAAUW: That includes the stabilization grant. I think it's something like \$24,500 without the stabilization grant.

MS. WHALEN: I wondered what the \$15,000 that they're still quoting for the stabilization grant relates to. Is that being used as a measure for the salaries . . .

MS. BLAAUW: A year or so ago it was quoted in the paper as an average salary for child care workers.

MS. WHALEN: So that was why you raised that issue. Okay, I don't think I'll carry on anymore, simply because I know you're in a hurry, Madam Chairman.

MS. BLAAUW: A real problem is the fact that nobody actually ever checks with staff whether or not they're receiving the stabilization grant or the operating grant. It's strictly done through administration. If you actually want to improve the front-line person's salary, then at some point people should be asking them whether or not there has been an improvement for them.

MS. WHALEN: So the accountability is an important point . . .

MS. BLAAUW: Yes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Pat.

MR. PATRICK DUNN: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you for your presentation. Just one quick question if you can comment on it. The association's national counterpart, I believe, claims or insists that Quebec has the best model for child care and knowing that our economy and population differ so greatly from Quebec, I'm just wondering, how would this be viable?

MS. BLAAUW: I think Quebec found they had to put a lot of money into it, a lot more than they originally thought. Once it becomes accessible to everybody regardless, then of course people will choose to put their child into a program simply because it's there. So I think they found that the cost was more than they thought.

The other side of that is, what's important to our society? If you really think that children are important and the way they're being educated and the way they're growing up will actually be of benefit to everybody in the long run or simply that children, as children, should be receiving the best they possibly can get, then you look at how you're actually spending your dollars and maybe governments would be more willing to put more money into it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Valerie, I just want to ask one quick question, either you or Margie can help me here. I struggle to get comparative data, to find out whether we're standing still, getting worse or improving in terms of early learning and child care in the province. Do people in the sector have the same problem? They seem to be measuring different things each year and trying to get factual information . . .

MS. BLAAUW: It's very difficult to get information. It's almost like you suddenly get presented with the way it's going to be - you sort of get a memo or something like that and it's like, this is what's going to happen. It sort of forces us always into reacting to things because consulting the people who are actually doing the work hasn't really been that great and it is very difficult to get information, very difficult.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Has your organization, for example, asked for that kind of baseline data, even before perhaps some of the bilateral agreement money came into the province to know where we're starting?

MS. BLAAUW: We have asked in the past and we get answers like, well it's going to the printers and it will come out in January or something and then it gets to be October and we still don't have the information. I think the last information was 2004, the last time they made a report, which is a little scary because it's a lot of money being handled here and it seems to be very uncoordinated, what they're actually doing.

MADAM CHAIR: Thank you. A quick one, Gordie.

MR. GORDON GOSSE: Madam Chairman, my question is, are operators in Nova Scotia concerned about an ABC centre coming here? I wonder if there is any protection out there for the private and non-profit daycare centres in Nova Scotia?

MS. BLAAUW: Well, there should be some concern about it because it has happened in Alberta, they have already taken over quite a few centres, a lot of centres in Alberta. I think they are in B.C. and I think they're also going into Ontario. What they do is they squeeze people out; it's the same as Wal-Mart comes in and squeezes out the small businesses by having low prices and they sort of go under and at that point they can raise their fees or do whatever they like. I think the other part about it is there is no individuality to the centre, so for parents looking for programs that might suit what they want, it's just the same thing and they have their own program, they have their own materials that they produce, they have their own curriculum, they train the staff in a certain way, so it's like McDonald's does with their people, they train them to do certain things and it all has the same kind of look to it.

I think there should be some concern about that and one of the reasons is that the government has given money to commercial operations now, so it sort of opened the door for somebody like that to move in. It makes it more profitable for them to do that once they know that there's government money because that is what they did in Australia, they took a lot of government money.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Junior wants to ask a quick question. I just want everyone to know that the time for this group is up at 1:25 p.m., so we'll extend it into our business part of the meeting at the end, but what I'll do from now on is just let people know what time frame we are working in. Perhaps you could indicate early on who wants to speak and we'll portion out the questioning. Junior.

MR. HAROLD THERIAULT: The present federal government put out the program last year, \$1,200 per year per child, \$100 per month and kind of said to the families, do your own thing, fend for yourself sort of thing. Do you believe much of that money is getting to the day cares of this province or any of the provinces?

MS. BLAAUW: Some of it might be, but even \$100 is really not going to do very much for a family looking for child care - it costs a whole lot more than that. Even if you are subsidized, \$100 would barely help you out. I think the other problem is it goes to everyone whether they need child care or not. I suppose there's something to be said for people who stay home that they should be reimbursed to some extent because they are providing child care - of course, that's part of what they do - but as a substitute for a child care program it fails miserably. It doesn't improve what's happening in child care centres, it doesn't improve the education that happens, it doesn't improve the training, it doesn't improve the salaries and it doesn't improve the number of spaces available either.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. I hope you will be able to stay around in case we do have some questions at the end.

MS. BLAAUW: Yes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We appreciate that, thank you. Next the Private Licensed Administrators Association, Heather and Shane. Just to let you know, the mics aren't for amplification, they're actually for recording for Hansard. Just to let you know at the end, if anyone from the audience is getting up to speak, we'll ask you to use the standing mic there so that we can record all of the comments. Perhaps you can introduce yourselves and if you have anyone else here from your association.

[1:30 p.m.]

MS. HEATHER HANSEN-DUNBAR: My name is Heather Hansen-Dunbar, this is my co-chair Shane Richard. We are the co-chairs, as Marilyn indicated, of the Private Licensed Administrators Association of Nova Scotia Child Care Centres. We're here today to tell you a little bit about ourselves and we had also prepared some comments on the ELCC Plan. We have a couple of other members present here today, Elaine Chaisson who is on our executive is also present, she's back there somewhere and also Bronwyn Richardson who had served as Vice-Chair for many years, she's also present today.

I did bring a couple of documents, they're not governmentese, which is what I believe you are all used to, but these are our brochures that go out to our members, and they explain, if you're interested in joining. The members actually get colourful ones, but you're government so we thought we'd save a couple of pennies there and we are a non-profit association. We also have a document that lists the benefits of membership for belonging to our association and then attached to it is a status report on the work that we've achieved. You will notice that that hasn't been updated, but it does also give you some background information, so if you'd like that.

Our association began 12 years ago and we formalized ourselves in 2001. We have members throughout the entire province. We used to base ourselves by counties and various different methods, but now we really look at the four regions, that's how the Directory of Day Cares is, so that's how we decided to work our membership.

Our members pay \$15 annually to belong and we also had a chapter form in Cape Breton and we had a chapter form in the northern area. They don't currently meet as regularly as our Halifax chapter. We tend to have people come up from the other regions to Halifax, so we found that Cape Breton and the northern ones tend to travel up and we do a lot of things electronically as well.

The status report really speaks to the things that we have achieved. When PLAA first formed, there were no portable subsidies in the province, there was no wage supplement for daycare teachers in private centres, there was no funding for special needs children in private centres either, and there was also nothing to address the difficulties with regard to taxation, that really is a challenge to daycares.

The majority of people who open daycares are in it because they love the field and they usually don't have business training. Once you get into it and you realize all the business challenges to it, you stay in it because you're serving families, you don't stay in it because there's any sign of any Porsches like Fast Eddie from Australia has. So that's why so many of us have taken the management development program offered the past couple of years. So we're still tackling the HST issue that is hurting all of us. We've been told that's like grabbing an elephant by its tail, so we haven't really achieved any kind of movement on that.

We've achieved some small gains with regard to business occupancy but the other things, you can see from our status report, operational grants and those kinds of things are listed. I'd like to turn it over to my co-chair, Shane, who will give our comments on the ELCC Plan.

**MR. SHANE RICHARD:** Again I thank you for the opportunity. My name is Shane Richard, I am from Truro so I do represent the rural-commercial centres in Nova Scotia.

Just to note, the Early Learning and Child Care Plan, I am very pleased that there is a plan. There is a plan that has started, we're moving in the direction where we're looking at a comprehensive system. It is a system, I believe, that has identified portability, enabling families to have choice throughout the province, regardless of where they live. There's identification of family home daycare, recognizing that the moms and dads who are already providing child care in their home - and it has been referenced in some studies - that they do know a lot about what they're doing and that they should be recognized for what they're doing as well and build maybe potentially within the system and encouraging more integration within the system.

So family home daycare, I believe, it is in many of the provinces as in Nova Scotia, is recognized as one other option, one other choice for families. It is all in how it's going to be structured and how it will evolve as well.

This is a new program, I'm sure there will be further evolution as time goes on and as you folks, the legislators, make further suggestions on how it can be improved.

In terms of the child care operating grant, again that grant is really, I believe, an opportunity to help stabilize the field, on top of the current stabilization grant that is available. That grant does a couple of things, at least in our view; it helps stabilize those centres that are not receiving some of that funding initially and it also helps create some of that universality piece that we've all been talking about, in terms of fees, and trying to make sure fees are not skyrocketing.

That certainly is a challenge because, of course, the true cost of child care is not always calculated into the operational costs and to the variety of grants that are available. So as it stands right now, there's likely work that needs to be done in that area but it is a beginning. It recognizes, like all other sectors, that everyone really needs to be treated

equally. If you're providing a service and you're providing it within the regulations and it is noted that parents want to come to your centres, then certainly you should be treated the same across the board, regardless of auspice.

The repair and renovation loan program, I think that is a novel program. It's a program really to help centres to kind of get back on their feet if they need to make some renovations and repairs. Again, likely there needs to be additional work put in that, additional issues identified but it is a beginning point. It is part of an actual plan to move forward.

The outdoor play space grant, which was identified, I think there's one centre in this province that could say well, we don't want that and no, it's not going to benefit children. Without any question, it's going to benefit children. You are going to see infrastructure within the playground spaces, you're going to see more design within the playground spaces, and in terms of accountability, for the operational grant as well as the playground, as well as the funding that comes through the centre's doors, there's clear utilization statements that have to be completed and are very explicit.

The early childhood education officers around the province can, at any point in time, ask any of the staff if they wish, if what they believe they're receiving is fair, and certainly at any point, because this is all very public, this is not something that's being done in a localized vacuum, this has all been very public, this has been in the media, around the plan, and I believe certainly people will ask questions. That's what's happening here today and I expect that is what happens on a daily basis throughout Nova Scotia about this.

The supported child care for special needs children, I believe in my mind, from a personal standpoint as well, that is an incredible fund to help children with special needs. To make sure that they're receiving an early start, making sure that they're receiving the supports that they need while they're in licensed child care. From my perspective, that really needs to be made available and it is available now certainly to all licensed centres across the province that have that need.

Again, when we're looking at all of these factors, I would suggest it is very important, a lot of work has been done. There's a lot of work that likely has yet to be completed but it's good to see that there's a plan in place because prior to the plan it was a patchwork - it was well, let's react to the situation and see what we can come up with and do our best, but there's an actual plan to move forward.

Some of the recommendations that I would like to suggest for future development, one is enabling more choice . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Sorry to interrupt but you are running out of your presentation time so I'm just wondering if you can summarize the rest of your presentation.

MR. RICHARD: I sure will. Very quickly, a couple of recommendations. One of those enabling the portable spaces, enabling all the spaces currently in the province, enabling those to be portable spaces so families can choose to go where they would like to go, where it is easier for them where they're working or where they're residing, enabling those spaces to be portable.

Number two, which is an incredible piece that there has to be a lot of work on is recruitment and retention. There's no question there has to be more work done within the recruitment and retention component. The challenges of recruiting early childhood educators is enormous. The number that the schools are producing is extremely low and, of course, there are a number of factors as a result of that, wages being one.

Third is another very important point that I hope we can move forward on. I think there's an opportunity here for this Legislature to serious look at it, and that is pre-primary. Pre-primary at this point in time - of course, it's been noted that it's not going to be offered by the Department of Education. I think some of the platforms here in the past have referenced the idea of at least piloting pre-primary within the child care sector and I think that is a very good idea. In fact, if you look at the services and what we're doing across this province within the child care sector, we are already providing an element of pre-primary in many cases. But what we're talking about and I think what maybe some of the departmental people may be looking at is around a common curriculum, to see that when children have that exposure it's important that they're able to evaluate to see that they are receiving the type of education and caring that's referenced.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. Committee members, we have about 11 minutes for questions and I have Wayne and then Pat and Gordon.

MR. GAUDET: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just curious, Shane, in your opening comments you've indicated that your sector needs to be treated fairly across the system. I'm quite sure every member on this committee fully agrees with you and I wish you all the best. I know there are many challenges and hurdles that need to be overcome.

I guess a few questions: How often does your group meet, in terms of how often do you meet with government? Is your association the only association that is speaking on behalf of private child care centres? I'll stop there.

MR. RICHARD: I'm not sure if it is known but there is representation on the working group for both not-for-profit and commercial centres to be able to participate and make sure their points of view are expressed. So in the working group through the Department of Community Services, we're able to do that.

Now in terms of frequency of which we're meeting, it's probably every couple of months that they get together. At times it was every month and then I think it's gone on to every two months and I think it's back to every month again now. So it has fluctuated a little bit.

In terms of other associations and representation and commercial child care centres, there's actually what I believe is one of the wonderful associations that they have - I believe down in your neck of the woods, down in the western part - and that is actually an association that has both not-for-profit and commercial operators, who are expressing their opinions and who have pledged their concerns as a joint group.

The reason this has recently come up because the association that represents both commercial and not-for-profit - I'm not sure if it's an association as such, in terms of the Associations Act, but it is a group that's meeting, and they have voiced their concerns and issues, which are very similar to most of what all of us are saying around here.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Perhaps for this round we'll just limit it to one question per member and then, if we have more time, we can come back to your second. Pat.

MR. PATRICK DUNN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm going to assume, and correct me if I'm wrong, that the majority of private operators are in HRM or the surrounding area, and is there a focus on maintaining this or is there a strategy to provide this service and continuity in less populated areas of the province? If that's the case, what are the unique challenges that we'll be facing in the less populated areas?

MR. RICHARD: I would have to say, of course, the majority of child care centres across the board, regardless if not-for-profit or commercial, are here in metro. So the concentration of each would be in the metro area. However, throughout rural Nova Scotia there are commercial centres.

When you talk about challenges, we've had centres in Guysborough County that were commercial and that really struggled to provide the services that they wanted to provide and the reason for which they got into it in the first place. I would think today, if they were still there, because of this plan that has been put into place, that likely they would still be there now. If that plan was in place at the time, two or three years ago, they still may have been there.

The reason I say that is because in the past they were not eligible for the operational support. They were not eligible for the types of supports that they currently have in place right now. Where that is available now, it is certainly making it more, I guess, the ability to operate within rural areas. Secondly, to follow up on that question, there's also the idea of creating more partnerships - partnerships with community groups, partnerships potentially within the school systems and providing after-school or other types of organizations, and being able to partner at the local level potentially within churches, that has happened.

So I believe that because of the plan, because of the focus on child care, that commercial operators like ourselves, people who live and breathe in Nova Scotia - we're not talking about the ABCs of the world but people like ourselves in Nova Scotia who buy

in Nova Scotia, who live here, pay their taxes every day, I hope it will expand. They're committed to the communities and they're accountable to the communities.

[1:45 p.m.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Gordie.

MR. GORDON GOSSE: Wayne had asked earlier about how often you meet with the government, because in your handout you said most recently you had met with Minister Morse of Community Services.

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: I had mentioned it wasn't updated.

MR. GOSSE: Yes, so I was just wondering, is there - you had answered it earlier by saying that you do meet on a regular basis with the department.

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: No, we - when you had asked how often we meet, we thought you meant how often do we meet with our members. How often do we meet with government? We actually just - I'll apologize for the document again, the front of it is a document we've given to our members for a couple of years and obviously the reference to Minister Morse shows that. The second part of it, that sort of is a status report, that's from 2006, so that is more current than the front page of it. But we actually had never been ever given meetings with any Minister of Community Services prior to Minister Morse, even though we had requested them for many years. So he was the first Minister of Community Services to actually begin meeting with the private group. Then, once the working group was established, we no longer meet with ministers because we have a voice through the working group. Would that be your assessment as well?

MR. RICHARD: I would say so, yes. I apologize for that error there. I'm sure Minister Streach wouldn't appreciate it.

MS. HANSEN-DUNBAR: I'm sorry, my mistake.

MR. GOSSE: That's okay. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Diana.

MS. WHALEN: I have actually two questions, but one is really short. The first one, I just want to know what is the percentage is in Nova Scotia of our public and private ownership? I know we're different than the rest of Canada, or most places in Canada in that regard, and I think it's important just for framing the discussion.

MR. RICHARD: Sure. In terms of actual private, the majority of child care centres in Nova Scotia are actually private, because the not-for-profit centres are also private centres as well. In terms of public-based centres, I'm not sure how many we would actually

have. I think it would be an extremely small number if there were any actual strictly publicly funded centres.

The folks to better answer that question would likely potentially be the Child Care Advocacy Association or the not-for-profit association, but in terms of our percentage, it has fluctuated. I think it's about half and half in terms of percentage, but I may be off a few percentage points . . .

MS. WHALEN: Well, even that's close. That's good, I just wanted to have an idea about it. I think the biggest thing for all of us is the fact that there aren't enough child care centres . . .

MR. RICHARD: Absolutely.

MS. WHALEN: . . . that people can't get to work, women can't return to work after they have children, and some of our notes indicated that there are up to 200 on waiting lists in different centres, even at different centres to be close to home. So, bottom line, what frames our discussion is the need for more daycare, more quality daycare, and early learning as well.

I wanted to ask you specifically about the pre-Primary program, and that would be my question about how you see that perhaps rolling out. I understand that in P.E.I., the Primary grade is delivered through daycare centres, so would it be a model like that, and I know you can't take too much time but maybe you could explain that, because I think it has a lot of merit. I'm really disappointed, actually, to see this pilot project that we've had going being discontinued.

MR. RICHARD: Well, and I know, I can certainly appreciate your disappointment with that. What I'm hoping is that, in fact, the child care sector may be able to pick that up and the child care sector might be able to provide the service where it would be clearly articulated from a curriculum standpoint of what the expectations would be when you're providing that service for the children.

Of course it's going to be a younger age group than P.E.I., so it will have to be developmentally appropriate, ensuring that the curriculum is developmentally appropriate, otherwise the kids are not going to receive what they need.

The other piece to this, too, and why I think it's probably more important for centres to be involved, is because there's a care component. When you're looking at the age of these children, it's about providing care and education, not just the education. In addition to that, all of our centres are built for those children. Those children are of zero to - well, if we're looking at pre-Primary, we're looking at about 3.8 to about 4.8 now, I suppose, or 4.5, but our centres are built with those children in mind. Our centres, when you walk in, they're designed for that specific purpose.

So as a result of the expansion program and as a result of some of those other initiatives, I would hope now is the opportunity to develop this in the long-term plan, and there's a real opportunity to do this. You have diversity throughout the province in terms of child care centres. You can have a provincial curriculum, which would be part of that, but also enabling the level of flexibility in terms of providing a diverse program within that kind of governing provincial curriculum.

I think the opportunity now is to do it and I hope the legislators really see that as the opportunity to move it forward as well.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, and I'll let Junior wrap up with a question.

MR. THERIAULT: Yes, you mentioned HST being an issue with you, I believe you did. What did you mean by that? Do you mean you're paying HST and you've asked - have you applied for exemption from both levels of government?

MS. HANSEN-DUBAR: We actually haven't taken any action probably in the past two and a half years. We were asked to prepare a research document by the Nova Scotia Government with regard to the actual impact of it, but when the GST was first created, politicians in the federal government indicated that they did not want to charge families GST, they wanted to give families that break. I'm sure that possibly was vote-related in some manner, but I won't say any more than that.

Anyway, it put us in a really difficult position, because therefore we pay GST, HST on every single thing - rent, power, our toys and supplies, our playground equipment, and we don't get any of it back. I have often been told by colleagues that I reference my centre too much, but I can use my centre as an example just because the numbers are at the top of my head. My HST currently that I lose every year is \$32,000; it's gone up from \$27,000 to now \$32,000 a year that I could be putting into salaries or equipment.

MR. THERIAULT: But aren't you registered as a business?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry - actually, Trevor, I had missed Trevor and we're almost out of time. So Trevor, if you don't mind.

MS. HANSEN-DUBAR: Marilyn, I just feel compelled to say out loud that I am, indeed, registered as a business, but I . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Trevor.

MR. ZINCK: Just a couple of quick comments. Portability of subsidies, excellent, but if I can take my subsidy somewhere, subsidized space, and I can't find a space, it's a problem. So one, we need to create more spaces. Stabilization grants have become band-aids when there are other problems, so it's for a certain period of time.

You talk about pre-Primary, there's probably evidence where some early childhood educators actually left to go into those programs, so they actually left the centres, be it private or non-profit, so that's an issue. I would suggest that you get on board - we're having a vision process right now here in HRM, both sides of the harbour - that you talk with the Department of Education, because both Community Services and the Department of Education should come together on that.

There has been talk about having child care in the schools. It's a 10-year vision plan, but I would stress to you to get both departments together on that initiative. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you both very much and I hope you'll stay in case there are some questions towards the end. So next we have Child Care Connection Nova Scotia. So please introduce yourselves and any other members who have come with you.

MS. ELIZABETH HICKS: So good afternoon, everyone. We'd like to thank you for this opportunity to present to your committee on behalf of the board of Child Care Connection Nova Scotia. This is Barb Bigelow and I'm Elizabeth Hicks, and we're the co-chairs of Connections. Also attending today is our Executive Director, Elaine Ferguson, and two board members, Heather Hansen-Dunbar with pay, and Laurie St. Amour with the non-profit.

Child Care Connection Nova Scotia is a community-based development organization incorporated under the Nova Scotia Societies Act. Board members are representative of administrators of full- and part-time programs. Also included are representatives appointed by the Certification Council of Early Childhood Educators of Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Coalition of Non Profit Directors, the Nova Scotia Child Care Association and the Private Licensed Administrators Association. Appointed members at large provide the perspectives of women's issues, post-secondary early childhood education training institutions and unions as they relate to child care. Child Care Connection governance structure is policy governance, the Carver Model, and today two of the organizations with representatives.

The board acts on behalf of its moral ownership, which is identified as early learning child care organizations, practitioners and programs. This moral ownership is a subset of a broader stakeholder group that is committed to and has an interest and investment in a high- quality early learning and child care system in Nova Scotia. Stakeholders include early childhood education training institutions, Nova Scotia Community Services, parents, children, related community organizations and employers.

Our goals are: investments in children will be maximized through recognizing, valuing and supporting the development of an effective, quality, early learning and child care community in Nova Scotia.

- There will be a comprehensive, coordinated, early learning child care community that maximizes resources.
- Early learning child care practitioners in Nova Scotia will be self-confident, skilled and professional.
- There will be a favourable public image of early learning and child care practice.

We also provide:

- Services such as networking, a toll-free number, e-mail lists, a contact point for information on the Nova Scotia early learning child care sector and a Web site;
- We have professional development opportunities including an annual conference, mini journal, workshops, lectures and resources;
- Community development projects include developing a model of a professional delivery system, licensing, governance, certification of administrators, re-certification, retention and recruitment, and mentoring. Connections also manages the administrative tasks for the Certification Council of Early Childhood Educators of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Child Care Association, facilitation and coordination of issues related to the trends of the sector;
- There are also awards and professional recognition included such as the Caring at Work Awards, Spirit Awards, Early Childhood Learning and Care Awards of Excellence in Program and Practice; and
- Promotions, which include Child Care Awareness Days in the month of June.

In 1995, Connections developed a model for a child care delivery system that supported a professional child care system and has been working towards developing structures and vehicles to support this system.

In 2004, we conducted consultations across the province with the child care sector to guide our direction to 2010. The five priorities that were identified were:

- Developing a strong professional infrastructure - strong, representative associations, standards of practice and a code of ethics;

- Building relationships and working together within the sector - more opportunities to get together, communication between centres and programs, and building trust and a strong, unified voice;
- Obtaining increased and sustained government funding - increased funding, sustained funding and funding for operations;
- Alleviating recruitment and retention problems - the lack of qualified child care practitioners for full-time positions and as substitute teachers is a major problem, caused by low wages, lack of benefits and negative public perception among other things; and
- Increasing awareness within and outside the sector - education within and outside the sector about the importance of quality care and what that means, increased respect, recognition and acknowledgement for child care practitioners from the public, the government and ourselves.

Being a community-based development organization, our focus is on building capacity in the child care sector in Nova Scotia. How the provincial government initiatives of the Early Childhood Development Initiative and the 10-year Early Learning and Child Care Plan impact our goals, advancing a system and the priorities of the sector as articulated in 2004, is of interest to Connections.

MS. BARB BIGELOW: We recognize that the stabilization grant of the Early Childhood Development Initiative recognized the key role that staff play in providing quality of care for children. It was a commitment to staff and a step towards stabilizing the sector. Other initiatives such as Partnerships for Inclusion, Child Care Information Services for parents, Early Childhood Resource Centres for practitioners, bursaries for training, and supports for professional development increased access to resources and training and added to the capacity of the sector.

The Early Learning Child Care Plan is a further development of the child care system. This initiative complements Child Care Connection's goals, contributes to building a system and builds capacity in the sector. Anything that enriches and further develops the system is good in the eyes of Child Care Connection.

[2:00 p.m.]

Aspects of the plan that benefit our stakeholders are welcome, such as those in process:

- The repair and renovation grant/loan - and from my own perspective as Director of Peter Green Hall Children's Centre, we've just completed the second of two repair and renovation loans and we're

thrilled as a centre. This was an opportunity not only to upgrade the facility, but to improve working conditions and improve our program for the benefit of the families, children and staff;

- The expansion grants;
- Family home care initiative;
- Child care operating grant; and
- Outdoor play space grant.

We are looking forward to announcements on the workforce strategy, sector development and supported child care plans.

If we look back on the sector priorities, steps toward

Increased and sustained government funding have been taken through the ELCC plan;

- Increased awareness within and outside the sector has made progress. The sector department ELCC plan working group is a vehicle for information flow to the sector and from the sector from the department with sector representatives from the Nova Scotia Coalition of Non Profit Directors, the Private Licensed Administrators Association, the Nova Scotia Child Care Association, Acadian child care, and family home care; and
- Alleviating retention and recruitment problems is a challenge for many sectors in Nova Scotia and we have hopes that the workforce strategy will address some of these challenges.

In closing, in our community-based development work we recognize that the ELCC plan is moving the child care sector forward in building a child care system. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Committee members, we have about 10 minutes for questions in this section. I have Pat and then Trevor.

MR. DUNN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Has there been any feedback regarding the new funding put in place for family home day care and has this made it a little easier to obtain care in smaller communities?

MS. HICKS: We've only got one representative on the board that has family home care components and she's here, but at this moment, no, we don't.

MR. DUNN: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Trevor.

MR. ZINCK: Over the last year we've heard government and some of us in the other Parties talking about a poverty reduction strategy. A bill was brought forward in the Fall session and there were also a series of consultation meetings. Recognizing the fact of how important early childhood education is to not just the child, the family and our communities, have any of your members or yourselves visited or participated in any of the consultations on poverty reduction?

MS. HICKS: Yes, we have. Stella Lord is on our committee and she has been part of that.

MR. ZINCK: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Wayne.

MR. GAUDET: Quickly, do we know how many early childhood educators are currently within the system across the province and do we know what kind of a turnaround we have annually?

MS. BIGALOW: We don't have that information, but I think our executive director probably does.

MR. GAUDET: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Do you want an answer to that?

MR. GAUDET: If that information is available.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Elaine, do you mind? We'll have to get you to come to the standing mic just quickly.

MS. ELAINE FERGUSON: I'll echo Valerie's observation about it is difficult to find any data that really has any kind of validity and reliability. The latest study that has been done is the Labour Market Update of the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council - no, I think it's You Bet I Care and that was 1998 data and it was around 20 per cent to 25 per cent turnover each year.

We do a census whenever we can get a student to work for us in the summertime and the number of practitioners both working part time and full time probably is in the range of around 2,000.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Diana.

MS. WHALEN: I just had a question around one of the issues that was brought up in the first presentation and that was about the equivalency training and how you have people working who are seeking equivalency at the same time and that they are treated pretty much the same as somebody who has a degree or certificate program that comes to work for you.

MS. HICKS: A one year or two year diploma, yes.

MS. WHALEN: But there are four year degrees still, aren't there, at Mount Saint Vincent?

MS. HICKS: Yes, there are.

MS. WHALEN: So there might be a few with that, although I take the point that there are not enough people in training right now. Given the fact that human resources is such an overriding concern and there's a shortage of people and retention is difficult, would you see it being possible that we eliminated the equivalency model that has been in place for 20 years?

MS. HICKS: Speaking for myself, I visit many centres in my capacity with Partnerships for Inclusion. I think retaining and recruitment has to be tackled first because many centres are having difficulty just keeping their two-thirds trained or equivalent at this present time, but that's in my capacity with my work, yes.

MS. WHALEN: I just wondered if that was a possibility right now because of the fact that you're in such a crunch in terms of staffing and moving forward? I wonder if you could comment on the availability of infant care, the 18 months and younger having a different ratio of care, which is important; they're tiny and they require more hands on. I just wonder if you could comment on the current status of lack of spaces?

MS. BIGALOW: From my perspective, I have an infant care unit. I have nine infants and three staff and approximately 200 names on my waiting list.

MS. WHALEN: It's just critical, isn't it - the shortage?

MS. BIGALOW: And I take calls every day from people who are desperate and don't know what they're going to do, moms who can't go back to work.

MS. WHALEN: Among your members would there be a fair number that haven't even got infant spaces because of the cost?

MS. HICKS: Yes, that is a decision many centres have to make because of the cost factor.

MS. WHALEN: Do you have any idea what percentage have it?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Diana, I'm sorry. I've given you a bit of leeway. Gordie.

MR. GOSSE: My question is on when you talked about retention and recruitment of staff. I just wanted your opinion on why more young people aren't choosing this profession?

MS. HICKS: Good question. Salary, benefits, the cost of training and the opportunity of advancement once you're in there.

MR. GOSSE: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm going to ask a quick one. I was wondering whether your organization has a position on making the department child care inspections public - put them on the Web site?

MS. BIGALOW: We haven't discussed that, as a board.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you. Thank you very much and again, we hope you'll stay around.

Next we have the Non-Profit Directors Association. Welcome, so if you could introduce yourselves and any other members who have joined you today.

MS. MARGO KIRK: Thank you. My name is Margo Kirk, I'm the Executive Director at University Children's Centre here in Halifax. Beside me is Laurie St. Amour, she's the Executive Director at Wolfville Children's Centre in Wolfville and Susan Willis is with Point Pleasant, again here in Halifax.

I think some of the things we have to say this afternoon are a little bit repetitive. There are obviously some very, very strong commonalities in how we are all looking at this, but I think there are some points that we would like to stress. We've been asked to comment on the plan that started out in May 2006 and when I first thought about that, I thought it was an awfully difficult task because detailed information about the plan is very sketchy; there has been very little communication. The initiatives themselves, a lot of them are in their infant state so having an accurate or an informed analysis just is not possible. That's also coupled with the fact that the plan itself has really never been fully articulated, apart from a very short one-pager that they have on their Web site as a brochure.

There definitely have been some positives over the last little while. But, having said that, we'd also like to stress that there are some general themes, some issues that are a concern for us. Consultation and communication, a broad consultation in essence just asks people to identify general themes. That is sufficient to gain a sense of direction but it provides little guidance for the mechanism of the implementation phase. We are thus placed in a reactive position which sets up an adversarial environment, rather than one where colleagues can have an informed discussion on evidence-based information.

We've been placed in the position to track down information and seek clarification, and frequently with conflicting results. Yes, we have the child care working group, however, confidentiality restrictions prevent any meaningful proactive dialogue with our representatives. Again we are placed in a responding position.

Clarity of some of these issues has also been a concern. Just recently most centres received payment for the new child care operating grant in January. We have notification that money was deposited to our accounts yet no details were forthcoming on how these funds were calculated, no reference was made or explanation given to us as to the period for which these funds applied. Was there a back payment? Was there an adjustment? Was there a retroactive portion? We're not told. Even within the reporting process for the enrolments, which forms the basis for the grant calculations, which is another issue unto itself, centres have received varying and conflicting information on how to record the data.

That leads us to a discussion on accountability. This, too, has been raised earlier. Our position is there is a screaming lack of accountability for public funds. What responsibility does the government have to the taxpayer, and even to the federal government which is providing these funds? What about its own accountability, to ensure that things are working the way they planned them to?

The Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada completed a project recently called Making the Connections, using public reporting to track progress on child care services in Canada. The conclusion, that the public reports issued thus far, and in Nova Scotia that means 2003-04, under the federal, territorial and provincial agreements do not live up to the promises of accountability and transparency. Existing public performance reporting standards were not followed.

Nova Scotia in the areas of affordability and availability- two areas identified as goals in the plan. The report comments that clear, comparative indicators were not available. In other words, assumptions are being made about the impact of these initiatives with no true evidence-based data to support them.

Accountability on the day-to-day operational level is no less a concern. The manner in which the outdoor play space grant was given out exemplifies the open-endedness and the lack of accountability a centre was asked to demonstrate when justifying the use of public funds. That's not to say the money is not appreciated, this is an accountability issue.

The same can be said for the child care operating grant. The operating grant has benefitted some, certainly not all but some centres. Whether it has benefitted parents and children, supposedly the goal, that's the one unanswered question. The stabilization grant was designed as a recruitment and retention strategy as well as a quality initiative. The money certainly again is appreciated, but is there any data suggesting it is working? What is the impact it has had? We don't know.

What about quality? There are some missing steps here as well. The plan does little to promote quality since it is based on minimum standards. There is not one aspect of the plan which rewards, encourages or otherwise speaks to quality - indeed, one would say it does just the opposite. It views individual children as a commodity to be paid for, \$3 a day.

Then there is also the community aspect as well. Despite the department's insistence about a made-in-Nova Scotia plan, all very valid, there is little or nothing in this plan which supports community initiatives, that is respecting and supporting communities themselves to develop their own facilities and programs which reflect their needs and interests.

Not all communities are created equal. Despite the Nunn Report, there is no room for creative problem-solving, coordination of services or thinking outside the box. There is no support for those communities which may need a little more intensive care. This plan seems to lack the recognition of the concept and the value of a community, which is rather ironic since we are discussing the Department of Community Services.

To sum up, we are very disappointed with the plan and actually would even question the use of the term "plan" itself. A plan implies a coordinated effort, a succession of inter-related initiatives designed to reach a common goal. Thus far here in Nova Scotia, we would argue that we merely have a collection of projects. Expansion was promoted but recruitment and retention has not yet been addressed. Changes in the subsidy allocation process were implemented before changes in the policy of family assessment. Our own anecdotal evidence indicates inequality, lack of clarity, lack of accountability, with little evidence that sustainable positive changes are in the wind. Indeed, policies and procedures are being developed on assumptions which have major flaws and we are leaving ourselves wide open to questionable business practices that exploit rather than promote early childhood education. We have serious concerns. Thanks.

[2:15 p.m.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Margo. Questions? Pat.

MR. DUNN: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my understanding that representatives from your organization sit on the child care working group. This group apparently meets monthly with the Department of Community Services. Has this been an avenue for you with regard to acquiring information, getting questions answered or any information that you may be concerned about?

MS. KIRK: I would say, and I don't know if Laurie has any other comments, we do have a representative on the working group. However, as I mentioned, there are very, very strict confidentiality conditions with that group and that puts us, instead of being able to participate in the implementation discussion phase of a lot of these policies and procedures, it is more a reactive phase and then you're looking at how are you going to fix

what didn't work, as opposed to trying to look at a process that might work the first time around.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Wayne.

MR. GAUDET: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm trying to better understand the issue of portability of subsidized spaces. I guess my question to you - should all government subsidized spaces be portable, should they be limited or should they not be portable at all? I'm just curious because I've been hearing from people and they're all over this issue.

MS. KIRK: The major concern that I have with portability is that it is limited, which means again there is only a finite number of spaces that can be used. Eligibility does not equal access and what that means is you are potentially setting up a system where certain communities that might need a little more support than another community might not get it because of a distribution question. The only way that I feel a portable system can work is if you take the cap off, where eligibility equals access.

MR. GAUDET: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Any other questions? Gordie.

MR. GOSSE: In your presentation you talked about licensing issues and that they seem to be minimal. I'm just wondering, do we need an update in the Province of Nova Scotia on licensing for daycares?

MS. KIRK: The Day Care Act is old and so are the regulations, so I think regular reviews of any policy is a good idea. The concern I had was more with, for example, the reference was made to the stabilization grant where those funds were disbursed based on ratios, numbers of children. The operating grant itself is based on strictly numbers of children and has nothing to do with ratios, it's the number of children, you get \$3 a day for every three- year-old kind of thing. What that does is it takes quality out of the mix. If a centre, for example, has some challenging behaviours, has several children with high special needs, if that centre decides to reduce the ratio, have a smaller group size, perhaps bring in extra staff, none of those quality program issues are addressed in any of these funding initiatives, they are strictly a dollar value placed on the head of a child.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Diana, then Gordie, then Junior.

MS. WHALEN: I have two questions, the first one I hope will be easy for you to answer. I'm wondering how much does the government right now spend from Community Services into the child care sector? Do you have any idea of the total millions of all these different programs put together?

MS. KIRK: According to the reports that have been released and, again, this is going back several years, the provincial money has not changed since early 2000, when federal money was added to the pot. At that point the provincial contribution - and, again, it depends on which programs you include in that figure and which programs you don't - was around the \$17 million to \$20 million range.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Diana, I will give you a second question, but choose carefully because we are going to move on, okay.

MS. WHALEN: She's on her toes. In New Brunswick, they use a system for portability where it's a single point of entry, I'm not sure if you're familiar with that and I don't know all of the details of it, but they have a list and your subsidy becomes available when your spot becomes available, so if you're eligible and you've got a spot, you get your subsidy. Does that look like a system that would work here?

MS. KIRK: Again, one of the concerns with the portable system right now is that parents are required to be basically on two different wait lists, one for the portable subsidy which is handled regionally and then second for the child care centre. The probability of a space coming available in the child care centre at exactly the same time that you come to the top of the list for a portable space, how often does that happen? I don't know. I know from personal experience I have had many parents phone up and say, I've just gotten a portable space when can I start, and my answer is, probably two years from now - they just don't line up. Again, the eligibility criteria and the accessibility criteria, they need to be looked at.

MS. WHALEN: My question though is would the New Brunswick system be better because it's a single list?

MS. KIRK: Yes. If that's the system you were going with, yes, it would.

MS. WHALEN: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN:: Gordie.

MR. GOSSE: The percentage of children coming into child care with learning disabilities, autism, have the numbers risen in the last 10 years in the child care system, high needs children?

MS. HICKS: Whether having accessibility to child care programs. . .

MR. GOSSE: The numbers themselves.

MS. LAURIE ST. AMOUR: I would say they are increasing. The numbers of children who are coming with identifiable special needs are increasing. Those that aren't diagnosed or there can be no diagnosis attached to that which would enable a centre to

access funding that could assist with that is a problem area, but yes, we're seeing children who are presenting with challenges for a number of reasons and it may not just be a specific diagnosis like autism or Down's Syndrome or something like that. Children are challenged due to poverty, to environmental and family dynamics and a number of other things that impact how they are able to cope within a child care environment.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Junior.

MR. THERIAULT: We certainly know there are lots of problems. You can pick anything out of the hat here today in this province and you know we could talk all day about the problems and it all comes down to the almighty dollar. In this province, we certainly aren't a rich province and by the time it is all divvied up, everybody is out trying to get a little extra money. I know in Digby, I help them through the summer, the two daycares there spend their summers fundraising all summer so they can live through the winter. Anyway I just want to get back to, it is about the dollars.

The federal Liberal Government two years ago put a proposal on the table for this country, a \$5 billion to \$6 billion proposal, to put daycare across this country, early learning down to two years of age or whatever and it sits on the shelf today. Did your association ever see this program and look at it and what is your thought on it?

MS. KIRK: Nova Scotia did sign on to the Ken Dryden agreement - whatever you want to call them these days - that was cancelled. One of the things that agreement did was outline some criteria for some standards. It looked at quality, it looked at accountability, it looked at universal access for children with special needs, that kind of thing; it sort of set the stage for a national standard of what we should be aiming for.

As far as the funds go, the OECD has done quite a bit of research studying over 20 countries. They have a standard or guideline of 1 per cent of GDP to go toward early learning and care. Canada last year put 0.2 per cent, so to have agreements like that are very important because we do need that federal money to set those standards and to get going. That is one of the reasons why, I think, federally at the moment Bill C-303, the Early Learning and Child Care Act, is supported by everyone except the Conservatives. The Bloc is supporting it, the NDP had presented it, but the Liberals picked it up very quickly as well because I think they all recognize that from a jurisdiction perspective, the programs and that sort of thing certainly come from the provinces and so they're shared, especially if we're looking at a community development kind of approach.

There does need to be a national standard so that someone in Nova Scotia will have the same rights and accessibility as someone in Ontario.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Trevor.

MR. ZINCK: Margo, it's always nice to hear your comments. Just briefly on the federal funding initiative - be it any Party, it would be wonderful to have a national

program. However, a lot of what I heard during your presentation was the word accountability, the other part was financing. We have an increase as a province in comparison to what we've received over the years in federal funding as well, so accountability is definitely a concern of ours for any government. You take the stabilization grant, I think every six months we've seen an announcement come out from the department, be it portable spaces or the one last Spring with the stabilization grant, we have to ask ourselves, why did that grant come to be? Federal funding was running out and early childhood educators were worried that they weren't going to be subsidized, centres were worried, so we put a band-aid on it.

So the accountability factor is huge and to hear you today say what I believe I heard you say last year as well, is that it just doesn't seem like a cohesive strategy. Am I hearing the right thing?

MS. KIRK: I have very grave concerns about the sustainability of this. Liz mentioned Partnerships for Inclusion - we participated in that as a centre. There are questions about how long that's going to continue. The information referral services, they're under the gun at the moment to find out whether they're going to continue or how long. That whole approach is not the way to set up a sustainable, stable system. You need to set the groundwork and then you need to build. You can't have the little programs parachuting in and out when you happen to have the funds to do it, there has to be a very solid starting point and you need to build on that. I don't think that's what Nova Scotia is doing right now.

MR. ZINCK: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm going to ask a question and then Wayne wants a second question. Margo, I think most people in this room have seen a lot of the national and international research on the value of early learning and child care across the world. Yet we've seen, as you just referenced, this policy patchwork in Nova Scotia. We're not maximizing the potential of a number of generations and it seems it's going to continue. What have you learned from some of your national work on the Canadian Child Care Advocacy Association that would be the obvious next steps in Nova Scotia? Can you give us some advice on what we should be doing, instead of these little tiny initiatives that move forward and then fall back and move forward and fall back? How can we build that sustainability?

[2:30 p.m.]

MS. KIRK: I think money is an issue, but I don't think it's the only issue. There are a lot of jurisdictions that accomplish amazing things on a shoestring budget, it's what you do with those dollars as well that really counts. There have been some initiatives presented to Community Services - Spryfield being one, looking at a hub model integrating services, having support systems within those services so that each service does not have to be a complete entity unto itself. You can coordinate that with other facilities, other services, so

that they all support each other from a community model. That model right now, for Spryfield anyway, has not been accepted by Community Services, yet it is supported by the community and they've worked very hard to come up with some very innovative ideas. But that whole concept really has not been supported. I think the answer is to look at the collective, look at the coordination of services, look at hub models - if that's what you want to call them - or that kind of a support structure, so that you do not have programs in isolation. Programs in isolation just are not sustainable.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. A quick one from Wayne and then we're going to open it up; you can ask questions of any of the groups.

MR. GAUDET: Thank you, Madam Chairman. We heard this afternoon that child care centres are receiving child care operating grants, stabilization grants, child care development grants. Do we have or do we know what percentage of their budget is actually government funding? The reason I'm asking that, I know our child care centres in Clare, for instance, are fundraising practically all of the time. Speaking with one of the directors of one of the centres it seems they hate going back to the community, but they have no choice. I'm just wondering, do we have a sense of what percentage of their budget is actually government funding? Is it about half, is it three-quarters, is it less? I don't want an exact number, I'm just looking at a round number if possible.

MS. KIRK: I wouldn't think it would be that high.

MS. ST. AMOUR: Probably just under half, I would think, and again it depends on how you were funded. Because of the way that new funding has come out, it's easy to see for a new centre that's receiving new money exactly how much of their budget that actually is.

For those centres that are not in receipt of new funding - as with a lot of the longer standing, non-profit centres, for instance - they did not receive additional funds for a child care operating grant, although it was announced that there was new funding for all full-day programs, that in fact was not the reality for many of those centres. There was no change in funding, there was no additional funding, it was funding that had been put in place as early as the early 1980s with equipment grants and so forth. So for those centres, we could be looking at probably close to perhaps half, depending on what their percentage of designated subsidized spaces were at that time. So for grandparented centres it's a little bit harder in terms of calculations now on where that funding goes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Now we're going to open it up to general questions. I'd like to start off and perhaps invite a representative from each of the organizations to respond, using the standing mic. How frail is our early learning and child care system in Nova Scotia today? Heather.

MS. HANSEN-DUBAR: It seems like everyone has referenced the fact that repeatedly people have spoken to how we need more spaces, we need more spaces. That is

absolutely true, there can be no doubt about that, but the need for more early childhood educators far outweighs the need for more spaces. I don't really feel that's an exaggeration.

With regard to equivalency, I have my child study degree and it has always been a personal professional goal of my own to see equivalency eliminated. The question that was asked of Liz earlier with regard to could we actually eliminate it - when you look at how many people are practising our profession, even though they're not a formally trained professional, that really speaks to whether or not we could possibly eliminate that.

So I mean it's really exciting to think about expansion loans, expansion grants and all those kinds of things, but the question of where the people are going to come from to care for the children is a huge one and I think probably one that a lot of us are, dare I say, freaked out at. That's not really an appropriate term, but that's what it is.

We've been saying the word "crisis" for a long time, but I think it's beyond a crisis.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I just want to be clear that I understand what you're saying. I think most people accept the figure of about 12 per cent of our children under the age of 12 actually have spaces in part-time or full-time child care, and you're saying that we can't even staff that 12 per cent properly?

MS. HANSEN-DUBAR: Well I'm on numerous associations, and because of confidentiality, I can't share some stats that I'm aware of with regard to the number of people practising with equivalency or untrained and those kinds of things. If you were to ask centres, where are you advertising, I mean first of all there's a lot of centre-scavenging, trying to attract daycare teachers from other centres and it is quite brutal. I mean a lot of directors used to make pledges to each other with regard to, I will never take staff from your centre. You can't even possibly conceive of that, but I mean people are saying they're advertising on Facebook, Kijiji - you know, you're trying everywhere to advertise. A lot of us call the training institutions as well and ask exactly how many people are taking the programs and the numbers of people going into early childhood education. Education is very minimal right now, the numbers are down.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Does anyone from the other groups want to comment?

MS. BLAAUW: Yes, I will comment on that, because I still hold the position that the equivalency . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: It would help if you mentioned again, for recording purposes . . .

MS. BLAAUW: Oh, the Child Care Advocacy Association. I still think that the equivalency has to be eliminated, and I'm not saying do that tomorrow. When it was first put in place in 1983 or 1982, or whenever it was, my recollection is that it was meant to be

a stop-gap because at that time many, many people were working in child care centres across the province and they had been working for a long time, maybe 10, 15, 20 years, and it wasn't until sometime in the 1980s that there was a lot of opportunity to take training. So at that time they said okay, we'll just have equivalency and you can meet the requirements and that will count. The purpose was to eventually be able to have all staff trained.

Well, that seems to have gone by the wayside and now people still can come into the profession and they have no training, they could even be just out of high school. They can take a couple of years and do workshops or whatever, and suddenly they are equivalent to somebody who has taken the trouble, had the commitment and professionalism to go to a training course. My position is that it just is not the same because the commitment is not there. I think if you want people to stay in this profession, they have to be recognized.

We talk about pre-Primary, we already are doing that in our centres but it is not looked on as that, it is not sort of advertised as that. We need to do much greater work, seeing that this is what we do in child care centres. We do do a pre-Primary program, we do prepare children for school and actually my position is that we actually prepare children for life, we're not preparing them for school. If we prepare children for life, then they go into school and they do all the learning that is required of them.

As far as a profession, I think we have to take a stand. I'm not saying get rid of it now, because you couldn't do that, there just isn't the number of people there to fill the spaces. But if you recognize people adequately, they will stay on.

I have very long-term staff in my centre, all of them. I know of a number of centres where it is the same thing, so if you're recognizing your staff and offering them some respect for what they're doing, then they will stay on because they love to do it. That's the thing, though.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Margo and then Trevor.

MS. KIRK: I just wanted to add to that. I think in many ways, the equivalency sets us up for failure. It's like a Catch-22 - you cannot develop a sense of respect and responsibility and professionalism in a field if you don't ask and demand for adequate credentials. So by not asking for adequate credentials, you're not getting those people who might be interested to go into the field because there is no respect or professional status. So really the equivalency model is actually working against itself when we want to attract people on the long term to a professional field of early childhood development.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Trevor, and then Pat.

MR. ZINCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. A quick question for Shane, a scenario for you: I want to open up a private daycare, what would probably be your top three or

four, maybe five, obstacles that I would have to overcome dealing with the government to get it established?

MR. RICHARD: If you wanted to open up a private daycare, in terms of obstacles, there are a number of obstacles that you may encounter. First, I guess when you make that decision you probably would have, hopefully, a good idea of what you're going to be getting into and those types of challenges and your heart is probably 200 miles into it and there's no turning back, no matter what.

So first off, you've got to have that level of dedication and commitment to see it through, no matter what, that you're going to make it.

Like any other kind of business or activity that you may be starting off, where you're going to have clients and there's going to be an exchange of some sort, sometimes the different levels that you'd have to go through - so for instance, when you register your business you maybe have to register through Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations. Then for your licensing, you would go through Community Services and then you would go through a number of government organizations in order to really make yourself available to open up your doors. It would be nice to be able to bring folks under one division eventually, and that's probably more of a pie dream than a possibility, just because the folks who would be responsible for the business registration number wouldn't have the competencies to evaluate daycares very well.

Another area, too, that catch most centres off guard when they get into it initially, is the whole piece around taxation, around HST. I think a lot of folks initially thought that they would be entitled to the HST piece and yes, they are registered business owners, but it's called an exemption for HST and they're not classified as zero rated. If daycare was classified as zero rated across this country then as a result, yes, you would pay in to your HST, but you would get an HST input tax credit which you could then put back into your centre and you would be able to put it in a variety of options. That is something that governments could collectively work on, but it takes an awful lot of collaboration and support amongst all levels of government, federal and provincial. The HST piece just within our area, the Atlantic - there would have to be a level of collaboration amongst those four Premiers and then you would have to have the Prime Minister supporting that change in the HST piece, so that's another one.

The property taxation piece has been challenging, particularly in this area of Nova Scotia just because folks who are getting into this business realize they're not going to be making a whole lot of money, they're going to be making a living at best. There are going to be times when they're not going to be able to take money out like other business owners and they're going to have to sacrifice to see that they're going to be able to pay their staff, especially through the summer months, because if they don't do it they won't survive and then that's it.

So they have to be conscious of the taxation piece and in this area, it would be awfully nice if we were able to move forward with having a kind of consistent policy on property taxation enabling all operators across the board to at least be equivalent to a residential rating versus a commercial rating. We've presented a whole piece on that and we're very fortunate in some of the rural areas where there was a level of collaboration between the province and the municipalities to allow operators to receive the residential rate versus the commercial rate, so that was very good. That was, I think, one of the first little pieces that came out a few years back. All of those factors together sometimes create a very challenging environment.

[2:45 p.m.]

We would suggest really having a mentoring system and that's something we've talked about and I think Child Care Connection has talked about and the working group has talked about, so somebody who is interested in doing this can then go to a mentor and get a sense of what they're going to be getting into and then evaluate, what are you getting into it for really, what are you going into it for, because if it's not for the right reasons you will soon find out you made a mistake.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Pat and then Gordie and then Diana.

MR. DUNN: Maybe I'll get you to stay since you're standing, I'm just going to follow up something that my colleague for Cape Breton was talking about earlier, the diverse spectrum of children's intellectual abilities and the individualized programs that are offered and that are needed amongst all the other problems we discussed here today. Is this a major problem for this sector to provide?

MR. RICHARD: I see it as a real opportunity. I see it that from a personal standpoint - probably first and foremost through the lens that I see it is very personal - and I believe it is incredibly important in each centre that they take the level of responsibility in recognizing that they should be participating and providing an inclusive program. Through Partnership for Inclusion, they've done a fantastic job around the province to help centres come up to the levels that really are needed.

Unfortunately, there are a number of centres around the province that have taken on their own wishes and I guess without really evaluating them, they decided not to take on children who may have those diverse needs for a variety of reasons. I have heard a variety of those reasons and I can appreciate them at some level, however, I think when there is a level of government funding that is going into these centres, then there should be an overall expectation from a contractual standpoint that at least there should be a number of those children within those centres and that they should not be necessarily screened out. I suppose they're not legally screening them out because under the Human Rights Act, they would not be permitted to do that. However, I think we all know there are certain centres that have not really taken the opportunity to provide that level of care and education and

an opportunity for those children and they need it, they need that extra effort, that extra support.

That extra effort and support that comes into the centres through the funding that is available, the other children benefit from that as well and from the experience that they have in those environments. I think it's incredibly important and hopefully there can be more gains made in that area.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Gordie.

MR. GOSSE: My question is for Margo. I just wanted to know, with the pre-Primary project coming to an end and those early childhood educators who went into that system that were taken away from the daycares, would you have any idea of the numbers, when this project ends, will be coming back to work in the system?

MS. ST. AMOUR: There weren't a lot of projects going on so you would be looking at a small number.

MS. KIRK: There were only 18, 19 or 20 pilots to begin with, so we're talking about 18 people.

MR. GOSSE: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Diana.

MS. WHALEN: I just wanted to ask a bit more about the money again. I'm thinking it relates to the accountability that was raised and the lack of controls maybe in terms of understanding even when cheques are issued, what exactly is included in that cheque, as you said, Margo. About a year ago, we had child care advocates here as well in March, to this Community Services Committee and the figure of \$130 million that had been allocated to our province was mentioned. I understood from reading those notes that money was in a bank and I guess they are drawing from it or drawing this down on some of these various initiatives. Do you think it's being fully utilized because again, we've indicated - maybe Margo you'd be the best to begin to answer, but you said it really isn't like a plan. It's not like a 5- or 10-year plan that's before us; it seems like a collection of projects or individual initiatives. Are we making headway or making proper use of that \$130 million to build a system or to build something?

MS. KIRK: I'm not too sure how the province approached this to begin with, but my guesstimate would be that they looked at the money and said, we've got a 10-year plan so how are we going to put it together and make it do as much as possible; that kind of thing. The concern I have about the way the plan is rolling out is that I'm not too sure, even within the Department of Community Services, how much coordination and consultation is going on from one group to another. I know we've had meetings with various people who have identified themselves as working on the subsidy piece, or working on the

retention piece and that sort of thing. I know comments had been made initially anyway where when we've asked questions the response was, oh, I didn't realize that had already been done or oh, I didn't realize somebody else, or no, I hadn't thought of the impact that would have. One of the missing pieces is - there is a domino effect, if you change this then it might work very well for one aspect, but you also have to look at see what's going to happen to the 10 other things further down the road.

I'm not too sure, I don't have too much confidence that whole picture, that holistic approach is being followed, or at least we haven't been told it is being followed that way. We haven't even actually been introduced to the team leaders or team members, having access to those people is not open-ended.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Pat, do you want to finish off the questioning?

MR. DUNN: Yes, just one quick thing. I've heard quite a few times that recruitment and retention have been major issues in this sector. With the recruitment and retention plan being announced this Spring, will the plan, as such, have the potential to be very helpful to this particular sector?

MS. ST. AMOUR: We don't know what those details are or what that plan is other than it is going to be announced. There is a bit of a disconnect between what are the needs and how are they getting that information. One of the things I've noticed over the years in working in child care is that much of our history is being lost within the department in that some of that history is not being passed on of what worked and what didn't. In trying to get some of that back to people, this is like a foreign language to them, what's happening and even just to explain how the funding has come about and why and what it was based on. We've lost a piece of what could have been helpful to begin with, so when you see - what you were saying about that domino effect of if you look at the income eligibility guidelines, you have to look at what the next piece of that is and how many subsidized spaces then are going to be available. If we're looking at portability, what will happen if there's not an unlimited supply of that and where did those spaces go or will they polarize to certain regions, or when somebody decides I'm leaving, I'll take my space with me and the funding goes with it. It's all based on the daily rate, but where is that space going and what's left as a hole behind.

Again, what you were talking about in New Brunswick sounds interesting that if you go and qualify, then the next time you find an opening in a space, that family is then assisted with that subsidy. So there are so many things that all interconnected with the way that the funding is in terms of when we talk about sustainability or stability because of those grants - if they're based on individual children and your enrolment drops and as a result, your funding drops, your staffing hasn't dropped, so it doesn't make sense to pull away from one when you're still trying to sustain the other.

When we lose two or three children in our centres, our staffing doesn't change, because we still have to meet the minimum requirements or the requirements of the ratio

regulation. Even that piece has provided problems and instability in that the money that was typically coming to centres that was a finite amount now is going to fluctuate; some of it could fluctuate every six months, where with others it's based on an annual amount.

Again, when you're looking at, okay, we'll start this new grant and here's how we're going to account for it, it's not even the same as a grant that was just started three or four years ago. So you wonder within the department, these little pieces, are they talking to each other and how do they figure that out? Then when you look at the number of people who have been in this field and you start adding up, we're in the hundreds of years of experience in working child care and are the biggest asset that Community Service could have in terms of consultation.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. On behalf of the committee I want to thank each and every one of the presenters. We do value the work that you are doing and it's very important for us to hear your voices and to hear what your concerns are. Believe me, we will try to transfer those into the other areas that we work in. We thank you very much for coming, we appreciate this. We're actually going to do a little bit of committee business, so you're free to leave if you wish. But you have our sincere gratitude for this afternoon, thank you.

Committee members, if you'll refer to your agenda, Page 2. You'll remember that the last couple of years we've had an annual forum and the topic has been poverty. We've had a request from the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities to have a forum this year on disability issues. They're suggesting that the forum be held in June as part of their Access Awareness Week and a month dedicated to disability issues. I'm just wondering what our response should be. Trevor.

MR. ZINCK: Madam Chairman, there are several members of the committee missing today. Would it be right for us to take a stance on this without their opinions? I'm not sure of the protocol, are the members sitting in able to support it? Are they allowed? All three Liberal caucus members aren't the regular members and there are three of us here now that can say yes, are they allowed? I don't know the protocol.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: They have the full rights of . . .

MR. GOSSE: It's like a pinch-hitter.

MR. ZINCK: Okay, sounds good.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Let's have a little discussion. If we're all in agreement then, it may not be an issue. I think if there's any division, then perhaps it could . . .

MR. ZINCK: I think it's a wonderful idea, we have the largest disabled population in all of Canada. I think we definitely should support it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Any other comments? Junior and then Diana.

MR. THERIAULT: I agree.

MS. WHALEN: I think it is an important issue and there are a lot of policy changes that are needed to bring Nova Scotia, I think, into line with making our province more accessible and just more livable for people with disabilities. So I think it would be very useful to talk to people, hear directly their stories as we did in the Poverty Forum, because I was a member of the committee at that time. I think it would be a very useful exercise. Hopefully you'll come away again with a list of 10 or more policy changes that could actually make a difference, so I'd encourage you to do it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Gordie.

MR. GOSSE: Well, you know my feelings, as a parent of an adult with a disability. I'm all for it, yes, absolutely.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, well, I think we're in agreement. Sorry, Pat, did you want to comment?

MR. DUNN: Yes, on behalf of the PC caucus here I certainly do agree, I'd love to hear it, yes, we should certainly be willing and able to listen to their voice. They have issues and we should be listening to them and I'm 100 per cent in agreement.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So let's ask Charlene to investigate. It may be that the Red Room is not available that first week, but as close to meeting their request as possible, if you could just check out the options there.

MS. WHALEN: Could I just ask one question? Will you be doing the same thing where you look for a lot of the different organizations that represent disabled interests, so that it's broad-based . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I'm assuming, yes.

MS. WHALEN: I know LEO is a good umbrella group, but there are a lot of broad-based groups as well that represent different . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Oh, most definitely, I think we'd be looking for the broadest representation possible.

MS. WHALEN: Okay, that's very good.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Trevor.

MR. ZINCK: I just want to make a comment that if we do go ahead in setting this up and there is a Spring election, is there a way that we can let them know that we would like to accommodate them but maybe after first thing in the Fall?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, I'm not sure we can commit whatever standing committee there might be at that time to . . .

MR. ZINCK: Maybe we can just let them know then . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We can recommend . . .

MR. ZINCK: . . . that in case there is a Spring or early summer election that we wouldn't be able to accommodate them.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, actually what might be more of a problem is if the House is still in session that first week of June.

MR. ZINCK: Yes, those two things, I think.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So perhaps they should be alerted that barring any . . .

MR. DUNN: Unforeseen circumstances.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Yes, exactly.

MR. ZINCK: I want to go on the record I'm not calling for one, I'm just putting it out there.

[3:00 p.m.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Gordie.

MR. GOSSE: Take the wind out of the sails, but I sure wouldn't mind. (Laughter) I'm hoping that the carpet is finished in the Red Room by that time, because I know that they're doing some renovations in the Red Room.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: In February, I believe it is.

MR. GOSSE: Okay, I didn't know how long they would be.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: No, they should be finished by March break.

MR. GOSSE: Apparently we're getting nice, bright, new red carpets.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, great. Well, I don't think we need a motion, we've got consensus that we'll go ahead with that. Thank you.

The second item. Our next meeting, as you see there, is going to be on the topic of adoption and foster care, which we all agreed to during our organizational meeting. The April meeting we've set aside for the Children and Family Services advisory committee - it appears that it won't take the full two-hour meeting, so we're wondering if we could partner that topic with another one on our list. I've suggested the United Way 211 system, which is further down the list that we had agreed to. The other possibility might be Seniors' Pharmacare, but I suspect that would take a full two hours, so we may not want to limit that to one hour. So I guess I'm asking for some feedback on whether we should partner the advisory committee topic with the United Way 211 system.

MR. DUNN: Any idea how long you think this is going to take? Would it be an hour, an hour and a half?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The meeting itself?

MR. DUNN: Yes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Well, I think we'd use our full two hours and have an hour for each topic.

MS. WHALEN: Has that committee ever met, that Children and Family Services committee?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I don't think so and I suspect that's one reason it's on . . .

MS. WHALEN: No, met in general, it's a new committee - well, in the last few years.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I think getting the membership has been a problem and I think that's why the committee . . .

MS. WHALEN: I'm not sure it would take an hour if they've never met.

MR. ZINCK: Actually, I sat in on two presentations, so they have met. There hasn't been a finalization on a report, which we would love to see, but I think it's important, especially with the . . .

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is this the working group or the advisory committee?

MR. ZINCK: This is the minister's advisory committee, chaired by Cheryl Harawitz.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, we could be talking about the mandate, the membership and the reporting, so it might take an hour.

MR. ZINCK: There are also some issues going on right now currently in New Brunswick and they are bringing a facilitator over from New Zealand to discuss issues there. They are trying to bring him here, as well, to talk to some people within the department, so I would like to broach that with him. So I would say easily an hour.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So perhaps we could ask the 211 officials to be here early and then if there is any spare time, they could start early. If it's a little later, I'm sure they'd be pleased to be bumped up.

MS. WHALEN: Yes, 211 is an important subject, I agree.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: So any other questions? If not, thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 3:03 p.m.]