

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Tuesday, December 6, 2022**

**Committee Room**

**Truth and Reconciliation:  
Language Legislation and Treaty Education**

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## **COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Melissa Sheehy-Richard (Chair)

John White (Vice Chair)

Larry Harrison

Danielle Barkhouse

Tom Taggart

Hon. Ben Jessome

Lorelei Nicoll

Kendra Coombes

Suzy Hansen

[Kendra Coombes was replaced by Gary Burrill.]

[Suzy Hansen was replaced by Lisa Lachance.]

### In Attendance:

Tamer Nusseibeh  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Karen Kinley  
Legislative Counsel

### WITNESSES

#### Office of L'nu Affairs

Justin Huston  
CEO

Nik Philips  
Policy Analyst

Celeste Sulliman  
Director of Treaty Education



**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2022**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**10:00 A.M.**

CHAIR  
Melissa Sheehy-Richard

VICE-CHAIR  
John White

THE CHAIR: I call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Community Services. I am Melissa Sheehy-Richard, the MLA for Hants West, and the Chair of this committee. Welcome, everyone.

Today we will hear presenters regarding truth and reconciliation - language legislation and treaty education. I just want first to remind everyone to put their phones and other devices on silent. In case of an emergency, I ask that everybody please use the Granville Street exit and walk up to Grand Parade.

I will now ask committee members to introduce themselves for the record by stating their name and their constituency, beginning with MLA White.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I would also like to note the presence of Legislative Counsel Karen Kinley, Legislative Committee Clerk Tamer Nusseibeh, and also Legislative Committee Support Clerk Kim Leadley.

I'd like to welcome the witnesses for joining us today, and I would ask them to introduce themselves as well, beginning with Mr. Huston.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: At this time, I would welcome Mr. Huston to give his opening remarks.

JUSTIN HUSTON: Before I get into my formal remarks, I just want to say thank you for inviting us here. We're very proud to share the work that we do, and we're very interested in having a dialogue with you this morning around any questions you may have about the work that we're doing. I'll also just say that - like probably most in this room - I'm battling a cough for the past month, so forgive me if I have to stop and hydrate.

I'm pleased to join you here today to talk about the work we're doing in partnership with Mi'kmaq on treaty education to support the Mi'kmaw language. Mi'kmaw culture adds so much to our province, and at the Office of L'nu Affairs, we believe all Nova Scotians should have the opportunity to learn about our shared history, Mi'kmaw traditions, and the many contributions of L'nu. We are all treaty people.

Our partnership in treaty education is based on a memorandum of understanding that was signed in 2015 between the Province; Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, or MK; and Millbrook First Nation. It was updated and renewed indefinitely in 2020. Through the MOU, the Mi'kmaq and the Province commit to develop treaty education programs and services. This effort is based on our shared goal, which is to help all Nova Scotians understand the treaty relationship and work toward meaningful reconciliation.

Treaty Education Nova Scotia aims to increase knowledge and awareness by focusing on three main areas: public education; the provincial public service; and the general public. This work is led by an implementation committee that has representatives from MK; the Council on Mi'kmaq Education; Millbrook First Nation; and various provincial departments including obviously the Office of L'nu Affairs; the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage; Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; and the Public Service Commission.

After many ups and downs of the COVID-19 pandemic, I'm pleased to say that treaty education in Nova Scotia is stronger than ever. Despite the recent challenges, we remain committed to making space for courageous conversations, to providing opportunities to learn and understand. Treaty education engages participants by asking four guiding questions, which we'll have an opportunity to circle back on this morning: who are the Mi'kmaq, historically and today; what are the treaties, and why are they important; what happened to the treaty relationship; and what are we doing to reconcile our shared history to ensure justice and equity?

By asking these questions, important dialogue is happening across the province. The number of Nova Scotians taking part in treaty education is growing. As more educators and students get involved, there is also interest in the broader community - including

businesses and community organizations, which I'm sure many of you are aware of and have fielded conversations or phone calls about.

More and more, Public Service employees are also taking part. In the last 18 months, several learning opportunities have been developed for this group. These include learning circles and department-specific workshops, as well as the KAIROS Blanket Exercise. Since its launch in May 2021, over 400 Public Service employees across the province have participated in the workshop called Understanding the Treaty Relationship through online learning.

Madam Chair, I would like to mention an important but difficult part of our shared history in Canada: residential schools. The past two years have been particularly challenging, with the uncovering of children's bodies at former school sites across the country. This devastating news has made many people aware of intergenerational trauma and systemic racism here in Canada and Nova Scotia. There is recognition of the impact still being felt today, including in L'nu communities. As we continue to share truth, we reconcile our collective history. We make space for reconciliation.

All of us here today acknowledge that Mi'kmaw culture and heritage, including language, are important to Mi'kmaw communities. They are important to all Nova Scotians. That's why our partnership with the Mi'kmaq includes working together to promote and preserve the Mi'kmaw language. As part of this effort, the Mi'kmaw Language Act received Royal Assent in April with support from all parties - thank you - in the Legislature and Mi'kmaw partners.

The Act recognizes Mi'kmaq as the original language of this land. It commits the Province to work closely with the Mi'kmaq to revitalize the language. The legislation was proclaimed by the Province and affirmed by the Mi'kmaq during a ceremony on July 17<sup>th</sup> in Potlotek First Nation. The Act came into effect recently, on October 1<sup>st</sup> - Treaty Day, which all of you will remember.

Work is now under way to establish a language committee that will include representation from Mi'kmaw leadership, and educational and other organizations. Each of the 13 Mi'kmaw communities will also be involved directly. The group will lead the development of an action plan to support Mi'kmaw language in the short term and for future generations. This language strategy will be something to celebrate as we continue to move forward on our commitment.

Madam Chair, working with our Mi'kmaw partners on treaty education and Mi'kmaw language has made our relationship with one another stronger. It has helped build mutual understanding and advances reconciliation. While progress is being made, there is also much more to do.

Thank you to the committee again for inviting me here and my colleagues here today. I would be pleased, as well as my colleagues, to answer any questions you may have. Wela'lioq. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: We'll proceed into our round of questioning. This committee functions with a 20-minute question period for each caucus.

I just want to remind everybody to wait until their name is called and I recognize you and your microphone turns red before speaking. At the end of the 20 minutes, we will have to cut you off mid-sentence. Those who have been here before know that.

At this point, I invite someone from the Liberal caucus to begin. MLA Nicoll.

LORELEI NICOLL: I would just like to thank you for being here, and your presentation. I was kind of waiting for the other two to speak as well, but I will direct some of my questions and welcome you to answer them in that regard.

The bill you just spoke of came into effect in the Fall. We're just wondering about the progress you just mentioned. I had action plan written here in my note, and you actually said action plan, so my first question is to know more about the action plan. When might we see that, and where could we find it?

JUSTIN HUSTON: The work is under way right now. For some of these things, the output is as important as the process and the journey.

We're working very closely with our Mi'kmaw partners to design the process, hand in hand. My executive director at the Office of L'nu Affairs, Ian Bower, is working directly with Blaire Gould at MK. They are chairing this language committee that is working. They've already started to do the work on the MK side, working and connecting with each community. The idea right now is that we've got a draft terms of reference and we're building the membership, right down to the individual level. I'm hopeful that in the coming months after the holidays, we'll have a finalized terms of reference and the membership, so we'll be able to get under way in the Spring with regular meetings to build that action plan.

LORELEI NICOLL: I understand the extensive work that has been done and where you are now, so I applaud you on that.

I was just going to switch now to elaborate on how you're addressing treaty education at a post-secondary level. The 2017 framework speaks in a very structured way on the P-12 curriculum, but the memorandum of understanding with the universities speaks to treaty education in a much broader way. I just wondered what concrete progress has been made within the university system.

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'll start with an answer, and then I might hand it to Celeste - for some of the work you've been doing with some of the universities. Essentially, our work is to provide help, support, and overall information and guidance. Really, the universities have been taking this on their own, and they've all taken some different approaches. There are inconsistencies, but they're all looking in some ways, which I think is really exciting - they're all seeing it as an important way that defines their identity as universities, and in some ways a competitive edge.

They realize that they need to develop these programs to serve their students who are Indigenous and non-Indigenous. They're stepping up and they've created some work across universities, where they're working together. Interestingly enough, in some ways they've been a bit siloed because they see it as all trying to get into that space and do it their own way based on their own culture at their universities.

I'll let Celeste speak to that in more detail.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Sulliman.

CELESTE SULLIMAN: We do work somewhat with the universities. Most of the focus of Treaty Education Nova Scotia is on the P-12 curriculum and focusing on P-12 teachers, but some of the work that we do is in response to some of those universities coming to us to look for either resources or really for us to provide them with some sort of navigation services, some facilitation services, link universities and communities together.

Some of the universities are doing some really great creative work as a result of some engagement with treaty education. Just recently, a university announced an auntie-in-residence program, which is a very unique program. Another is that a number of them have Mi'kmaw education coordinators who will help both the faculty and the students navigate the treaty education information. Some of them even have elders in residence.

The universities are doing some really great work. It's a little bit beyond our scope to prescribe the work that these academic institutions do, but there's both great academic work and great student service work being done by the universities to educate people on the treaty relationship.

THE CHAIR: I'll just take a moment and let MLA Jessome introduce himself to the committee for Legislative TV purposes too.

HON. BEN JESSOME: I tried to sneak in here without too much notice. Excuse my tardiness, folks - I'm Ben Jessome and I represent Hammonds Plains-Lucasville. Thank you all for being here.

LORELEI NICOLL: To that point, everyone is very interested in learning the language, leaving the initiative to universities, but there's also the desire by Nova Scotian

adults to learn the language and there's also the opportunity with NSCC. I'm going to go into my next question in that regard, but you can answer it when you respond.

As an MLA who has a reserve within Cole Harbour-Dartmouth, how can we integrate the principles of treaty education in our own communities? What could we do? There is a desire from the general public wanting to know more, but right now the reserve has kind of like a standoff approach. I don't know how to do it. It's very much like education, when you have students who want to learn but don't know how to approach that.

[10:15 a.m.]

I just wondered if there were something that we could do to improve that relationship. I mean, I have the office of the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat right there at the reserve, and I've been there - I am a former municipal councillor; I created that relationship. But now provincially, that relationship - I don't know whether to approach or not. So I just wondered what we could do and how you could facilitate.

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'll start with an answer to that, but I think I'll hand it over to Celeste and Nik to give us some examples of the work that is happening at the community level.

I think those are the key things: the curiosity and the desire. I think that's the foundation that treaty education must build upon. The work that we're often doing is about sparking that interest, but often that interest already exists, and then it's about how to provide safe places, good information, a good process to have those conversations and to make those community connections.

The Mi'kmaw communities are all different. There isn't a homogeneous group of individuals - everybody's individual in different communities, just like across Nova Scotia. I think it's really important for MLAs and community leaders to understand that we're all in the same communities. It's those family connections. It's the people you see at the store, at the gas station.

What I think treaty education can help to do is help to have those conversations in a way that allows the non-Indigenous partners in that to come to a conversation where it isn't putting all the emphasis and the weight on our Indigenous community members to hold that space for. We have the work to do, as non-Indigenous allies.

Maybe I'll hand it over to Celeste and/or Nik to identify examples of some of the work that we do, whether it's the speakers' bureau or some of the different things we can do at the community level.



CELESTE SULLIMAN: I love that you raised that point. Most often, that's the question that we get from individuals: How can I do this? It's very simple and it's very complex all at once.

What we really work to do in treaty education is create understanding, to fight against racism, but to talk a little bit about the truth of our shared history, which for a lot of people is very painful and difficult to both talk about and hear. We're really all about building relationships. That's key. I'll say that that's the foundational piece to treaty education: building relationships.

When we talk about building those relationships, we talk about building those based on curiosity, and also based on intention and authenticity. When we engage people in treaty education, no matter what audience we're dealing with, we always ask people to take a look at what their intentions are, take a look at the value that you place on the relationship, and just be curious and be authentic in approaching both people in L'nu communities, and Indigenous people living in the urban population.

We do a lot of work with communities through our Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Speakers' Bureau. Sometimes it's individuals in communities or in organizations who will come to us, and they'll want learning. We can't do all the teaching. We can't facilitate all the groups. But we can help people navigate communities in order to connect with individuals within communities so that people can build relationships.

We have access to a really open and knowledgeable group of elders, knowledge holders, and educators in L'nu communities and through the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, where we can match people in community with people who are curious and who want to learn. There are some formal ways to do that, and we also just encourage people to build those authentic relationships. If it feels right, we say enter into the space, which sometimes can feel awkward but gets easier as we build the relationship.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Philips, did you have something you wanted to add as well?

NIK PHILIPS: I would specifically like to just talk about our Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Speakers' Bureau. It's something that we have actively been working on - not as owners of the speakers' bureau, but as stewards of the speakers' bureau in building those relationships. In understanding that Mi'kmaw communities are not homogeneous - that communities are different and have their own experiences. We use the speakers' bureau as an intersection in being able to build capacity and relationships in that regard. That's what I would like to share.

LORELEI NICOLL: I need to delve more into what the speakers' bureau does and what I could do to facilitate. I know I hear from both sides - is there anything you can do to help us? I hear that from the Millbrook people. I'd be more than happy to do that.

Every time you say L'nu Affairs - for years I kept saying, why are they calling it the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, that so needs to change. It's music to my ears to not hear that anymore.

Also, I just wanted to add that I have met with the reserve people, and they talked about truth and reconciliation many times, and they said they wanted to make Treaty Day, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, an actual holiday. They still have the desire to have a statutory holiday and wondered if that was part of your action plan, or if that is something that has to go down a different path.

JUSTIN HUSTON: I can speak to that. That isn't specific to treaty education and the work that we're doing, but there are conversations being had with relevant departments around exploring whether that could be a statutory holiday. Canada recognizes it. While the Province doesn't recognize it as a statutory holiday, it's certainly something that we're considering.

I should also note too that our Mi'kmaw partners and leadership have often, prior to the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, which the federal government created as a holiday, previously called for Treaty Day - which is October 1<sup>st</sup> instead of September 30<sup>th</sup> - to be a holiday to recognize that treaty relationship.

There's some convergence there around that, and I think we've seen that over the last couple of years with the new federal holiday and looking at ways that it can tie into what has been always more important here in Nova Scotia, which is October 1<sup>st</sup>, which is Treaty Day.

THE CHAIR: MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: How much time do I have remaining?

THE CHAIR: 5:20.

BEN JESSOME: Thank you folks - I appreciate your time and efforts here this morning. It's important work, and it's just nice to see governments taking steps to advance these types of initiatives.

I'm wondering how treaty education ties into service delivery for government. I guess we're probably talking about a broader scenario, but given the nature of this particular committee - we're talking about Community Services - I'd like to know how treaty education fits into a better situation for our Mi'kmaq and broader population with respect to service delivery.

JUSTIN HUSTON: I think that's a great question - thanks for making the connection, too. It really is critical.

When we talk about ensuring that all Nova Scotians receive the level of service and program delivery they need, it's important that we talk about being culturally appropriate in terms of meeting people where they are. We know that Indigenous peoples in communities, African Nova Scotian communities, and other marginalized communities don't always receive the same level of service because the system might not be able to reflect who they are or how they need their services delivered.

A fundamental part of treaty education is helping people who are delivering the services understand that treaty relationship and understand the unique cultural and historical background of the people they're working with - understanding things like intergenerational trauma. It is a foundational piece.

What I would say is that the treaty education work lays the groundwork, and then we have other programs. Celeste mentioned that sometimes we will do work specifically with certain departments, and we will - whether it's through the speakers' bureau or it's having specific sessions that we will tailor for, say, the Department of Community Services or the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables that speak to the work that they're doing and help put it in the context of treaty education.

Then there is work that the departments will do on their own, either with our office at L'nu Affairs, that is a little bit different from treaty education. But it's a critical part of how we're trying to really transform the public service in terms of meeting the needs of all Nova Scotians, and this is that foundational level of information so that people can understand, and they can get a bit of a better perspective before they have those conversations on the phone or they're trying to deliver programs and services.

BEN JESSOME: Does your department have - and by extension, other departments in government - perhaps I'll use the word targets in terms of annually we want to ensure that this many people within our broader public service are engaged in this type of education? Are there specific strategies within respective departments to facilitate this type of work? Can you comment on anything that's structurally definitive within a strategic plan scenario?

JUSTIN HUSTON: There are a few answers to that. I'll try to cover it off, and if I don't, let me know.

We don't have specific targets in terms of, say, the number of public servants who are taking the training. It's not mandatory. We can speak to some of the numbers in terms of those who have participated.

Different departments, based on the work that they do, have already in place and/or are in the process of developing either specific units or staff who are focused particularly on working with Mi'kmaw and Indigenous communities and individuals here in the province. For example, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

has the Mi'kmaq Services branch. At NRR - the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables - there are certain staff who are dedicated just to working with the Mi'kmaq on various programs and projects.

A lot of the work that they do is work with the Office of L'nu Affairs. We're sort of a coordinating hub of an office. There are only 17 of us. A lot of our work is working with those departments to help them do their work with the Mi'kmaq in a way that's culturally appropriate. We're trying to shift the idea of - and you definitely don't want to use the word stakeholder. It's not an interest group that we're working with. We're working with rightsholders in many milieus. It's a partnership. It's changing the way that we do that work. Many departments have already adopted that or are in the process of building . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. Thank you. Sorry about that.

We will now move on to the NDP caucus. MLA Lachance.

[10:30 a.m.]

LISA LACHANCE: Thank you so much for being here. I guess I wanted to start off - and this might not be a direct question to you, but you can comment on it if you'd like to. As members would know, and as the Chair would know, I don't normally sit on this committee. I was excited to come for this topic, but I was also just a bit concerned that we didn't actually have any representation from MK or from Millbrook First Nation speaking today.

I don't know that you want to comment on that, but I think it's super important to not talk about Indigenous folks without Indigenous folks representing communities at the table.

JUSTIN HUSTON: They absolutely were invited to participate, but they didn't feel they could make it work, given timing and schedules. We made them aware that we were invited. They were certainly open to participate, but they chose not to at this time. I think it is important - we certainly know "nothing about us without us" is the approach. They were certainly invited as partners.

I would say, all the work that we're talking about doing, and I want to emphasize this: treaty education in Nova Scotia is a banner, and any of the work that comes under that banner is done in partnership with the Mi'kmaq. When we talk about the work that is happening, we have a strategic plan and we have an annual work plan that we work out with our Mi'kmaw partners, and we are responsible for delivering certain aspects of it. They are as well within, say, their school system or in their communities. It is something that we have worked out together. This is what we're going to focus on for the next year, the next five years.

When we say Treaty Education Nova Scotia, it's important to emphasize there's the work that our office does, but the speakers' bureau and everything is done in conjunction with our Mi'kmaw partners.

LISA LACHANCE: I think perhaps you started to answer my next question. You referred to the MOU as indefinite since 2020. How is that implemented in a practical sense annually, and how is progress marked through the MOU process?

JUSTIN HUSTON: To go back a little bit - if you'll bear with me a little bit. This isn't to eat up the clock, I think it's just good background information. The work that we're doing in treaty education is modeled after some work that has been happening for decades, really, in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. It was a partnership between the First Nations assembly of different provinces, different groups, and the federal government. In Nova Scotia we took a different approach, where it was really the Province working in partnership with the Mi'kmaq to develop our own approach to treaty education.

The term, "we're all treaty people" - that is a term that's borrowed from out west. The way they said it was - we're very honoured that we came out there to learn from them, and it's their job to pass it on. We're having these similar conversations with our colleagues in P.E.I. and other provinces that are looking to build from Nova Scotia.

We signed this MOU in 2015 - I think it was for five years or every three years - and in 2020, we decided to renew that. Rather than putting a date on it, it would be indefinite. There are always those caveats if either party wants to pull out, but we don't foresee that happening. As you can imagine, an MOU is quite high-level and it identifies some big, thematic areas, but it doesn't get down to the details of what are we going to do. That's where the implementation committee comes in.

There's a strategic plan and there are annual work plans that we identify in terms of who's doing what. We try to be flexible and adaptive, because that's the name of the game, but that's how we keep track. At a senior level - although we haven't been able to meet because of COVID-19 - there are a number of chiefs, myself, and other deputy ministers who would meet on an annual basis - or more frequently if needed - to review the progress and to provide direction and advice in terms of how to keep moving.

LISA LACHANCE: You talked about the Mi'kmaw language, which was certainly very important and had all-party support, as you noted. I think at the time that we were considering that in the Legislature, I talked about the importance of language to really understand where we are and who we are. We're very excited to see that work start. What is the budget this year for work related to that Act?

JUSTIN HUSTON: There is no budget assigned to that for the work this year. There are funds that we're utilizing just to get the committee going, but basically, we have said

we need the committee to come together and pull together what the plan is and sketch out what the actions are, so that we can then fund appropriately.

The federal government has dedicated significant dollars. I could be wrong, but it's either \$500,000 or I think it went up to \$1 million to work on language initiatives in the province, directly to MK.

We're looking to make sure that any work that we do is not duplicative - that it can leverage those dollars, and that it can be used most effectively and efficiently. We're looking for essentially that committee to come together to recommend: here's what the approach should be and here's what we think the Province should - and then we'll make our assessment and decisions from there.

LISA LACHANCE: One more, and then we have to pass it on to my colleague MLA Burrill.

You spoke of the emphasis - and this might be a question for Ms. Sulliman - on P-12 treaty education. I'm wondering, how is that work evaluated?

CELESTE SULLIMAN: Thanks for the question. The work that's being done in P-12 education - both in MK schools and in the Nova Scotia public schools - is being led specifically by Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The Mi'kmaq Services branch at EECD is the primary branch of EECD that's leading that work.

Nik and I do collaborate with those two groups to support projects on creating resources, teacher training and education, events, and facilitating presenters in schools for students, and I'll say a number of other activities. The list is really quite long, the number of pieces that we're engaged in.

What I can say is that the focus right now is on creating some resources for both students and teachers. One of the things I think we have to realize is that we can create all the resources that we want for the children in the schools, but the teachers who are teaching that curriculum have not received that same education.

What we're doing is trying to make sure that new teachers - embedded in their curriculum is work on the treaty relationship and on understanding the complexities around things like residential schools, centralization and enfranchisement, and those issues that we talk about in treaty education. There are a lot of teacher in-services that are done in order to ensure that teachers are able to educate the students and help the students navigate some of the work.

If I can share, we have a celebration this week. We co-created, in a very complex way - because nothing is really simple in treaty education; it's very complex - the Province,

working with MK and working with Bouton d'or Acadie, a press in Moncton, New Brunswick, created a resource called - it's *The Honour Song*. That resource is a story levelled for Grades 4 and 5 that is about the creation of the "Honour Song", which is a very sacred song in L'nu culture. It's in English, French, and Mi'kmaq, and we're getting to celebrate the launch of that.

In terms of measuring the success, right now what we're doing is we're starting small. I say we're eating the elephant one bite at a time. We're trying to slowly introduce resources, concepts like etuaptmunk and netukulimk, into the school curriculum both in L'nu schools and in public schools, and we're trying to do teacher training.

JUSTIN HUSTON: Just to follow up on Celeste, and to your question specifically as well, what I want to emphasize is the work that happened, particularly with EECD and MK, that they have woven into - teachers teach to curriculum outcomes, right? That is probably the biggest measure. Woven into every class in every grade are curriculum outcomes that relate to treaty education.

If you're in second grade, or let's say sixth grade math, there will be elements of treaty education or Mi'kmaw curriculum outcomes woven into it. This isn't like in the past, where you might have a Grade 10 class in history on the Mi'kmaq or about - this is woven throughout. If anybody has kids or grandkids here, you will know that starting in pre-Primary or Primary, they're hearing the "Honour Song". In Grade 2, they're starting to understand what it means to have a partnership and a relationship. It's age-appropriate and it scales all the way up to the time that they're going to be graduating from Grade 12.

Specifically to your point, they will be graded on those outcomes. Teachers will be held accountable to those curriculum outcomes, which include aspects of treaty education built right in - we wanted to make sure it was built right in. All that work happened with Mi'kmaw partners, with folks I think at St. Francis Xavier University and others who specialize in pedagogy. I've got two educators here, a university professor - Nik, you were director of education at Millbrook First Nation, right? They'll do the education talk, but it's pretty amazing what we've been able to do, and it's very unique across the country. You don't see this anywhere else in the country.

THE CHAIR: MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: At what time do we need to conclude?

THE CHAIR: There are eight minutes left.

GARY BURRILL: I wanted to think a little more broadly about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and where we are on the calls to action in Nova Scotia. One of them that speaks so clearly to the provincial jurisdiction is the whole question of disproportionate incarceration. The call there is not just to eliminate that of course, but also

to develop a reporting mechanism by which we can see how we are moving out of this terrible disproportionate situation. Where are we in Nova Scotia on reporting towards the accomplishment of this goal?

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'm glad you brought up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the 94 calls to action. It's something that we'd been working on prior even to its release. Since the release of the calls to action we have been tracking our progress on the various items.

You're absolutely right. There is a disproportionately high number of Indigenous folks attached to our justice system and incarcerated, and there is work under way. The short answer is that we are reporting on the numbers. We have a sense of what those numbers are - I don't have them right here. There are a number of efforts under way in terms of looking at ways to reduce that incarceration.

The Department of Justice is working with Mi'kmaw partners on an Indigenous justice strategy that will look at how to prioritize and frame some of this work, but there is a lot of work that's already going on. Everything from looking at programs at the end of the pipe, in prisons, looking at correctional officers who are from community or who have the cultural training and background to work with community, to backing up it up to things like restorative justice. Rather than a pipeline into incarceration, are there other traditional ways to look at - whether it's the court in Wagmatcook in the Gladue court system - where it's looking at alternative resolutions versus incarceration?

Then backing it up even further and looking at work that's happening, tripartite conversations and negotiations that are happening around programs like social income assistance on reserve and looking at ways to have more of a wraparound, where the family and the individuals are at the centre. We're looking at full care in all programs and services so that we avoid people falling through the cracks.

Backing it up even further into youth and looking at making sure that they see themselves having a place in society and in the economy. If you're in community and you're looking at perhaps Eskasoni First Nation, where you've got a 70 per cent child poverty rate, you need to be able to see what your options are going forward. A lot of the work that's happening at MK, the work that we're doing in economic development and training with NSCC is looking at whether there are opportunities for youth, in terms of the broader society and growing our economy. It's the key to all of Nova Scotia's success, but particularly for those communities.

GARY BURRILL: I think there's a pretty broad agreement that we are not one of the most advanced jurisdictions in the country on this front. When the TRC came out, at that stage, we were one of the few provinces that actually didn't even have statistics on disproportionate administrative confinement. Do we still not have those statistics? Do we know about Indigenous populations and solitary confinement yet?



[10:45 a.m.]

JUSTIN HUSTON: I don't have an answer to that, but that is something that I can follow up with. We'll make sure that we provide information back to the committee on that.

GARY BURRILL: Just about the TRC - that key recommendation about adopting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. You know, there are other parts of the country that have seen this as an important thing to do; the TRC thinks of it as an important thing to do. Are there discussions within the government, or are there discussions in your work, about moving toward this goal? Where are we on the adoption of UNDRIP.

JUSTIN HUSTON: Thanks for the question. I'll provide a little bit of context as well, but I'll start with answering your question directly and then provide some context.

There are no discussions under way right now around formally adopting UNDRIP, in legislation or otherwise. What I would say is that the work that we do - whether it's in consultations or negotiations or treaty education or otherwise - is very consistent with all the principles of UNDRIP, but we're not in formal conversations around something like what British Columbia's done, where they're adopting their own legislation around UNDRIP.

I'll point back to the context around the TRC. When the TRC came out and had 94 calls to action - we have in Nova Scotia something called the Mi'kmaq-Nova Scotia-Canada Tripartite Forum, which some of you may be familiar with. It is an organization that has existed for over 20 years. It came together, basically, as a way to solve problems collectively between the Mi'kmaq, the federal government, and Nova Scotia around justice, education, sport and recreation - whatever it might be. We brought that forum together - when I say "we," all partners, led by the Mi'kmaq - and held a symposium chaired by Senator Christmas to look at ways to prioritize those 94 calls to action in Nova Scotia.

It was a two-day session that we held up in Membertou, and it was basically hearing from leadership in community and across the two levels of government about where to prioritize. The areas that we prioritized were things like health, some work around treaty education, education broadly, economic development. Of those calls to action, we probably had about seven or eight that were seen as priorities by the chiefs, which we've been acting on as a priority. We're due to re-circle back to the Tripartite Forum around what some of those priorities might be in a check-in.

I wanted to provide that context, that we're really following the lead of that Tripartite Forum and that process. For example, discussions around the Mi'kmaw health authority, Tajiikeimik - that is well under way with the federal government and ourselves

around looking at ways to advance that. Things like social income assistance, some of the work around recognizing truth and reconciliation around sort of a monument to residential schools. That's some of the work that's going on there.

THE CHAIR: You have 30 seconds, MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: There's only one call to action in the provincial jurisdiction about language and culture: the elimination of provincial fees for people who wish to change their names to pre-colonial form. Where are we on that?

JUSTIN HUSTON: We've already done that.

GARY BURRILL: I didn't know. That's wonderful.

THE CHAIR: Perfect timing. Order. We will now move on to the Progressive Conservative caucus. MLA White.

JOHN WHITE: Mr. Huston, in your opening remarks and throughout the day as well, you've mentioned a few government departments and Mi'kmaw partners who are working on treaty education in Nova Scotia. Can you take a few more minutes to tell us how these partners work together and maybe describe some of the accomplishments that they've had over the last year?

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'll talk about the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, which conveniently is the portfolio I also hold. Then I'll hand it over to Celeste, who can share a little bit about the work at the Public Service Commission as well as the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, which we've touched upon quite a bit already.

At the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, we are a key partner in treaty education. We have staff who sit on the implementation committee, and going back to the cultural action plan five or six years ago, woven right into that plan was a focus on Mi'kmaw culture, language, and art. It is really infused into the work that we do in the department. We pilot a lot of the initiatives that might be coming out of treaty education. We're kind of a testing ground or incubator for some of the work that might happen.

If you've had a chance to go to the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History recently or the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, you will see Mi'kmaw culture and language on full display in brand new exhibits. We're actually working on a new exhibit in the Museum of Natural History that will happen, I think, next Fall, that's being worked very closely in partnership. A lot of the work that we do, again, is "nothing about us without us." Roger Lewis, who is a very well-respected Mi'kmaw ethnologist, related to archaeology and

cultural heritage at the museum - he's a member of Mi'kmaq Grand Council as well - has been leading a lot of that work.

That's an example of some of the stuff that's happening at CCTH. I'll also say that CCTH worked in partnership with the Office of L'nu Affairs in the development of the language legislation. We will be there in partnership as a department with OLA on all these initiatives.

CELESTE SULLIMAN: I'll talk just a little bit about the work that our partners at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and at the Public Service Commission are engaged in. I'll start with the Public Service Commission. We work really closely with our colleagues and the people in the culture division, who essentially lead a lot of the training in equity, diversity, and anti-racism. I think earlier, you learned that Nik and I co-developed and co-deliver a workshop called Understanding the Treaty Relationship, and that workshop is an eight-hour workshop.

It's quite intense. It takes a lot for Nik and me to deliver that and for people to take it, so we are working really closely with Public Service Commission in order to address the need for people to be able to access that a little more readily. We're working on an online, self-directed version of that course so that people from all across the province, no matter whether you sit at a desk or whether you drive a snow plow, that you have access to that course. We're trying to do it in a culturally sensitive way, but also in a way that will make it more accessible to more individuals.

Between that, and then some of the work that is being done in anti-racism and at the learning centre - for example, the learning centre hosts and helps us enroll and coordinate KAIROS Blanket Exercises for public service employees across government. We just held one last week. The Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre hosted us, and we had close to 40 public service employees from departments all across and from different regions all across Nova Scotia come and join us for that learning session at the Friendship Centre.

I've spoken about some of the work that EECD is doing, but essentially the work that's coming out of Mi'kmaq Services branch on treaty education is really pivotal and it's foundational to all the work that we do. All of the resources that they help create and curriculum pieces are foundational pieces for the work that we do. I'll also share that just recently, EECD hired a woman by the name of Sharon Bernard who is the reconciliation coordinator. She is specifically there to increase learning around residential schools. Those are some of the pieces.

JOHN WHITE: I'm probably going to ask you to elaborate a little more. When we looked at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action, we noticed that call to action No. 57 speaks to federal, provincial, and municipal governments providing "... education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools. This will require skill-based training in intercultural

competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.” Much of the stuff that you’ve already talked about.

Can you share with the committee, or maybe elaborate a little more on some of the specific work that’s being done on treaty education to address this call?

NIK PHILIPS: Specifically, to talk about some of the stuff that we’re doing, first and foremost, we have definitely heard from our Public Service colleagues in some of the areas that we need to address. One of the things that we have certainly been doing is developing what we call treaty education series, which are information sheets that we provide in collaboration with community in developing specific things and topics.

To speak to some of those, we have recently developed one that looks at the office name and why we moved away from Aboriginal Affairs, using the term L’nu - understanding that the term L’nu comes from the root word ninnu, meaning “my tongue,” so that we’re speaking all the same tongue. Those information sheets are provided to Public Service employees at their request.

As Celeste has noted, we’ve also developed that eight-hour Understanding the Treaty Relationship workshop, which essentially addresses the four treaty education questions: Who are the Mi’kmaq historically and today; what are treaties and why are they important; what has happened to the treaty relationship; and how do we reconcile our shared history in an equitable and just way?

In that regard, in terms of some of the actual stuff that we’ve done in terms of numbers that I would like to share: to date, Celeste and I have been able to make contact with over 1,000 Public Service employees, specifically completing 31 small projects. We have completed 10 presentations, which also include lunch and learns that we offer. We also have completed the Understanding the Treaty Relationship and KAIROS Blanket Exercise five times this fiscal year.

Those are some of the things that we are specifically doing in regard to that call to action No. 57, as it relates to Public Service employees.

JUSTIN HUSTON: I’d just like to toot our horn a little bit as well on this. I can tell you from my experience talking with colleagues across definitely Atlantic Canada, we are way out in front on this work. I can tell you as well from talking to some of our federal colleagues, we are drilling down way more in depth in the level and quality of training that our public servants are receiving. We’re in some discussions with our federal colleagues, as well as our Atlantic province colleagues around how they can learn from some of the work we’re doing and/or piggyback on some of the work that we’re doing here.

It’s a real opportunity to recognize the work that’s happened in seven short years. To go from not even having any kind of a treaty education program in place, to really being

seen as a regional, national leader in the work that we're doing and the way that we're doing it.

JOHN WHITE: Not to put you on the spot, but in reaching out to 1,000 employees, that's a good portion. Have there been any opportunities or challenges that really stand out? If there are, great. If there aren't, that's okay.

CELESTE SULLIMAN: The great thing about us reaching out is that people are there waiting to take our hand. We have no problem filling courses, filling seats for the KAIROS Blanket Exercise. We have no problem at all attracting people to lunch and learns. Nik did one just recently with a group from the Higher Education Branch, and there were 75 people in that learning session alone that he delivered a couple of weeks ago.

[11:00 a.m.]

That's really wonderful. It's wonderful to see the responsiveness and it's wonderful to see people have a real willingness to want to learn and to want to expand their learning. I guess the biggest challenge is capacity. We would love to clone ourselves and each other. We have colleagues all across government who are sharing the load. Nik and I have the great privilege to lead some of this work from the Office of L'nu Affairs. We really are the navigators and the facilitators and the relationship builders.

There's a whole slew of people who work collaboratively with us. Without them, we couldn't do the work, but we really would love to clone ourselves so that we could double that or triple that. But perhaps the creation of an online self-directed learning tool will help with that, and then we can just go from there and build on that.

JOHN WHITE: I too am a public schoolteacher, and I've got to say, when you have your student body showing up already engaged and involved, 90 per cent of your lesson is already delivered. That's excellent news to hear, for sure.

One last question before I pass it on to MLA Harrison. In looking at the work in treaty education across the country, there appears to be a strong connection between the federal government and the work being done in places like British Columbia, as you mentioned already, and Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Here in Nova Scotia, it looks like the province and the Mi'kmaq have a strong partnership working together, which is great to see. Mr. Huston, you kind of touched on this already when you mentioned \$500,000 to \$1 million. Can you describe in some more detail the role that the federal government currently has in funding and supporting treaty education in Nova Scotia?

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'll provide a little bit of context of the governance context here. There's treaty education in Nova Scotia as an initiative, and then there's broader work

that the federal government is doing relative to education. They're linked, but they're distinct.

It's important to understand that the federal government provides funding to MK, or Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey - the Mi'kmaw school authority - essentially for them to run their programs, as well as capital for all their schools. So they have that direct relationship. Our relationship with MK is that we set curriculum outcomes, and as long as MK helps students reach those curriculum outcomes, they can teach their students however they want, essentially. I'm simplifying it. The federal government has a significant role to play in the sense of the work that they do to support MK.

When it comes to treaty education specifically, as I mentioned, we're a bit unique here in the sense that in Nova Scotia it has been primarily a partnership between the Province of Nova Scotia and the Mi'kmaq. The federal involvement has been limited. I would say mainly they have provided some significant project funding so, say, for some of the work that was required to develop the curriculum outcomes at the P-12 level. They provided some specific funding. They provided some other project funding.

We have offered, frankly, to them to say, look, I think there's an opportunity for you to become more involved, and they haven't taken us up on that, for whatever reason. I'm not quite sure. But that's kind of fine in some ways, because I think what it's allowed us to do is be very Nova Scotia focused, and nimble and adaptable. Whenever you involve the federal government, as you can appreciate, just like we want to have consistency across the province, the feds have this thing around precedents or consistency across the country. That can sometimes be more of a hindrance than a help.

We bring this up as one of the areas for future collaboration all the time. Personally, it's been a little bit of a frustration on my end of things that we haven't had as much participation from the federal government in treaty education to date. It's something we'll continue to work on.

THE CHAIR: MLA Harrison.

LARRY HARRISON: The Mi'kmaw Language Act - extremely important legislation - no question about it. Can you speak a little bit more about the importance of the legislation and what that legislation's really going to mean as we move ahead?

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'll speak to it maybe from a government process, but Nik, I might call on you just as a language speaker to speak more from a personal perspective as well. The calls for the Province to do something about language really started coming about three years ago, just pre-COVID-19. It's around when the federal government started introducing the idea of a Language Act, which they had passed at a federal level. There were calls provincially to do something similar to show that support.

The response from the government at the time was, we're interested, but we need more information - tell us why this is so important and compelling. The Mi'kmaq had done some work that they had led themselves around looking at the percentage of language speakers in community and were able to show that the trend over the past 10 years is basically like this: Even as the population grows in the community, the number of native speakers or those who would say it's their first language is decreasing. One number that stands out to me is in Eskasoni First Nation, which is the largest Mi'kmaw community in the world. As Chief Leroy likes to say, there are just under 5,000 people in the community, and fewer than 30 per cent are fluent in Mi'kmaq.

That number is dwindling as knowledge keepers and holders and elders unfortunately pass away, and for youth, who are very influenced by western culture and what they see on Netflix and video games, it's not as cool to learn. There's a real sense of urgency and crisis within the Mi'kmaw community, and they've essentially reached out as partners to say: We know a lot of this work has to happen from within, and we need to be the leaders of that as a community, as Mi'kmaq, but what can the Province do to work and support that?

The legislation really provides an enabling framework for the Province and the Mi'kmaq to work together in conjunction with what the Mi'kmaq are doing with federal support around how do we work to collectively support Mi'kmaw language across the province. Some examples of that would be around normalizing the language. If anybody is familiar with New Zealand, has had a chance to travel there or has seen some of their promotional material or has seen the start of a rugby match, you will know that the Maori language is ubiquitous throughout the country. "Kia ora" is the hello that's in New Zealand. It is a part of their national identity.

There's work that we can do here in the province around making it part of our provincial identity. Signage is another example of ways that we can support MK in teaching language in their schools, the way that we could teach kids in the general public schools words here and there or language, or Indigenous students or L'nu or Mi'kmaw students in schools having support where possible.

We're waiting to see what the Mi'kmaw language implementation committee is going to come up with in terms of potential actions for the next one to five years, and then based on that, we'll figure out what our space is as a government to support the work of the Mi'kmaq in doing that work. I'll hand it over to Nik now, if you want to share a little reflection as well.

NIK PHILIPS: Deputy Minister Huston talked about it from a strategic place of understanding, and what I would like to share is from a cultural sense. When we talk about moving forward with this legislation, what does that mean? It's really understanding and acknowledging what it means to be the first language of this land and acknowledging that our language is descriptive and distinctive in its use. It's very different from English.

By being able to use the language, it allows us to - the language itself is encoded with the qualities and the understanding of the relationship that we not only have to ourselves, but also the relationship that we have with community, and also the natural environment, and knowing that all of these pieces are interconnected.

When we look at Eskasoni being the largest Mi'kmaw community, and seeing that only 30 per cent speak the language, that in itself speaks to the urgency and the reason why revitalization is so important. Language is the key to our identity, and not only to our identity as individual people, but the language itself speaks to the relationship that each and every single one of us as treaty people have to the natural environment.

THE CHAIR: Order. We now have 10 minutes left per caucus, so we can go back now to the Liberal caucus. It looks like MLA Nicoll.

LORELEI NICOLL: It's been very informative. It's interesting as you speak about governance. We were wondering, why are they coming to Community Services? That speaks volumes to the fact that we have to find a permanent way in how you're working the broad portfolio that Mr. Huston has. It speaks to that.

I want to ask about Section 6 of the House of Assembly Act. It declares the House's intention to add a member representing the Mi'kmaw people. Has there been any discussion between the Province and Mi'kmaw representatives on this outstanding commitment? Also, the Act requires the Premier to hold annual consultations concerning the nature of Mi'kmaw representation in our democracy and to report to the House.

While we know the Premier is no longer responsible for L'nu Affairs, it was something I remember former Premier Dexter brought forward, and subsequent premiers also held that portfolio, but that is no more. The Act is quite specific that the Premier must report to the House. If we could get an update on the status of this reporting and the substance of these conversations, as we're having it today, I think it is imperative and so important that we have it in the Legislature. I just wanted to ask about that.

JUSTIN HUSTON: This is an interesting one around the seat in the Legislature. I can't remember when that was passed. I think it was the '80s or early '90s, the idea of ensuring representation. It was from the Mi'kmaw community as well as the African Nova Scotian community. I can speak from the conversations that happened with Mi'kmaw leaders at the time, and even as recently as a couple months ago. The initial response back was, I'll paraphrase here: Thanks, but no thanks. We are our own level of government (Interruption) - right, order of government. We are not going to be sitting in your government. We are a Mi'kmaw nation, we're our own government, and we have a table for that, and that's our made-in-Nova-Scotia tripartite negotiation process, as well as other tables like I referenced earlier, the Mi'kmaq-Nova Scotia-Canada Tripartite Forum and others.



However, the commitment was made and continues to this day, that chiefs and Cabinet meet on an annual basis. That did get messed up with COVID-19 and the inability to meet and priorities being elsewhere, and there was agreement to put that on pause, but as recently as June, Cabinet met with all chiefs in Dartmouth to come together for the first time and review and highlight key priorities and with a plan to meet again this Winter.

When it comes to reporting in the House, that's an interesting point. I'll have to go back and look at that. That's not something that we've done, but I think it's something certainly that we could do. It has not been something that we've done over the past, since I've been involved, three governments, but it's very easy to do and it's something that - I'll give you a sense of how these meetings go. It's essentially an opportunity where chiefs and Cabinet ministers sit according to their portfolios. They're next to each other, so it's a mixing around the table, and it's a series of conversations around shared priorities.

[11:15 a.m.]

It's typically led by our Mi'kmaw leadership around, this issue is very important to us, let's talk about whatever it might be. The conversation goes from there.

LORELEI NICOLL: I just wanted to add to that. That's why I say orders of government. I've spoken to a lot of people in the community that I represent and they've asked me, where do you stand on Mi'kmaw services and that? A lot of people think that Indigenous affairs is a federal matter, and therefore they go to their representative MP to resolve it, but they are, to your point, their own order of government. I even say provincially we're an order of government.

In that regard, I just wanted to say in closing that how we facilitate this conversation is what's integral to the success of the work that you're doing. If there's anything that we could work towards, as I referenced earlier, I would love to arrange something within the work that I'm trying to do in the constituency.

I will now pass it on to Mr. Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Back to the line of questioning around service delivery and how the work around the Mi'kmaw language helps to facilitate service delivery. Mr. Huston, can you speak specifically to hiring and recruiting from the perspective of meeting people where they're at, and ensuring that people see themselves reflected in the staff and leadership in our government?

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'll answer your question. I want to provide, if I can, a little bit of context as well to that. I'll go back to what I said earlier about the work that we're doing in language, the work that we're doing in treaty education. Again, I would call that the sort of foundational level of work that's happening that supports more detailed work that's happening in the department.

For example, the work that's happening with health and wellness around Tajikeyimik, the Mi'kmaw health authority, and the conversations around that, or the conversations that are starting now between the Mi'kmaq and the federal government and the Province around social income assistance on reserves.

Those are conversations that are happening in a very real way that relate to service delivery. The work that we do is around, I would say, raising the bar of public servants around their ability to enter into those conversations from a different place than they might have been prior to receiving any of the treaty education work.

When it comes to recruitment and retention, there's a lot of work that's under way within the PSC as well as across departments. I'd say there are two ways that are happening right now. One is around recognizing the importance of this relative to certain programs and services - the creation of specific new roles which may be designated positions, to show that it's critical for that person to be L'nu or Mi'kmaw or Indigenous, depending on the type of program or service, for the success of that service delivery or that program. In other cases, it may not be designated but it may have a very strong emphasis on having a connection to community or the work of community.

Then there is broader work that is happening around all positions across government, changing the way that we're looking at ways of qualification - why have we gone down this road of requiring a master's degree for an entry-level position? We need to recognize where people are at. People bring other abilities and skills other than just a post-secondary diploma when they might bring other value to a position.

It's also looking at our interview processes. There are also some cultural competencies around how we interview and the way that we tend to formally structure some of these interviews is very much biased toward folks who are either already in the system or already know how that kind of western "here's how you're going to have to compete, and make sure you hit all these points."

The other part, in a very practical sense, is when there is anybody from the Indigenous community applying, we work to ensure that on the interview panel itself there is someone else from the Indigenous community there as well who can provide that lived experience and that perspective.

Those are some examples of some of the things we're doing. There's a real concerted effort across - not just for Indigenous communities but all underrepresented groups in government. We know that government needs to do better at reflecting all Nova Scotians.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. MLA Jessome, you have one minute.

BEN JESSOME: You go ahead, Gary.

THE CHAIR: We'll move on to the NDP caucus. MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: I would just like to say first that I found, Mr. Philips, what you said about the urgency of language revitalization to be very compelling.

I would like to ask a political question about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In our party, it seems to us that the most authentic and comprehensive response we could make as a government in Nova Scotia would be to commit ourselves formally to the implementation of those calls that are within our provincial jurisdiction, and then set some targets, as we do in other things about which we're serious like health care or energy policy. Understanding that some of the calls are very complex, some of them not so much, we could set up a reporting mechanism by which the government would be able to say, here is where we are this year on moving toward these calls.

As you know, the legislation that we've brought forward to this effect has not advanced, but I want to ask your opinions. Does this seem or not seem like a valuable framework for moving forward with the milestone of the TRC?

JUSTIN HUSTON: To back up a little bit, with the TRC calls to action, we do track all 94, but particularly those - I think there are 54 or 45 that relate either directly or indirectly to the provincial government's role. We have an evergreen document where we're tracking that on a monthly or bi-monthly basis around progress that's being made.

Some of those I mentioned, I would call the low-hanging fruit, or at least more short-term - like the ability to waive the fee for name changes for anybody involved in the '60s scoop, et cetera. Some of the other ones I would say are on a spectrum or are generational in change, and the progress will take quite a while. It took 400 years of colonization here to get to where we are. I know in the past when parties have asked to see a progress update, I think we've provided that to some researchers within your party. We're very open to it, and I think that we're able to show that we've made quite significant progress in a lot of areas.

Like I said, other areas are going to be a bit more challenging, but it's certainly something to consider. It's something I'll bring up with the minister around some sort of annual reporting on the TRC.

GARY BURRILL: Did either of you wish to speak?

CELESTE SULLIMAN: I just wanted to speak to quantifying the progress and the calls to action. As Deputy Huston said, there are quite a few calls to action that impact the provincial government in particular, and one of the challenges that we always have difficulty with is quantifying our success.

We can speak about our success, as Nik did earlier, about the numbers of people that we're reaching and engaging in the learning, the number of people who participate in KAIROS Blanket Exercises, and the number of documents that we create. Really I think the way that Nik and I approach treaty education - and I think that this is present in the perspective of our colleagues as well - is that we really try to take a qualitative approach to measuring the success of treaty education.

When I think back to 15 years ago, when I started in government, I can tell you that government looked very different than it does today, 15 years later. It's not just because I see maybe more L'nú or Indigenous people working in government, but the conversations are different. The tone is different. The process of engagement is different. The focus is different. Those are some qualitative aspects that really can't be measured in the same way that we can just quantify things.

I do see a shift in the way that the provincial government is heading. Even the fact that you invited us here to this committee speaks volumes for the attention that is being given to both Mi'kmaw language and to treaty education.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Philips, did you have anything that you wanted to add? Okay.

GARY BURRILL: I just wanted to be clear that the issue isn't tracking. The issue is lifting up the framework by public reporting, and I have failed to understand why the government has not felt that this would advance the moment of the TRC, to elevate it to the level that we give to things that we say, this is so important we report publicly on it. That's the key point, I think, that is contained in our proposal which - as I see it - has not yet been addressed. I don't know if you wanted to respond to that point. I guess you've already spoken some to it, yes.

I'd like to go back to something you said when you were speaking about the Mi'kmaq-Nova Scotia-Canada Tripartite Forum, just as an illustration of things. You were talking about the issue of the monument, or you just mentioned it as a thing. I think it's an important thing that - I think the recommendation was that every capital city in the country shall have a monument to residential school survivors. Where are we in Nova Scotia on this?

JUSTIN HUSTON: It's a question that we get now and then. It's important to realize that a monument toward a residential school is not always seen - so we're following the lead of community on this and there's work that's happening at the Tripartite Forum around framing recommendations about a path forward on this. Whether it's at the former residential school site in Sipekne'katik First Nation, or it's here in the capital city, it's important to realize that there's a lot of sensitivity around a monument and what that means for different people. There isn't consensus.

Further, to some of our previous comments around the Mi'kmaw community and communities not being homogeneous, not everybody agrees where it should be, what it should look like, if there should even be one because it could be triggering to people and communities.

Essentially, we are respectful of that relationship and that partnership. When the work is done and recommendations come forward, and there is a sense from community of yes, this is what we think is the best thing and how to proceed, we will be ready to be there in partnership with our Mi'kmaw partners.

GARY BURRILL: I don't want to let this chance go by without speaking to that key recommendation from the TRC about reducing the number of Indigenous children in care and developing a reporting mechanism for where the Province is on improving this. Where are we on having statistics and figures about the trajectory we're on, regarding this call?

JUSTIN HUSTON: I know we're limited for time. I'll paraphrase by saying I don't have the exact stats on that, but there is a lot of work that's happening, both at the Department of Community Services and with Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services of Nova Scotia, which is sort of a partnership between DCS and Mi'kmaw leadership. There're also discussions around the development of a Mi'kmaq-led children and family services model.

That is something that we can report back to, in terms of the status of that, to the committee. I'll talk to my colleague at DCS around that.

THE CHAIR: We will now move on to the Progressive Conservative caucus - MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I'm going to stray just a little bit here because mental health has been a passion of mine forever. What kind of investments have we made in young people? I want you to tell me a little bit about the Mi'kmaw native friendship centre in the Chair's constituency, actually, or the Every One Every Day project in Halifax, or even the Eskasoni Crisis and Referral Center. I don't want this to go by without bringing mental health into it.

JUSTIN HUSTON: Not surprisingly, I think everybody around the table would recognize that mental health and wellness is probably emerging as one of the biggest priority issues in Nova Scotia and in health care. We're not unique. It's across the country, coming out of a very difficult time for many. That is certainly the case within Mi'kmaw communities as well. It's something I hear on a regular basis when I'm talking with chiefs, and I hear other colleagues as well, that mental health and addictions is one of the biggest issues.

[11:30 a.m.]

I think there's a lot of work that's happening, that has happened previously and is continuing to build on within community, with government. Again, I'll come back to where we try to meet our partners on this is that it's community-led, or Mi'kmaq-led, and government provides that support where it can in terms of feeding into local solutions and approach.

We've got the Eskasoni crisis line or the work that they're doing in community and we look at ways we can support that; or whether it's at the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre in terms of direct program delivery, partnering with the Office of Mental Health and Addictions or DCS around actually some of the program delivery.

Many folks don't know, but the current temporary Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre space - the Province is providing that rent until a new facility is built. We're covering that whole new facility that's located off Brunswick Street.

That's an example of some of the work that we are doing, but I want to just emphasize that it is a growing concern among our First Nations partners and leadership around the state of mental health and addictions in community.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I'm just wondering if you could share with the committee what type of resources are available for employees, and for that matter, even not-for-profits. For example, my Chester Playhouse burned down two years ago, and in the rebuilding they're going to add some information in for them and for employers who wish to incorporate treaty education and awareness in their space, I guess it would be.

JUSTIN HUSTON: This is a common question that I think Celeste and Nik field on a regular basis. Speaking to the question earlier from MLA White around some of the challenges, I would say what has changed particularly in the last five years is that we've gone from a place of really trying to knock on doors and raising awareness that this is something that's important they should pay attention to, to all the knocks we're having on our door saying hey, this is really important to us, we need help.

I think that speaks to something of a level of awareness that people have, which I think is very important to recognize as a positive. People have an awareness that there are sensitivities about ways to do this, and they want to do it right and they want to do the right thing. They will often come to us and similarly say: hey, we're rebuilding this facility or we're doing this program in our community, and we'd really like to have a Mi'kmaq element to this - what do we do, who do we talk to? Or sometimes the question is: Can you send an elder to my event?

A lot of the work is actually stepping back a little bit from that and saying, let's figure out a way to have the Chester Playhouse get in touch with Acadia First Nation and start to build a relationship at the staff level. Or we might say, we know of an elder down on the South Shore who might be great to come to that event or work with you on some of that stuff.

What we're careful about with treaty education is that we don't hold the information or the knowledge. We are a conduit to folks in community who can help provide that. If you asked someone from Acadia First Nation - a knowledge holder or elder - or if you asked someone from Membertou First Nation, you might get a different answer. It's a different region of the province, a different community, different history.

It's very important to make those local connections and it's kind of like what I said earlier: It's important for organizations and groups to think of it. Having the sign is the product, and you can get that pretty easily, but the value comes in the process and the journey to get that sign in the playhouse. The relationships that you're building by working in community, that's what's going to last longer.

I think that's some of the work what we do: actually help put the folks at the Chester Playhouse in touch with folks in community to then start that dialogue. That sometimes is just the seed, and from there grows a whole other series of relationships and projects.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I thought that was a great answer. The 231 calls for justice in the 2019 final report on the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls has required that all levels of government and Indigenous organizations work together on how best to move forward.

I'd like to know what has been done here in Nova Scotia - I think everybody's got a little thing here happening with their voice. What are some of the steps that Nova Scotia is taking in regard to this?

JUSTIN HUSTON: Great to weave that in. There are a lot of calls to justice that cross-cut with the TRC calls to action, and obviously we're working on that. I would say that the process that we're following is not unlike the process we followed around working with Mi'kmaw leadership around prioritizing the calls to action in the TRC, around the calls for justice for the MMIWG inquiry.

We have worked closely, leading up through the process of the national inquiry, working with the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, our office, and really following the leadership of the Mi'kmaq, in particular women's leadership, around how they would like to participate in the inquiry. We put families first in how to welcome the commission - how to have it be a wraparound for communities and families that would participate when it was held in Membertou First Nation.

Then in response to the calls to action, we participated in all the national committees that were involved in creating this. We are again following the lead of Mi'kmaw leadership around helping us prioritize. Of those 231, not all are as relevant in Nova Scotia as they might be in other parts of the country, and some are much larger priorities here than other places.

COVID-19 again stalled some of that work. We're really waiting for the Mi'kmaw leadership to come say, here's how we'd like to approach this and come together. I would say, one of the key things that we've done is answer the call for the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association resilience centre. Both the federal government and the Province provided funding for this resilience centre, which has already broken ground in Millbrook.

The centre will be a cultural centre for women and a safe place to assist women who might be fleeing domestic violence, but also there's a maker space that's under way so people can start to create crafts that can have economic return to their families, as well as a cultural centre that will be women-first, women-focused.

That's an example of some of the concrete things, but again, we're waiting to follow the lead of our Mi'kmaw partners.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse, 40 seconds if you wanted to make a closing remark.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I would like to thank all of you for being here. You really gave us some great information to work with, and you definitely know what you're doing in your jobs. I'm going to speak for us and hopefully everybody that we really, truly appreciate your time and knowledge.

THE CHAIR: At this point I'll just ask if any of the witnesses have some closing remarks they'd like to share. Mr. Huston.

JUSTIN HUSTON: I'll provide a brief and high-level remark here - I just wrote a couple of notes down. First, I want to thank you again for the invitation to come here. I think partly we were questioning, we're going to this committee - what's the connection? We really relish the opportunity to highlight the work that we're doing. We think it's very important. It's foundational to the work of this committee and making Nova Scotia a better place for future generations.

One of the things that we like to say is, we are helping to educate our future leaders. If you think of folks in this room and the age that we're at - maybe Nik notwithstanding - what we learned in school is not the full history, is not our shared knowledge of this province. It's very difficult - adult education is something else, and we're doing our best to learn, but when you have it woven into starting it at Grade 5 or Grade 6, and



understanding what it means to have a friendship, what it means to have an agreement, a treaty, elements of culture and heritage woven into it.

I will be very excited 20 years from now, when some of these young people are our leaders, and if the tone of conversation has changed in the past five or 10 years, imagine what it's going to be like in 20 years. That's where our vision is, and that's what we're looking for with our partners.

On that note, I just want to say I think it's been the tone of some of the questions and conversation around the table today. I would really encourage you, in your roles as MLAs, as leaders in your community, to be looking at ways that you can help champion this work and be that facilitator and that connector. You are in a unique position. You have the respect of people in your community. You have the respect of the Indigenous community, as well. There are certain things that everybody, I think, can get behind. Language and treaty education are a couple of those things, and I think you're very well placed to help us in our journey, and help us bring the message to the province.

THE CHAIR: Did either of you have any comments you'd like to share? Okay.

We do have some committee business, but, again, thank you all so much for taking time out of your schedules to come today, and thank you for the excellent work that you're doing. I look forward to seeing it progress.

We'll call a two-minute recess.

[11:42 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:44 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: I call the meeting back to order. At this point, we will go over some committee business.

The first on the agenda is the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission progress report for Spring 2021 and August 2022. It was shared with the committee by the Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I'm just asking at this point if there's any discussion on that report. If there's no discussion, is there consent from the committee members to have it posted on the Nova Scotia Legislature website?

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

[11:45 a.m.]

The next item on the agenda is the request of the Face of Poverty Consultation to appear. This was not discussed at the last meeting, so I would suggest that we revisit the topic at a later agenda-setting meeting, considering the topics have already just quite literally been set. When we do the next agenda setting, perhaps let's move requests that come in during the course of the agenda that's been set appear on the agenda setting as motions so that they can get considered as part of that process - per the rules of the committee. Is there any discussion on that?

Finally, the request from the committee to the Department of Health and Wellness to provide a written briefing regarding the assertive treatment program. I just wanted to let the committee members know that this has been sent out and we are just awaiting the response for that. I guess there wouldn't be discussion on that. We'll discuss it when it comes forward.

We'll move on to the next meeting, scheduled for January 10, 2023, because of the holidays. The topic is the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on vulnerable Nova Scotians and those living on income assistance. Witnesses will be the Department of Community Services, Feed Nova Scotia, Chebucto Connections, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Nova Scotia, and Nourish Nova Scotia.

Since that concludes committee business, I would say that if there isn't anything further, the meeting is adjourned.

[The meeting adjourned at 11:47 a.m.]