

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**Tuesday, September 3, 2024**

**Committee Room**

**Investment in the Nova Scotia Film Industry and its Impact on Communities**

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## **COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Melissa Sheehy-Richard (Chair)

John White (Vice Chair)

Larry Harrison

Danielle Barkhouse

Tom Taggart

Carman Kerr

Hon. Derek Mombourquette

Susan Leblanc

Suzy Hansen

[Carman Kerr was replaced by Braedon Clark.]

### **In Attendance:**

Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

Tamer Nusseibeh  
Legislative Committee Clerk

### **WITNESSES**

#### **Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage**

Susan Jeffries, Executive Director  
Culture and Heritage Development

#### **Screen Nova Scotia**

Laura Mackenzie  
Executive Director



**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2024**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**10:00 A.M.**

**CHAIR**

Melissa Sheehy-Richard

**VICE CHAIR**

John White

THE CHAIR: Order. This is the Standing Committee on Community Services I call to order. I'm Melissa Sheehy-Richard. I'm the MLA for Hants West. First of all, I want to welcome everybody back. It seems like after that long weekend, it's full tilt in committees. I just want to say hello to everyone.

Today we will hear from presenters regarding Investment in the Nova Scotia Film Industry and its Impact on Communities. I just want to remind everyone to keep your phones on silent and if we need to exit, to please use the Granville Street exit and walk up to the Grand Parade.

I will now ask committee members to introduce themselves and their constituency, beginning with MLA White.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I would also like to note the presence of Chief Legislative Counsel Gordon Hebb as well as Legislative Committee Clerk Tamer Nusseibeh.

At this time, I'd like to ask the witnesses to introduce themselves. I will begin with Ms. Jeffries.

SUSAN JEFFRIES: Thank you for inviting us to speak today. We're really excited to be here. I'm Susan Jeffries, Executive Director in the Culture and Heritage Development unit with the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. Our unit is responsible for the administration of film funding. I'm joined here today by Laura Mackenzie, Executive Director of Screen Nova Scotia. We're going to discuss how our department supports the Nova Scotia film industry. We're very happy to share that information with you today.

THE CHAIR: I would ask Ms. Mackenzie to introduce herself for the record.

LAURA MACKENZIE: I'm Laura Mackenzie, the Executive Director of Screen Nova Scotia. Thank you all very much for welcoming us here today. I'm excited to tell you a little bit about Screen Nova Scotia. I'm excited to talk about our place in the Canadian and global marketplace. I'm excited to talk about how busy we are right now and to dig into all of the questions that you might have.

THE CHAIR: Now I will welcome Ms. Jeffries with her opening remarks.

SUSAN JEFFRIES: I'll provide opening remarks, we'll share a video, and Laura will also provide some opening remarks. Nova Scotia's film industry is a vital contributor to our economy and an essential part of our cultural identity. This sector is experiencing significant growth which enriches the lives of Nova Scotians, particularly in our rural communities, where its impact is increasingly evident.

Consider the new Distant Location Incentive offering additional funding to productions based on percentage of filming days outside of Halifax. Productions that film 100 to 150 kilometres from Halifax will be eligible for incentives ranging from seven to 10 per cent. This is a very new initiative. So far, the results have been very positive, with rural communities becoming desirable filming locations. For instance, the feature film *Little Lorraine* was in production for over 23 days this Summer, with filming taking place in Glace Bay and Louisburg. We're very excited to have that take place.

Since the inception of the Nova Scotia Film & Television Production Incentive Fund in 2015, we've committed \$279.7 million in support to our film industry. This substantial investment has catalyzed more than \$965.2 million in production spending across Nova Scotia. These figures aren't just numbers. They represent significant economic benefits for businesses. Restaurants, accommodations, and countless other enterprises are seeing real dollars flow into their operations thanks to the presence of production crews throughout the province. In the 2023-24 fiscal year, we increased the funding to \$39 million, supporting 81 projects. That contributed an estimated \$140.7 million in provincial spending.

We're particularly excited about programs like More Opportunities for Skilled Trades, MOST, which is vital in this context. They help us to retain and attract young,

highly skilled workers to our screen industry, ensuring that Nova Scotia remains in play, a place where they can build lasting careers.

The story of our film industry really extends beyond economics. It's about nurturing a diverse and inclusive creative sector. Our support for organizations like the Atlantic Filmmakers Cooperative, the Atlantic International Film Festival, Women in Film and Television Atlantic, as well as Screen Nova Scotia, are critical in developing the next generation of filmmakers. These organizations ensure underrepresented voices have a platform they need to tell their stories, enriching our cultural landscape.

Looking ahead, we're excited about the development of the film tourism strategy which aims to capitalize on the stunning landscapes that have made productions like *Sullivan's Crossing* and numerous Hallmark movies so popular. These films do more than entertain - they serve as opportunities to showcase our communities and increase interest in visiting our province by travellers. In the upcoming year, Tourism Nova Scotia plans to take advantage of film productions happening throughout the province with targeted marketing content on NovaScotia.com and support for the tourism industry to create experiences to help connect travellers with film locations.

Government strategic financial backing is essential for cultivating a vibrant, competitive creative sector in Nova Scotia. It underscores our commitment to fostering an environment where filmmakers, screenwriters, and performers can thrive, making the success of the film sector not just possible but inevitable. As mentioned, our film and television sector is flourishing with continued government support. Through targeted incentives, funding programs, and strategic initiatives, we are ensuring that this growth remains both sustainable and inclusive.

I look forward to our discussion today, and I'm eager to answer any questions you may have. At this point, we would like to introduce the video, if I can just get that going.

[A video was played.]

THE CHAIR: Very good. Ms. Jeffries, is it now . . .

SUSAN JEFFRIES: Yes, please. I'd like to introduce Laura Mackenzie, Screen Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Mackenzie.

LAURA MACKENZIE: I think the video said it all, pretty much, but I do have a couple of opening remarks as well. I'll touch on some of the things that Susan already did, and some different and some broader context as well.

Again, I just want to say thank you so much for the invitation to come and have this discussion today. Let me start by saying that the film industry's impact on communities at large plays a critical role in the value proposition of the Province's investment.

But first, I'd like to tell you a little bit about Screen Nova Scotia. Screen Nova Scotia is a film commission and membership-driven industry association. We work hand in glove with CCTH and our supportive provincial government, who have recognized the economic and cultural strength of our industry.

It is Screen Nova Scotia's responsibility to attract international productions to our province. Once we have their attention, we work with them to establish their project here. We also support the development, production, and international sales of Nova Scotia-originated productions. We administer programs tailored to fill the gaps in the talent-development pipeline of our producers, our writers, and our directors. We're committed to increasing the diversity of our talent base, crew, and performers to include all Nova Scotians, from Yarmouth to northern Cape Breton. To help Nova Scotian productions close the gap in their financing, we administer the Content Creator Fund, and we're developing a dedicated year-round sound stage for productions to call home.

Every province has its own iteration of a film commission. Some regions have more than one. Many are Crown corporations, some are departments in government, and some are arm's-length non-profits like us. But we are an anomaly. Our unique structure was created through necessity after the 2015 removal of the Film Industry Tax Credit.

Now I'd like to talk a little bit about where Nova Scotia currently sits in the Canadian production landscape and how we got to where we are today. As reflected in the Canadian Media Producers Association's 2022-23 annual trade report called *Profile 2023*, Atlantic Canada sits at 3 per cent of the Canadian market share of all production, at \$319 million in production volume. Just two years prior, in 2021, we were at 1 per cent - a position we'd held since 2015. Prior to 2015, we held a 2 per cent market share for a lengthy period.

But the removal of the tax credit alone doesn't tell the full story. To give it a slightly broader context, in 2010, the U.S. streamers such as Netflix and Amazon, for example, entered the Canadian production landscape. By 2014, production volume and foreign investment in production overtook Canadian production volume and Canadian investment in production. So while in 2015, we were scrambling to retain the crew who had stayed in Nova Scotia, and we were putting the pieces of the industry back together, this tidal wave of production was starting to roll across Canada. When it hit Quebec, it stopped. Between 2014 and 2017, production volume in B.C. increased from \$1.5 billion to \$3 billion.

Because of the reputational damage we incurred, we were perceived by many in the industry as being closed for business - an unstable jurisdiction. We went from 2 per cent of the market share of production to 1 per cent because of these two market factors. Needless

to say, the opportunity cost of these two environmental changes was significant. If we had been in a position to welcome the streamers when they were moving their productions across Canada, we likely would have, at the very least, maintained our 2 per cent market share position, which would equate to close to a billion dollars in lost revenue over that decade - and that's a conservative estimate, given that we likely would have assumed a 2.5 per cent or even 3 per cent market share sooner than we did.

But that's yesterday's news, and we're not looking back. Nova Scotia's film industry is thriving today. In fact, we're bursting at the seams, as evidenced by the growth from the 1 per cent to 3 per cent over two years. The momentum we're experiencing is really exciting, and we're going to harness it for growth.

[10:15 a.m.]

What is the value proposition of the Province's investment? It's the productions that choose Nova Scotia as a destination for filming, injecting their millions of foreign dollars into the hearts of our communities where they film. It's the growing number of homegrown Nova Scotia productions that attract export dollars to the province.

Both international and local productions employ Nova Scotians. By creating new Nova Scotia crew positions and keeping our existing trained crew in the province, the industry creates employment, it expands the tax base, and it allows us to produce a greater volume of productions.

A film production is a microcosm of a city. It takes a similar list of goods, services, and amenities to power it. As Susan mentioned, it takes accountants, lawyers, carpenters, electricians, painters, drivers, riggers, artists, musicians, and on and on. They spend their dollars at the local hardware stores, the grocery stores, the restaurants, and the tailor shop. They rent the local cars. Essentially, if a service is available, they will rent it, but that's just the beginning.

*Little Lorraine* is a low-budget feature filmed recently filmed in Cape Breton - we heard a little bit about it already - directed by Andy Hines. I'll mention Andy Hines is the son of Sherman Hines - who is one of Nova Scotia's most treasured artists - so he's already got a little bit of international renown.

News of this feature spread like wildfire through Hollywood's most prestigious trades last week, from *Rolling Stone* to *Variety*. This story is a Nova Scotia story, it's a Cape Breton story, and soon, when the film is released, everyone will know this story and that it took place in northern Nova Scotia on an absolutely beautiful little peninsula they've never heard of before called Cape Breton.

The return on investment in the form of tourism dollars from film and television marketing paid for by international and Canadian distributors is immeasurable. Economic

impact is the engine that keeps the industry funded but hometown pride - the pride that you feel when you see your community showcased on screen - is what keeps it powered.

The new Distant Location Incentive will allow productions like *Little Lorraine* - which would not have been financially possible without this new bonus - to move into other destinations untapped across Nova Scotia. We at Screen Nova Scotia want to work with you and your constituents to bring production to your communities. Thanks for listening. I'm really excited to dig in to this conversation.

THE CHAIR: At this time, we'll move into the questions, which we do 20 minutes per caucus. I just want to remind everybody to wait until you're recognized by the Chair and until your light turns red before speaking. I will turn it over to MLA Clark.

BRAEDON CLARK: Ms. Mackenzie, I might start with you just because you mentioned something that I think is important in the industry. We see in the video, we talk a lot about our natural landscapes and beauty - and that's really important - but also it's really important to have somewhere indoors permanently like a sound stage where you can do a lot of work. You mention that in your opening comments. I'm just wondering if you could give the committee a bit of an update on where that project is and, in your view from the industry's perspective, what does that do for Nova Scotia's film industry? What does it unlock that we might be missing out on today?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Mackenzie.

LAURA MACKENZIE: I'll start with what it unlocks. When I go and I meet with studios or streamers and we are going to talk about whether or not they have a production that they want to bring to Nova Scotia, there are typically four questions that every studio or streamer is going to ask. They want to know about our locations. Incentive is first, then they want to know about our infrastructure, so what do we have for sound stages or spaces in which they can use for productions for that particular project, regardless of whether it needs survival systems and water tank or if it needs a sound stage or an airport hangar.

Then we're going to talk about our crew and performer base. They want to know how deep our crew and performer base is, what it is made up of, and where the gaps are. The fourth is the weather. They want to know about the weather. That's typically what we start talking about.

The infrastructure is probably the second on the list of priority for the streamers when they're making a decision on whether they can come here. It's pretty important to have a sound stage that Nova Scotia can rely on to be available when it's needed. Right now, we do have a couple of spaces in Nova Scotia that are being used as a sound stage. There's a production called *We Were Liars* that is an Amazon MGM Studios production, and they're filming over in Burnside. There's another project called *From*, which is another Amazon MGM Studios series. We have *The Institute*, which is a Stephen King

series that's filming right now and they're using another production space over in Burnside. We have a space out in Mount Uniacke that's being used for another production. We do have spaces that the market has provided, but we're still low on spaces.

With the Province's financial investment, we are working on developing Screen Nova Studios Inc. which would be a sound stage that Screen Nova Scotia would operate with its partners. At this point, we have been negotiating an offer to purchase a couple of PIDs of Crown land over on Prospect Road. More recently, we have finally come to a decision on an offer and what the price would be. Essentially, it's moving along, but it's moving slowly.

Recently, as I said, we settled on a final price which was renegotiated after we did an environmental survey that surfaced more wetlands than we originally thought were on the property. The Department of Natural Resources and Renewables agreed to resurvey and removed a large part of the wetland acreage from the PID, allowing us to purchase only the usable lands. Currently, the development application is held up due to the mayoral election, so we cannot move forward until after that election to determine whether or not we will be successful in our development application. Of course, we can't purchase the land until we know if we can develop it or if we can rezone it.

The other concern that we have is that there is going to be a Wetland Alteration Application that needs to be approved because we are removing the heavy wetlands, but there are going to be some areas on the land that are going to need to be altered. We'll have to get a Wetland Alteration Application. We can't do that until after we own the land.

BRAEDON CLARK: Elections: what a drag sometimes. They slow things down. They're important, though.

I wanted to ask a bit about - you touched on the labour piece as well. I think this is something that - we all want to see the film industry succeed, and any industry in Nova Scotia succeed, but when it grows as quickly as it has - tripling, essentially, over two years in terms of volume - one of the challenges I would assume is keeping up with that from a human resources perspective.

When streamers or productions come to Screen Nova Scotia or to the department and say: Hey, we want to film in Nova Scotia. Here's the scale, what, if there are any, significant gaps in terms of local talent and local ability - because obviously you want to keep as many of the people working on these productions living and working in Nova Scotia, I assume. Where are those gaps, if there are any, and how do you close those as quickly as possible? Maybe I'll start with Ms. Mackenzie, but Ms. Jeffries, if you want to chime in, too, feel free.

LAURA MACKENZIE: We have grown quite significantly over the last couple of years. I would say since 2020, we've probably increased by a crew or a crew and a half. I

would put us probably at about four or four-and-a-half crew at this point. I will just preface this with the fact that I have a workforce development consultant who's actually doing a scan on the workforce right now in order to identify the gaps.

Just from a broad perspective, we can look to the unions and the guilds. In Nova Scotia, we have IATSE Local 849. They're responsible for the technicians. We have IATSE Local 667, which is responsible for camera labour, and we have the Directors Guild of Canada. Essentially, between these three unions, their membership is the lion's share of the crew that are required. They do a lot of the crew training and the crew mentorship.

What we're able to do is we're able to look at how many permits they handed out in any given year on top of their membership working. After everybody in their membership has a job, then they have to start permitting workers. They did provide me with some numbers on the number of permitted workers. Right now, in 2024 - this is just thus far in 2024 - there have been 1,549 deal memos that have been signed, and 190 of those were permitted from out of town. Between the three unions, there would have been about 700 permitted individuals working in the industry this year, and that is almost double from last year. In terms of the gaps, what we can do is we can look at the jobs of the people who have those permits. That's what we'll really be digging into after this year is complete, is who is permitted. If they are permitted, it typically means that they're emerging in the industry. That tells a bigger picture too. We'll start to dig into the demographics of the crew; we already know that there are gaps in our locations department. We know that there are gaps in the production accountants.

Certainly we have certain departments in the industry that are starting to retire. When it comes to replenishing the gaps in the film industry, we have to come at it as a community from all kinds of different ways. We need to look at upskilling, we need to look at repurposing from other industries. We need to look at just going out and getting the young people into the industry. Thankfully, we have this MOST program to help us do that.

Between Screen Nova Scotia, the unions and the guilds, and the other organizations that are responsible for supporting and promoting the film industry, we all have a number of different programs to help fill the gap. Screen Nova Scotia, for instance, we do a writers' internship program. We take writers and we put them in writers' rooms in Los Angeles and Toronto so they can get that experience and bring it home.

We have a script development program where we take writers who have a script that would be probably close to its final draft, we hook them up with a script editor, as well as a producer mentor, to get that script to a place in which it would be ready to be pitched. We recently opened a Pre-Development Program that's tailored towards individuals who have come from historically marginalized communities only. Right now, we have a Pre-Development Program going on where over eight weeks we'll see those 14 individuals go through that training in preparation for taking their project to our Screenwriters

Development Fund that will open in the Fall. That development fund is essentially meant to help them get that project ready to pitch to funders.

Through above-the-line writers-directors-producers training that we do, through the training that IATSE Local 849 and IATSE Local 667, the Directors Guild of Canada, and of course the graduates that are coming out of the community colleges, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. There's a program at Saint Mary's University, there's the Costume Studies program at Dalhousie University. We really are trying to work to come together to identify where the gaps are. Once we have this full scan that's presented to us, we do intend to work with partners to develop additional curriculum to make sure that we are looking at essentially filling the gaps, regardless of whether they are new people coming in or if they are people who are aging out. There's a plan that's starting to come together so that we can really have some infrastructure in place to handle it.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Jeffries, did you have something to add?

SUSAN JEFFRIES: Behind the scenes, if you will, of a lot of these programs is support from the Province from a funding perspective. As an example, it was mentioned, training programs for new, emerging artists to enter into the film sector. We support organizations like Screen Nova Scotia in some cases to present those programs as a funder.

There are other organizations that we work in tandem with, such as the Atlantic Filmmakers Cooperative, which offers programs for individuals who want to make a film. We support them financially for those projects. One in particular is called FILM 5, which is an opportunity for individuals to come together and create a very small, short film. That often can be a good segue into the film industry for an emerging filmmaker, to start with a small film - programs such as that.

We work with individuals throughout the community. The Light House Arts Centre ran a program recently above the line and below the line to encourage individuals from marginalized communities to come in and learn about the film industry. We also support emerging screenwriters through the Screenwriters Development Fund. A writer and producer can come into this program with the very first script that they want to develop together. We help with the screenwriting side as well. Our role as a funder is to support the organizations that work alongside Screen Nova Scotia to provide those training programs. I just wanted to comment on the various angles that we take in support of the development work that Screen Nova Scotia is doing as well.

BRAEDON CLARK: Thank you both for that. I also wanted to touch on something that was brought up earlier, which is the Distant Location Incentive, which I know is quite new and seems to be bearing fruit early on, which is good. I understand and appreciate the logic behind it. I think it makes sense to try to identify and make it easier to film in places where maybe traditionally we haven't done that. I'm just wondering, from the department's perspective, Ms. Jeffries, how do you assess the effectiveness of that on a

go-forward basis, and how do you determine this is working? Maybe it's working really well in Cape Breton but it's not working as well in northern Nova Scotia or vice versa, or we need to invest more in this particular incentive. How are the performance metrics being developed for that particular incentive to make sure that we're getting the best return on our investment there?

[10:30 a.m.]

SUSAN JEFFRIES: We're very excited to be able to offer the Distant Location Incentive. We talked earlier about the overall funding landscape across different jurisdictions. To remain competitive, we know that other jurisdictions offer support for filming that takes place in rural communities. We saw this as an opportunity to increase interest in filmmaking across our regions.

We already had an existing rural incentive prior to April 1<sup>st</sup> that was at the 2 per cent level. Producers could come in with their projects and receive up to a 2 per cent incentive to film 30 kilometres outside HRM City Hall. We do know that approximately 50 per cent of the film productions that came took advantage of that incentive.

We are learning that there needs to be a further incentive for these organizations to go further than that outside of the Halifax Regional Municipality. The cost to do that is higher for a production. In some cases, they take crew with them, obviously. There are expenses related to hosting the crew and production in the community: hotels, food, et cetera. Not to say that doesn't exist with filming within HRM as well, but the added cost of going further distances is a burden to some productions. We wanted to incentivize them to consider taking their films outside the region.

I mentioned earlier that the incentive bonus that was in place prior to the new incentive bonus, which ranges between 7 and 10 per cent depending on the distance that you are making your film outside Halifax, was around 52 per cent. I have some new figures to give you an idea of how this is being received in the community. It was just launched a few months ago. In 2023, for example, we had 81 productions, which included 45 productions that accessed the rural bonus. That was the existing rural bonus that was based on 30 kilometres. Right now, we have 22 productions that have come forward since April 1<sup>st</sup> to express an interest in taking advantage of the new rural bonus, so we do see an increase. We're only six months into the fiscal year, so based on the response we have had so far, we are seeing an increase in new productions coming in looking at rural locations where they might not likely have had a chance to review them before.

We are seeing that being very well received. We mentioned *Little Lorraine*. That was a very unique production in that all of its production took place on Cape Breton Island: 23 days of production between those two communities. That's an excellent example from a domestic market, for sure, of the kind of productions that we want to see coming into our communities. The measure of that will be to be seen at the end of our fiscal year, where

we've just introduced it. Are we going to see an increase in the number of productions outside the HRM area? That will be absolutely one measure. The other measures that go in tandem with developing a film community is the increase in capacity in a community in terms of skill and labour so that the community itself has the capacity to host these films - use of the economic impact of a community. We'll be measuring those measures as well, as part of Nova Scotia's spend, which is something we track with the Nova Scotia Film & Television Production Incentive Fund as well.

A lot of the productions that have come in thus far will not be completing their final print until next fiscal, so we will see an impact, likely, financially to the budget in the 2025 fiscal year, just because of the nature of the long-term application process that takes place.

Do you want to add anything to that, Laura - from a distant location and stuff?

THE CHAIR: We have just over two minutes left.

BRAEDON CLARK: I think it's interesting, and I asked a similar question at another committee I was at a few months ago. Neither of you was there, so I'm not repeating myself to you particularly. It was a question about comparisons and how you judge - we probably won't have time to answer all of this, but I kind of want to plant the seed. Obviously, it's not reasonable to say: Hey, what does the Nova Scotia film industry look like compared to that in British Columbia or in Ontario or in California or Georgia or bigger locations? But what do you look at for comparators and say - because everybody's got incentives, right? If you look at it from a negative standpoint, you could say: Well, it becomes a race to the bottom and everybody's just kind of cutting things as much as they can to compete. I don't necessarily believe that.

What jurisdictions do you look at to compare with and say: Hey, X is doing this. Maybe we should consider that on more of an apples-to-apples case.

LAURA MACKENZIE: Just very quickly, I think it's not an easy question to answer, because of course, it's really nuanced. I think what we need to do is we need to look at our offer. So it's not just the incentive, it's the offer. How does our offer compare to other secondary markets? We are a secondary market. If a production needs the size of a sound stage and the size of a crew that it can only find in Vancouver and Toronto, then we are simply not playing that game.

What we're looking at is the types of productions that we can essentially host comfortably in Nova Scotia. We're going to make sure that we're competitive in that offer. That includes the infrastructure to fit the size of productions that are coming here. For instance, the largest production that we have in Nova Scotia right now is *We Were Liars*, and the *We Were Liars* crew is about 250 people, if not more. They are using a sound stage that they are absolutely bursting out of right now. They are probably just a little bit beyond

the capacity for what we can host in terms of infrastructure right now, so we really need to look at that. How does that compare to other secondary markets?

THE CHAIR: Order. My apologies. The time for the Liberal caucus is up.

I will turn it over to MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thanks to both of you for being here. I just want to say, before I begin my questions and comments, that I really do think that your position, or your presence, at Screen Nova Scotia, Ms. Mackenzie, has been a big part of the growth, of what has happened. I think anyone in the film industry would acknowledge that. Thank you so much for the hard work that you've been doing, and also to the department for seeing the value of a real investment in the film industry. Obviously we haven't seen that all the time, so that is good.

I have a bunch of smaller questions, just based on your opening, but then I have a couple of bigger things. I don't know where to start. I guess I will start with film tourism. My partner was in the first, second, and third episodes of *Sullivan's Crossing* this season - I think a pretty small part - and it's incredible how many people will come up to him and be like: Oh, you deliver babies now, and talk about this whole thing, because his wife has a baby on the show. It's amazing how popular *Sullivan's Crossing* is. I mean, it's good. It's a good show.

Just for that example - what explicitly would a film tourism strategy around *Sullivan's Crossing* look like? Are we talking about advertising a campground and being like: This is where it was shot, and you can camp here too? What else are we talking about when it comes to a tourism strategy around a production?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Jeffries.

SUSAN JEFFRIES: As I said earlier in my opening remarks, we're very excited about the potential for film tourism.

I'll take you back to earlier days when the film tourism strategy was being discussed. There was a working group that was formed. Laura is part of that, and I am as well. It is led through our Tourism division. We got together and discussed what is currently happening in the province in terms of the support for film tourism - what products exist for visitors to experience.

Tourism Nova Scotia has a very robust research area. In concert with our working committee, we looked at some research to determine what would be a motivator for travel related to film tourism. In the research that was conducted with the test group, we looked at a number of productions that had been filmed in Nova Scotia to understand their awareness of them and how it would motivate them to travel, and what they would like to experience

as part of that. There was an expert who was brought in from New Zealand. I can't remember the gentleman's name at the moment - maybe Laura does - who gave us some global examples of the impact of film tourism and what it could mean for our province.

Where we are right now - as an example with *Sullivan's Crossing* - Tourism Nova Scotia did make some initial investments this year in providing some content. They created some short ads that showed the beauty of Nova Scotia in the areas where *Sullivan's Crossing* is filmed. They got a tremendous response from those who viewed it in terms of positive interest in visiting the province as a result of seeing the locations like those of *Sullivan's Crossing*.

An important part of the research that came out is that - as was mentioned also in the testimonial - Nova Scotia becomes a character in the films that are being filmed here. What resonated in the focus groups is that what's most important to the visitor is that the film that draws them as a visitor is a film that actually portrays Nova Scotia as Nova Scotia. *Sullivan's Crossing* is an example. They're in a fictitious community where the central film is done but it is Nova Scotia. It is Halifax. Number one, that was what resonated with visitors of the province to look at a film and see it as representing Halifax.

Not equally as important, but also important, are those films that are in iconic places - you can see very visible, well-known places in Nova Scotia. That can also be a motivator as well - knowing that it is Nova Scotia and recognizable locations.

I've got some notes here related to what has actually happened in terms of the investments from Tourism Nova Scotia. In 2024-25, they've increased their presence on novascotia.com. There's a section on the site that visitors can go to, and they can read about content that relates to filmmaking in Nova Scotia. The campaign that they developed was created under the Compelling Tourism Communities Marketing Initiative, which basically allowed them to do some filming that directly relates to the content of Film Nova Scotia.

The work that's ahead for Tourism Nova Scotia - visitors to the province would need to look at: What can I do to experience the film location? They're working with their development officers to develop activities that people can do when they come and visit the province to experience a film location.

I'll give you an example of a current product that exists. Everyone is well aware of the popularity of Oak Island. One of the current ways to experience Oak Island is by boat. There's an operator there that offers tours by water, and when that company announces they're touring for the season, it sells out in minutes. It's very popular. Some film sites aren't accessible to visitors while they're filming.

The big part of Tourism Nova Scotia's work moving forward is to develop those experiences that actual visitors can come and take in. They're working on that, and they'll continue to develop film content that supports the various films that are taking place.

SUSAN LEBLANC: That's helpful. I wanted to ask a bit about the ecosystem of the film community. As we know, we have lots of local productions, and some local producers and directors who are working on a more global or international stage - like Thom Fitzgerald - but we have lots more indie production, then we have a lot of stuff coming in from other places.

[10:45 a.m.]

One of the impacts of the 2015 crisis, if you will, when the tax credit was taken away, was that a lot of people left, a lot of filmmakers and crew and actors even left to go elsewhere for work. It felt like it gutted the ecosystem. I'm wondering right now, in terms of we're having a booming season, we've got four and a half crews again, but in terms of import versus local, what are the numbers like there? Is our local scene healthy again, or is it still working to become healthy again? I know there's lots going on, but in terms of the balance or how it's all working together as an ecosystem, where are we?

SUSAN JEFFRIES: I think we talked earlier about the various types of productions that are coming here. We spoke about the service productions, which are those international-in-scope film productions. We have currently two to three of those happening within the province right now. In terms of activity on the ground, we have, in terms of the various types of productions, there are actually about 25 productions that are filming right now in the province as we speak. There's a lot going on in various parts of the province.

Year-to-date, what I will say from a funder perspective: Nova Scotia Film & Television Production Incentive Fund has to date 82 productions that we've received requests for funding for for the 2024 fiscal year. I mentioned earlier 40 of those have accessed the rural bonus. In comparison, the 2023-24 year of production had 81 for the whole year. We're six months into this fiscal year, so . . . (interruption).

SUSAN LEBLANC: Sorry to interrupt. I just want to clarify. My question really is, of those 82 from last year or the 81 that we have at this point this year, how many are from away and how many are local?

SUSAN JEFFRIES: I don't have the exact figure with me today, but I will say the large majority of those are what we would call domestic productions. They're Nova Scotia-produced productions. I don't know if Laura has any other figures that would compare to that, but I can get that number for you. I just don't have the complete list with me at the moment.

LAURA MACKENZIE: I think it's around six foreign service productions of the 81. The story of the types of productions I find actually a really interesting one, because it's changed significantly over the past decade. When the Province removed a labour-based tax credit and implemented an all-services incentive, it changed the type of production that we were able to do. At that point, just like many other jurisdictions across Canada, the productions that were attracted to those jurisdictions were labour-heavy productions, big-budget series and feature films that are going to require a lot of crew use. After the incentive fund was put in place, we started to see a significant increase in the number of documentary TV series that were filming in Nova Scotia.

We have an exceptionally large number of projects that are filming in Nova Scotia. Many of them are documentary television series. In fact, I think I have a number here. In 2021, it was almost 68 per cent. It's a great thing if we can have both. We want to make sure that we've got the productions that are being developed here in Nova Scotia. We've got Canadian-content projects that are creating a significant increase in labour. We want to make sure we've got the international productions that are coming in, because they also support the training of the crew that exists.

Having these non-fiction or documentary TV series, they're typically doing a great job in bringing new people into the industry. They're developing the emerging part of the pipeline. I think now we're benefiting from that having happened.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I know when that happened, of course, as a performer, my thought was - and lots of people from the crew and performer standpoint were like: Well, that's great for documentaries, because they're smaller groups of people - is the economic impact going to be less because there are fewer people being hired, fewer people paying taxes - smaller productions, et cetera? It's good to know that besides the inherent value of documentaries, which I love - they're good for crew training - I did want to talk a little bit about that labour aspect of things.

I've heard you speak about the Directors Guild of Canada. I've heard you talk about the IATSE unions. I've talked to folks I know from one of the IATSE unions and the Directors Guild and heard about the crew increases. I also understand that the permitting, as you talked about - you were saying there are 700 people but then there's permitting because we don't have people. It may not be young people, but it might be people who have just been brought in for hair and makeup or whatever on a certain thing. It feels like we still need to expand more in terms of crews, but the one thing that I'm not hearing about is performers. I have two questions about performers.

Number one: Am I correct in saying that we do not have a labour tax credit of any kind right now - and I'm asking that question because when I go on to apply for a project, for instance, it will say on the application: You must be a resident of Nova Scotia - because of tax credits. Whenever I see that, I go: Well, I thought that wasn't the case anymore. Is it

the case for performers specifically? I know animation is different, but in terms of live action people productions.

LAURA MACKENZIE: The Nova Scotia Film & Television Production Incentive Fund will only pay out on Nova Scotia-eligible costs. That is people who pay taxes in Nova Scotia.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Okay. Good.

LAURA MACKENZIE: Yes.

SUSAN LEBLANC: My other question about performers is: I know that American television and big productions are based on the star system. Everyone knows that, so it's really exciting when Willem Dafoe comes in to make a show. That's awesome, but it also means for our local performance industry that realistically, for those big productions, there's not a ton of big roles. There's tons of background, which is awesome for a certain group of people, and then there are some acting roles and there are some small principal roles. But in terms of how we convince big productions that we do have the talent here - they might not be the Willem Dafoes of the world but they are people who are really good, just aren't known on the American screen, as it were. Is there any work going on there and is there any thought to developing our screen actors here? We have lots of development opportunities but we don't really have any performance development as far as I know - except for Dalhousie University, which is not really - they're not being trained for film acting. They're being trained for theatre - and Acadia University. Any thoughts on that?

LAURA MACKENZIE: Performer development is absolutely something that is on our radar. You're absolutely 100 per cent right: We do not have a significant number. We don't have enough performers who are being recognized by the studios in Los Angeles as being capable of taking on a principal or star role. That is simply something that we need to continue to work on. It's going to be the responsibility of all of us working together: Screen Nova Scotia working with ACTRA National and ACTRA Maritimes to make sure that we're developing and implementing the kind of training that is going to actually output the kind of stars that will be triggered onto shows. In terms of the types of training that we can do, likely we need to be bringing in some star training. We need to do some very specific, unique, creative Nova Scotia training when it comes to training our performers into those roles.

SUSAN LEBLANC: That's on the radar? Is there a plan for that, or is it sort of, it's on the five-year plan?

LAURA MACKENZIE: It's on our workforce development consultant's radar. They are incorporating some training ideas into that strategic plan.

SUSAN LEBLANC: In terms of the big productions - I forget, what do you call them? service productions? - is there a strategy or a thought around features versus series? Obviously, series, if they go, then there's an investment over many years, hopefully, and then features are bigger. Are you focusing on one or the other, or is it whatever you want to do? (Laughs)

LAURA MACKENZIE: Well, we tend to try not to turn away productions. When it comes to going out and attracting productions, there is a natural order that we'd like to see happen in Nova Scotia. We always want to make sure that we have a Canadian content television series going here.

Having *Sullivan's Crossing* in its third season is wonderful. It's a really great show. It's doing great in ratings. We hope it continues to come back. When that show takes its bow, we'll work toward getting another one. That work includes not just speaking to the Canadian producers and not just encouraging the Canadian broadcasters and the Canadian financiers - those who trigger that market attachment: Screen Nova Scotia will go out and meet with Bell Media, and CTV, and CBC, and ask about what they're doing to make sure that there's a Canadian content show in our region because that's important. We'll continue to do that.

We do need to make sure that we've got the international community filming here for many reasons, including that tourism aspect, including the economic impact, including the fact that they're able to pay their crew the Tier A rates, which allows for a significant amount of training and crew development here. The ecosystem, I would say, requires all types of productions, and we want to make sure that we're not giving up the Canadian productions or the Nova Scotia-originated productions and just filling it with service.

THE CHAIR: The time for the NDP caucus has elapsed, so we will move on to the PC caucus, beginning with MLA White.

JOHN WHITE: I'm bursting with excitement over here, listening to the film industry, because I've been living this all Summer long. Actually, for a couple of years with the Unama'ki Motion Picture Co-operative, *Shipwreck Kings* is a movie that's being shot in Cape Breton right now. It's a History Channel series following *The Curse of Oak Island*, which is my favourite show, to be honest with you. I'm giving them a plug. It's in Louisburg. It's an estimated \$5 million production, and if that series takes off, that's the type of series that we're just talking about here

I agree with my colleague over there with the impact that has, because when someone comes into a community like Cape Breton or any of these rural communities across Nova Scotia and injects \$5 million over a few months, that has an impact. That's a massive, massive impact. I'll mention a little more of that in a couple of minutes, but before I do, I want to give you ladies one more chance to talk about the Distant Location Incentive program. I really want to hear the details because I want the world to know we're

open for business. I want to give you that chance to say it loud and clear: What are the details of the program so people know?

SUSAN JEFFRIES: *Shipwreck Kings* - I am aware of that coming into Nova Scotia, particularly up in Cape Breton and on water. Obviously, there'll be some beautiful scenic parts of that filming.

I'll get into some of the details around the Distant Location Incentive. As I mentioned earlier, we know that jurisdictionally when looking out there to remain competitive and to encourage productions in our rural communities, an incentive is needed. There has been some work prior to the development of the Distant Location Incentive in terms of mission visits to rural communities. Screen Nova Scotia has led several missions with decision makers to the island of Cape Breton as well as other areas for folks to see firsthand. The Distant Location Incentive - as an incentive - is important, but also supporting that broadly is bringing forth opportunities in the market for filmmakers to look at rural locations.

[11:00 a.m.]

The Distant Location Incentive is a prescribed geographic area. The incentive allows up to 10 per cent of total eligible Nova Scotia cost. The Nova Scotia Film & Television Production Incentive Fund is a rebate program that provides financial incentives for the Nova Scotia spend and that's an overall spend in the community. It's Nova Scotia labour. It's all the costs that go into on-the-ground expenses.

We mentioned accommodations, food and construction. When a crew comes into a local area, they're buying locally. They're using local caterers. They're using a local crew - where possible - and the cost of doing that is higher in a rural area outside of HRM.

When we were developing what the criteria would look like for the Distant Location Incentive, we knew we had the two per cent base. As a qualifier for the Distant Location Incentive - between seven and ten - you absolutely have to qualify for the two per cent bonus. The qualifier is 50 per cent of your filming has to take place outside of the 30-kilometre zone for the two per cent, and stacking on top of that is up to a 100-kilometre bonus of seven per cent. If you go beyond 100, the incentive goes up to ten per cent. All of this is prorated - the number of days spent filming matters whether you get the full percentage or not.

We gave an example earlier of *The Lighthouse* and *Little Lorraine*, one of the very first productions to fully embrace the opportunity to be reimbursed for ten per cent. That incentive is a huge motivator for filmmaking. We have had really good pickup from new requests coming into the fund that are showing interest in filming rurally.

We had to redesign the administrative side of the applications themselves so they specifically ask for what rural locations you may be going to. In our previous iteration of our fund with the two per cent bonus, at the application period there was not a specific request for them to tell us where they were filming outside the 30 kilometres but that they were. The exact details as to where film productions are filmed would come to us at the claim stage - which is when the film has finished production and they're putting in a claim.

The two-zone structure is quite intentional. We know that incentivizing someone to go even farther from the Halifax region was important to incentivize them at another level. The reason for the two levels is that 100 kilometres -within an hour one would say - is reasonable to expect that organizations could do that, but to further incentivize them to go to areas like Cape Breton or Yarmouth and farther is important. We know that prior to this very few productions had been filming in Cape Breton - as an example - so it's not hard for us to look at where filming took place and see where there's lots of opportunity.

We also looked at some of the organizations that are developing film throughout the province. You mentioned Unama'ki Motion Picture Co-operative, which is a new organization - an Indigenous-led organization - who have a very keen interest in developing film production on Cape Breton Island. They were instrumental in bringing forth to us what exists on Cape Breton Island in terms of capacity. They're doing some of that work to help us to develop capacity in the community.

We're working closely with the Nova Scotia Community College to develop film training workshops as well, but by all indications, we expect that there will be continued good pickup for the fund across the province - not just in Cape Breton Island - so it could get a little competitive out there in the rural communities.

JOHN WHITE: I love the competition. I do. I see this as a resource that rural Nova Scotia can use. I do believe that Cape Breton is ahead of the line here right now only because Unama'ki - I mean in taking advantage of it, because Unama'ki Motion Picture Co-operative is leading it, and they've been involved so far ahead. I'll tell you this: I know that the Cape Breton Partnership had been out in municipalities all over mainland Nova Scotia to try to show them what's going on and how to work with the film industry, because the film industry is so different. It's a lot to take in. It's a lot to try to understand. I think I'm scratching the surface and my mind is boggled by it.

I'm happy to have the Cooperative and the Partnership to go back to, and I'm happy to see that they're out trying to promote it across the entire province, which is important. We're talking about a massive opportunity. One of the things that I learned is that Hope, B.C. is where Rambo *First Blood* was shot 40 years ago or something like that, and it still brings in 60,000 tourists a year. I want that kind of business for Cape Breton. That's what I want. We need one big film to bring in that tourism industry. We need that in Yarmouth. We need that on the South Shore. We need that everywhere. That's exactly what we need, because we have so much to offer all over Nova Scotia, from the talent and everything else.

To try to get back to my question, because I have so much I want to say - when I was listening to you, Ms. Jeffries, there were so many things you talked about that I wanted to comment on. I understand that in 2023, *Creepy Cape Breton* was the only production happening on the island. That was a small series, a Mi'kmaw series by producer Dawn Wells. I'm curious: What are the numbers of rural productions now under that incentive for Glace Bay and Dominion? Under the old system, what productions were happening in Cape Breton? Am I wrong? Is that the only one in Glace Bay and Dominion? How does this benefit outside of Halifax, really?

Halifax, we can't compete with. We can't compete with the capital. It has the urban city, which we can't duplicate. If you want that, you have it. Everywhere else, we have to compete with what we have. We don't have, as was mentioned already today, the trained people, either, to work in the industry, so this is what we're trying to build up, to train. We need people trained, and then become fair game, I'm sure. I'm just curious if you know the number of productions that were in Glace Bay and Dominion under the old system. I can tell you some of the numbers that are happening now. I think I have seven here. I'm going to let you talk. (Laughs)

SUSAN JEFFRIES: I didn't bring the geographic breakdown of productions with me, but I can get that to you. What I do have with me is historically the number of productions that have come to Nova Scotia that have expressed an interest in the 2 per cent incentive that existed before we introduced the Distant Location Incentive. In fiscal year 2022-23, of the 82 productions, 45 productions accessed the rural bonus; in 2023, 81 productions, 45 productions accessed the rural; and year-to-date, I mentioned we have 40 productions that have accessed the rural bonus.

Since April 1<sup>st</sup>, as I said, we received 22 applications requesting the bonus. Year-to-date, there are two approved productions with the bonus and 10 productions that have requested the bonus that are in our review process. Again, there's an increase in the overall requests for productions since it's been announced. We also, in our intake for the film production fund, some of the productions are happening in the next fiscal year. Of the 2025-26 year for productions, we have received five, and all five have requested the distant location bonus.

I wanted to offer Laura an opportunity to comment on having a rural bonus as an incentive from a sales perspective, from a tourist attraction - I'm wondering if you might want to comment on that, Laura, from your purview in attending marketplaces.

LAURA MACKENZIE: MLA White, it's exciting, I know. I agree. Screen Nova Scotia hosts a familiarization tour every year. We bring in six or seven physical production executives from streamers and studios in Los Angeles every year. We've had Netflix, we've had Amazon, we've had Fremantle, some of the largest studios: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Studios, and Paramount Pictures have all been here.

We take them on a three-day tour around Nova Scotia. We take them down to Lunenburg. We stop in Chester for lunch. We take them across to Windsor. We stop in the Valley for dinner and we watch the sunset at a vineyard, and then we charter a small plane and we take them to Cape Breton. We have historically stopped at the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre for an Indigenous welcome. We will travel over to Cabot Links and visit some of the smaller locations along the way. We bring a locations manager with us - somebody who has filmed in Cape Breton a number of times - so they can point out the infrastructure that exists there. We talk a lot about Louisbourg. We talk a lot about some of the infrastructure that already exists there that could be revived for production.

This year, we have planned a helicopter tour to take them up and down through the highlands so that they can get a look at the scope and scale of the beauty that exists up there. We're doing Cape Breton this year, and likely in the years to come, we'll move to some other jurisdictions so we can make sure that we're showcasing all of Nova Scotia.

My point is that we almost always have a number of those studios come back to us with scripts because they got so excited about the locations. They come back to us and they want us to do a script breakdown and they want us to provide a digital image package of what they saw so that they can take it and share it with their friends to encourage them to come here.

These are the kinds of things that we can do to make sure that we are getting people excited about all of the untapped potential that exists in Nova Scotia that before the Distant Location Incentive they wouldn't have thought about as necessarily financially viable. That is because when you film in Halifax or when you film close to Halifax, your crew goes home at night. You don't have to feed them at night. When you take a production out to any other jurisdiction, outside of the 2 per cent - you get the 2 per cent from the previous rural filming bonus, but that's not enough to cover the cost of taking an entire crew down to Yarmouth or taking an entire crew to Cape Breton or to Tatamagouche or to Wolfville or anywhere along the way.

What has changed now is that productions can look at these untapped locations and go: We don't even have to talk about the bottom line. We can afford to go there. This 10 per cent bonus is going to offset the cost of taking those crew and putting them up and paying them per diem and travelling them. What has changed is that now every location in Nova Scotia has just as much potential to be a location for filming as Halifax.

JOHN WHITE: That's exactly what I'm getting at. I know that the Hollywood studios have been in Cape Breton the last two years for a familiarization tour, and it's been bringing an experienced team in to train an unskilled workforce. That's the problem that's been here. We have rolling fields of green. We have forest. We have hundred-foot cliffs. We have sandy beaches. We have everything you want to film. But we don't have a skilled crew to get there, and that's kind of the question of becoming.

I know all of the productions that took part that started this year have had great success and good experiences. That's good to hear. I know it's created a lot of buzz as well. I'm aware that Sunbelt Rentals Film & TV is looking at bringing a location down there too, and a producer is happy about that. I know there are four new businesses that are about to pop up because of the film industry, and it's not every day you hear about business popping up in Cape Breton, so it's exciting.

Bringing people in to train our locals - our kids have opportunity. Our kids can stay home now. They don't need to go away. I know several kids who worked in the film industry in Ontario, because it wasn't available here. I'm very happy to see they are coming home and they have a chance to be here now.

[11:15 a.m.]

We talk about world communities and the benefit of a film industry. It's just absolutely incredible to watch the buzz - some of the big-name actors who come in. That happened with *Little Lorraine*. When *Little Lorraine* came in, we had some - it was absolutely wild to see the buzz on the street, from the caterers to searching for cargo elevators, to food trucks, to extras. It was absolutely amazing. Everybody benefitted from that. That's what we need to do. That's where we need to go to get people back to work and get people trained, and then I say that we would have a trained workforce, and we would be okay. We have to build that workforce up again. I think that's the question that has been most on the floor today.

To get back to my question - I'm all over the place - I do understand that Unama'ki Motion Picture Co-operative is creating a photo library of the places to shoot because it's very diverse. There are places you could shoot *The Lord of the Rings*. Stephen Amell was one of the actors in that show, also in *Little Lorraine*. I understand that could be shot in some areas of Cape Breton.

They're producing pictures and describing it from a filming perspective - where halls are, how to get access to it and everything else. That's a unique benefit for rural communities to have something like that. I'm wondering if there's anything else that's being done to help rural Nova Scotia to promote what they have naturally in their communities.

SUSAN JEFFRIES: If I can use Unama'ki Motion Picture Co-operative's work thus far in developing capacity in the community, it is transferable information that can go to other communities. One of the important pieces of information that an organization like Screen Nova Scotia needs to have at their disposal is an understanding of what the community has to offer - what their attributes might be, what their capacity is from buildings, crew, et cetera.

To build that photo library - that mapping of facilities - is important. When you have a way of knowing where your baseline is, that can actually help to determine what gaps you need to fill and what kind of requirements would be needed. All of that information that Unama'ki has begun to do would be done in concert with Screen Nova Scotia and their film library which is used - maybe Laura might want to comment on how that's used by location managers and by their location staff at Screen Nova Scotia.

Unama'ki is not doing this alone. It's important for any jurisdiction to work with us as a funder. We have programs that we support in our department and/or other government department supports. Unama'ki in particular, we've made the connection with the Department of Labour Skills and Immigration who looks after the MOST program, but they also have some training programs that they could tap into to develop training programs.

Unama'ki has actually taken it to schools. They've gone out into community and to your point, MLA White, on how important it is for youth to understand that is a viable career, they've also done a lot of outreach. I see I've just run out of time, so my apologies.

THE CHAIR: Order. We do have a second round of questioning so you may be able to finish your thought. We will now go with seven minutes per caucus beginning with MLA Clark.

BRAEDON CLARK: I just have a couple of bigger-picture questions for the seven minutes here. The first one - and both of you can answer this if you could - is, going forward, what do you see as the biggest barrier or issue preventing the explosive growth we've seen? If there isn't any, that's great, but there are always issues in life. What would you identify - if you could - as the one biggest thing that keeps you up at night or worries you a bit about the film industry in Nova Scotia in general?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Mackenzie.

LAURA MACKENZIE: The biggest issue is the ecosystem overall. Right now, we're bursting at the seams. We just simply cannot supply the demand that's out there. If we're going to get to a place where we can supply the current demand, then we need another sound stage. We need another crew. We need more infrastructure when it comes to suppliers for camera and equipment. We need more accommodations available to us.

We are simply going into these locations and they're bursting at the seams. We have projects that are coming in right now. They're looking for housing in Lunenburg and for production space, and we simply don't have it available. I would say right now we're just beyond our capacity, meaning we've had to bring in - I think the number I gave was 130 permitted out-of-town workers here right now. We need to look at who those individuals are, and we need to make sure that we're filling those gaps.

Screen Nova Scotia is very close to hopefully having a dedicated sound stage beyond what the market is producing already. We have suppliers who want - for instance, as we were speaking with MLA White, who are looking at opening up express shops in some of these other communities in Nova Scotia and potentially having more inventory on the ground and growing their space. When the industry grows, you have to grow the entire ecosystem in order to supply the demand.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Jeffries.

SUSAN JEFFRIES: My only comment to that would be that we continue to work with Screen Nova Scotia to understand where the needs are. As I mentioned earlier, anything that we can do to encourage the capacity building from a labour perspective, we will do within our programs and in concert with other government partners. Laura is right. It's a very busy season. I indicated already the request for support from our fund is higher going into 2024, six months in. We'll continue to work with Screen Nova Scotia as they do the work that they're doing with their workforce development strategy and understand where the gaps are and continue to have conversations as to what our role is in terms of that as a funder.

BRAEDON CLARK: My second question connected to that would be: Where would both of you like to see the industry here in Nova Scotia in the next five to 10 years? What do you see when you look into the future for this industry? Where do you think it can be if the issues that you both mentioned in your first answers are met to some degree?

SUSAN JEFFRIES: I'll answer that, and I'll also give Ms. Mackenzie an opportunity. Of course, all of the challenges that we talked about today are challenges that we hope to overcome to build the industry - having the smart incentives, having opportunity for film support be made available through training to have film production happening throughout our province. Important to that is a year-round film community who can support film production. That includes having a sound stage.

Laura pointed out earlier the Top 5 priorities of decision makers. Weather played a role in that, and it's important to have opportunities for production to happen outside of the warm, balmy season that we have. Any of those five priority areas, to work together and to ensure that we have provided our utmost best foot forward moving on is important. We'll continue to understand what those gaps would be and what we need to do to ensure that the film production stays consistent and sustainable and grows at the same time.

LAURA MACKENZIE: I'd say the vision for the film industry is to grow as sustainably as possible. We want to make sure that if we're inviting a production to come to Nova Scotia or if we're encouraging production to be developed here that we can host it properly, we can welcome it, we can sustain it, and that we're not putting our communities in jeopardy in any way, shape, or form. We certainly want to make sure that we maintain our Nova Scotia hospitality, that we are making sure that when productions are coming in,

that they're being welcomed by the community. I think that kind of vision requires the continued collaboration of government and the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, and Screen Nova Scotia and the communities working together.

In terms of my vision for the industry, I would love to see this industry grow in a way where we are maintaining an appropriate balance of Canadian content being developed here, that we're still bringing in those foreign service productions, and just maintaining this ecosystem. It's important to have all types of productions. We need those low-budget feature films that are the passion projects that really bring people into the industry and give them that calling card so that they can start to build their careers.

Some of the community television networks that are funding some of the low-budget television projects that are coming out are really well-done content. They are made by emerging individuals. Right now, we've got this incredible ecosystem where the market is available here for the emerging talent, for the big-budget Canadian content, and the market is available here for the international service. We just want to make sure that we can grow the entire ecosystem sustainably.

THE CHAIR: Perfect timing. We will now move on to the NDP caucus with MLA Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: I want to say that when we say bursting at the seams, it's a good thing. It's absolutely wonderful to know that our film industry and as well the growth in Nova Scotia is actually amazing. We look forward to seeing new folks in Nova Scotia coming here to do amazing things and then seeing it on screen. I wanted to say that first but also ask a question about accommodations.

You mentioned this - and I know I'm big on if we're going to have folks come, we want to make sure that they have a place to stay. I want to know how has the housing crisis has impacted the film industry - whether it's short-term or long-term stays - to be able to do the work that we need to do here in Nova Scotia?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Jeffries.

SUSAN JEFFRIES: We mentioned earlier accommodations - hugely important for those crews. Some of the crews are based in Nova Scotia so they go to their homes at night. For those crew and filmmakers who need accommodation, they are using any and all ways to find places for people to stay. I know that they tap into Airbnbs. They have rented houses where crew collectively stay in a whole house.

To date I have not heard specifically that they're not finding places for people to stay. It takes a little bit of creative thinking to accommodate. It may not be as close to the set that they may want - they may be a little bit outside the area that they're filming in. Thus

far - to the extent that I've had some comments from the production incentive fund - they're making it work.

In some cases, the costs are a little high. That's going to be reflected in their budgets as well - that's probably no surprise. They're just having to get very creative and find ways to house those who need housing. That means going out and working with whomever they can make connections with. They have locations managers and those who are directly responsible for arranging that, and I don't think they leave any rock unturned to try to find accommodations.

SUZY HANSEN: I just have one more. We mentioned the MOST program - and I know that there are a number of programs that they have within the school there that benefit our young folks. I'm just curious to know, are there any specific programs by the MOST program that you're able to tap into that you're able to draw and recruit folks in the industry?

SUSAN JEFFRIES: I can speak to some of the investments we've made to encourage folks to enter the industry. We have worked as I mentioned earlier with the Atlantic Filmmakers Cooperative with their FILM 5 program to encourage new entrance. That seems to be a program that is a very likely launch for them to get into the film production industry. It's kind of an on-ramp to some of this Content Creator Fund work that's being undertaken.

Nova Scotia Community College as well, we've worked with them directly through a program that's training through microcredentialing. We've completed two iterations of funding through funding that was provided to the Light House Arts Centre - they had a first graduating class in May for individuals who went through.

What they were instructing them on was director and producer. They've done some work around electrical and gaffing and so I know that some of those positions have resulted in on-set opportunities. I think Laura can speak to the work they're doing at Screen Nova Scotia as well with support of the department as well.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Mackenzie.

LAURA MACKENZIE: Screen Nova Scotia offers a Diversity Mentorship Program. Essentially what that means is we invite new individuals who are interested in working in the industry. They don't have to have worked in the industry before. We invite them in to apply and be part of the program. We select between 12 and 14 per year and we provide 12 to 14, as I mentioned, individuals with four weeks of paid mentorship on set. These individuals are typically within the age range where they can access the MOST program. We're always looking to try to create programs where we can encourage that age range to take advantage of the MOST program, so we do the internship program.

[11:30 a.m.]

As I mentioned, we also have our Amplified Voices Pre-Development Program and Amplified Voices Development Program. We're working right now to train some of these individuals into more of the producer and the writer roles.

THE CHAIR: MLA Hansen with just under two minutes.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm going to pass it over.

THE CHAIR: MLA Leblanc with two minutes.

SUSAN LEBLANC: With the MOST program, is it the case that it covers all of the jobs on a film set?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Jeffries.

SUSAN JEFFRIES: It does not. There are some areas that we're aware of that haven't been included. I think hairdressing was mentioned as one the last time we made mention of this. They have targeted those who have skills that are very transferrable. We talked about electricians. We talked about carpenters. We understand that there may be some gaps in what is funded.

I do have some statistics that I think we've shared earlier with a committee that give you a snapshot. We do know that of the received applications - the 449 that have been received to date this year - there is 0.2 per cent that identified film occupations, and that those - the average tax refund is around \$3,722. Of those applying for it, there is - it is a new program. There could be likely some opportunity to expand on what the MOST program would offer. That would be a discussion with Labour, Skills and Immigration.

That would be the information that I have to date, but I don't have any other specific occupations that maybe have looked into the program and have not - they're not being realized. I don't have that information.

THE CHAIR: Sixteen seconds. MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Last word, Ms. Mackenzie. Are you working with the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration to promote those jobs that might be missing from the MOST program?

LAURA MACKENZIE: We work with the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration with our Diversity Mentorship Program. We do get support to bring new people into the industry at that age range where they could access the program.

THE CHAIR: We will turn it over now to the PC caucus with seven minutes, beginning with MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I really want to start out by saying that I don't know a lot about the film industry, but as I sat here today, it's very clear to me that we're in very capable hands with you folks. I expect that as time goes on, as you grow the vision to grow with sustainability, we'll do just that. Certainly, with this kind of leadership and with the government continuing to support the incentives in what I think is a fairly competitive environment, we'll grow Nova Scotia in this industry.

I want to thank whoever was a driving force to bring in this rural incentive. As I sat here today, a lot of it appears to be - it was kind of sounding a little bit like HRM versus the rest of Nova Scotia. I don't really see it that way. I believe that HRM, or Halifax and the surrounding areas - a tremendous number of assets to be used in the film industry, and it's well-known. I also believe that rural Nova Scotia has a tremendous number of assets that can be used to further grow the Nova Scotia film industry, and as those become known, we will grow the industry.

So in my view, it's not all about sort of Halifax and rural. It's about the whole industry together. I think that the rural incentive, as you call it, is a masterful piece of growing the industry sustainably.

I will have a question at the end here, but I also do want to comment - and actually, I have failed in this because I intended to write a letter after you guys were last here to invite you to come down to West Colchester. I know that you have a lot of places to see and stuff like that, but we have a lot to offer there too. I will get that letter off officially. Actually, Tory Rushton, Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables and I have talked about that. We share the Cliffs of Fundy Geopark, the UNESCO World Heritage site, and this tremendous number of fossil cliffs, unique geology, and the highest tides in the world.

I recall speaking to the people who qualified the area as a UNESCO geopark, and after they had flown the helicopter along the shore from Truro to Joggins Fossil Cliffs, they said we had potential to have the number one geopark in the world. There is tremendous opportunity there. That's my pitch. I hope everybody got that. I encourage you to come down there.

My question is just simple. Now that you're out in rural Nova Scotia to some degree, what kind of feedback are you getting from the residents? Are they really happy to have you there? What kind of feedback do you or the people who are on the sets get from those residents?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Mackenzie.

LAURA MACKENZIE: I agree with you, MLA Taggart. It is extremely exciting, and I also agree with you that it is not a zero-sum game. It's not us or them. It is very much a matter of we used to have productions that would take their crew out for a day. Now they can go out and film their whole production there. It's really a game changer.

To answer your question, we always had a great response from Nova Scotia. Certainly, there are areas in Nova Scotia that are overused - that are used more than others, I should say, not overused. Along Highway No. 103 - Hubbards, Chester, Mahone Bay, Lunenburg - is our number one destination for filming location. It's just always been that way, and the reason for that is because we have always been known internationally as having a very similar seaboard to the Northeastern Seaboard. We look like Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard, and we can play those locations very easily.

In terms of tourism, selling our beaches is not a bad idea, but I do agree that there's more work that can be done now that we have incentive to do it, to really showcase some of the other locations that we have. The next steps are to take the location manager who works in our office down to some of the other locations - as you suggest, down to your location. We get a photographer to take some photos, we become introduced to the infrastructure that exists, we meet with the councillors and the mayors and anybody who wants to work with us to support the growth of those communities. We take those photos, and we put them in our database, and we make sure that when somebody calls us and says: I'd like to see an image package for this location, that we have access to that in our database. It's not just coming down and understanding and knowing fully how to sell your location. We also need to do a little bit of work to make sure that we have access to the digital images as well.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse with 1 minute, 24 seconds.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I don't have a lot of time, do I? I'll just make a couple comments because I really don't have enough time to ask the question I have. I remember when the bottom dropped out in 2015. I've been dealing with movies for a long time. *K-11: The Widowmaker*, *Two If by Sea*, *Haven*, you name it. We lost a lot of good people who realized they could no longer feed their family here because we just were not going to get the same number of movies and industry here. As somebody who understands a sound stage, I am so excited that we will be building one.

The local rink in Chester has been used as a sound stage from time to time. As a matter of fact, this Fall, it looked like Christmas decided to take over. I just want to say that I'm very happy and proud of what the government has brought back to the table, and this distance one as well. I'm ever so grateful and proud of what you and Screen Nova Scotia do for this province. It is big. I just want to say that because there's no way I can get a five-minute answer out of you guys in 1.5 minutes.

THE CHAIR: MLA Barkhouse, you timed your comments perfectly. Order for that. I will welcome some closing remarks if you like. Ms. Jeffries, if you had some comments for the committee.

SUSAN JEFFRIES: Just once again, thank you very much for an opportunity to come and speak about the government's work and the work that we're doing in concert with Screen Nova Scotia. I think we all will leave here very excited about what is to come. I'd like to express again our thanks to Laura Mackenzie for joining us today.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Mackenzie, any closing remarks?

LAURA MACKENZIE: I just want to thank everybody for your encouraging remarks here today, for your great questions. I think we have done a lot of work, but we have a lot of work that we can do if we want to grow the infrastructure and the ability to film all the way across Nova Scotia. Screen Nova Scotia is that - Screen Nova Scotia. We're not Screen Halifax. We're invested in helping.

I do think when it comes to workforce numbers, there is one piece that we didn't talk about, and that was the non-union labour that we have available here. I did, of course, just want to very quickly touch on the fact that we have so many productions in Nova Scotia that are filming right now and throughout the year that are not relying on union labour. They do have crews that they're hiring on their own, such as *The Curse of Oak Island*, which probably feeds 95 people every single day, and much of the labour comes from many of the vendors that they're bringing on their set.

The entire film industry doesn't work the same way as service productions do; there are many other types of productions that are employing Nova Scotians in unique and creative ways. We'll continue to do that work as well, but in the meantime, I look forward to coming down to visit you in your areas of Nova Scotia. Thanks again for today.

THE CHAIR: We do have a little bit of committee business, but you're free to leave. We will take a five-minute recess.

[11:43 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:47 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. I call the Standing Committee on Community Services back to order. We do have a couple of items on the committee agenda for discussion today. The first was a motion that was tabled by the Liberal caucus, and I'll turn it over to MLA Clark on that.

BRAEDON CLARK: My understanding is that the motion was introduced by MLA Jessome, who obviously isn't here today. I'll ask that we just defer it again to the next meeting so he has a chance to speak to his own motion when the time comes.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion on that?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Also, as per the committee's request, there was a letter drafted during the May 7, 2024 meeting to ask the Minister responsible for the Office of Emergency Management if the Alert Ready training review is available and if it can be shared with the committee. Tamer sent that around in our package yesterday for everyone to review. Other than a couple of little changes on whom the letter is coming from, is there any further discussion on that letter? Seeing none, we will have that sent off.

Also, we received correspondence and response from Staff Sergeant Robert Frizzell, non-commissioned officer I/C of CROPs Support of the RCMP, who responded to the committee's inquiries regarding the Upper Tantallon wildfires and the decision-making process. Just wondering if there's any discussion on that piece of correspondence that's with us on the table today. MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I don't recall the conversation at our committee. Is this coming out of the committee? What's the status there? I don't understand.

THE CHAIR: It's my understanding that it came up in discussion at the last committee meeting the vice chair chaired, and MLA Jessome at the time had asked for a little bit more information on that investigation. Mr. Jessome's not here to refresh our memories, but that's basically the gist of it. As I said, somewhere in our package - I've misplaced mine - is the response from Staff Sergeant Frizzell. Everybody has that at the table. MLA Taggart, if you wanted just to review the question, what the Legislative committee clerk sent, and then Staff Sergeant Frizzell's response is on the top of that email.

TOM TAGGART: We're just going to table this, is that correct?

THE CHAIR: Yes, if that's okay. MLA Leblanc has her question.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I was just going to say there's nothing really for this committee to do. It seems like it's going to be a private conversation between MLA Jessome and the folks. I think unless MLA Jessome comes back to the committee with an issue around it, I think just table it, right?

THE CHAIR: We'll just add it as a piece of correspondence. Then our last piece - which was circulated in our package as well - is that the Community Services Committee's annual report is ready for approval to be sent to the House. I was wondering if everyone had a chance to review it, if there were any corrections or omissions? Seeing any - if not, we will make a motion to table that in the sitting.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I make the motion to table it in our next sitting.

THE CHAIR: There is a motion.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

On to our next meeting date - it's October 8, 2024. The topic is Addressing the Homelessness Crisis. As per the rules of the committee, if the Legislature is still sitting on October 8<sup>th</sup>, that topic date will be moved to our first meeting in November, followed up by agenda setting in December.

If there's no other committee business, then we will say this meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11:52 a.m.]