

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, September 14, 2016

LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER

**Office of Immigration
Settlement Funding**

Public Accounts Committee

Mr. Allan MacMaster, Chairman
Mr. Iain Rankin, Vice-Chairman
Mr. Chuck Porter
Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft
Mr. Brendan Maguire
Mr. Joachim Stroink
Mr. Tim Houston
Hon. David Wilson
Ms. Lenore Zann

[Mr. Stephen Gough replaced Mr. Brendan Maguire]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Ms. Nicole Arsenault
Assistant Clerk, Office of the Speaker

Mr. Michael Pickup
Auditor General

WITNESSES

Office of Immigration

Ms. Julie Towers, Chief Executive Officer
Ms. Suzanne Ley, Acting Executive Director



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2016

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN

Mr. Allan MacMaster

VICE-CHAIRMAN

Mr. Iain Rankin

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, please. Good morning everyone, I call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order. I would ask everyone to ensure that their phones are placed on silent so we don't have interruptions. We'll begin with introductions.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Today we have the Office of Immigration to discuss settlement funding. Ms. Towers, I'd like to give you a chance to introduce yourself and your colleague, Ms. Ley, I believe it is, and provide some opening comments.

MS. JULIE TOWERS: First off, thank you very much for being here. It's an excellent opportunity for us to share the information and the work that's going on at the Office of Immigration. I'm looking forward to an exchange not only of information that we can provide to you, but to talk about some of the things we can all do as Nova Scotians on immigration.

First off, I've been three months as the chief executive officer at Immigration. I've been at Aboriginal Affairs for over two years now. Very much I'll try to answer your questions but if there are particular gaps, Suzanne Ley, our executive director who is here with me, has been with Immigration for a couple of years, may have more specific numbers if you have a question. So between us, we should hopefully be able to answer all your questions or follow up as we need to.

I've learned very much in the last few months how hard people have been working at the Office of Immigration but also in other provincial departments and a lot of the partners that are involved because there are a lot of players in this file.

In recent years it's safe to say that this province has been increasingly assertive, really looking for opportunities to bring more people to Nova Scotia and keep them here. I keep getting teased about a quote that Minister John McCallum, the federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship made to the chamber of commerce this Spring. The way he phrased it was you'd have to be an idiot not to know that Nova Scotia wants more immigrants, because everybody has been conveying that message clearly.

It's really important to understand how much immigration is a shared responsibility between the federal and provincial governments. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada very much control who comes to Canada, including to Nova Scotia. They have to approve not only someone as an immigrant to Canada but also if we're designing things within this province to encourage immigration, they have to approve that as well. So you'll see that as we go forward and we talk about things, that differing role.

We do have a good working relationship with our federal counterparts, but we do want to maximize opportunities so we are continually trying to encourage the federal folks to look at what we can do here in this province and the Atlantic Region as well.

We have gained considerable ground in the last three years, not only increasing numbers, more newcomers, but also strengthening the Provincial Nominee Program and the immigration pathways which we'll talk about, and championship of diversity in this province and welcoming communities.

We were the first province in Canada to start on and take advantage of the federal Express Entry program which started in 2015, the idea being how to more quickly bring people to Canada.

Also here in Nova Scotia we designed two streams that helped suit the labour market needs in the province and we can talk more about them, the Express Entry programs. Also two business immigration streams started on January 1st of this year; one is for international entrepreneurs and one is for international graduates who want to start a business. That business stream for international graduates is actually the first in Canada. We need to keep a lot of bright, talented people here, whatever their ages, but we know we have an opportunity with our students coming through our universities and colleges.

The other aspect that certainly I think everyone is well aware of is what we've seen in Canada and particularly in Nova Scotia this year with the Syrian refugee crisis. Since December there have been over 1,000 Syrian refugees who have come to the province, through either government sponsorship or private sponsorship or some combination of that. Communities have really responded well to that.

We've also received a modest increase in the last three years to budget allocations. It's important that that money gets spent wisely, which I know is some of the questions you'll have. We've particularly invested more in immigrant settlement services in the province. As anyone knows, if you move around - and speaking as an Air Force child who moved lots - getting settled in a new place, there's a lot of supports that can help with how you get integrated into a community.

One of the parts that we've been doing is very much increasing the share that goes to the immigrant settlement service organizations over the last three years. This budget year it's a total of \$6 million; as a comparison, in 2013 it was \$5.4 million. We can talk in more detail about those numbers. Those settlement partners, there's a number of organizations across the province, but particularly two of the largest players that we'll be talking about are the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia, or ISANS, as many people will know, and the YMCA across the province. They've really made a huge difference not only over time with immigrants, but particularly with the compressed time frame for the numbers of Syrian refugees.

It's important to recognize, even though immigrants tend to go to urban areas - roughly three-quarters tend to go there and that's across Canada, including Nova Scotia - but it's important what supports are in place outside of a major urban area, so there have been additional investments outside metro Halifax in the last three years, including a lot of one-on-one counselling services.

A new partnership with the YMCA particularly helped with that. They provide that one-on-one contact. They have settlement counsellors and they right now are active and have offices and counsellors in nine of our communities: Bridgewater, Yarmouth, Cornwallis, Amherst, Truro, Pictou, Sydney, Kentville, and Port Hawkesbury. Two of those, Kentville and Port Hawkesbury, were just added this Spring.

We also did an agreement with the New Dawn Centre for Social Innovation in Sydney, so they have two people who are full-time settlement counsellors. There have also been other investments that we can talk about that have played out in Bridgewater and other areas.

It's safe to say that we're growing in the province, the number of immigrants, they're up already. We get information at different intervals and we recently received the numbers for January to June 2016. Not only did we fill all the nominations under the federal allocation that received the cap, which is 1,350, which we're also working on this year, those are the principal applicants, but remember they also bring family members.

Last year in total in Nova Scotia there were 3,403 people who came to Nova Scotia. In the first six months we're already over that. We've surpassed that so we're doing well as a province.

Remember, that's not just refugees - that also includes people coming in through the Nova Scotia Nominee Program, which we can talk about. That means more nominations, more landings, more demand on the system and those settlement services and how do we help them as well.

We tried to provide quite a bit of information, besides the briefing package that was researched for you, in the tables and charts that we provided to you to show you which organizations are active - where the money is going.

So in the months and weeks ahead we definitely want to continue that focus on immigration, build those strong relationships. Everybody has a role to play. Certainly MLAs across the province, because you're very connected to your communities, have a role in that - in finding out what's happening, what more can be done - what we can do to be a welcoming province and help people come here, but also stay here. That's really important. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Towers. We will move to Mr. Houston for 20 minutes.

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Thank you for those introductory comments on this very interesting file. In terms of the nominees - I'm just trying to understand - we can have a 1,350 annual allotment of nominees. They come off a nominee list that the province puts forward to the federal government. How many persons would be on the list today that the province has put forward to the federal government asking for nominee approval?

MS. TOWERS: It's an ongoing system so it's done all throughout the year. We issue nomination certificates to people that they then can use to start the process. I think of it as a constantly moving train. So you're issuing certificates and when people actually arrive - it might not be in the year they receive the certificate, it might be the next year. So that's going on.

I'll turn to Suzanne to add some more information about the details of how that process works.

MR. HOUSTON: Sure, but I guess the question would be, how many certificates has the province issued?

MS. TOWERS: To date, for this year?

MR. HOUSTON: Yes.

MS. TOWERS: We have about 500 spaces left.

MR. HOUSTON: So the province issues a certificate, which says to a person, we are going to nominate you, but by virtue of the province nominating that person, are they going to get approval?

MS. TOWERS: Certainly we've done a lot of the original processing - checking - on that, but it still goes through the federal immigration folks to be reviewed and they have to give final approval for somebody to be a permanent resident in Canada.

One of the things we're working on - all the provinces and territories with the federal government - is how to streamline that as much as possible so it's not assessed at a provincial level for nomination, and then all over again. That's very much what Express Entry is designed to do, to try to streamline that, but continual improvement on that.

MR. HOUSTON: So I guess the theory is - if you're allowed 1,350 per year, you issue 1,350 certificates. Is that fair?

MS. TOWERS: That's correct. We can help you with some of the numbers as well because each year it may be that we fill our cap but some of our neighbours don't and we can request to use their unallocated certificates, so in some years Nova Scotia has been able to bring in even more than our cap. It may not be large, maybe an additional 20 or 30, but that's the other thing as we get towards year end, there is that negotiation back and forth.

MR. HOUSTON: So if the province is able to issue 1,350 certificates, how many people apply for those certificates? Let's say 2015, how many applications did you have for certificates that you had to pick 1,350 from?

MS. TOWERS: I'd have to check. I don't know off the top of my head the exact number of how many applied.

MR. HOUSTON: Just the order of magnitude.

MS. TOWERS: Easily three times that, but remember, there may be people who apply and they do it as almost a blanket application. They want to come into Canada, but they may ask for Alberta, B.C., and Nova Scotia, so it's not just who applies to come to Nova Scotia. They may apply for anywhere in Canada and hope one of the provinces takes them in.

MR. HOUSTON: So you wouldn't issue a certificate to somebody who has applied in multiple provinces, would you?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Ley.

MS. SUZANNE LEY: One of the things that we look at our in our program is intention to settle in Nova Scotia and so we look at a variety of factors. One of those, as you mentioned, is whether they've applied to other provinces in the country. Certainly if

there's a pattern of five applications in Alberta, that would play into our decision of whether they truly intend to come and settle in Nova Scotia.

MR. HOUSTON: That's helpful. So of the certificates that have been issued - I guess we're talking 2016 now - have you issued all 1,350 for 2016?

MS. TOWERS: No, not yet. We check constantly. We have a target that we work towards each month that the nominee officers work on. There are two pieces to it - what we call base nominations and Express Entry nominations that total 1,350. That was when I said we have about 500 spaces left in this calendar year because immigration is done on a calendar year and not on a fiscal year for checking those numbers. We're well on our way - about 65 per cent.

MR. HOUSTON: For those 500 certificates that are still available, you have thousands of applicants?

MS. TOWERS: Yes, and we're probably issuing, I would say right now, about 170 certificates per month.

MR. HOUSTON: Once the certificates are issued, then that person has to apply for permanent residency or citizenship?

MS. TOWERS: It depends partially on the stream that they come in under. If they're connected, for example, through a skilled worker stream where there's a job offer, one of the advantages in the Nova Scotia Provincial Nominee Program is that people can come in and work, whereas under the federal system they have to have everything approved before they can start. That enables them to come here, fill the labour market need, and then complete all the work that the federal government requires for the permanent residency.

MR. HOUSTON: So if there are 1,350 a year, there are 500 left - there's roughly 800 that have been issued - are most of those people working?

MS. TOWERS: It would vary. As I said, once the certificate goes out and they're nominated, when they can physically get here is affected by a lot of things. It may be family commitments, it may be when the job starts, or it may be a security check they still have to complete with the federal system. So there's always going to be a bit of that time lag, but certainly some of the folks would have started arriving.

MR. HOUSTON: So for last year, the 3,405 people, I think I saw, immigrated to Nova Scotia, 1,350 of those would have been under the Nominee Program and some would have been under family sponsorship and some would have been under refugee sponsorship. Do you know how that breaks down?

MS. TOWERS: Correct. I'll pull it out here. I know I have it in all this paperwork about the breakdown of that. There certainly would be, I believe 1,079 - we can check the

exact number for you - would have been Syrian refugees. Then the next largest majority of that would have been people coming through one of the economic streams to jobs. Then a much smaller proportion came in as protected persons under another category or family dependants. Suzanne, do you have the numbers handy right here?

MS. LEY: For 2015, our total landings were just over 3,400. Of those, 1,394 in 2015 were provincial nominee landings; 1,090 were federal economic landings, so federal economic streams; and then 917 were federal non-economic, so family class refugees, that kind of thing. There's a bit of a nuance in here where there are 1,394 landings, which basically translates to the nominees we've nominated in the past and their family members who are coming with them, so there's a bit of an order of magnitude, a multiplier, where a principal applicant who is counted under the 1,350 brings with them potentially a spouse or children so the landings number is usually higher.

MR. HOUSTON: In terms of the process to become a permanent resident, do you have a number - the average length of time it takes for somebody to become a permanent resident in Nova Scotia? Is that different across provinces? Would different provinces be different?

MS. TOWERS: It would vary across provinces. Right now the average time in Nova Scotia to process someone under the Provincial Nominee Program is a month. We're fairly quick at going through that. The amount of time then until they can arrive, as we talked about, might be affected by other things.

Under the federal system, under their Express Entry system, their target is within six months and they're meeting about 85 per cent of the cases within six months, whereas in Nova Scotia we're at a month.

MR. HOUSTON: So in terms of the settlement funding, the provincial budget is about \$6 million this year. Now am I correct, that is in addition to federal settlement monies? Are there two pots of money that come to help with the settlement process, or is it only provincial?

MS. TOWERS: You are correct, there are two pots of money. The provincial amount is just shy of \$6 million that's coming out of the Province of Nova Scotia. The federal amount is around \$8 million, so combined it's those two, the \$6 million and the \$8 million.

MR. HOUSTON: So it's \$14 million combined. Now the federal \$8 million is probably just a formula, is it? It just comes off how many immigrants arrive in Nova Scotia I guess?

MS. TOWERS: Yes, it is very much based on numbers. Remember there are also funds for different aspects around settlement. It could be pre-arrival, it could be language

services, it could be workforce-related, so it could be coming out of different funding sources as well.

MR. HOUSTON: The federal?

MS. TOWERS: The federal and also even our provincial. That \$6 million is a reflection of about \$4.3 million that comes from settlement services which the Office of Immigration are directly assigning through our budget and also through the Canada-Nova Scotia Job Fund Agreement, there is \$1.5 million that is coming through federal monies originally to Labour and Advanced Education for various work-related employment development, which is then directed to the Immigration budget.

Again, the provincial one is the \$4.3 million direct settlement services and a cluster of services there and the \$1.5 million that is very much related to job counselling, resumé writing, all those types of services. Then the federal \$8 million would be again those range of types of services. It's important to know that they are not duplicated. We go out of our way to make sure that we're working with our partners so that it's directed where it is most needed for those settlement supports and it's not the federal government and the provincial government funding the exact same thing.

MR. HOUSTON: So the federal and the provincial - how does Nova Scotia compare to other provinces? Does every province get a federal allotment and then top it up with money from the provincial treasury? Or do different provinces do it differently?

MS. TOWERS: I certainly know that the federal government would be providing money to provinces and territories for immigration, but I could not speak to what provincial and territorial budgets would be for their own immigration.

MR. HOUSTON: Is it your understanding that every province adds some additional monies to the process? Or are there any provinces that think this is a federal responsibility so it's federal money?

MS. TOWERS: I can certainly check on that for you and get some information back to you.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. It would just be interesting to see if there is any philosophical differences at the provincial level on who is responsible for funding that settlement. I'd be more curious if they are able to get more federal money, you know what I mean. I would be interested in that.

Now let's talk about the \$14 million, which would be the \$6 million from the province and \$8 million from the feds. Your department disburses that \$14 million; does the federal government send their \$8 million out in chunks to the YMCA or to whoever, or do they give it to your department to disburse?

MS. TOWERS: I can speak to you on what the Office of Immigration does and then Suzanne may be able to add to it because she has worked in both the federal system and the provincial system.

What we do is detailed service agreements with the different organizations, so within the information that was provided to you in the charts and tables, you can see which organizations, for example this year, 2016-17 fiscal, there are 14 organizations across Nova Scotia that are receiving funding. We work through basically a service agreement, what are you going to provide? Here's the approved levels for salaries, et cetera, the types of services. Then as well, if there's any slippage, like one organization is not going to use all its money in the course of the year, we can then look at if that can be shifted to one of the other organizations that may have additional needs. Their proposals may say they expect to service 30 clients or 50 clients and they may have more or less, so we can reallocate as needed, to shift that gap.

I'll turn it over to Suzanne to touch on the federal aspects of how that money is distributed.

MS. LEY: The federal settlement funding is, as you mentioned earlier, distributed based on a formula across the country. It's a fairly complicated formula but it's basically the number of landings or the number of people who have come to the province, with a multiplier in there in terms of the increased support that the federal government sees that refugees require, so there's a small multiplier in there and it's basically an algorithm of landings over how much money is available and it's a three-year average of landings.

To your earlier question about whether other provinces are able to get incremental money in different ways, it's distributed based on the formula and there are no developed agreements. The federal government does their own call for proposals process every year, so as Deputy Towers mentioned, we meet with the regional staff here who are responsible for distributing settlement funding. We'll have a case conference and make sure that if there are needs coming up or if there are gaps in funding that the federal government is not providing, if there's a way we can come behind it and provide that support.

MR. HOUSTON: So in terms of the formula from the federal government, you mentioned a multiplier in there for certain situations, I guess. It seems like there's probably a bit of subjectivity in that. Does the province then say well we need this multiplier because of our set of circumstances? Is there any subjectivity around that multiplier?

MS. LEY: No, the multiplier is only on refugee landings and it's basically on the number of landings every province has, and then a small multiplier for refugees and only refugees. It's a national formula applied across the country.

MR. HOUSTON: Is there any multiplier for whether people are going to go to urban centres versus rural centres, or is it the same?

MS. LEY: Not in the national model that I've seen.

MR. HOUSTON: So the province has \$6 million that gets distributed out to, I think, 14 organizations - I just want to make sure I understand. Some of those 14 organizations would be getting provincial money; they'd also be having a separate application to the federal government and they might be getting some federal funding as well. Would that be the case?

MS. TOWERS: Yes, it would vary with the organization. A large organization, like ISANS - the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia - they definitely are receiving both. Some of the others may be very small scale, very localized, very regional. It may be just provincial money or it may be just federal money.

MR. HOUSTON: In terms of the 14 organizations that the province has service agreements with, those 14 organizations get the \$6 million, that's kind of in rough terms how it works. Are they all not-for-profits or are there any profit organizations in that 14 - maybe of the list of 14?

MS. TOWERS: Yes, and we'll pull that out, we'll find the page number to reference in your briefing material so you can see those. But yes, the eligibility even to apply for that money, so what happens is the province issues an invitation to apply, basically a call for proposals in the Fall of each year. Any of those non-profits can apply. They have to have a background in immigration settlements, but it also gives the categories of types of services - it's still pretty open-ended, they can be very creative within that. Then that is assessed and they're confirmed, subject to budget appropriation, by February so that they can start work the first of April. So that's very much how that works. Suzanne, do you have the tabled number handy for folks to look at?

MS. LEY: It's in the submission that we provided - Table 2.a.i. You'll see that most of those are not-for-profit organizations. Our settlement guidelines don't disclude language schools or private corporations if there is an identified need. The only one I think that may be an exception to the question about not-for-profit is New Voice Languages and Tutoring in Lunenburg. I believe that they have a business line where they teach language to international students, where they make a profit. I think they may be the only one.

MR. HOUSTON: With the 14 that sign service agreements, how many organizations would have applied? Is it just 14 that applied?

MS. LEY: Last year there were a few organizations we didn't fund. One was a research for proposal, for instance - we're working with them in a different way. So we don't fund everybody that applies. We also sometimes get applications where there is a duplication of service. So somebody is proposing to teach language in a community where we know there is already language instruction happening there. So we do look for partnerships in applications, and if we do see duplication, we'll not approve the application

and we'll work with folks over the course of the year if they're interested in coming back the next year.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Houston. You have a good eye on the clock - you have just run out of time. We'll move to the NDP caucus and Ms. Zann.

MS. LENORE ZANN: Thank you so much for coming in. I am very interested in this topic as an immigrant myself, coming from Australia back in 1968. I came over with my family in a year when there was a shortage of teachers in Canada. We sailed over on an ocean liner called *SS Canberra* with 2,000 Australian teachers because there was a shortage here and too many in Australia.

At the beginning we were only going to stay for a year or two. We moved to Regina, Saskatchewan when we first came and then we moved to Nova Scotia and stayed because we did find a welcoming community in Truro. My mom and dad actually started the multicultural association there and started to welcome other immigrants and bring everybody together. I think that is so important in keeping our immigrants here, making them feel like they have a home and there are other people in the same boat, so to speak.

So I know how important immigration is to the growth of our province, especially with a rapidly aging province. I know that we rely on the federal government to allow us a certain number of immigrants. Also, while the NDP was in government, I know that we did set a goal of doubling immigration by 2020 with the Welcome Home to Nova Scotia immigration plan, which I'm happy to see that this goal has been continued and carried forward by the current government.

So to meet with that goal, it said in that program that the province would need to issue 1,500 nomination certificates a year by 2020, which would obviously require the federal government to eliminate the cap on nomination certificates. Has there been any progress on that? I noticed that for instance the federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, John McCallum, in Ottawa told Nova Scotians that the cap would be looked at again sometime in the next three years, but he didn't really offer details. Could you maybe provide an update on the situation?

MS. TOWERS: I'll ask Suzanne to pull out from the briefing materials the nominations over the past decade and how that has changed, but I'll speak to it generally. Nova Scotia has definitely been jumping in leaps after a very slow start of 300 a year, 500 a year and it was 700 for a number of years. It's really only in the last three years that we've seen that openness to increasing that allocation cap. So it went up to 1,050 and everyone was helping to lobby to increase it, that this province was ready to take more people in. That's why it went up to 1,350 last year, which was maintained for this year, which we did not even know for sure whether that would happen or it would drop back, but it has been maintained. We're certainly on track to fill that.

The more credibility as a province we have by meeting that cap all the time and trying to exceed it, it increases our probability of getting the federal government to recognize that we can take in more.

There's a couple of important points there. One is, we need to make sure that the communities are welcoming, as you mentioned, but also that there is education and employment. Jobs are very much part of that, we need to employ everyone who is here. As you know in my other portfolio, that's important as well. Going forward, that is very much part of ongoing discussions - just even in the last week certainly through conversations with federal, provincial, and territorial colleagues, that's what happens.

Each year there's a discussion and provinces and territories lobby the federal government for their numbers. The federal government introduces, on the first of November each year, to their Cabinet on what the proposed total number for Canada will be and within each of those categories - the economic, the family, et cetera.

The other part besides just total numbers that everyone has been trying to work towards and negotiating is whether we can move to multi-year planning. That would be very efficient for everyone, certainly the governments but also the settlement providers, all the organizations that are involved. That's an ongoing discussion right now, so we'll be looking to see what comes out of this Fall's allocation.

The other aspect that you may have heard about, which Minister McCallum did announce with the Atlantic Premiers back in July, was around a pilot specifically for the Atlantic Region. The idea was, within the economic stream, how can you make even more matches between businesses that need labour, finding immigrants that can come to meet that demand?

What we're working on right now with the Atlantic Region and the federal colleagues is what that program will look like, what the criteria will be. How do we identify what the needs are? What are the occupations that we know we need, the types of workers? We're working on that, and that has the potential of an additional up to 2,000 people over the Atlantic Region, of which Nova Scotia would be another 800, for example, if it's a proportional allocation.

Based on the record, Nova Scotia has been very successful, even more so than our neighbours sometimes, so we may be able to not only take our allocation but the unfilled parts in those other regions. I think there's a real opportunity and that's a pilot over the next three years, to not only build on our existing capital but potentially add to it.

MS. ZANN: Thank you very much for that. Is there a name for that program?

MS. TOWERS: It falls under the Atlantic Growth Strategy. If you looked under July of this year, there were particular aspects under that growth strategy such as clean

growth and innovation, but immigration is one of the five aspects under that growth strategy.

MS. ZANN: It's interesting because you bring up a number of different issues there which I am interested in, education for one and housing is another; I know that's very important. Also I know as an MLA that we oftentimes get immigrants who have been here for a while who are frustrated because they were professionals in their own countries and are not allowed to practise here; for instance, doctors and engineers. I have one doctor in particular I can think of who is a neurosurgeon, and she is so frustrated because they only allow a certain number of people to be accepted each year and to be approved to be able to actually do the work they did back home - Russia, in her case. Is there any update on those changes to try and make it easier for professionals once they do get here?

MS. TOWERS: I can speak to it broadly and I'll ask Suzanne to add to it. It's known as the foreign credential recognition. As you said, it crosses quite a number of disciplines and there is a lot of work on that, just as there has been on labour mobility: how can you move across provinces, how can you move across countries, and have those credentials recognized?

There's more than one part to that. One is, not only do they recognize the institutions they may have come from, for example, the practical experience somebody may have, also sometimes there are cultural aspects to it as well. One of the interesting examples that was provided to me by some of the folks at ISANS was around pharmacists - how there were people from other countries that came and they knew their science. They could figure out dosages, no problem, but they had not culturally been exposed to what would be typical in Nova Scotia and Canada in terms of how you interact with people. So it was cultural competency, they were not passing their tests because of that.

They figured that out. They're taking groups - whether it's pharmacists or some of the other fields - and saying, what are the existing barriers? What is it that's affecting somebody's credentials being recognized? Then figuring out how to help people move through that system. As well, there's a lot of work going on in Canada. There's a working group across all the provinces and territories, and with our federal colleagues, on foreign credential recognition. Maybe I'll just pause there and turn it over to Suzanne to add to that.

MS. LEY: Just to add a couple of things, if I may. One of the points I wanted to make was that in the Nominee Program - and I know you're talking about people who are here already - one of the things that we look for in particular, we ask applicants - that if they're coming in a licensed occupation that they do their homework before they come, that they understand whether they can practise in their profession, because the last thing we want is for them to be frustrated.

We also provide supports at pre-arrival, working with ISANS and with others, with an organization called CIIP we do some information sharing for folks before they come,

what's it like to be in Nova Scotia? If you don't have a job when you're coming, what does it mean to do a resumé here? What does it mean to work with the licensing body in your field of practice, for instance?

We also work with our settlement service providers for the folks who are here already and are potentially frustrated, so we have some occupation-specific bridging programs, for instance. We have a program run out of NSCC for internationally educated nurses. There are some job workshops, some communication-specific programs, so as Deputy Towers mentioned, making sure that folks are able to work in the new culture that they're living in, using the skills that they're bringing from home, which is part of the work that's happening nationally in terms of best practices.

MS. ZANN: I believe in this particular case, the woman came over with her husband who had a job at Dalhousie AC, but she's a doctor and they only allow one or two or three each year to be accepted - something like that - so it's very frustrating. They've been here for a quite a while now and she still isn't able to practise.

That is something that I noticed when I was in British Columbia when I lived there. There were a lot of taxi drivers who were from other countries who were engineers and doctors and they were driving taxis, which is hard. So it is nice when you can tie the need for jobs - as when we moved over here. There was an obvious need for teachers and we filled that and obviously stayed.

I had heard that the increase in the provincial immigrants hasn't necessarily been kept up with the funding, and in particular, for the Provincial Nominee Program. I noticed you said that you went from \$5.4 million in 2013 to \$6 million now. So in the last year, for instance, since we've had the new immigrants and the refugees, what has been the increase in funding in the last year?

MS. TOWERS: There are a couple of areas where there were funding increases. One is specific to settlement services - the one that we're talking about that's now just shy of the \$6 million. The settlement funding in 2013 was \$2.9 million and then it was \$3.38 million in 2014-15. It went to \$3.58 million in 2015-16 and this year to the \$4 million.

We can get you the exact numbers you want but you can see by the scale that it's going up by a few hundred thousand each year, as the number of immigrants have come up as well. Some of it is going into those settlement organizations because remember, it's proposal-based. They're coming forward, they know their clients, they're saying we - it's not directly proportional. They may be able to provide a program, and having a few more people doesn't make a significant difference to what it's going to cost them but it may be incremental but not directly proportional, so there's a bit of that going on as well.

MS. ZANN: So it sounds like we heard from ISANS that the increased number of people has not been met with increased provincial funding that they actually need, so that is concerning, and in particular for me, affordable housing does come to mind. For instance,

according to Halifax's most recent housing needs assessment, recent immigrants pay over 40 per cent of their income on housing in this city and that's really just a fraction less than single individual households. That's concerning given that a large proportion of the new immigrant households really are considered low income.

I know a lot of them have children who have to go to schools and that means that five new immigrant families actually fall within the very first income bracket. Those particular family members are working for minimum wage and we know that's already pretty difficult to work on; many people have to have two or three jobs in order to just survive. What is the Office of Immigration doing to ensure that affordable housing is available for these newest Nova Scotians?

MS. TOWERS: A couple of things - I'll see if we can get all the pieces pulled together for you, let's see if I can get these in order. Immigrants as a whole, as you know, there's a wide range: from very highly skilled, they may be coming into a very high-end job, and at one end of the spectrum there may be folks such as the recent refugees coming from Syria. There's a huge range in terms of what they bring with them and what they will need for supports as well.

Part of what both the provincial Office of Immigration as well as the federal supports do, are related to what those needs are. One of the things - and I'll remember to turn to Suzanne in a second - we can give you the numbers, for example, that are provided in direct supports for things such as housing, that are directed at refugees. So there's not only the funding that we provide that we've been talking about quite a bit around the settlement services, which are very much directed at those initial months and year coming in, but how do you help people get settled in the first place, versus ongoing. That's very much tied to the labour market and getting employment for folks because out of that comes the household income that helps them cover all their costs, as it would for anybody else.

I think it's important that we think about where on the spectrum - as you said, it may be a lower income bracket that we're particularly trying to find out what the scale of the issue is. I'm sure, as you know, in the housing aspects - and I wouldn't purport to know all about housing, I deal with aspects of it through both Immigration and Aboriginal Affairs, but that's very much Housing Nova Scotia working with the other departments on what the demand level is, what the supply is, how that can be covered off to match. That's something that I think we can come back maybe with some more information to you.

At this moment maybe what I'll do, Mr. Chairman, is turn it over to Suzanne to speak to what we know are direct supports that are available when someone first arrives.

MS. LEY: I'll talk about the Syrian refugees in particular because I think that's the unprecedented national project. That's the piece that we have been paying a lot of attention to this year, particularly in terms of housing. It was a lot of people in a short amount of time, and kudos to our settlement service provider, ISANS, the resettlement assistant provider responsible for finding temporary housing, finding permanent housing. We were

the first province in the country to have people out of temporary housing and into permanent housing in the refugee effort so a big applause to them for that work. It was a lot of work.

Two points I wanted to make in terms of funding for housing and funding for refugees in particular. The deputy mentioned that there is \$6 million going from the federal government into settlement this year and \$1.5 million of that is incremental for refugees. So \$6.5 million was our allocation under the national formula and \$1.5 million of that is to make sure that those folks have the support that they need.

I do have some information about the types of direct support for housing that refugees in particular get when they come to Nova Scotia - government-assisted refugees - and it depends on the size of the family. If you're a single person, you'll get \$300 a month for housing. If you're three or more, \$620 a month. So it's aligned with provincial income assistance rates.

Also, one of the things that government-assisted refugees are provided by the federal government is a small start-up allowance, so a bit of money to buy some furniture. Again, it depends on the size of the family, and it goes from one person, which is just over \$1,300 up to five people, would be \$3,500.

MS. ZANN: How long do you support a new family for? Is it different for immigrants than for refugees or is it the same?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, I apologize - just ran out of time. We'll move to the Liberal caucus, and Mr. Rankin.

MR. IAIN RANKIN: I do like this topic as well. I think that it's important to recognize some of the contribution beyond government in this instance. I don't think it's commensurate with the millions that is spent in a budget line item to the support required for each individual family. I would actually venture to say that we actually bring in more revenue into the province with the more immigration that we have, and certainly with the strategy with multi-tiered ways of getting into the country.

Even with the refugees alone, we had the private sector giving apartments for rent. The RONA building was available for donations. For those who watch CBC, last night there was a great example of a family in Mabou actually donating a house. When we're talking about housing and within one day the community got together and filled that house with furniture for that family. Of course we had the federal government providing health care within the first year for all these refugee families coming in. I think that's important to note.

With the entrepreneurial stream that was introduced, I just have a few questions on how that relates to helping grow the economy. I was wondering, given in the past there was - I think they called it a mentorship program - under a former government that wasn't

working the way that it should have been working to retain immigrants here, what was learned from that process? Were there best practices that were looked upon in other jurisdictions? I know Manitoba had a good strategy and that's how they were able to develop a cap that was like \$5,000 and that really drove economic growth.

If you could explain how the mechanics of that program work and how it is doing so far. Are we getting applications from across the world?

MS. TOWERS: There has been quite a bit of change over the last decade in that economic stream, which includes the entrepreneur stream. With some of those changes, my understanding is that people at the Office of Immigration before my time did look at best practices from around the world - from different countries, from different provinces. Some of the aspects that they particularly have changed over this past decade - there is no transfer of money through the province, which is what used to be the case.

All staff are trained so that they know the types of potential fraud aspects they could be looking for, the security aspects they need to be mindful of. There is very much a use of third parties now to look at someone's financial background - their net worth - to make sure that it's clear. It's not a government officer - it's a third party specialist looking at those things.

Those safeguards have been built into the system very much to improve the probability of an entrepreneur coming here being ready to potentially start a business or invest in a business and be very active in the Nova Scotia economy, so we've seen that shift.

Since the entrepreneur stream was introduced in this past year, there have been over 150 people who have applied and over 50 that we've screened down to invitations to apply. They meet basic criteria based on those assessments and there are four that are currently being assessed right now at the office for potential certificates. I'll ask Suzanne to speak to the range, but we're getting those levels of interest from the countries we invited to apply in detail - I'm not sure off the top of my head, she'll know, but I believe it was over 20 different countries.

So we're seeing a real global interest and that is one of the advantages in this electronic age of having online applications, we have a much broader reach than we used to have as well. If I may, I'll turn it to Suzanne to add to that.

MS. LEY: If I can go back to the first point about the lessons learned and what we did, just to build on Deputy Towers' remarks. We spent two years honestly looking at programs here across the country. You mentioned Manitoba, British Columbia has a program that's successful, other provinces like Ontario, P.E.I. and others have either had them or have current streams. We looked at models in the U.S. and New Zealand, the U.K. and Australia, and actually spoke with officials in those countries about what was working and what wasn't working.

We also of course looked at our Auditor General's Reports and what we had experienced here in Nova Scotia and what the federal IRCC was telling us in terms of best practices - things that cut down on fraud, cut down on misrepresentation - because what we're really interested in is making sure that the people who come to Nova Scotia through our stream are people who really want to come and stay here and build their life and build a business and aren't using the economic stream or the entrepreneur stream as a way to buy their permanent residency card because we've heard from across the country that that's often the case.

The deputy mentioned the program has an expression of interest as a first step. An applicant has to come to us and say, here's who I am, here's what I am interested in, and I am interested in coming to Nova Scotia. We've seen 159 expressions of interest so far since we launched in January. Then we'll take that list of people and their attributes and we'll select who we want to apply to the program. So 53 invitations to apply have gone out and as Deputy Towers mentioned, those come from 23 countries. India has 15, Iran has eight and Pakistan has four and then there are 20 other countries with one or two applications each, so a broad range of global interest.

The program is fundamentally different. As Deputy Towers mentioned, there are third party verifications of financial statements, the expression of interest lets us control intake, control who actually applies.

One of the pieces that's really important for us, as I mentioned, we're interested in people who are willing to come and stay. One of the tools we have is the temporary to permanent model which we're using which was a piece that we learned from British Columbia. What that means essentially is when somebody is approved to come to the province, we'll support them for a work permit to come and start their business for two years and we'll hold back the nomination until they come and get settled and show us that they are in it for the long term.

MR. RANKIN: Do you have any sense of when the first few businesses will be up and running, in terms of like next calendar year or when I guess the application for some of these 53 invitations would be ultimately approved?

MS. LEY: Sure. I don't have an exact date but the invitations to apply, for instance - they have 60 days to get back to us, I believe, with a full application. In the interim they have to go and get some of the third party checks. We want them to verify their net worth, for instance, that it was legally obtained.

So the four applications that are out, I'm not sure, or that are being assessed - we will have a decision on those I think in the next couple of months. Certainly if they are approved they could come and start their business next year but sometimes there's a lag in terms of the time it takes somebody to get rid of their assets in their home country and actually make the move and come to Nova Scotia.

MR. RANKIN: One last question on that stream. Is there any strategy to try to focus on any of the rural economies outside of Halifax, basically, to help economic growth? Is there an incentive or some way that we can place some of these businesses in some of the outer areas?

MS. LEY: One of the things that we've done - in the expression of interest phase, I'd mentioned people tell us who they are and what their ideas are. What I hadn't mentioned is each of those attributes is assigned points. That's how we select who we invite to apply - it's the person with the highest points. One of the ways you can get points in that process is if you're proposing to start your business or buy a business outside of Halifax.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Ms. Towers, you mentioned in your opening remarks that immigration was a shared responsibility between the federal and provincial governments. That's where I get confused because as an MLA, my office is often contacted with questions from people coming for resources and information - especially with the refugee program here.

Can you better help me understand where you go separately and where you overlap in your mandate?

MS. TOWERS: It's really important if you have any inquiries as MLAs and somebody is trying to understand the system, that's what our office is there to do. So not only everyone who works there, but in particular there are a dozen nominee officers and their manager and director who know the system inside and out. They can help people.

For example, they have a family member they're potentially looking to help immigrate. They can say, okay, here are all the different pathways that exist - and we'll speak to that in a second - and then what is the best match for you and what you're looking for. Is it general information on immigration? Is it specifically someone who wants to immigrate? That's very much our role - to make those connections, to understand both systems as best we can to help people.

So one of the things that would have been in your package is around immigration pathways. What are the different ways to come to Canada and to Nova Scotia? You may be able to see in that - it's even colour-coded. If people can find that, this is what it looks like. It's a very helpful piece sometimes to get a quick overview of the immigration system.

For those of you that were also handed out the annual report that just came out, there is a copy on Page 19 as well. You may find it in this more easily than all the rest of your briefing package.

You can see that it's in essence - it's purposely colour-coded just to make it easier for people to see, and the part that is in green is the provincial role. That's the Provincial

Nominee Program and the different streams associated with that - Skilled Worker, Express Entry, Entrepreneur - we're talking about. The other colours in there, particularly the blue, relate to the parts that the federal government handle as immigration.

So the federal role, because they have the legislation - the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act - they have overall control over how many can come to Canada and who is approved to come to Canada, and under which of those categories. So then they allocate out to the provinces, numbers and types within those pathways. The provincial role is very much then to help people within each of those pathways - where is their best fit? We may be referring them to a federal contact if they don't fit within a provincial stream directly. So that's our role - to help them within that - but also help them navigate the overall system. I hope that answers the question.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: That helps. I found 211 was very helpful - the information found on that and we did refer a lot of groups to that. Sometimes I've heard back from groups when they went up to the Office of Immigration they didn't find it welcoming. I think it was just the environment - physically, it didn't look inviting. I don't know if that has changed, but there seemed to be a lack of information on the glass plate doors and whatnot. Has anyone remarked to you about that?

MS. TOWERS: I have not heard that directly myself but there may be a couple of things there and I would be curious to know - we could have a further conversation on that with anybody who is hearing anything along those lines. Was it the federal office they went to or the provincial office? I can't speak to the federal office

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: I'm not sure.

MS. TOWERS: The other thing is that the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration just moved. It was up on Brunswick Street, which is where the federal office is already located, but it just moved this Spring Garden so I only have direct knowledge of the new office, which is in Spring Garden Place. I've certainly been hearing from staff how much more open and bright and welcoming it is. There are signs when you come in, in multiple languages. There's a dedicated receptionist there to greet people.

I'd be very much interested to know if this is something that you are hearing recently or from the past and if there are specific issues because we'd certainly want to address that and make it easier for people.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: It was definitely quite a while ago, I would say even before some of the refugee issues were coming up and people were going to the office. It was just a concern that people have expressed to me and it may have been the federal office as well. Why I'm asking is sometimes separating the federal and the provincial is quite confusing for people.

MS. TOWERS: Maybe Suzanne can answer since she would have had the history with the past office.

MS. LEY: Deputy Towers made a really good point about before our office moved - we were co-located, or in the same building anyway, with the federal government. I think it was highly confusing for applicants or immigrants who are here who are looking for services and oftentimes are looking for the federal government. As Deputy Towers mentioned, we have a receptionist who will welcome you to the office but often they are not looking for us; they are looking for the federal government. Certainly since we've moved, I think some of that confusion has cleared up. Folks who are coming to us are meaning to come to us, where we have more of a walk-in approach than the federal government might in their building.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Just going further on, you sort of mentioned about retaining people. I've often heard that we are a friendly province but not necessarily welcoming. As we transition, as this year ends, for some of these refugees who have come over, how can we as MLAs help our refugee groups in our communities - continuing to be welcoming and showing hospitality and understanding to our newcomers?

MS. TOWERS: That's a critical point for all Nova Scotians. As we know, many people came to Nova Scotia from somewhere else. It may have been another province, it may have been another country. That welcoming has to be more than superficial, it's really important.

What's fairly well known, and I'm certainly learning more all the time, is for someone to want to stay wherever that is, a specific community or province or country, it's not only what welcome they receive - and we can talk about some of the things communities and MLAs can do about that - the flip side of that is as well, immigrants themselves will say it's very important that they become part of the community. It's not just that someone welcomes them and tries to do everything for them, but how they can contribute.

It may be through the school system, it may be through their job, it may be as a volunteer. So it's not only what people already here can do, but what can we do to make it easier for people coming to contribute and become part of that community? I would really encourage MLAs - you're very much more in touch with your community generally, you are out there, you meet people, talking to people - the awareness, being open about people coming wherever they may come from. Besides the organizations that are dealing with this all the time, it's the day to day - the neighbours, the communities.

One of the things that started this year was a dedicated block of \$100,000 created to be a community refugee support fund or development fund. The idea was individual organizations and communities could apply for grants of up to \$1,000 - the information is in your briefing, but we're more than happy to help people look at that. It's very simple seed money, but the idea is that enables people to express how they can welcome someone.

There is a huge range of ways. It enables people to contribute and be part of this. They don't have to be a member of ISANS. They can be the neighbour - what can we do?

One of the things we have - and I'll ask Suzanne to pull it up - are examples for you of the types of things we received today and they're phenomenal to watch. Everything from a community picnic to one of the high schools teaching some of the new children how to play ball hockey. Those are the kinds of things - not changing your culture, but understanding the culture and being part of the community. I think that's something for every single Nova Scotian - and particularly MLAs - who have those contacts. So I'll turn it over to Suzanne. I think there are some good examples for people there.

MS. LEY: The table is in your package but it has been updated. There are 28 grants altogether: two for exceptional volunteers, so folks who have been going above and beyond volunteering to help people settle in the community; and 26 projects for a range of things, like the deputy had said, like welcoming events, picnics, community meetings, language training, a variety of really interesting and neat projects across the province.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll move back to Mr. Houston for 14 minutes.

MR. HOUSTON: Just on that, what table number is that?

MS. LEY: That's 2.b.v and it's on Page 12 of the package we provided.

MR. HOUSTON: In terms of the 1,350 nominee certificates - you get thousands of applications for that - you don't have to discuss it all now, but can you share with the committee the criteria that you use? Do you score the applicants or maybe there might even be a chart you can share with us? Is that something you can share with us?

MS. TOWERS: This is very much something I am learning myself - the details of that review process. So I will ask Suzanne to speak to that because I'm going through the orientation myself to learn all those pieces - not only here in Nova Scotia, but what is used federally as well.

MR. HOUSTON: Sure, but are there written procedures? Maybe you would share those and then if I have detailed questions I'll circle back afterwards. Maybe the clerk can make a note of that too, maybe.

In the certificates that have been issued - let's talk about this year, which I think there was maybe about 800-ish certificates issued this year - would there be any doctors in those certificates? Is there any kind of concerted effort by the office to search out doctors, for example?

MS. TOWERS: There is going to be a wide range of occupations across those. Certainly we can get back to you with details on that, but it's part of that points-bearing system - they're called national occupation codes. So that's part of the federal system which

identifies provincial and territory use. So within those occupation codes, those higher level skill ones are some of the ones that are targets, so even within the allocations, it will say, for example, so many skilled workers have to be - and I won't go through the details, but they're just letters and numbers to help identify the level of skill and which job types fall within that. So it is a points-based system and it is affected by that, so it's already screened to cover some of those highly skilled ones, for example, within the skilled worker stream.

So yes, it's already designed to capture some of that, but I'll turn it over to Suzanne, if I may, to speak to direct experience most recently.

MS. LEY: I can't tell you exactly offhand the number of doctors in the program but certainly as the deputy mentioned, it's a wide range of occupations - high skill, low skill. Our skilled worker stream is the only pathway in Nova Scotia for NOC D, the lowest skill in the national occupation classification.

One of the things I wanted to mention to your previous question is, immigration is fairly complex. We recognize even with our streams - we have four active ones and each of them have different criteria. The process generally is the same or similar and we have guides that will help folks through that. We will come to anyone anywhere in Nova Scotia if there are questions, if folks need a 101 presentation on how the system works and how you work with people in your community to direct them to us.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, that's fine. What I was getting at with the doctors was whether any additional energy was being put into recruiting doctors to the province through the immigration streams available, and I guess what I'm hearing is "no".

MS. TOWERS: Certainly health care - remember, it is not just doctors. That would include things like continuing care workers, so there are targeted aspects into that health care sector, not only within the existing pathways. I spoke about the Atlantic Workforce Partnership and the pilot over the next three years. That is another area we're working on right now, where those demand occupations are, and health care will be one of them again. That's very much the opportunity to increase targeting certain needed occupations.

MR. HOUSTON: Has anyone from the Department of Health and Wellness come to you and said hey, we need more doctors, can you help up get more doctors? Has any of that taken place or not?

MS. TOWERS: We work very tightly with Labour and Advanced Education on what those occupations are that are in demand. They are always working to find out where there's gaps, not only in health care but in anything else. That's the kind of information we can track down for you.

It's not always what people assume it is. It can be someone within the health care system but it might be paramedics; it may not be doctors specifically. That's why I think

it's important to go back to that database and then say, here's what has been identified within the health care profession itself as the areas they need.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, thank you. I'm just curious because the doctor shortage is something that has been in the media a lot for months now and I was just curious if anyone in the Office of Immigration or Department of Health and Wellness or anyone said hey, maybe we should be looking for more doctors through this avenue and put some resource and energy into that, but I guess no, it is what it is, unless the Department of Labour and Advanced Education says to the Office of Immigration, here's a profession that's in short supply and we need to look at. That really hasn't happened, from what I take from you - there's no additional effort being placed. I guess that's a fair summary on my part, is it?

MS. TOWERS: I think it's really important, even though we're getting data through Labour and Advanced Education, remember they get their information from the businesses and the sectors themselves. It's really important to know what the people need who will be employing, and that generates the gaps or areas that we need to target. That's why I think it's really important to go back to that, not what we're maybe hearing about, but what those actual numbers are. What are the known gaps by the people who are trying to hire folks, what is it that they're not finding?

MR. HOUSTON: The Department of Health and Wellness has a physician recruitment team. Has that team reached out to you for help?

MS. LEY: We do work with them and we work with other organizations that are recruiting doctors. We hear from them typically when they come to a point where they're trying to hire an immigrant, so they've identified someone they are trying to navigate through the system and bring through a pathway.

So as Deputy Towers mentioned earlier, that's where we'll work with them to say the skilled worker stream really is your best avenue, or we think you'll go faster through a federal program so we recommend you go there. That's really how we work with them. It's based on a demand-driven kind of model.

MR. HOUSTON: I would ask very specifically then, to me that seems like that would be an area where they're coming to you all the time and saying, here's a physician we want to hire, can you help us? Are there a whole bunch of active files between the Department of Health and Wellness and you guys at this stage?

MS. LEY: We can look into that for you. As I said, I'm not sure how many doctors are in our inventory or have been nominated this year, but it's certainly data we can look at.

MR. HOUSTON: Let's go back in terms of settlement funding. I guess there is \$14 million in the province that's goes into settlement funding projects. The College of Physicians and Surgeons used to have a program that helped immigrant doctors start

working in the province. That program was cancelled by the college in 2014. Is your office working to help them re-establish any type of program that would be specifically targeted to helping physicians work in the province, or is that something that your office would not be actively involved in?

MS. TOWERS: We have not been approached by the College asking about that, to my knowledge. I'll check on that for you, but we have not been approached on any specific labour needs that way. It tends to be very much individual businesses reaching out to our business officers saying, this is what I need, and it can be anything from metal workers to continuing care workers. There is a huge range.

Remember, in Nova Scotia, a lot of our businesses tend to be small and medium-sized so it might be one position of one type or two positions of another type. To my knowledge, no one has asked specifically about that particular one, but I will ask if Suzanne has heard of anything.

MS. LEY: I was aware that the program was cancelled in 2014 and at the time they were looking to go toward a national model, so aligning with other organizations across the country. It's similar to what we talked about earlier, that international mobility is one of the areas that we're concerned about - making sure people can move across provinces as well.

MR. HOUSTON: In terms of the funding, I'll talk about the \$6 million from the province - I do have the table, so thank you. There is a lot of continuity in this - the same organizations year over year, with some movement - but there doesn't appear to be any for-profit organizations on that list so I just wanted to know specifically that it's not because they're excluded - it's just because they haven't put a program forward that you've approved.

MS. LEY: That's right. There are one or two each year that we don't fund typically, but generally we're working with organizations that have capacity, that have been doing this for a number of years. ISANS, for instance, has been doing settlement for longer than 30 years so it's not, like you say, that they're excluded in any way.

MR. HOUSTON: So in terms of the funding, the \$14 million in settlement funding comes into the province from the federal and provincial sources and we have roughly 3,000 immigrants a year, I guess, so we have a \$14 million pot providing services for 3,000 people a year. How do you assess the effectiveness of the spending of that pot? Is it just retention of immigrants in the province after some period of time? How are you assessing it - it seems like \$14 million for 3,000 people should be able to provide some pretty good settlement services for the volume of traffic that they'd be having. How do you assess the effectiveness of that spend?

MS. TOWERS: Remember we talked about the service agreements with the different organizations. When they bring forward a proposal of what they can provide, it

includes an evaluation component that they intend and are expected to do, and that we follow up on. That includes a financial evaluation so there are quarterly check-ins - what are they spending, what is getting accomplished, how many clients are being reached against their proposal of what they intended. They have to be very clear outcomes and see how well they're doing against that.

So that's each year, each agreement. Again, the track records of those organizations over time is very much known that they are consistent, that they are producing, and so the outcomes may be measured a number of ways - for example, language services. Are they meeting language benchmarks, because if they are delivering those services they have to meet those language benchmarks in order to be able to apply to be permanent residents, for example, if they are not already.

MR. HOUSTON: Are you aware of any situations where an organization received funding and then the office determined they didn't meet the outcomes so therefore we're not going to fund that this year, they're not eligible again? Are you aware of any circumstances where the office has said gee, that was a program that just didn't meet the outcomes? Are you aware of any of those?

MS. TOWERS: I can certainly speak to this year, that that has not been an issue. To continue as well, remember there's this long-term evaluation because immigration is not just what happens in the first few months or weeks but it's retention over time, success over time. How many people stay in the province is one measure so that's our evaluation of how we're doing as a province, as well as how an individual organization is doing on the outcomes it's to meet.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, thank you, we've run out of time. We'll move to Ms. Zann and the NDP caucus for 14 minutes.

MS. ZANN: Yes, actually this table of funding by program and organization is very helpful. I have to go back to one of my first questions where I said that ISANS told us that the increase in immigrants has not actually been met with increased provincial funding and they are finding that difficult. When I look at that chart it appears that their funding actually decreased, going from \$3,476,978 in 2013-14 down to \$2,727,122 in 2016-17. Is that actually correct, it has gone down?

MS. TOWERS: That's why we provided tables, so you could see the trends over time. As you know, in any fiscal year, an organization might come forward with a proposal and what they are proposing to offer that year may be different, so they may be piloting something, trying it out. So sometimes it's not a core funding base but it's directly to match what it is that they are proposing to accomplish in that year, which they are affected by as well in terms of what their capacity is and what they can do.

Certainly for the historical side, because I don't have that long-term experience, what I'll do is ask Suzanne to speak to that. I'll let you know that ISANS - certainly as I've

been speaking with the different representatives there, the executive director, the board chair - they are very organized, they know what they are doing, they have a very good working relationship with the province which they want to continue. They are always trying things, like their economic development, their bridges to the workforce.

One of the pilot projects they're trying this year, for example, which would have been funded - they are targeting a particular age group within the refugees. They know a lot of the younger folks may be covered off in the formal school system, but they are concerned about those sort of late teens to early 20's, what they can do specifically with them to keep them engaged. That's what I mean about programs moving in and out of the system.

MS. ZANN: I understand that but I'm just looking and it seems like a steady decrease, like from \$34 million to \$29 million, then \$27,768,049 to \$27,727,122. I'm just wondering why it continues to decrease for them in particular.

MS. TOWERS: For some of the historical changes, I'll turn it over to Suzanne to speak to.

MS. LEY: I'll speak about two things in particular. As Deputy Towers mentioned, we work really closely with ISANS - I just met with Gerry this week, actually. There are two things that I think you'll notice as pieces of context that aren't coming with your table, which is just numbers, that happened kind of in between 2013-14 and 2015-16.

One of them was the shift from the Canada-Nova Scotia Labour Market Agreement to the Canada-Nova Scotia Job Fund Agreement. So as the deputy mentioned earlier in our conversation, part of our funding comes from the federal government's ESDC through Labour and Advanced Education to the Province of Nova Scotia. So the program changed essentially between 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 so we had less to invest in the new program under the job fund agreement.

The other piece that I think is really important to highlight is after the regional development authorities closed, ISANS had picked up some of the work that they were doing in terms of immigrant navigation, but when we looked at our funding for 2013-14 and going into 2014-15, as the deputy had mentioned earlier, we really wanted to enhance the services across the province, that regional network of face-to-face settlement services.

So some of the work that ISANS had been doing, we shifted that work to the YMCA, and that's where they launched the YREACH program. So as the deputy mentioned, originally they were in seven locations and now they're in nine, so moving some of that pan-provincial outside-of-Halifax support from ISANS to the YMCA.

MS. ZANN: So you're talking about the regional development agencies that were doing immigration work as well, right? I know that CORDA, for instance, in Truro was

doing very good work there with immigration. So you're saying that then switched to ISANS, but then that got downloaded onto the YMCA?

MS. LEY: Yes, it shifted a bit. The RDAs were doing some navigation and in a couple of locations ISANS picked that up when the RDAs closed, but it wasn't everywhere. It was sort of bricks and mortar where we needed a more kind of pan-provincial outlook. So that's when we partnered - and you'll notice the YMCA's funding changed significantly from 2013 to 2014-15. That was that shift and the launch of the YREACH program.

MS. ZANN: There were a number of programs across the province that were helping. For instance, in Truro, the Black community - they closed the community enhancement office there and there were several other places for women's groups and for African Nova Scotian Affairs that closed and now the YMCA is picking up that slack. So is this along those same lines?

MS. LEY: I can't speak to the other organizations closing.

MS. ZANN: But the YMCA is now looking after . . .

MS. LEY: They are a YREACH partner and they've got a dedicated YREACH coordinator in - I believe she or he is in Maggie's Place in Truro.

MS. ZANN: How many of them do you have across the province?

MS. LEY: Nine currently.

MS. ZANN: Is there just one person in each of those nine communities?

MS. LEY: That's right.

MS. ZANN: I wanted to just turn to education. I'm also the Education and Early Childhood Development Critic so I'm curious about the support for Syrian students. In the classroom - I know that at the Joseph Howe Elementary School here they saw an influx of 41 Syrian children in February this year, and it was obviously a sudden increase, but it expanded the school's population by a third from its existing 146 students. In a news article, the president of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union said that teachers were struggling to support these 316 Syrians expected in the Halifax Regional School Board this year.

Could you please give us an update on how the Office of Immigration is working with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to ensure that the teachers at the front lines of integration for the new Nova Scotians have the proper resources and supports that they actually need?

MS. TOWERS: There are actually two ways. The Office of Immigration is certainly working with our provincial counterparts at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, but also nationally. So I'll speak a bit to both.

As everyone knows, that was such a compressed time period to move everyone in and we were learning as we went - not only in Nova Scotia, but across the country. I'll find out for you some specific numbers, but I know that the school boards and the department worked to put those extra supports in place. I just don't remember off the top of my head some of the numbers so I'll track that time for you.

Particularly in those initial months and that initial year, language was one of the biggest issues and so a lot of that is done through the settlement funding as well - teaching immigrants English, which is part of the Halifax Regional School Board, but delivered across the province. That's not only, because this is an important part - as we all know, learning language is not just within the formal school system, but some of the programs have been designed to help after school as well.

The libraries have been involved in that, doing some programs, so that not only the young children who might be in the Primary to Grade 12 system, but their parents are going and having conversational activities to try to increase their language supports and their proficiency.

Now on the national side, because this is not unique to this province with the influx of the 25,000 refugees, there is a lot of work going on with the federal government to find out what the reasonable levels of supports are, what has gone in already and what should go in in the future. So that's underway now.

MS. ZANN: Has there been an increase in funding then from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to cover these new Syrian students?

MS. TOWERS: That's what I'll track down for you because I'm not sure if it's a reallocation or an increase. That's what I need to check to get the specific numbers and how that was handled for you.

MS. ZANN: About the English language training, in an interview with the CBC in June, Gerry Mills voiced her concerns about immigrants and refugees settling in Nova Scotia who may have recently graduated from high school in their home country, as you said. But many recent immigrants ages 18 to 25 miss out on English as a second language training offered in the high schools throughout the province, which makes it challenging for this particular segment of the immigrant population to integrate, in order to find good work and participate in the new community. What is the Office of Immigration doing to address this gap in training?

MS. TOWERS: You may remember me mentioning that was something that ISANS was piloting through the funding our office is providing to particularly target that

age group. They come in and they have conversational classes to help them adjust to everyday life in Nova Scotia and increase their probability of opportunities not only in the labour force but also as we know - that's a high-risk age for anyone, whether they are immigrant or not, to make sure how they can be actively involved in their communities.

I know that even when I met with ISANS two months ago, just after I started, they were struggling because there was such a demand for language, they were running about a dozen language classes just trying to get everybody through but as of last week they've caught up on that backlog. So they've not only gotten everybody through introductory work but the key now is, how do those other supporting pieces, the conversational classes, the library events, et cetera, how do those continue to help people continue to develop their language skills, that it's not just the basics but to be able to integrate in a daily way.

MS. ZANN: Sure, I understand that, but I do also have to harken back to the fact that their funding has declined quite dramatically, I would say, from \$3,476,978 in 2013-14 to \$2,727,122 this year. I would like to know why and where those programs have been lost that they were offering. If you could provide me with that, that would be great.

I think my time is probably up. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If you are finished, that's fine, we're running down but you're okay?

MS. ZANN: Yes, that's fine.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, we'll move to the Liberal caucus, Mr. Stroink.

MR. JOACHIM STROINK: Thanks for your presentation. I guess I want to touch on the Ray Ivany report because that was a big catalyst of kind of rejigging the immigration file to where we are today. The Ray Ivany report recommended that the province attract 7,200 new Nova Scotians to our province. I guess as of today, we have the highest numbers that we've had in 10 years. I guess it just shows that no matter what, the program we're doing and implementing and the hard work that the department is doing is working.

Can you share some of those numbers of what our target is? My understanding is we are roughly halfway there this year. As a Nova Scotian this is exciting, this is positiveness that the program and the hard work that your department and everybody is doing is working.

MS. TOWERS: That's very much where everyone plays a role in this province, not only about being welcoming, as we spoke about - the labour market, all those pieces, how those contribute. Within the target, it's not only what we may set as a target and I think it's important to have targets, whether they are aspirational and how realistic they may be, but that for Nova Scotians is very realistic. That was a target by 2020, I believe. We're on track very much not only by maximizing all our existing streams - trying to find the best fit for

folks. We did speak earlier a little bit about the numbers of landings, which is a reflection of how many people we end up with here in the province.

So if last year we had 3,403 people arrive in Nova Scotia - this year we just received the numbers and we were at 3,418, I believe it is, for January to June. So already for the six months of the year, that is more than half of that target.

We're always going to be limited to some part by the federal cap, but that's why we keep pushing that federal cap up, but because the landings are going up that is a reflection that we are getting there, that is a realistic target. We are going towards what the Ivany commission identified as a direction that the province needs.

MR. STROINK: I guess that's also a reflection on the department going to the federal government with the plan and not just going out with a hand-out. I think that's where the hard work has really come from the Province of Nova Scotia and your department, by going to the feds and saying, in the past it has been done like this, it doesn't work - this new process, this is what we want to do, this is how we're going to increase our numbers. If you wouldn't mind speaking a bit to that.

MS. TOWERS: That's where everyone has a voice. If everyone, when they have an opportunity, speaking to a federal colleague to reinforce that Nova Scotia is open to immigration, that's the awareness aspect. To your point, it's very much also about the credibility. Nova Scotia has had to build its credibility that we can and will welcome immigrants and that we know how to do it and we'll do it in a business-like way. We'll be thorough in our screening, but we'll also make sure that not only can we bring people here who go through that screening, but that they stay here and contribute.

That's I think what the office - and I'm really lucky because I've inherited working in a group that has been very focused. It's a focused vision, and focused procedures. That is paying off and we're seeing that, but we have to keep up that momentum and everybody has to contribute to that going forward.

MR. STROINK: With that in mind, with past governments and this government, we've created new streams to allow new immigrants to come in. What are some of those new streams and how many new streams did we bring forward to increase our population?

MS. TOWERS: I'll speak to some of the most recent ones and then I'll ask Suzanne to speak to some of the changes over time because that's what I mean by building credibility - what works well and what doesn't work well and how you build continuous improvement.

Certainly in this past year the most immediate streams that have been introduced are around the entrepreneurship. Everyone has heard that loud and clear coming out of the Ivany commission and the Now or Never report about being entrepreneurial, about being creative in various ways. So there are the two streams.

Business Entrepreneur is for people who want to start a business or invest in a business and they have demonstrated whatever entrepreneurial skills they have, however they may have applied them; it could be in a range of disciplines and fields. The other one was specific to graduates - the international graduate entrepreneur stream. Those are the two that have most recently started, but remember it's all of those streams - the skilled worker, the family - they all contribute.

For most people to even want to come to make that move - immigrants by their very nature are risk takers. Those of us who change provinces, change jobs, change countries - we're risk takers. That's also that entrepreneurial spirit that they were trying to get at. So I think that's very much the opportunity that we can build on and that we're seeing. It's going to be very helpful for everyone to show how that's getting reflected in how people are contributing in communities - how they're contributing in the labour force. That would be a very important part of it.

I've been talking quite a bit so maybe I'll ask Suzanne if I've missed any points that she could add to some of those questions.

MS. LEY: Just two things to start and then I'll go into some of the streams. I started in the department in 2014 and two key things have been driving our work since then. One is that we need to demonstrate success. To your point about talking to the federal government about increasing numbers, that only works if we are doing it well, so increasing program integrity, we've hired program integrity staff who have police background to do the fraud checks, misrepresentation - all of that kind of quality assurance stuff. We've also filled our allocation every year and we've gone back to the federal government at the end of the year and said we're ready, we can take even more this year.

The other piece that I think is really important, we wanted to be nimble and responsive. If you are an immigration lawyer you may think that's a bit annoying because our forms change, our programs change but we've been responding to needs. One of the first things we did in 2014 was change the skilled worker stream. It was a minor change that we negotiated with the federal government, but it allowed international graduates to apply to the program. Prior to that, they could only go to the federal government.

In 2015, as the deputy mentioned earlier, we were the first province in Canada to take advantage of the federal Express Entry system, which meant more nominations, faster processing and a new stream to add to our program. Then we were monitoring how that was going and about two months into Express Entry, we were hearing from major employers like IBM, banks, Grant Thornton, our university presidents, and our immigration lawyers that there was a gap in the system. So very quickly we responded with a second Express Entry stream which has been highly successful for people who have work experience. So international graduates, temporary foreign workers - we're processing those files now in a matter of weeks and they get six months processing at the federal level.

To your question, we have essentially overhauled the Provincial Nominee Program. It looks fundamentally different than it did five years ago, six years ago and, as the deputy mentioned, the two most recent streams on the entrepreneur side.

MR. STROINK: That's very exciting to hear because it shows that your hard work is paying off and it's incredibly hard for people to be critical of what you are doing because the numbers show that the work you are doing is positive. I can understand the frustration for some people that it works and they can't be negative about it, and that's a great thing.

My other question to you really was the other aspect of the Ivany report - recommending that the province retain 10 per cent of its international graduates. That's about 7,000 students that we have in the program right now and if we can keep 10 per cent of them, that's great. Where are we with that and how are we doing on those numbers?

MS. TOWERS: The tag team will start here - I'll give a quick response and ask Suzanne to dig out the detailed numbers from amongst the paperwork. We're very much on track with that. You're correct, it's about 7,000 international students in Nova Scotia. Many of them come here, they like the province, they learn about the province, they want to stay here, so the different streams do as much as possible to encourage that.

We do a lot of outreach. Our staff go out this time of year to all the universities and colleges to talk about immigration, to get them thinking about it as soon as they get in this province because I think that's the important part - to get the idea planted as soon as you can.

We've seen the change in numbers, how much it has gone up from 100, 150 to I think we're at about 500 students right now, so well on our way to that 10 per cent or 700 students. I'll turn it over to Suzanne as she has the specific numbers handy.

MS. LEY: You were not wrong - between 2011 and 2014, we were nominating about 150 international graduates per year. Since January of last year until September 10th, when we put this together, we nominated 708 international graduates, so it's a bit longer than a year. Of those 708, it's interesting to note that 427 of them are grads from programs in Nova Scotia but we've also attracted 281 international student graduates from other universities in the country as well.

MS. STROINK: That's very exciting, congratulations. That kind of ends my questions there but I do want to just commend you from all Nova Scotians on the hard work you've done for the province, it's phenomenal, so part of that by saying thanks from everybody. We appreciate your hard work and keep going because we need more people here doing the right things. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Stroink, and thank you, Ms. Towers and Ms. Ley. I'll give you a chance to provide some closing comments.

MS. TOWERS: I will be very brief. I think it has been a good discussion and an opportunity to share information on the system. We'll follow up on some of the requests and track down information for you.

I would encourage you - remember, I mentioned about the community fund, so even though we have had a number of applications, there is still money in that fund. Maybe if it's useful, we can send that direct link to all MLAs just as a reminder to encourage organizations that you speak to, to do that. It's very much part of that welcoming promise that we need to move forward on. Thank you very much for your time today.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Towers.

We do have some items on the agenda. We will begin with information requested from our June 8th meeting. We had a response from the Auditor General's Office. The question was about the timelines for the species at risk audit. The applicable dates were April 1, 2013 to September 30, 2015. That was the report done on species at risk by the Auditor General through the Department of Natural Resources.

Are there any questions on that item? (Interruption) It's more of an information item. Everybody received the correspondence. I'm just doing a review of items. Certainly if you have a question - I don't want to interfere if you have a question. (Interruption) It can be for the Auditor General if you like.

Ms. Zann, with a question for the Auditor General.

MS. ZANN: I'm sorry that it doesn't seem to be getting on our schedule at this point in time, but were there any particular issues around that particular issue that you would like to get on the record about what has been going on with the endangered species here in Nova Scotia? I know there have been some different news reports, but could you maybe briefly sum it up for us?

MR. MICHAEL PICKUP: I can sum it up for you in a couple of sentences without it being in front of me. Overall I would say the gist of the conclusions were not positive. The work wasn't being done as planned by the department and they acknowledge that as well. So I certainly think species at risk - given how critical it is to the lifestyle of Nova Scotia, to the economy and everything else - that the results were significant. This issue has picked up some traction across the country so I think it would be a valuable topic, if that's what you're asking me.

MS. ZANN: I would say that in light of new developments also where now the cap has been taken off the clear-cutting across the province and also this whole glyphosate spraying which I've been very vocal about, I do have major concerns about animals, wildlife in Nova Scotia, but in particular with endangered species - not to mention the whole Alton Gas situation with the striped bass. So I believe we'll probably all be watching

to see what actually happens when that brining process begins. Do you have any comments about any of that?

MR. PICKUP: I think I would just comment on the report. It's more than endangered species. It's threatened, endangered, extirpated and extinct, so there are four key classifications of it, all of which I think are important. In many cases once they're gone, they're gone, once they get into that last category. So I think it's an important topic.

MS. ZANN: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you Ms. Zann. The next item relates to the Auditor General's Business Plan for 2016-17. On July 5th that was distributed to committee members. Are there any questions on that item? Mr. Pickup would like to make a comment on the business plan.

MR. PICKUP: I will put it under the idea of the business plan, but it's a quick comment. I started sharing forward what audits we're doing and I just want to let members know that we're now at a point where I can share the Spring 2017 reports that we'll be working on - probably May time. We are doing climate change, and that's part of a national audit - all 10 Auditors General in Canada and the federal Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. That's looking at mitigation and adaptation, so climate change. Another one in the environment area, looking at how the province is doing in environmental assessments.

Then two audits in the health area. One on the provision of mental health services and how effective that is, and the other on physician planning within Nova Scotia and looking at that situation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, any questions? Hearing none, the next item we have - on June 1st, we had a meeting with Service Nova Scotia where the topic of alternative service delivery was discussed. That was for the Land Registry, the Registry of Joint Stock Companies and the Registry of Motor Vehicles. Since then, on June 22nd, we have been provided with a copy of the report on alternative service delivery that was prepared by Ernst & Young, so that has been provided to the committee.

Any questions on that item? Hearing none, we move on.

Mr. Houston, you made a request for an emergency meeting. That was dated July 22nd and the purpose was to examine the hiring practices of the Executive Council Office and the Public Service Commission. Is that something you want to - we have it on as an agenda item because it was asked for at the time and wanted to bring it before the committee. Do you have anything you'd like to say about that request?

MR. HOUSTON: At this stage, Mr. Chairman, I guess we'd have to bring that as a full topic. Would that be an option?

MR. CHAIRMAN: That would certainly be the preferred route, to bring it to the subcommittee.

MR. HOUSTON: I'll take it back to my caucus and discuss because I know that the HR Standing Committee is doing some stuff in that area, too, now. I think for the moment we can take it off this agenda and if I bring it back I'll bring it back at the subcommittee on agenda setting.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you. The next and last item is the Department of Business with the Jobs Fund. As you'll recall, we had a meeting with the Department of Business on October 28, 2015, and the request was for information on the Jobs Fund. At the time it was communicated by the department that it would cost a lot of money to put together the information. We also agreed at that time that we would wait for the annual report, which we have received, and that was distributed to committee members around August 18th of this year. Everyone has that report, and are there any questions on that?

Hearing none, is there any other further business to come before the committee?

Hearing none, our next meeting is next week, September 21st, where we will have Chapter 2 of the Auditor General's Report. We will have a briefing that morning on Chapter 2 of the Auditor General's June Report on hospital system capacity, followed by our regular meeting at 9:00 a.m. with the Department of Business, to discuss rural Internet access.

With that, we stand adjourned. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 10:59 a.m.]