

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, October 17, 2018

Legislative Chamber

**Maintenance Enforcement Program -
May 2018 Report of the Auditor General, Chapter 3**

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Public Accounts Committee

Mr. Allan MacMaster (Chairman)
Mr. Gordon Wilson (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. Ben Jessome
Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft
Mr. Brendan Maguire
Mr. Hugh MacKay
Hon. Christopher d'Entremont
Hon. David Wilson
Ms. Lisa Roberts

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Department of Justice

Ms. Karen Hudson,
Deputy Minister

Mr. Steven Feindel,
Director - Maintenance Enforcement

Ms. Kathy Sparling,
Senior Manager - Maintenance Enforcement



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2018

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN

Mr. Allan MacMaster

VICE-CHAIRMAN

Mr. Gordon Wilson

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, I call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee meeting to order. This morning we have the Department of Justice with us to discuss the Maintenance Enforcement Program which was actually audited in the May 2018 report of the Auditor General, and I'd like to remind everyone to place their phones on silent. We'll begin with introductions.

[The committee members and witnesses introduced themselves.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Hudson, you may begin with some opening comments.

MS. KAREN HUDSON: Good morning, committee members. Thank you for inviting me to discuss the important work of the Maintenance Enforcement Program. I'm joined by our Director of Maintenance Enforcement, Steven Feindel; and our Senior Manager, Kathy Sparling. Steven and Kathy and I look forward to your questions today.

The Maintenance Enforcement Program is a free program that helps children and spouses receive court-ordered maintenance. The benefits provide 15,000 families and 14,000 children who rely on this program with an accurate record of payments, a buffer between payers and recipients, and provides enforcement actions if an order falls into arrears.

Over the next two hours, we'll share with you the areas where our work is strong and where we are improving. The message I'm hoping to share with Nova Scotians today is threefold: (1) the Maintenance Enforcement Program is important, it supports the financial and emotional security of Nova Scotians; (2) the Maintenance Enforcement Program has been a priority of this government for the last three years, and significant gains have been made; and (3) the program will remain a priority, and we have a plan to do even better.

Over the past two decades, our enforcement officers and support staff have collected almost \$1.2 billion on behalf of recipients - mostly women and children. The program collects and distributes approximately \$233,000 a day, or \$5 million a month for families enrolled in the program.

Twenty-five years ago, this program didn't exist. Separated and divorced parents with children were on their own and they had to enforce their own support payments. The government back then, to its credit, recognized the importance of having a program to support children and their families, so the Maintenance Enforcement Program was established in 1996. Our mandate is to ensure that families that rely on child and spousal support and have been ordered by the courts to receive it, get it.

The program is about providing financial stability for families, and with financial stability comes a path to opportunity and success, and strong families mean strong communities. Payments are often the difference, I say, between surviving and thriving. Here's what we've done better:

1. We are collecting more maintenance. In 2017 the Auditor General noted that \$55 million was sent to recipients. Now in the first quarter of this year we have collected \$15.9 million, which projected out is more than \$60 million.

2. Outstanding arrears - by that I mean the arrears that have accumulated since 1996 when the program started - were \$73 million in 2015 and they now stand at \$58.8 million, the lowest amount in a decade.

3. The number of cases with arrears is also declining. We currently have 5,848 cases. That's down almost 7 per cent from last year.

4. There were 23,000 enforcement actions undertaken in the last fiscal year. This is a 19 per cent increase in enforcement actions undertaken compared to the prior year.

5. We have hired additional staff resources to monitor and enforce orders.

6. We're developing a new online service to increase the ability of clients to access information and help from the Maintenance Enforcement Program through their mobile and tablet devices.

7. In August, we coordinated with the Department of Community Services to ensure that support payments to families on income assistance are no longer clawed back from their income assistance cheques.

8. Last year and earlier this year, we proclaimed legislation to strengthen enforcement actions for our enforcement staff.

9. We also put specific Maintenance Enforcement metrics into the Department of Justice's accountability report and, in fact, in the Auditor General's Report, he commended the department and the Maintenance Enforcement Program for this.

10. Our Maintenance Enforcement staff have a new way of working together. For example, there are short team meetings that are held in the morning and at the end of each day to review the goals that are set for that day and then how those goals have been met or not met and what the barriers were.

When the Minister of Justice was appointed in 2017, the first thing he said to me was, "Hello" and the second thing he said was, "Please give me a briefing on the Maintenance Enforcement Program." That's how important this issue is to him, to the department and to the Premier. The Auditor General's Report is welcomed by me and the department.

The six recommendations have been accepted. Essentially the Auditor General said we can do a better job monitoring and enforcing orders, and that we can do a better job training and developing staff. I agree. Specific work continues on the six recommendations from the Auditor General and they will be implemented by the end of this fiscal year, but I'd just like to end by touching on a few specifics.

First of all, we have a better policy now to guide staff on how to monitor inactive cases. An inactive case is one that's not being enforced. This happens, for example, when a payer is in prison or on income assistance. We have revised the policy and created a new checklist to guide our staff regarding how to monitor and enforce inactive cases.

Second, quality assurance. Quality assurance means we have to ensure that our staff are following those policies and checklists. We have developed an interim schedule of reports that staff must complete, be reviewed by supervisors, and then be provided in feedback. The final quality assurance process will include random audits.

Third, on the issue of the size of caseloads, we have added enforcement officers, a supervisor, and an organizational program director who has a black belt in Lean Six Sigma. We continue to work with staff on identifying what we need to watch, what process improvements we can make, and how to give feedback.

Fourth, regarding our response to client complaints, we have set timelines now for response back to clients.

Finally, we have focused on a new training program for staff and developing performance targets. Our senior manager of Maintenance Enforcement in New Waterford, Kathy Sparling, has an approach I always say to myself based on the letter “c” - communication and clarity.

There is a new energy in our Maintenance Enforcement New Waterford office. One front-line enforcement officer told me recently that things have improved 100 per cent, and her colleagues agreed with that statement.

The Maintenance Enforcement Program has made changes. We will continue to improve and we’re committed to excellent service. We thank you for this opportunity and we look forward to your questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. We will begin with Mr. d’Entremont of the PC caucus for 20 minutes.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D’ENTREMONT: Thanks for being here to answer our questions. I know as an MLA, quite often - I’m not going to say it’s a lot a month, but once a month or so we’re getting phone calls from individuals who are not getting their payment for the most part. So some of our questions as we move along will go around the job of an MLA and how we should interact with you.

Let’s get started in the beginning. We asked the same question of the Auditor General earlier - when was the department made aware of the audit and when do you feel the audit began for you? So you’re starting to work together - when did that start for you?

MS. HUDSON: I stand to be corrected by my colleagues here today - I believe that it began in 2016. That’s when the work commenced and the files that were pulled by the Auditor General for review were over the year of 2016 and into Fall 2017.

MR. D’ENTREMONT: The audit covers from April 1, 2015 to September 30, 2017 - a pretty big area - just to see what the trends and stuff are going to do. When did the department receive the recommendations from the Auditor General?

MS. HUDSON: We received the recommendations from the Auditor General in Spring 2018, close to the end of the May date when they were published. We had a review of them a while earlier before that.

MR. D’ENTREMONT: I would suggest you probably got it in February, somewhere towards the mid . . .

MS. HUDSON: Yes, an interim report review. But the final report came out in May.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: We all get it on - I think it was May 18th in this particular case.

If it was February, and the senior management of the department has it by that point, were you able to use that information to help with your budgeting? As we know, you're in the full budget process at that point. If they identified issues, were you able to use that information to maybe lobby the central government for more money for maintenance enforcement?

MS. HUDSON: What we did with respect to the information that we received in a draft form - with the chance to provide input early in the Spring before the final report - was use that information to help shape and give more context and more direction with respect to the areas that we were improving.

Specifically with respect to budget requests, what we had in the last fiscal year was five new positions being put into the Maintenance Enforcement Program. We needed to continue to see what use and the best use of those five positions. At the time when those five positions were authorized in terms of the budget in 2017-18, we were in the process of filling those positions in the 2017-18 year. Early in 2018, we needed to see if those were the right positions in the right place doing the right thing.

In terms of making further requests for budget influx into the Maintenance Enforcement Program, we needed to see what use and effect was being made of the resources and the significant resource influx that government gave in the 2017-18 year.

Mr. Feindel, anything else?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Feindel.

MR. STEVEN FEINDEL: The only thing I would add is that we were approved for roughly \$1.2 million to invest in IT and improvements to the technologies utilized by our clients for the 2018-19 fiscal year. That was part of the budget process as well. That was in anticipation of trying to respond to feedback that we had had from our clients, but also being proactive around trying to improve the client service side of things.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: This year you budgeted \$900,000. Was the additional budget allocation before or after the department was made aware of those AG recommendations? There's \$900,000 showing in the books for this year. I don't know where the \$1.2 million comes from. There's \$900,000 showing.

MS. HUDSON: In terms of the \$1.2 million, in terms of investment in IT, that is for this current fiscal year.

The Maintenance Enforcement Program has had online accessibility for clients for a few years. However, we know that there needed to be upgrades for that online process and support for payers and recipients. We were very pleased that in this fiscal year, the government did give the increase in terms of the \$1.2 million so that by the end of this fiscal year that we are currently in - by April 1, 2019 - we will have a platform that better supports Nova Scotians in terms of their interaction with the Maintenance Enforcement Program.

We're doing a very interesting thing in terms of developing the ability of Nova Scotians to get the information, to give the information, and to receive the help that they need from the Maintenance Enforcement Program. We're working with clients to help develop what sort of online aspects are most relevant and easily used by them. This client consultation approach that we are using regarding that new influx of resources is quite exciting for us this year.

[9:15 a.m.]

MR. D'ENTREMONT: The budget for maintenance enforcement has been slated to increase since 2014-15, but in terms of actual spending, it is only up by about \$300,000 in that time - \$3.2 million in 2014, \$3.5 million in 2017-18 - so every year during that time there has been a budget increase that has never been realized.

We're almost halfway through that year, what are your expenditures to date? Will the program see the full \$4.4 million that is being budgeted by technology and staffing? Are you going to be able to be full complement by that point?

MS. HUDSON: I will start, and I will ask Mr. Feindel to follow up on anything I have missed. We do expect to expend the budget allocation for this year. In terms of the IT, we do expect that that will be spent. We are under way, we are planning, we are spending, and we are developing the IT needs to better meet Nova Scotians.

In terms of the prior year where there was an influx of resources to come into five additional resources for the Maintenance Enforcement Program, it does take some time to recruit and select and hire into those positions.

Thirdly, from time to time there are people who do leave the program in terms of staff, and then those positions have to be posted and hired, so sometimes there are vacancy savings, if you will, in terms of savings that are not being able to be utilized because there is a process that needs to be followed to rehire into a vacant position.

We are accelerating our use of the good funds that the government has put into the program, with respect to ongoing operational expenses and the new funds this year for IT. Mr. Feindel.

MR. FEINDEL: The only other thing I would add is that my mandate - I joined the program back in March and I've been there about six months. My mandate is to make sure that we are making the improvements necessary there for the program. My approach is to leave no stone unturned, in terms of the resources that we have available to the program and the team there. That involves making sure we make maximum use of the positions we have and the funding we have to make the program the best it can be.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Let's go to the report itself. There's six recommendations from the report: one is complete, one is scheduled to be complete by the middle of December, and the remainder are scheduled by the end of the fiscal year. The already completed recommendations said complaint responses took three days for routine complaints; 10 days for complaints from the director, Ombudsman, or an MLA; and 20 days for a complex legal case. Why are there different standards? Maybe you can explain what the difference is between the three.

MR. FEINDEL: Sure, and I'll have Kathy Sparling jump in here because she deals with a lot of these every day. Generally speaking, we have complaints that come in where perhaps a recipient, a client, is looking for the status of a payment and they're complaining they are not getting a response on that. Those types of complaints would be considered to be a routine standard, we can get that information back to them pretty quickly. We might have to make sure that we talk to the enforcement officer to get the updated information and have them contact.

When we have an inquiry, whether it's from an MLA or perhaps a complaint to the director of the program, those tend to be a little bit more complicated and require a little bit more, I'll say, investigation to kind of see what's happening with the case, looking at the record of activities.

By the way, these targets that we've set are initial targets and we're evaluating whether they're appropriate or not. Obviously, we want to resolve complaints in the most timely fashion possible.

In the complex and legal cases, as you can appreciate, there are some fairly complicated situations that some of our clients can get into, sometimes involving other jurisdictions, the complications around perhaps the enforcement activities that are happening on that particular case. We often need to perhaps ask for legal support around those, and that's why some of those more complicated cases take a longer period of time to resolve.

Kathy, perhaps I'll ask you to kind of jump in with some experience on some of those actual cases.

MS. KATHY SPARLING: This was a great opportunity to enhance the complaint response to the program from clients, MLAs, and complex cases is where we were able to identify the segregation of when a complaint comes in.

With the increase of staff, org. development manager, and a new coordinator, it gave us further opportunity to improve IT enhancements, which we can now do reports running and respond - and we were able in our MEP system to identify when a complaint is made, when one is in progress, and when we're able to close it. So we can clearly pull out those complaints.

We meet as a manager team every morning to review the report on what we have for today, where we are with ongoing complaints and when a complaint is closed. It's also to look for trends on where areas of opportunity are to work and develop our staff, whether it be in training new staff and where we can focus on making improvements to the program.

I can say 10 days for MLAs. I deal a lot with some of the MLAs here, so it's nice to see you. We do 10 days because our first response is to receive an MLA inquiry/complaint - it may not be a complaint, it may just be an inquiry. Then we would circle back to the MLA because our priority would be to respond to the client to find out what the concern is with the program.

Complex cases is exactly what it says. It could be a court order that can be very complicated in how it is written and how we are able to enforce it. Then we move to legal if necessary to get some advice there.

Again, IT improvements, org. development manager, new coordinator - all of that has helped and improved. I have to say that it's also supporting our staff and our people on the ground who are working with this every day. It can be very challenging so we do have some support mechanisms in place so we can work with the enforcement officers and assistants to attend to some of these, as it can become very challenging. I hope that answers.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: That does help quite a bit. I can say I've been an MLA for 16 years and I've had multiple people that have been responsible for enforcement or MEP, and I don't have your phone number, so after this can we have your phone number? (Laughter) The Liberals at the table here might have your number; I don't necessarily have that. I just want to do it in the public forum.

MS. SPARLING: We do have a list that's distributed to all MLAs with all of our phone numbers, and I'll ensure that if you did not get that, you will.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Thank you. The case work - from the numbers that we're looking at - are from about 330 to 400 cases per worker. So assuming that most maintenance payments are monthly - they could be working on 22 cases a day - any sense to an optimum caseload level? That's a lot of work for a few people.

MS. HUDSON: With respect to the caseload, as you've said, they've been reported to be between 330 and about 450 per enforcement officer. First of all, we are now at our full complement of enforcement officers. Secondly, we are now at our full complement - and very excited about that - with respect to the supervisors, i.e. the coordinators; we have three of those. The coordinators review and give feedback to the enforcement officers.

In terms of fourthly, or thirdly, what we have done in terms of other than increasing staff resources and focusing on how those staff do their job and support each other, we have made changes regarding the way in which those staff numbers do their job. So we have moved into a tiered service model. What I mean by that is that not every case is the same and you can't simply look at one case and say that is comparable to the amount of work that needs to be done compared to another case.

A tiered service model means, for example, that we have enforcement assistants - using a proportionality lens - that now monitor those cases that are in full compliance. Whereas we use the enforcement officers to be looking at monitoring and enforcement of the more complex cases. Then within the enforcement officer continuum - and we have 10 of those - the way in which, and the type of caseload that they have - we have some enforcement officers - and this is a new model for us and we're adjusting it and ensuring that some enforcement officers will have a focus on more of the complex cases where there are complexities because of multiple payers. There might be complexities in other caseloads because of persistent arrears situations.

So we are looking at the way in which the enforcement officers do their caseload, and not every enforcement officer has the same type of caseload. There are changes that we have put into place just over the last few months and are quite excited about, because we are getting the feedback from our enforcement officers and our enforcement assistants that this is making sense to them, it is a better way for them to manage overall caseloads. Not every enforcement officer now has the same degree of caseload or the same complexity of that caseload.

We have increased resources in terms of the number of supervisors, we have increased resources in terms of the number of enforcement officers, and we have gone into a proportional - i.e. tiered - model. I would ask if Mr. Feindel has anything to add.

MR. FEINDEL: The number of cases for each enforcement officer is certainly an area of ongoing focus in the team. With the question of too high, the answer is that it really depends on the number of cases and the types of cases that are being managed by that enforcement officer, as the deputy has pointed out. If it's a case that's in compliance and the payments are happening, we can have a higher caseload. If it's requiring a lot of enforcement activities, things like examinations or court actions that have to be taken, that obviously a caseload of a high number is not sustainable.

We're looking at that ongoing and making sure that the types of cases assigned to the enforcement officers are appropriate. Also, as has been referenced, we have a service model that has that progression through our enforcement continuum where the focus on the cases that need that higher level of enforcement activity is perhaps rebalanced and looked at on an ongoing basis within the team there.

We do that, as I say, ongoing and often as part of our productivity meetings, and that's an ongoing piece that we are paying attention to.

The other comment I would make is that talking to my colleagues across the country, there is a wide variation of the number of caseloads. It's dependent on things like how much automation is in your system that assists the caseworkers with being able to do their activities and it also depends on the individual profiles of those cases, the types of enforcement activities that are necessary.

There's no magic number in terms of what the right number is, but over time, we hope to establish those benchmarks so that we're not running folks too hard, that we're providing the right level of client service, in terms of looking after those cases and getting the money in the hands of recipients, and basically doing that with the quality assurance measures that we're instituting on an ongoing basis as well.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: The department stated they are collecting 87 per cent of payments. Is there any sense of how many caseloads of that caseload are trouble-free, that there's no follow-up required, or is there a certain percentage that doesn't require monitoring at all, or do you monitor everything, just to be sure?

MR. FEINDEL: We obviously monitor everything and there are mechanisms in our case system to be able to keep track of all our cases and we're doing a better job at making sure those mechanisms are being used. In terms of the actual number of cases that are in full compliance, around 87 per cent of our cases are in full compliance or they have some - there are some payers who prefer to have a garnishment in place to actually make the payments happen, so that 87 per cent would include cases like that.

We have reports that come out of our system to let us know if any of those payers go into default, so then they're flagged for further follow-up.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, time has expired. We'll move to the NDP caucus and Ms. Roberts.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Thanks very much. Certainly, I appreciate that this is one of the programs in Nova Scotia where the work of everybody with the Maintenance Enforcement Program has a huge impact on citizens' lives, so I appreciate all the efforts to improve it.

Obviously, sometimes people who have children together or people who used to be in relationships - sometimes they arrive at maintenance agreements independently and sometimes they're ordered by the court. How do you receive maintenance? How do the cases come to you in those different circumstances? Is it that they hear about it somehow through the public that there's this option? Is it that when there's a court order it automatically goes to maintenance enforcement?

MS. HUDSON: I will ask Ms. Sparling to give some more detail on that. In terms of how the cases come in to us, either the payer or the recipient can enrol in the Maintenance Enforcement Program. What we're looking at now is how you enrol, and the questions about that are on our website.

What we are looking at is making it even easier for people to understand the benefits of enrolling in the Maintenance Enforcement Program and also how we can make that enrolment process even easier and more fluid and use more technology to do all of the enrolment. We're looking at things such as the number of forms that people might have to fill out if they wish to enrol and how often we actually do a check back with them.

One of the things that I have heard from our people is, rather than if somebody contacts who would like to enrol and just sending them the forms, we actually think about doing a reach back - i.e. a call - to them in terms of whether they have a question. Sometimes forms can be hard for people to understand. We think that they're plain language, but they're not plain language sufficiently. In terms of how you enrol or how we get the orders, people have to enrol. It can be either the recipient or the payer. We are looking at how we can do a better job supporting people to do the enrolment process.

[9:30 a.m.]

Finally, what we are looking at, too, is with respect to the issues of getting it better known to Nova Scotians about the program. How can we brand the Maintenance Enforcement Program for Nova Scotians? Right now, currently, we are talking about 15,000 families and 14,000 children. There's a significant amount of maintenance that comes in, is enforced, and goes out - as I said, \$230,000 a day, projecting \$60 million this year.

Secondly, how can we do a better job making the Maintenance Enforcement Program known to even more Nova Scotians? With that, we are working with maintenance enforcement and our Court Services Division to focus in terms of - when anybody is in court and they are getting an order or varying an order, that our staff in the courthouse are also aware and understand the Maintenance Enforcement Program that is not in the courthouse. We're working in terms of branding and making it better known to Nova Scotians.

MS. ROBERTS: If you don't mind, I'll just move on to another question. I appreciate that, and certainly one of the reasons that it is so important that these improvements get made is because it gives people confidence that it makes sense to enrol in the program. Nobody wants to enrol in a program if they feel like it's not going to work for them. But I think any relationship that has broken down can benefit from having somebody else tracking the money - that financial piece of the relationship that continues beyond the date when the relationship is amicable and intact.

The Auditor General reviewed 25 cases where it was expected that the Maintenance Enforcement Program would have taken enforcement action to collect outstanding payments and found that appropriate action was either not taken or was taken later than it should have been in 21 cases. Can you speak to what led to action not being taken in those cases and which of the improvements that you're talking about today have actually improved that situation so that that won't be the case moving forward?

MS. HUDSON: I will start. With respect to receiving the Auditor General's Report, I always look at a report such as this as a really great opportunity to have an independent person have a look at a program and give advice and help shape how we should be going forward.

With respect to the enforcement actions, one of the things that became clear from reviewing the Auditor General's Report, reviewing the findings, and then taking a hard look at ourselves is that we need to better use automation and feedback in terms of management feedback from the management level. One of the things that we have done regarding enforcement actions is look at using a bring-forward and automated system for our enforcement officers to be reminded: you must look at this case now, have you considered this type of enforcement on the enforcement continuum?

Before the automation, it was really left to the enforcement officers individually to set reminders to themselves about when to look at a case, when to consider what the next step would be in that case. What we have done and what we are continuing to work on in terms of our dashboard for management and enforcement staff is looking at using the IT that is going to be a system IT - here is this day of October 17th and I am an enforcement officer and what is going to come up on my screen today of all of my cases that I should be looking at today. Not dependent on me if I am an enforcement officer having hopefully set something to be reminded.

So we are looking at a system automation - a dashboard, if you will - to assist our enforcement officers in looking at and considering the next step on the right way. We've also done more training about the enforcement options that are now available through the strength in legislation.

We have nine videos that we have in terms of training modules. Aside from all of the new training that has been done on these new enforcement tools, we have developed, I believe, nine training videos for staff in terms of how you do this, when you should do this.

So looking at better training, better oversight, the management looking at reports and giving feedback as opposed to just receiving a report and not giving feedback, and using automation.

MR. FEINDEL: There are really three areas to make sure that we're monitoring, so the results were disappointing to us as well, I'll say. We looked at the reasons for why we had some of those challenges with those cases. Those cases that were reviewed by the Auditor General we jumped on right away and made sure that they were obviously up to date, but we've been spending the last number of weeks and months looking at all of our other caseloads.

I'll give you an example of where I think the Auditor General pointed out that we weren't making as good use as we could for the bring-forward capability in our case management system. We found actually that when cases were moved from one enforcement officer to another, the bring-forwards were actually not carried with those. So that was actually one of the reasons why some of the case monitoring wasn't happening in the way that it should. We've corrected things like that and we now have sort of a three-pronged approach with training the staff better and supporting them more, adjusting the caseloads where we need to, making sure that we do have a renewed approach to quality assurance, and our productivity reporting around the way the cases are being managed.

The deputy referred to the daily stand-up meetings that we have in the morning and afternoon. The enforcement officers are themselves setting goals for the day in terms of the number of case calls and bring-forwards and call-returns that they're going to make. Then they're reviewing those at the end of the day, and that has brought a real focus and communication around the team supporting one another - and having coordinators now staffed appropriately as providing a level of oversight to that.

So we think we're on a much better path to make sure that the quality of monitoring those cases is in a much better place than it perhaps has been.

MS. ROBERTS: I think there are a number of different metrics that were used in the Auditor General's Report that you are tracking for individuals who are relying on the Maintenance Enforcement Program. I think the most significant metric that they're looking at is, what is the time lag between when they get an order or there is an agreement made that they're going to get a certain amount of money in a month to when that money actually starts to flow into their bank account.

I'm wondering how you're tracking that. This is a question very much motivated by a constituent who was assigned a maintenance enforcement worker in December and

she has not yet received the money. So I'm interested to know, is there something that you're tracking in terms of that time lag between assignment of an officer and money starting to flow to the payee?

MR. FEINDEL: Absolutely is the answer to that. The time clock ticks when the court order has been issued, and so the time it takes to get that court order in our system, get the enrolment package out, get it through our intake process where we look at - is there some initial enforcement that needs to be done. Those are all critical time points.

I think we're not where we need to be yet with some of those pieces, but we know that's a critical stage because if there are arrears already owing by the time we start to administer the payments on that court order, then you're behind the 8-ball already, not only for the recipient, but for our management of the file. So we know that's super critical, and we've actually made a number of improvements around our intake functions so that we assess the file, make sure that appropriate enforcement activities are put in place as early as possible as we know that makes a difference, and making sure that we have that follow-through on the monitoring of that file in the early stages, to make sure those payments are happening.

We also want the profile of how much administrative overhead the program adds to passing payments to the recipients to be as low as possible. So things like how long we might be holding on - we get a lot of cheques from payers and we actually have reduced by 50 per cent the amount of time that we hold any funds, because of cheques that we receive, making sure the funds are there before we pass them along. Over the last few months we've reduced that by 50 per cent and we plan to do more around that.

MS. ROBERTS: So again, because I am sort of motivated by this particular case, should I be surprised that it is nine months between assignment of a maintenance enforcement officer and receipt of first payment?

MR. FEINDEL: I'll ask Kathy Sparling to maybe jump in and answer that question for you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Sparling.

MS. SPARLING: Yes, it is one of the priorities for myself, as a senior manager on the ground, and we have made improvements from enrolment to intake, for example, finding an income source as soon as possible. Sometimes that becomes a challenge, actually being able to attach to an income source.

One of the things we have to delay the time from enforcement would be an intake officer. We've added another enforcement officer to that tier in the structure model to ensure that we're taking action immediately, rather than waiting for it to be transferred into another caseload so that another enforcement officer has to do the same reviewing. For

example, the legislation improvements may be a motor vehicle revocation that can be started right at intake and that's one of the improvements that we're making, as opposed to waiting. The legislation has allowed us to do that more efficiently, so we are taking actions to that effect.

I do encourage when there are challenges - nine months is way too long for someone to wait, I agree, and I encourage that person to contact me. There may be some barriers that are preventing us from attaching to money, an income source.

MS. ROBERTS: Can I ask, when the payer is a federal government employee, I mean obviously there are different situations and different levels of complications, depending on income sources, but federal government employees it seems to me should be pretty straightforward.

MS. SPARLING: Attachment, garnishment, yes. I agree, I would like to be able to speak to that case a little bit maybe after the fact. We have made improvements, it is recognized from one of the things is the mindset and the goal is to when parties walk out of a courthouse and there is a court order, the payer knows he is responsible to pay when, immediately on the date it says in the order. Our goal is to get that rolling and moving immediately. Hopefully that can be in our current caseload where a payer is making payments regularly, on time, without any enforcement actions, and I do say we have I believe 52 per cent of our cases that do that and that's the goal. I hope that answers.

MS. ROBERTS: Thank you. I am going to move on to something else and I will follow up with you. The information provided shows that almost 15,000 children were served by the program. It also notes that as of January 2017, there were a number of children not counted in cases where money is owed to the Government of Nova Scotia, for example, for arrears owed to the Department of Community Services.

I am wondering if you can describe in what circumstances would child support money be enforced to be collected, where the money would go to the province rather than to the child?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Hudson.

MS. HUDSON: I'll start and ask, Mr. Chairman, for Mr. Feindel to follow up. With respect to the changes that have been made this past summer - and they are quite exciting changes - when the recipient is on income assistance, before the change was made, any maintenance that was collected was deducted off the income assistance cheque of the recipient. Now that has changed - and that is good - in terms of it not being clawed back or deducted off the income assistance cheque. We expect that this will see about \$3 million more flow through to recipients per year. That is a significant amount of money for those most vulnerable of our recipients.

[9:45 a.m.]

As has been said before, the vast majority of recipients are women, and in terms of talking about income assistance, we are talking about the most vulnerable women and children in our society. So it is a good thing now that that income - that maintenance - will not be deducted off the income assistance cheques. I would ask if Mr. Feindel could give you more specifics regarding your question.

MR. FEINDEL: When the recipient is on income assistance, the Department of Community Services and the recipient enter into an assignment of maintenance agreement. That assignment of maintenance is actually the recipient agreeing that those maintenance payments through the court order are assigned to the Department of Community Services because they become part of - they were up until August 1st considered part of their income assistance payments.

Those assignments of maintenance are tracked in our system and basically you can have two types. One is where the payer is paying and that money goes to DCS because it's then being passed on as part of the payment to the recipient in their income assistance. If it's arrears and those payments aren't coming in, those arrears accrue to Community Services. Up until August 1st, that's how that was. After August 1st, on a go-forward, the payments are made to the recipient.

MS. ROBERTS: I'm sorry, I have only two minutes left. I think it would be very interesting to engage in a discussion with those parents that are in arrears now that that policy has changed to create some kind of carrot as well as a stick or something. I think for many payers, knowing that you're paying back a debt to the province is a very different emotion-laden decision versus I'm going to settle up with my kid. It would be nice to see some sort of conversation going forward about how we can get people into compliance to the direct benefit of their children.

MS. HUDSON: Certainly. Two things. One, we are focusing on having a client advisory feedback, a process that lets us speak with our clients. Secondly, to your point, we agree - the studies that we have seen do show that when payers know that their money is going into the family, there is an increased likelihood of payment, so it is a win-win situation. I did want you to know that we have begun a process of formally reaching out to and interacting with our clients to see if our services are making sense to them and how they can be improved.

MS. ROBERTS: Last quick question. The AG Report mentioned issues with staff absenteeism and extended leaves. Are you able to provide us with any data on sick leave or short-term disability among staff at the Maintenance Enforcement Program? Has it changed over time?

MS. HUDSON: I will start. With respect to absenteeism and overall with respect to employee engagement, as I said in my opening remarks - and this comes from our Maintenance Enforcement colleagues - they see a new energy, a new way of doing things. They are much more engaged than when I was there two years ago. It was a different vibe when I walked into the New Waterford office. The staff themselves have said that they do not see the same issues. They said 100 per cent improvement, and that includes employee engagement.

There are always going to be issues of absenteeism, of illness, of short-term illness, of long-term illness, but we have done a better job of filling vacancies, as Mr. Feindel said, when those come up.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. The time has expired. We'll move to the Liberal caucus - Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: It's good to have you here. Maintenance enforcement is certainly a topic that we MLAs do hear a fair amount about. They're very complex cases, I must say. Some even involve multiple payees, which I'm finding when it's not part of your world that it's quite an eye-opener with the lifestyles that some children are exposed to and whatnot.

I want to talk about the move to New Waterford because according to the AG's Report - and I think we've all heard it - it impacted the services. I think a lot of it was that staff did not care to move to New Waterford, so you had to hire new staff. I'm wondering, what are the qualifications for your staff? You have different levels, you said supervisors, you have enforcement officers, you have assistants to enforcement officers - what are the qualifications for staff at Maintenance Enforcement?

MS. HUDSON: I would ask if Ms. Sparling could provide the specifics.

MS. SPARLING: For an enforcement officer, we look for somebody who manages a high volume of case management experience, some financial experience background, because they are managing money - not in the hand per se, but court orders - so they do ensure that they have some financial background managing and working with clients.

One of the biggest factors is the ability to manage high-volume case management experience, meaning bring-forward systems, productivity reports, working with clients. What makes it unique to maintenance enforcement and case management is it's two people on every file, so you are responsible to manage two sides of a file - payer and recipient - so high-conflict ability to manage and work with people, as well as respond to a team environment.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: What kind of secondary education?

MS. SPARLING: A post-secondary degree is one of the qualifications, but you may also have experience that could match that. Somebody within our system - it's a unionized environment. We could have somebody who has worked as a conciliator for 10 or 15 years and may not have a degree, but they would certainly be qualified to apply for the position as an enforcement officer.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Okay, and the assistant enforcement officer?

MS. SPARLING: The assistant would be a clerical background. They may have a business diploma, a community services background. We do have people who have degrees who apply for that position. We've had some great success with succession management in our program in the last three years, which has helped with retention.

We talk about attendance and absenteeism, so we have provided the enforcement assistants the ability to learn case management skills on the job, by working the files that are current where no enforcement action is in place and reciprocal jurisdiction files where the payer is in another jurisdiction and it's being enforced there. They are developing great skills in the last year we've been following this procedure and it has been working very well.

They come in with administrative skills as they are answering phones. Some of our workers come from call centres because they do manage the client service line. I hope that answers your question.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Okay, so no one has a social work background or community services background at all. I know it falls under the Department of Justice but many of these people are serviced by Community Services and social workers.

MS. SPARLING: It's interesting that you say that. A social work background isn't the first to go to, no, but a lot of our workers will have those types of skills, working in other departments. If you come from a case management experience in DCS and you do come to the MEP, you will have that. We're there to do more of a referral, if somebody is more needing that type of attention, so our focus is mainly on getting the money to the recipient so it's an enforcement.

If there is an area where a client is needing more, we do case reviews three times a week, if there's a challenge, and we have coordinators that are hands-on for clients that need that, so an enforcement officer isn't spending a lot of time having to manage what isn't part of the role of their position.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: The Auditor General also remarked that there was a lack of training or no training and PD. Can you talk to me about what you're doing to improve on that? Are you having performance reviews now?

MS. SPARLING: Yes, definitely a challenge was training. We do have with one of our added positions the org. development manager. Also, one of her qualifications - we didn't get to that position - is training, so we've developed some of the great tools that we have now to ensure the consistency that we do peer-on-peer training more or less.

We do have video that we create so all staff are receiving the same type of training on specific procedures on our system. We have 12 videos right now that are great, and you can go to it any time to review. So new staff can have that. Or if you're changing your role and what position you are working on, you can have the videos.

We also do a training room where we do court order once a week. We have a weekly court order entry support provided to all staff. So, if you're new and you're learning how to read a court order or enter it on our system, we have a support once a week where you can come in and there are two enforcement officers and a coordinator available to support staff to do that, so it's consistent. It's weekly.

We do one-on-one meetings with staff. We do productivity reports, and then we do individual meetings with their coordinator to identify areas and opportunities of training. We use the PSC training that's available. We do other types of training in our training room - crisis calls. We had an enforcement officer that is taking higher education who took this training, and she then brought it to her peers.

We do have a package that has been developed for training, consistent, and it's being rolled out now as we speak. December 2018 is our goal. So, yes, we'll have consistency in training as a high priority for the program.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Most of your clients contact you through telephone, I'm assuming. Your walk-in would be limited?

MS. HUDSON: I'll start, and I'll ask Ms. Sparling to also answer. Yes, there are two methods of contact. There are a lot of telephone calls. Also, with respect to online, we do receive some letters, but not as many with respect to that.

In terms of the client contact, we have seen an increase from about 44,000 contacts into the MEP program from clients two years ago, to last year going up to more than 48,000 client contacts, so there are a lot of client contacts coming in.

We are looking at trying to make it easier and clearer for how clients can get information so that they do not need to call in, that they can get that information. They can get it at eight o'clock at night as opposed to having to making a call during business hours. That is why we're focusing on increasing the IT side of it for clients.

We have an interactive voice messaging system now where clients can call into their enforcement officer and leave specific information that they are requesting. We do

track the calls that come in and when they need to be returned. That is a difference in our approach.

I did want you to know that the number of client contacts have increased - the Auditor General noted that. From two years ago, they went up from about 24,000 to the last year to about 48,000. So there has been a significant increase in client contact, and hopefully part of that is because people do understand a little bit better than they did a few years ago about the benefits of being in the program. If Ms. Sparling has anything else to add.

MS. SPARLING: We do have many ways into the program: IVR, correspondence, NSMEP, fax, and our client service line. We pay close attention to all. We do ensure that - on our "bring it, leave it" boards where we have our goals for the day - what's outstanding in the morning and what's done by the end of the day to ensure that we do respond to all of the clients.

One of the things we're very excited about is the MEP online IT enhancement to allow all Nova Scotians in our program the ability to reach out on their own if need be. We do think, too, it's going to free up some of the time for the enforcement officers and assistants to attend to the cases that need their attention, as opposed to some clients having to call because they have an Apple product and they're not able to access our system. That is going to be a huge improvement., so people are able to access on their own. To clarify, we don't have a walk-in service - just to clarify that. The opportunity for the IT people - there's an app for that if you want to be able to access on your own to identify all the different people.

[10:00 a.m.]

We will always be able to respond to those who would prefer a live voice and a call. There's going to be a generation where they want to be able to respond, and our IT improvements should be up to date to respond to the clients who want to use that app service.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Deputy, I think you mentioned filling out the forms earlier. That's one thing I have noticed as an MLA. I've been aware of it because I'm an educator. There's a large number of people who are illiterate. We don't fully understand literacy here in general. We think because someone can write their name, they are literate. Comprehension is the essence of being literate.

Numerous, numerous constituents come in, not just for these issues, but to fill out heating rebate forms. There are a large number of people, especially in rural Nova Scotia, who cannot fill out and comprehend the forms. What do you do to help these people when everything seems to be online or on telephone? What do you recommend to people who are having these kinds of issues? Or do they just not apply?

MS. HUDSON: What we do now is rely on the process that we have online and the forms being there and being able to connect in through online in terms of looking at those forms, getting the forms. Where we want to go and what our plans are - two points - first of all, is to work better with Court Services staff.

Court Services staff are in the courthouses, so they have a client point of contact. We have Court Services staff and Maintenance Enforcement staff who have the same clients. Payers and recipients are in the courthouse with respect to getting their order or varying their order, and they are our clients if they enrol. Looking at working better with our Court Services staff to assist people: do you want to enrol in the Maintenance Enforcement Program, let me help you with that.

We are also looking at a navigator position to assist those people in terms of reaching out, as I said earlier, sometimes even calling back - not just saying here are the forms or go on the website and get the forms, but noting when people have called in or emailed in a question and requested forms, and actually having a person call them back, a navigator, and asking, did you receive the forms, did you get the forms, can I help you with the forms?

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: A quick one - do you ever have people who come out of the program? I know women who have been sort of strong-armed by their exes who have gone to direct payment and then have found that their former partner is not making payments, especially when it comes to back-to-school expenses and things that they sometimes split, expenses that aren't a regular occurrence. Is it easy for them to get back on as a client?

MS. HUDSON: Yes, and I would ask Ms. Sparling to provide some specifics. You can come back. We try to make it as easy as possible.

MS. SPARLING: I hear what you're saying. When you want to withdraw from our program, that is one of the factors that is brought to be. If a recipient is saying, I would like to withdraw from your program, it's not as simple as that. I do recognize what it is that you're making reference to, and domestic violence is a high priority to ensure that all people are safe, and I would not want a recipient to feel that they are being forced into requesting to withdraw from the program by a payer.

The payer would also have to sign this form. The recipient would have to sign, but we would have to be ensured of the payment arrangement in future. What is it? What is your arrangement to make these payments? They are to be made, and the payer would be directed to do that. We would have to know what that arrangement is. Is it by direct payment? Is it by cheque or what have you? We would ensure that the recipient knows that they can re-enrol at any time very easily without any judgment or roadblocks.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Thank you, I'll pass it on to my colleague, Mr. Maguire.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Maguire.

MR. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you for being here today. I have a few questions and I ask that we have short, quick, direct answers, please. A lot of people I deal with have become extremely frustrated with the Maintenance Enforcement Program. They are dealing with years and years of non-payments. Their experience, and some of our experience in our office, is that phone calls are not being returned to those clients. They are not being returned in a timely manner.

What do you say to those clients who have given up? How much of that \$58.8 million - and I can give you a whole list of individuals that I know who have said, do you know what, I'm not even going to bother any more, I've been going through the system for so long. That's a lot of money that can change a lot of children's lives and feed a lot of people.

It's a two-part question: how much of that money is money of people just saying, do you know what, I'm not even going to bother trying to collect any more, I've been doing this for years?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Hudson.

MS. HUDSON: Thank you. With respect to the first question regarding phone calls, we now have timelines to ensure that phone call inquiries or complaints are returned. That is something new for us and we do expect - and it has been also been identified by the Auditor General.

MR. MAGUIRE: So what's the timeline? If I make a call tomorrow and say that my partner isn't paying, what's the timeline for a return call?

MS. HUDSON: Two to three days.

MR. MAGUIRE: Two to three days?

MS. HUDSON: Yes.

MR. MAGUIRE: And the resolution of that? So a phone call is great - we're reaching out and saying yes, we realize you've contacted us and that's great - but that's still not putting money in the pockets of the people who need it. How long until that case file is resolved? Do we have timelines?

MS. HUDSON: In terms of looking at what enforcement action should be taken and explaining that enforcement action, we are asking in terms of the inquiry that that is what is communicated to the recipient if, for example, they were the ones calling in. So it's

not just a timeline in terms of you get back to somebody, yes, I've heard your issue, thank you, we're working on it. It is about what the next step is, what can be done.

Now there are different timelines with respect to what can be done. For example, putting a garnishment on if the person has a source of income that is from the federal government is easier than doing another enforcement action further along. There are specific timelines but what we have our eye on now and because of the Auditor General's recommendations is looking at ensuring that the supervisors have their eye on whether the right enforcement actions are proceeding and that we don't have these long time delays.

MR. MAGUIRE: Then we'll get to the second part of the question but are you actively reaching out to people who have been in the system for weeks, days, months, years, and have not received any type of payment and maybe have not reached out to your department because they've given up? That's a big part of this - people who have lost faith in the maintenance enforcement system. Are you actively reaching out to them to give them the proper tools or to encourage them in the right direction to get the money they deserve?

MS. HUDSON: Yes, I believe your question is around the inactive cases. The inactive cases are those in which there is no enforcement action. Where we have not been where we want to be in the past is that we have not monitored those and reached out to the payers, the recipients, on a regular, consistent basis.

We now have a process of when cases need to be reviewed and we are refining that, so that a case just doesn't sit there with nothing being done and never being checked on for years.

MR. MAGUIRE: I appreciate that you've been in this role only for a couple of years, and we thank the Auditor General for taking on this very important topic, but why did it take an Auditor General's Report to say there are people out there who are not receiving the proper maintenance enforcement? Why now? Why not two years ago, five years ago, 10 years ago?

MS. HUDSON: Certainly the importance of the Maintenance Enforcement Program has been on the radar of this government for the last three years. When I came into my role just two years ago, it was a high priority for me and changes were made.

We were coming off the 2015 review and implementing that review. That 2015 review had 27 recommendations; 25 of those have been implemented. The only two that were not implemented and are now going to be implemented in this year were with respect to Internet technology.

What we have, Mr. Maguire, is a situation where certainly what I hear you asking is why did it take you so long . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. The time has expired. We'll move to the PC caucus and Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Thank you. That was getting interesting, but maybe I'll let them get back to it when it's their turn.

According to the 2017-18 accountability report, 45 per cent of cases are in full compliance. I appreciate that this has improved over time, but with more than half the cases having arrears, it's concerning. I think that many who don't encounter MEP would be surprised that full compliance is so low. What factors lead to such low compliance?

MS. HUDSON: I will begin and I will ask Mr. Feindel to follow up. With respect to 45 per cent of cases in full compliance, I believe we're up to a little bit above that now in this quarter. With respect to your question, yes, we do have our eye on continuous improvement and getting that up even more.

We do stack up favourably with respect to other jurisdictions' maintenance enforcement programs regarding the amount of cases in compliance and full compliance and regarding the amount of money flowing over into recipients' hands. Part of the issue is that there is a segment of the cases that are inactive cases. Of the outstanding arrears that were from the last fiscal year that have accumulated over the course of 22 years of the program - \$60 million last fiscal year - approximately \$14 million of that was with respect to inactive arrears - \$12 million to \$14 million inactive arrears. That has to be factored in, in terms of understanding why - and what I hear your question is, why only 45 per cent of cases are in full compliance. A portion of those cases are payers that cannot be located.

We have used our Public Safety unit now within the Department of Justice, and the Maintenance Enforcement Program can make a referral to our Public Safety Division to try to track down payers when we cannot find the payer through the Maintenance Enforcement Program, when somebody is gone underground. So when we're trying to locate them or when a recipient has maybe given information - I think that he's working, and I think that he's working under the table. So in terms of looking at moving cases out of an inactive status, we've done better on that and have talked about that.

I do wish you to know that we are also utilizing our Public Safety Division to do investigations, but part of the understanding of the 45 per cent - now 46 per cent - of our cases in full compliance, is also looking at the inactive arrears, and also looking at issues of complexity of certain cases where there are situations where a payer or a recipient should actually be going back to court to vary the order. For example, if arrears might be continuing to tally up on an order and, say, the children have aged out, those arrears keep tallying up until the order is varied.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: According to the 2017-18 accountability report, 64 per cent - or a shade under two-thirds - of cases are seeing monthly compliance. That means that 64

per cent are making the required payments while 36 per cent are falling into arrears of some sort of degree or another. Am I seeing that number correctly that way?

MS. HUDSON: Yes.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: So 39 per cent are reducing their arrears; 36 per cent are increasing their arrears, which leaves about 25 per cent making their full monthly payment only. Of these 25 per cent, are they relatively low maintenance accounts or do they require a lot of attention?

MR. FEINDEL: The 25 per cent would often involve cases like a high degree of arrears that are quite often in place for a long time and are perhaps more difficult. So the further up the enforcement continuum we get, there is more time and attention needed and given to those files, but they also take more time.

As the deputy has mentioned, we've got some initiatives under way, in some cases, trying to encourage re-looking at the court orders themselves to make sure that they reflect accurately the ability of the payer to pay, and therefore that we have an accurate picture of the arrears that are owing.

This is a complex business trying to deal with the variety of cases that we get. The numbers are very much what drives the program, so we pay attention to the types of files that need the increased amounts of attention.

[10:15 a.m.]

You mentioned the 45 per cent - and it's actually 46 per cent - recently, under 50 per cent doesn't really leave a good impression so we've actually flipped that around as a target for this year. We want 55 per cent in compliance, to drive activities from the team and working with our payers to get that into a better place.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: We're talking about arrears and non-compliance for 22 years, so we're starting to add up the dollars. The question, when do we determine a payment is unrecoverable? I know this money belongs to children and families, but at what point do we write it off? Twenty-two years ago, if there's still stuff that's owed back then, what is our limit on this stuff?

MS. HUDSON: I will say there is provision within the policies and the Act for the Director of Maintenance Enforcement to basically determine that a case is going to no longer have enforcement action. That can be triggered, for example, when all ability to locate a payer or determine income of the payer or to find a recipient - sometimes the recipients can't be found in certain cases - that those undertakings have been undertaken

and with no further information. Then a decision can be made at the director level that no further action is going to be taken.

However, part of the arrears - the problem is that the arrears are still calculating and accumulating so they are unenforceable arrears, if you will, or false arrears. But we do have our eye on looking at what has been done to find the payer or the recipient to find an income source and to flow that money through. Then, if that comes to naught, the director - only the director, as I understand it and I stand to be corrected - can make that decision to no longer do any enforcement action.

MR. FEINDEL: What I would add there is that the greatest amount of effort possible is put into making sure that the payments are collected and that we do have enforcement of the court order, so we don't give up. If we do determine, as the deputy has pointed out, that it's a situation we really can't enforce, we do look at that. However, in the majority of cases, some of these ones that you're perhaps sometimes hearing about are those we have been working on a long time. Things like we have a lien on a property and it takes a while for that property, if it's sold, to accrue any payments to the recipient.

We have the ability to garnish lottery winnings so that's a timing factor. I've observed in the time that I've been with the program that when those come through, those are opportunities for us to deal with some of those cases where there haven't been income sources for quite some time.

It does require patience sometimes to identify where the money - if the payer doesn't have the income, does not have the assets, then there's a limited amount we can do. But sometimes it's monitoring, rechecking, constantly trying to pursue the options that we have available to us in the Act for enforcement before that money can actually be recovered for the recipient.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I'm sure there's cases where over 22 years people have passed on, estates have been probated, there's really no access to that payer, and of course families have changed over 22 years. I just find it interesting that we still calculate some of those numbers and we've moved on so far.

There was a 2015 client survey - it wasn't a great survey - that 12 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with enforcement. Are you planning on doing a survey again? What would it look like?

MS. HUDSON: I will turn that over to Mr. Feindel because I asked that question myself very recently. As I've said, just as a precursor introduction to his comments, we have within the context of our increasing the accessibility and usability of our IT side, had a very specific, intentional focus on reaching out to clients. From that conversation and keeping our eye on the metrics - because I do like metrics and it's a road map forward - I did ask the same question that you've asked. So I'd ask Mr. Feindel to answer that.

MR. FEINDEL: We've currently got some work under way doing client consultation as part of building new online service. That's reaching out proactively to clients in our client base to get their feedback - not only on things that they might like to see in an online service, but their experiences with the program, and it's giving us some insights that are necessary.

We have a client consultation group that was formed as part of that work in 2015. Our manager of organizational development has included in her role to continue to manage and consult with that group in terms of obtaining feedback. My plans would be that we would also introduce client survey activity during our enrolment process, and also part of our enforcement activities. Certainly things like people not choosing to enroll or withdrawing from the program - understanding why that's happening and seeing what we can do to address that feedback.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I would be remiss if I didn't ask this question, on the first day of cannabis sales in this province and having the Deputy Minister of Justice in front of me - have the regulations been completed? Have they been submitted? What's the policy on random roadside checks? Is there anything you can share with us quickly?

MS. HUDSON: We are in good shape in Nova Scotia for today. It is, perhaps, the biggest day of social policy change in Canada in decades - I've said since Medicare came about and Tommy Douglas had a good idea.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. Time has expired. (Laughter) I wanted to hear it too. We'll move to the NDP caucus and the honourable David Wilson.

HON. DAVID WILSON: I shouldn't have told him I was going to ask about cannabis. (Laughter) It was my first question since the deputy minister is here. I'll definitely let you finish that answer or I can ask you another one on it. It's really kind of the same. Is your department and the province prepared for the legalization of cannabis today?

MS. HUDSON: We are ready. It has been a very significant undertaking for the Department of Justice, working with all other government departments, working with Nova Scotians. It has been a very interesting and challenging timeline. The federal government set the timeline and every province and territory had to respond.

You have seen from the news recently that compared to some other provinces and territories, Nova Scotia is in a good position relative to where some other provinces and territories are. For example, British Columbia has one retail location set up and Nova Scotia has its retail environment set up, has its online environment set up, has its focus in terms of the police training and the resources regarding impaired driving, has invested significantly into communication efforts for Nova Scotia. The communication strategy has been noted to be one of the most fulsome across Canada compared to other jurisdictions.

The Government of Nova Scotia has invested dollars into a communications strategy. I stand to be corrected in terms of right now, but at this point in time in this fiscal year, it's \$400,000 into a provincial strategy of communication, focusing on having the health and safety of Nova Scotians at the forefront. So the communications strategy flows from issues about how to talk to children, what the things are to know in terms of going slow in terms of cannabis, and also impaired driving.

So relative to our retail environment, relative to the complexities and the challenging timeline, relative to comparing ourselves to other jurisdictions, and focusing also on communication with Nova Scotians, I think that we're in good shape.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I was going to ask you about the budget, how much is being spent, so I appreciate the information you've given us. Have you worked with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and the Department of Health and Wellness around the public education campaign - especially geared towards youth? I think the discussion about legalizing it or not is over. I think a lot of the attention now is turned to making sure - and all the evidence shows how the use of cannabis at an early age has a huge impact, a negative impact on our young. For me, I want to make sure we're doing everything we can to make sure that those young people understand the ramifications of maybe doing cannabis at an early age.

Are you working with the Department of Health and Wellness and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to make sure that that campaign, that development of public awareness is something that is done? Is it done and if not, when will that be finalized so that our teachers, our health staff around the province can make sure they're educating young people on the impacts of this?

MS. HUDSON: We have been and will continue to work very closely with the Department of Health and Wellness and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, specific to your question on those two government departments and with respect to communication out to Nova Scotians.

As one example, a letter was developed and sent to all parents of school-age children in September of this year with respect to what parents should have on their radar regarding issues of cannabis and young people. Our communication strategy has also focused on protecting youth and ensuring that all Nova Scotians know what the rules are and what the concerns are and issues they should keep front of mind. The communication strategy has had a big element with respect to youth - i.e. you may have seen some of these ads: how to talk to your children, how to raise the subject or answer the questions. It also had the second focus on impaired driving and safety on the roads.

Regarding how we have worked with Health and Wellness, Education and Early Childhood Development, and other departments in terms of protecting youth - in our retail environment, as you know, we have a retail environment where if you're under the age of

19, you cannot go into the retail store and see the cannabis products or purchase the cannabis products. On our Nova Scotia online retail e-commerce site from the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation, you cannot go onto the site unless you have your age verified before.

Nova Scotia is one of only a few provinces that have added extra protections into their e-commerce site to ensure that only people of the age of majority for legal cannabis consumption can actually see the products and make an online purchase.

MR. DAVID WILSON: We can't keep our heads in the sand, especially around the limits. I mean, someone can go and purchase 30 grams, but I don't know if someone can smoke 30 grams in a sitting; I doubt it. My concern is the ability for young people to maybe get someone who is of age to get that.

The final question on this - I know during the session there were a number of questions geared towards the minister around the cost of the changes, especially around law enforcement. One of the questions - and I don't think we got an answer - was around our municipalities. Will they have the ability to recoup some of that cost, especially around policing and law enforcement, because there is going to be an increase in law enforcement.

I've talked to my own people who are doing it in my community - it's the RCMP - but there are going to be increases. Is there an ability for those municipalities within this fiscal year to say listen, we are seeing pressures, is the government prepared to address some of those pressures? Are we as a government getting that funding from the federal government? This was kind of shoved down to the jurisdiction of the provinces, because of a federal change.

I know there's a couple of questions in there but I'm just wondering if you could comment on that.

MS. HUDSON: I will attempt to go backwards with respect to the multiple prongs of your question and I hope I get all of those. With respect to the impaired driving situation in Nova Scotia and our ability to enforce and therefore promote safety and security on our roads, Nova Scotia is in good shape compared to other jurisdictions regarding the number of drug recognition experts that we have in our 10 municipal police and the RCMP across Nova Scotia. I believe right now we have 61 drug recognition experts and we also have training for the SFST officers.

Compared to other jurisdictions, we have a higher ratio of police trained as drug recognition experts than others, so we are in good shape. I believe Chief McIsaac from the Cape Breton Regional Police Service just made that comment within the last day, and it's not the first time that he has made it.

[10:30 a.m.]

With respect to the federal government, these are challenging timelines, and the federal government is going to be supporting provinces and territories with respect to providing funding for training of SFST and DRE. What I mean by that is that the federal government is providing money to provinces and territories in terms of ensuring that we have adequate trainers in each province and territory to train other front-line police with respect to how to recognize and enforce impaired driving laws. The money has not yet flowed to the provinces and territories, but the indications have come out in the last very little while that the money will soon flow. We do expect to have those positions in place very soon, and work has been under way.

There has been a lot of communication back to the federal government with respect to what the envelopes will be for each province and territory or what the focus of this federal money coming forward is with respect to impaired driving. We have had indication that the money is soon going to flow.

With respect to the ability of police to respond to a changed environment in terms of cannabis being legal recreationally as of today, there is an increased ability for police to be able to respond in terms of the simple possession charges that were illegal yesterday no longer being illegal today. The environment has changed. Some things have come off the radar, and now other things will be coming on the radar. In terms of what it is going to actually cost the province and the municipalities, this is a changing and fluid environment, and we are learning as we go, almost day by day. But do not think there has not been significant work, and there will continue to be.

MR. DAVID WILSON: One of the groups of individuals who I have heard from is those who use marijuana for medical use. There's a bit of concern - I know I only have a little bit of time here - that with the closures of some of the spots that they used to get it, a lot of the intention was to go online and get it through the mail. There's a possible postal strike. Is there any work being done on how to address individuals who access medical marijuana who might not be able to get to one of the 12 stores?

MS. HUDSON: Two things - first of all, if you have a prescription for medical marijuana, that is regulated solely by the federal government, by Health Canada. The only way to receive your supply of medical marijuana if you have a prescription is that it would come to you online. Or you can grow it yourself, or you can get a licence for someone else to grow it for you. You cannot go into a dispensary and receive medical marijuana. That is illegal - it has been, and it continues to be. There has been some misperception within the citizens across Canada about the legality or illegality of dispensaries.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We'll move to the Liberal caucus. Mr. Gordon Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I'll bring us back to the topic at hand, if you don't mind. I do say, though, that you certainly have a good grasp of the subject matter, not only on the cannabis side, but certainly on the maintenance enforcement.

It's usually humbling when you sit here and hear of all the intricacies within a department, especially something like maintenance enforcement, which is not only legal, but it's complicated. It's very emotional. It's people at risk. It's probably one of the most challenging places, I think, in government. I have to say that our focus is on your staff. You have heard some questions, and I certainly want to commend them for being in probably one of the most challenging jobs that there is and thank them.

I just have a couple of questions. Obviously, we're at the very end of the questioning, we have heard a lot of the answers, so I'll try to be in areas that weren't touched on already. One right off the bat was, what is Lean Six Sigma Black Belt? (Laughter) Nobody else asked, but I am very curious - from your opening statement.

MS. HUDSON: I will actually ask Mr. Feindel to fill in the blanks on this. A Lean Six Sigma Black Belt sounds very interesting. It was interesting when I heard about this a couple of years ago. We are very lucky to have within our Maintenance Enforcement Program in New Waterford this person - Kendra Grant. She comes from private sector experience. From my understanding, what it means - because I've asked that myself - is that this is a person who has a very clear, efficient, and effective lens. She's focused on the two Es, in my thinking - the efficiency and effectiveness of business processes - looking at what we do in our processes, how they can be made more efficient and more effective. That is the way in which I say, that is a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt.

She is the manager of operational programs for the Maintenance Enforcement Program. She looks at the efficiency and effectiveness. She has made changes regarding the way in which we interact with clients, how we should train our staff, and how we should change our processes. Those are the three prongs. Mr. Feindel may wish to add something.

MR. FEINDEL: Just very briefly, Lean Six Sigma is a cross-industry standard for continuous process improvement. There are several certifications within that program. Government has been very proactive in developing those skills. There is white belt, yellow belt, green belt and black belt. Black belt is the highest level of certification within that Lean Six Sigma program, so we are very lucky to have that level of expertise within the Maintenance Enforcement Program.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Back to the topic at hand, I am curious with the Auditor General here - I hadn't heard too much asked about it - there were 27 recommendations. I'm more interested in follow-up and your communication back and forth with the Auditor General. I think we as a committee would be interested in also knowing the status of those 27 recommendations and the plans for how you are going to address them.

I know that could be a very lengthy document, but it would be very fruitful for us to request that, if possible. I'd like to hear how you interact with the AG in that regard.

MS. HUDSON: I would ask that Mr. Feindel also speak with respect to this. The 27 recommendations from the 2015 review report have been addressed. That was a road map. As I said before, I do believe in having a plan. "The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry" - I do understand that, but I do like to have a plan, and a review report gives us a plan. Then we had the Auditor General come in and ask, what are the areas that are specifically continuing to be problematic? That too was welcomed and a good plan.

Regarding the 2015 review report, we will provide that to you. We have acted on all of the recommendations with the exception of, and I touched on them earlier - the two that have remained outstanding are with respect to Internet technology, and we do expect to have those operationalized by the end of this fiscal year. They were about how we can use Internet technology better to give information and how we can make our client base aware of the Maintenance Enforcement Program and how to access and get information, so those two will be acted on.

Regarding how we discussed it with the Auditor General during the time when he was starting in 2015 and focusing mainly on 2016 and 2017, I would ask Mr. Feindel to discuss that specifically.

MR. FEINDEL: The report that came out from our client consultation group in 2015 was already in hand before the Auditor General came in with their six recommendations this past year. Those had been worked on over the course of the last two years and the final two - as referenced by the deputy - have been outstanding just because of the need to move forward with technology changes to enable those. It's around notification to payers and recipients - that's one of the recommendations.

The other one is around the awareness on the MEP online. At the moment, with the inability for clients to get in with tablets and mobile devices it doesn't make a lot of sense to go and push folks to use the online system if they can't get in. We're fixing that this year, so in early 2019 we'll be in a position to wrap up those 27 recommendations.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Thank you. I'll turn my questions over to my honourable member.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Hugh MacKay.

MR. HUGH MACKAY: This has been a very informative session and I wish you all the best with the improvements you are embarking on. I'm going to come back to some metrics. I believe that there is currently about \$60 million, \$58 million and change owed to recipients. Did I hear correctly that that's down from \$73 million some time ago? That's roughly about a 20 per cent decrease.

What would you judge to be a realistic target in those sorts of terms, of millions of dollars, as far as outstanding payments owed to recipients?

MS. HUDSON: I'll begin, and then I'll ask Mr. Feindel to continue on. In terms of realistic and where we would like to be, those are two different things. In terms of being realistic, I would say that, just to take rough figures, \$60 million is now at \$58.8 million in terms of the arrears - it has accumulated since 1996.

We do know there is a significant portion of those that would have to be backed out, that those are the unenforceable arrears, or false arrears, if you would, payers or recipients who either can't be located or have no ability to pay or that the dependency no longer exists if we're talking about children. That would have to be backed out of an understanding about what would be a realistic figure. So if you backed that \$14 million out of that then you are getting down into the 40s.

Then it's looking at what the complexities are. Sometimes enforcement action takes a really long time when perhaps there have been arrears that have accumulated and the only ability to enforce those arrears might be a lien. As Mr. Feindel spoke about, sometimes it takes a long time for that situation to come to pass.

I can't sit here and give you a specific figure in terms of what would be a realistic amount to get down to, but I can say this. I do get impatient in my old age and I do know that I have great people around me who are very passionate and knowledgeable about what they do. That combination of my impatience and their knowledge will get us to a better position regarding the arrears that are outstanding.

I don't want to commit to what I think would be a good amount to say are outstanding arrears in terms of a realistic amount, but certainly we would have to decrease or subtract out those arrears that are false or unenforceable.

MR. MACKAY: Was Mr. Feindel making comments, following on that? If not, I'll proceed on.

MR. FEINDEL: The only thing I would quickly add is that, as the deputy has pointed out around those unenforceable arrears, we've reduced down 7.2 per cent since March of this year. That's a pretty good result for the team to be focusing on the arrears.

The arrears is really an indicator. What we really want to focus on is getting payments in the hands of recipients. If we're doing that better and we're doing that well, the arrears will come down.

Around \$10 million of that arrears has been in place since the program was created, so all of those factors come into play. As we get that number down, it gets tougher and tougher to kind of resolve those situations but we constantly look at ways that we can attack

even those older files, to have strategies to try and figure out how we can collect the money owing to recipients.

MR. MACKAY: I think I understand the cumulative effect of arrears. Coming back to the outstanding payments, we've got some hard numbers there, \$73 million to \$60 million. I think if we, as the Public Accounts Committee, are going to assess the performance of the Maintenance Enforcement Program, it would be very good certainly to know if there is a target or goal - to be a range of under \$50 million, under \$25 million, under \$5 million.

[10:45 a.m.]

It's very difficult for us to assess the effectiveness of your program. That's what we're here for: to ask those tough questions and to hold your feet to the fire, quite frankly. I would certainly like to know a target. I don't think I'm going to get the answer. I agree with you - we'd all ideally like it to be zero, but that's not realistic, but I would like to hear that we could achieve under . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: There's just 10 seconds remaining.

MR. MACKAY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman - over to you.

MR. FEINDEL: We'll be working on ways that we can identify lowering the arrears to the minimum amount, if possible.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you to everyone for their questions. Thank you to our witnesses for their answers. Ms. Hudson, I'll give you an opportunity to provide some closing comments now.

MS. HUDSON: Thank you very much. We have strengthened our legislation. We have strengthened our staff complement and strengthened our staff training. We are seeing better outcomes.

The legislative changes, combined with the increased staff - five last year; combined with more clarity about how to do their jobs; combined with a commitment to a client-first approach, combined with \$1.2 million this fiscal year in IT improvements, combined with a new energy of our staff on the front lines in New Waterford - and I commend our staff, and in particular Kathy Sparling and Steven Feindel with respect to making that change happen; combined with the road map provided by the Auditor General; and combined with the fact that the Department of Justice has a good track record in terms of following up on Auditor General recommendations - I think we are in a good position, as much as anything can be in a situation such as this where we're talking about payers and recipients, and often in very challenging circumstances. We are on the path to a good

situation and even greater improvements in the future. The approach is commitment and clarity in terms of the Maintenance Enforcement Program.

I would like to end by just ending actually with the words of the Auditor General because he did in his report commend the Maintenance Enforcement Program. At the end of the Auditor General's Report - I just want to end with two quotes from the Auditor General because I think they sum up well that work was under way when the Auditor General began his report and we are very committed to following through and continuing and building on the gains made. Those quotes come from Page 63, Paragraphs 3.34 and 3.37 of the Auditor General's Report.

The Auditor General says: "Management sets goals for the Program as part of the Department of Justice's annual business planning process. They improved the goals by including measurable performance indicators. Examples are provided below."

The final quote from the Auditor General is: "Even though there are issues with monitoring and enforcing court orders, we found that management is making informed decisions to try and improve the Program's performance. As many of these initiatives are recent, we did not see changes in our testing results. We encourage management to continue to monitor performance and make changes as necessary."

I thank the Auditor General. I thank you for today. You have our commitment that our priority, focus, and energy are going to be on this program.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much. We do have some committee business. I will allow our witnesses to exit, if they wish.

We have correspondence that I believe everyone has received from the Department of Business - information requested from the June 6, 2018, meeting from the Auditor General - his 2017-18 performance report and business plan. Also, from the Department of Seniors, which was information requested from the May 16th meeting. Are there any questions on that correspondence?

The next two items - one is the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedures, future meetings; and also, scheduling future meetings - clarification of issues. These issues are raised by the committee clerk, based on the motion that was recently passed to change the way we choose our witnesses.

Ms. Langille, could you perhaps run through some of the issues you've encountered with trying to schedule meetings.

MS. KIM LANGILLE (Legislative Committee Clerk): I do have a couple of things that it would be helpful if I had clarification on and that might make my life easier, based on the exact wording of the motion. It really goes to scheduling of reports.

The first one is scheduling of reports and chapters in the order that they are in the report, which makes sense but it does prove difficult for me. As an example, if the first chapter witness isn't available, the next meetings can't be set up until that is booked. If that's the intent, that's fine, but I just wanted to highlight that issue. I guess if there's any room for some flexibility on my part in that regard or not, I guess that's one concern I had. I don't know if you want to address these as we go along.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think one by one would be best. We'll move to the gentleman who moved the motion, Mr. Gordon Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I didn't know if others wanted to speak first on it but I think it's a very valid point. It wasn't intended to that and I don't think there's any objection and I spoke briefly with a couple of other committee members on this. If we have flexibility there, by all means. If we can meet that order, I think for a matter of preparing for our researchers and that, it would be helpful, but if we can't, that's certainly fine.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. d'Entremont, then Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Sure, and I agree with my colleague here. If they're out of order, they're out of order but at least we have the opportunity to have those departments before us. Again our concern has never been the order of the Auditor General's Report - it's simply the opportunity for other topics to come before this committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: I don't think the intention was solely that we could only do one chapter at a time. If there are chapters where there is a lot of compliance and whatnot, we could combine and have more than one department in for a meeting.

We know by going over the reports, the ones that seem to have the most issues that we would like brought forward. But if we have some departments that are doing very well, we could probably combine a couple for one meeting. We've done that before, we've had different departments in.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think the consensus is that the committee is okay with providing the clerk flexibility in scheduling of the meetings. Ms. Roberts, I'm sorry I didn't see that you wanted to make a comment as well.

MS. ROBERTS: Just to build off the comment made by Ms. Lohnes-Croft, I think that yes, there is reason for flexibility and also real potential for combining chapters, particularly when different chapters touch on the work of the same department. However, I don't think it's fair to ask the clerk to make that decision or to do that analysis. Maybe that becomes part of the job of the subcommittee, to group together topics and to be looking ahead at where we're going, suggesting actual witnesses.

Certainly that seems like it's probably not a conversation we want to have with the whole committee but that would be appropriate to discuss at subcommittee, along with a number of the other points that the clerk raised, for example - who to call and what to call from the financial reports where every chapter doesn't necessarily beg that witnesses be called and likewise, follow-up reports where we might want to select those departments that are having the least success in terms of compliance with past audits.

I think all of that would make sense to work on at the subcommittee level, so that we're directing the clerk rather than asking her to wade through that stuff and make a bunch of discretionary calls.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Any other comments? Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Also in that vein, we should have a subcommittee meeting sooner than later. I don't know about next week but at least the week after that, that we can all sit down and maybe discuss our way through the next number of months of meetings.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. We are kind of moving ahead in the agenda there, those comments are certainly relevant. So in terms of the first item addressed by the clerk, is it agreed that the clerk will be given flexibility in terms of the first item addressed by the clerk, is it agreed that the clerk will be given flexibility in terms of scheduling Auditor General Report chapter meetings?

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

It may not be appropriate for me to make that motion, but I'm just trying to advance things.

The next item is - and I'll let the clerk speak to this - financial reports of the Auditor General.

MS. KIM LANGILLE (Legislative Committee Clerk): Ms. Roberts touched on it. With regard to the financial reports, follow-up reports, things such as that - sometimes, for example, the financial report, I think only one chapter often has recommendations. The other two talk more about issues and they may address different departments. As you pointed out, I don't really feel it's my place to say, I think these folks should come in. You've sort of touched on it and I think there's some agreement that that would be something that would possibly be put forward to the subcommittee to discuss those issues.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Could I add one other thing also that I think would be beneficial for us? When the Auditor General comes in before us with that report, to have the deputy minister at his side also to answer some questions. In doing that, that might help

us even get further down into who more appropriate - unanswered questions is usually the challenge that we have here, especially when we have the AG, so I would suggest that might be a practice that we adopt for future ones to help us.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Keep in mind that we have about three minutes remaining. Ms. Roberts.

MS. ROBERTS: I would like to move that the subcommittee identify specific topics and witnesses from financial reports and follow-up reports.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The motion is intended to advance the discussion here. Mr. Gordon Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I'll try to be brief on this because we just have a few minutes. We have two things here. One is follow-up and one, which is in the five points that you had here - if I could just say briefly, I would definitely say, yes, let's continue following the same process that we have.

Back to the follow-up, as I mentioned earlier, I'd like to have a subcommittee meeting to talk about how we address follow-up. How do we track? How do we as a committee prioritize? How do we even know what we are lax on and what we're not?

At the same time, I think that subcommittee meeting could be a very fruitful one also on - what is our role now in selecting witnesses? How do we look at the financial reports? What about things that are outside of the AG Reports that we might want to bring forward? I see my colleague being excited about that comment. It shouldn't be a surprise, but truly I'd like to see that meeting in preparation for that. I'd like to ask our clerk if she could look and find out how other provinces actually do follow-up.

I'm sure that we're not reinventing the wheel here. It would be nice to see a jurisdictional scan on that to give us some best examples of good cases and on agenda setting for things that are outside of the AG Report - if we could have some of that work done in preparation.

Finally, the last thing, I think it's so important that we get our training done. I know that there's work going on in selecting a Leader - and there might be different people sitting here - but I would suggest that as early as possible in November as we can, to get that training. That is all foundational on our understanding of how to do these things. I would really appreciate that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We have run out of time. We did get one piece of business concluded there. I think the remainder will have to wait until the calling of the next subcommittee meeting, which I expect will be soon.

Is there any other business to come before the committee? Hearing none, this meeting is adjourned.

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