

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, November 30, 2022

COMMITTEE ROOM

**Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration; and
Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia**

**Re: 2022 Report of the Auditor General -
Immigration and Population Growth**

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Public Accounts Committee

Hon. Kelly Regan (Chair)
Nolan Young (Vice-Chair)
John A. MacDonald
Melissa Sheehy-Richard
Tom Taggart
Kent Smith
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Susan Leblanc
Kendra Coombes

[John A. MacDonald was replaced by Chris Palmer.]

In Attendance:

Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Kim Adair,
Auditor General

WITNESSES

Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration
Ava Czapalay - Deputy Minister
Jennifer L'Esperance - Senior Executive Director

Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia
Jennifer Watts - CEO



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2022

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Hon. Kelly Regan

VICE CHAIR

Nolan Young

THE CHAIR: I now call the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order. My name is Kelly Regan. I am the MLA for Bedford Basin and I'm the Chair of the committee.

Just a reminder to everyone to put your phones on silent. I'm going to ask committee members to introduce themselves, beginning with Mr. Young.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I will also note that we have officials from the Auditor General's Office, including our Auditor General, the Legislative Counsel Office, Hansard, and the Legislative Committees Office in attendance as well.

On today's agenda, we have officials with us from the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, and the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia with respect to the 2022 Report of the Auditor General, Immigration and Population Growth.

I will ask witnesses to introduce themselves, beginning with Deputy Minister Czapalay.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I will invite Deputy Minister Czapalay to make her opening remarks.

AVA CZAPALAY: Good morning. I'd like to begin by thanking Jennifer Watts for joining Jennifer L'Esperance and myself today with this committee meeting. Settlement is an important part of the work that we do to ensure newcomers can be successful in our communities and workplaces. Jennifer is a valued partner, and ISANS is recognized throughout the country for excellence in settlement services.

I also want to thank the committee for accommodating our travel schedule. Jennifer L'Esperance and I, along with Minister Balsler and representatives from the Regional Enterprise Networks, were attending Destination Canada immigration forums in Paris and Morocco for the past two weeks.

On November 8th, the Office of the Auditor General released a report on the audit of the Immigration and Population Growth branch. My thanks to the Office of the Auditor General for reviewing our operations at this critical time of growth in our department. The recommendations on how we can reach program delivery excellence are helpful and will be implemented.

People come to Nova Scotia to study, to be reunited with family and friends, to find a safe haven, or to start a new life. We're fortunate to play a role in these new beginnings.

As many of you know, government is committed to growing our province's population to two million people by 2060. For the first time last December, our population reached one million people. According to the Statistics Canada population clock, within the past year, that number has grown by another 30,000 people, and this year, we're on track again to have a record number of landings. This year, 10,670 new permanent residents have already been recorded from January to September. That is more than any previous year, and we still have three months remaining in the calendar year for processing.

It's no secret that the most pressing issue facing our economy right now is labour shortages. Nova Scotia is not alone in feeling the pain of these shortages. It is the work that we do now to grow and diversify our population that will help Nova Scotia's labour market and communities prosper in the future.

To be successful, our approach to population growth must be strategic and nimble. We must attract and retain people who are job ready, who have the skills that employers need, and we must make sure that all regions in Nova Scotia benefit from population growth. We must continue to collaborate with employers, municipalities, and a wide array of partners in communities throughout Nova Scotia to support this growth.

We know we must strengthen our programs and procedures to continue to meet the needs of newcomers and employers, and the work to implement all of the Auditor General's recommendations has already begun. For example, we have commissioned research to better understand settlement funding and how it can best meet the needs of newcomers.

We have added more human resources to our Immigration and Population Growth branch, including 12 new positions to process more applications with consistency. Two new positions have also been added to conduct fraud investigations and program compliance reviews, and of course I mentioned previously that six navigators have also been hired to this group to support regional settlement and retention.

We are creating new procedures to ensure policies and application assessment tools are updated regularly and effectively communicated to staff. To supplement the work of our investigations and compliance division, we have added a fraud reporting service. This will allow individuals to safely provide anonymous tips of activity that may be fraudulent.

Before closing, I want to acknowledge the areas where the Auditor General's Report indicated that we are doing things well. The report shows that the department is exceeding our performance indicators, that the decisions we're making on immigration applications are the right decisions, and that the work that our settlement service providers do is extremely important to the success of newcomers in our province.

Thank you again to the Auditor General's team for their thoughtful recommendations that will help strengthen the work in our Immigration and Population Growth branch. Thanks also to our partners and settlement organizations, including ISANS, who do tremendous work to support newcomers.

Finally, I sincerely want to thank the team at the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration. They care about their work, and they understand the importance of providing a warm welcome and timely support to newcomers who choose to come here to Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Deputy Minister Czapalay. Now Ms. Watts.

JENNIFER WATTS: Good morning. Thank you for the invitation to speak today at the Public Accounts Committee.

ISANS has over 40 years of experience delivering innovative and successful settlement and integration services to immigrants in our province. Our services include resettlement services for refugees, settlement services for immigrants, language services, employment services . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. I'm sorry, we've got some chatter in the room. If we could just focus on our speaker, thank you.

Ms. Watts.

JENNIFER WATTS: As I was saying, among the services we offer include community integration services, employer supports, and business development and entrepreneurship support.

We deliver pre-arrival and post-arrival programs for immigrants destined to come to Nova Scotia that enable immigrants to both arrive better prepared and be successful in settlement and integration once here. These programs are delivered through in-person, blended, and virtual delivery.

We work provincially by delivering over 60 different programs across the province in rural areas and small centres that support immigrants, employers, and community groups active in settlement activities in coordination with settlement, community, and business partners.

Meeting the needs of immigrants is key to our service delivery. ISANS staff do a comprehensive needs assessment with each client as part of our intake process to develop unique settlement pathways that ensure successful outcomes, working with partners when appropriate, including francophone partners.

Our programs cover a wide range of areas, focusing on skill-building, integration, and labour market attachment. We develop tailored programs that ensure successful outcomes. Examples of this would include labour sector-specific language training, employment supports, and actively working with employers and government partners on labour market needs, as well as addressing International Qualifications Recognition barriers.

ISANS delivers these programs using an empowerment, trauma-informed approach based on adult education principles to support an immigrant's ongoing journey and well-being.

Our bridging programs support successful immigrant labor market attachment. Some of the recent bridging programs include early childhood educators, professional drivers, construction workers, and long-term care aides. We offer specific programs for youth, young adults, and racially visible immigrant women. Our award-winning Digital Navigator programs support immigrants in building their digital skills, and our community-based programs support the anti-racism capacity of non-profits to build a more welcoming province.

ISANS actively supports Canada's response to humanitarian crises worldwide, and we are supporting the increased numbers of government-assisted refugees arriving in Nova Scotia from all parts of the world. We are also actively engaged in recent specific humanitarian response initiatives, including the special programs for Afghanistan and

Ukraine. As a Settlement Agreement Holder, ISANS supports privately sponsored refugee settlement through family-linked applications.

We do all this because of the support we receive from our partners at Immigration and Population Growth, but also from our federal government partners as well as many community partners in the province. We live our values and are continually working towards a vision of a community where all can belong and grow.

As I said, we are very appreciative of the funding and guidance that we engage with the provincial government and see this as really helping to build a future for immigrants here in Nova Scotia. I'm happy to be here today and I look forward to your comments and questions.

THE CHAIR: I will just give our one MLA who hasn't been introduced yet an opportunity. Mr. Smith.

KENT SMITH: Hi everyone - apologies for my tardiness. My name is Kent Smith, and I'm the MLA for Eastern Shore.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Smith - I understand both bridges are difficult this morning.

With that, we'll begin the first round of questioning. Each caucus will have 20 minutes. You may be in the middle of answering questions and time has elapsed, and I will interrupt you and just call order. I'm not being rude - I'm just trying to move things along and be fair.

We'll begin with the Liberal caucus. Mr. Maguire.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: As usual, I always start with this: I'm going to ask a bunch of questions and I just ask that we keep the answers quick, because we have very limited time.

I do want to make a quick comment before I start my questions. I think it was the deputy minister who said that people working in the department care about the work, and I agree with that. I think that with every department, the people behind the scenes care a lot, and that's why they're there. They could probably be making a lot more money somewhere else, but they choose to do public service, and it's appreciated.

Sometimes we go a little hard in this committee and other committees, but know that it's more about finding the right answers. I realize that everybody is under a tremendous amount of stress, so I appreciate the hard work that you and everyone else does.

Having said that, two million is the number that we've heard from this government. Has your department met with the Premier about that number and how to achieve two million?

AVA CZAPALAY: Just acknowledging with thanks your comments about the staff. We'll pass that on.

I think the Premier's been pretty public about the two million by 2060. We have had meetings and lots of discussion. We know exactly what we need to do to get to two million by 2060. Essentially it boils down to 25,000 growth in our population each year.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm glad that you said you know exactly what to do, how to get there, obviously the numbers and stuff for that. What kind of investment is going to be needed in our education system to get to two million people and have the education system to support it?

AVA CZAPALAY: By education system, do you mean the universities?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: The public schools.

AVA CZAPALAY: Okay, P-12. It's very clear to us that we need to work across government to look at all government infrastructure. You mentioned schools - that's really important, but also health care, housing. There's a wide array of services and supports that are needed.

One of the things that we're focused on is bringing in job-ready immigrants and newcomers from the rest of Canada who come with the skills that are needed to help Nova Scotia prosper and grow. We have an economic-based program that brings people in with job offers ready to do work. Those people come with families, as you mentioned, and they come with the same aspirations that any other family would. They want their children in schools, they want their children in their hobbies and to have a nice life here.

One of the things we've been fixed on for the past year is making sure that all regions of Nova Scotia benefit from population growth so that all schools receive the same kinds of opportunities to have new children enter those schools. Our navigators are in six regions throughout the province, working diligently with newcomers to help them understand what kinds of opportunities are in those regions for work but also for supporting the lives that people need. Also, our settlement associations are working across Nova Scotia to help people attach to communities where they will find work.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I appreciate the answer, but the question wasn't about that. It was about physical space. I look at the community that I represent, and almost every single school is over capacity. Right now, if you want to go to John W. MacLeod, that

school is at about 180 per cent capacity. If you go to Cunard Junior High, that's at overcapacity. J.L. Ilsley, which was just built, is nearing capacity.

[9:15 a.m.]

I'm asking about physical space. Have you had that discussion with the Premier about how many physical spaces, how many expansions, how many new schools, how many teachers need to be hired to deal with a million more people?

AVA CZAPALAY: I think what we're going to find in the coming years - we're on track for record-breaking numbers again this year, as I mentioned in my opening remarks. We're exceeding the 25,000 that we need.

Part of the hard work we do as a department is making sure that the people who come here are the people we need to attach to our labour market so that our whole economy will grow. Having people here attached to work adds to our tax base and grows our economy.

That's our first priority: to bring people in, but also to work with the other departments so that they appreciate what our path is in terms of population growth. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, along with other departments, knows that we're on track for 25,000-plus each year.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: What I'm trying to get at is that we have a health care crisis, and we have a housing crisis, and bringing in 25,000 new people - which we want, let me be clear - we heard stories last year of Ukrainians who were coming here who were homeless. The Syrians who immigrated to this province - and a lot of them ended up in my community - have been a joy and a huge welcome to the community. We know that a lot of them ended up in public housing, for example, and that has skyrocketed the list from six months to three years.

We're in the middle of a housing crisis, and 120,000 Nova Scotians are without a family doctor, and climbing rapidly. I think it's fair to ask, when we're bringing people into this province, that they're properly taken care of. That includes housing and that includes doctors. To double the population of Nova Scotia - we just don't have the housing capacity.

My question is, how many new houses - not the economy, but how many housing units need to be built in Nova Scotia to deal with an extra million people?

AVA CZAPALAY: There's no shortage of people wanting to come to Nova Scotia - none whatsoever. Our job is to make sure that we bring people in who are job ready. You'll remember that we have a marketing campaign - that has been very successful, with

over 100 million impressions on our website and on our media of people looking to come to Nova Scotia.

The campaign focuses on skilled trades and health care workers, so prioritizing marketing to those groups so that people come here who can build our houses, who can create the infrastructure that we need to support our burgeoning population, who can work in our hospitals.

I mentioned our participation in the Destination Canada forums in Paris and Morocco - 83,000 people applied to attend those fairs. The Canadian embassy screened those applicants for us, down to about 5,000, but we had everyone from truck drivers to French teachers to doctors, nurses - all kinds of people.

Our job in Immigration and Population Growth is to bring in the qualified people Nova Scotia needs to grow its economy and to communicate the numbers of people we're going to be bringing in so that the rest of the province can respond to that in an appropriate way.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: It's great that we're bringing in people who can build houses, but we need to have houses for them to live in in order to attract them. If there are other jurisdictions that have housing for them to land in - affordable housing. Right now, we have the second most expensive rent in all of Canada. It grew by \$600 last year and it's climbing.

I will say that my family did immigrate to this country, and I immigrated to this country. I acknowledge that was a lot different for me to immigrate as an English-speaking white man than it is for others - I completely acknowledge that. But if individuals are immigrating to this country, they look at the housing market, and they say, holy guacamole - it's \$2,600 for a two-bedroom in Nova Scotia, where it's \$1,500 in New Brunswick or it's \$1,500 in another area. That is going to stop them from immigrating to this province, or it's at least going to give them pause.

I know that we're bringing skilled tradespeople in. For me, it's not just about skilled tradespeople, it's about people who need to immigrate to this province. I'll give you an example. I've had many people in the Lebanese community reach out to me about the ongoing situation in Lebanon and how difficult it is for them to immigrate to this province now. I would argue that under Pierre Elliott Trudeau in the 1970s - I think it was - if anyone remembers the immigration from Lebanon, that has been one of the most successful immigration policies this country has ever seen.

It's not just about skilled labour, as you know. I know you know that. Again, what I'm trying to get at is, we are asking people to immigrate to this province when we are in the middle of a health care crisis where it's six to eight hours at the IWK, where 45,000

youth went to the IWK and left without being seen, where you go to the QEII and you can't be seen a lot of times. That's not because of the staff - that's because of overcapacity.

Spryfield used to be one of the most affordable places in all of Nova Scotia. It's now \$3,000 for a two- to three-bedroom in Spryfield right now. Houses are selling for \$700,000 to \$800,000 when they used to sell for \$200,000. Again, I ask if there is a plan in place for capacity - not for bringing people in. We're bringing 25,000 immigrants into this province this year, and if we didn't bring in 25,000 people into this province, the people who are here are struggling to find homes, and they're struggling to find health care, and they're in schools that are over capacity.

What plan is in place to ensure that those 25,000 people find an affordable home, a doctor, and a school where it's not over capacity?

AVA CZAPALAY: You raise a really important point, and that is that people who come here have many choices. It's us working with community partners, with our settlement associations - with our organizations throughout Nova Scotia to ensure that those people who are considering coming to Nova Scotia receive the information that they need to make a decision.

We can tell them about Nova Scotia. We can connect them to an employer and help them find a job. But if they don't have housing, if they don't have a school for their child, if they don't have other things, then they will go elsewhere. That point was excellent, and it's one that I think sometimes we forget to emphasize - people have choices. We certainly saw that in Paris and Morocco, with the rest of Canada there, all the jurisdictions - including the jurisdictions in the north - were recruiting for people to come.

For us, the best thing that we can do in immigration and population growth is to be consistent in our forecasting in terms of what the numbers will be so that plans can be put into place.

Also, I mentioned the navigators. Having the navigators in communities working with the Regional Enterprise Network and working with the Chambers of Commerce, and working with all the community partners to ensure that there's a really good understanding of what the assets are in those communities to support newcomers.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm glad you brought up navigators. Housing navigators in particular are quitting; that's what's happening. They're bringing in housing navigators to find homes for individuals in communities, and they're quitting because there's no housing. I realize that it's your job to forecast the number of new immigrants coming in, but as the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, I would think it's also your job - and correct me if I'm wrong - to make sure that those individuals are fully supported.

Right now, I would argue that they are not fully supported. We have families of six, eight and sometimes ten people in my community living in two bedrooms, three bedrooms. We see this all the time. My office works daily with the new immigrants in our community. We support them, we help them throw events, and some of the things that we saw was they weren't getting the proper language support in schools. Their parents were not getting the proper support after schools. The housing situation was, quite frankly - if I could just be frank - was a mess, and I'm not blaming you because that's not your job. Your job is not to deal with the housing stock and housing situation.

What ends up happening and what we've heard from a lot of the new immigrants who have come into this province is that the moment they can afford to, they're leaving. That's what they're telling me. The housing's too expensive, the support was not there in place for their children in schools. That's depressing because I truly believe that Nova Scotia is the best place to live in Canada, and I think that Nova Scotia for you is kind of an easy sell.

I don't mean that like your job's easy. I think if you compare Nova Scotia to other places, it's - and truthfully, most people want to live in an urban core, right? We know that. When new immigrants are coming in, they want to live in walkable distance to things, and that's another thing that we have to deal with in rural Nova Scotia - showing them the beauty and everything that is rural Nova Scotia.

This is kind of a yes or no question. Do you believe that with our schools, transit, housing, health care, education - and that includes rural Nova Scotia - do you believe that the proper infrastructure is in place right now to support 25,000 new immigrants a year, and 2,000,000 by 2060?

AVA CZAPALAY: I think if we utilize our navigators and work with our partners across Nova Scotia, we can capitalize on any available infrastructure.

You make a good point in that immigrants tend to initially think about an urban setting like Halifax or Sydney. I think we need to really encourage immigrants to see the value of living outside of urban centres. It may come down to the availability of housing and work in a particular rural setting, as opposed to urban.

We do know, also, that having more than one family in a particular area might - if it's rural - might lend to that feeling of support and home.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: That was my next observation. I've had the privilege to travel quite a bit. I did the backpacking thing when I was younger, and stuff like that. I think one of the things that you notice is the beauty of cities that are culturally diverse. As with anyone, you want to go to a place where you can get your food, you can get your culture, and you can have those conversations and things like that.

[9:30 a.m.]

I think it is difficult, and I'm glad that you said that. I think it's very difficult - and I'm just using Meat Cove, for example - to put a Syrian family in Meat Cove by themselves. It's probably not going to be successful - and that's not to say anything bad about Meat Cove. It's just that if you're the only individual there and you can't get the food and the things that you need, then you're not going to stay.

I do have a kind of a strange question. The cab driver that I used to see all the time, he actually was a Russian cab driver - this was years ago. He actually moved back to Russia. Tried to get me to play poker with him, and I was like, I don't know about that. He was actually a nuclear scientist - and he was a cab driver here. There's a lady who was just in my office the other day who was a GP in England, and the list goes on and on. We are seeing a difficulty of individuals transitioning their skills from their country to here. Sometimes it costs a lot of money to do that.

I think money is a barrier. I think time is a barrier. So, I wonder if there's any thought to removing the financial burden that is on individuals when they're coming to this - I mean, it's expensive anyway to come to this country and set up anew. I think it's worth waiving these financial burdens so that individuals will come here and get set up as doctors, and streamline the transition for whatever profession they're in to be here in Nova Scotia because we know we're in desperate need for a lot of it. I see Ms. Watts shaking her head.

THE CHAIR: Just so you know, there's one minute left in the Liberal questioning time. Ms. Watts.

JENNIFER WATTS: Thank you, Brendan, for the question. I think we at ISANS have been working on international qualification for at least a decade. We've been doing that with the support of the provincial government. We look at both systemic barriers - so working with regulated professions to remove barriers - and we also design programs to help people who are coming in with a profession or a trade to receive their accreditation. We developed very specific programs to help them on that pathway, and also help them develop strategies.

It is not easy. There has been a lot of movement though, to be very honest - a lot of movement in a very positive direction around that. We also have a loan fund. We have developed this now and actually have just gotten approved again for the delivery of a loan fund to help people - if they have to write exams, if they have to get to Montreal to write an exam, or buy equipment for their trade, that is available through our program. We have been able to put together systemic barriers - trying to reduce those - but also very specific training programs, which have been hugely successful.

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for the Liberal questioning has elapsed. I would just like to allow a quick introduction here - Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Good morning, everyone. I'm sorry I was late - it was the bridge's fault. Susan Leblanc, Dartmouth North.

THE CHAIR: We will now move on to the NDP. Ms. Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you, and welcome. I'm going to start with a few questions with regard to the labour market needs.

On Page 26 of the Auditor General's Report, 1.32, the AG pointed out that the department needs a process to identify labour market needs in order to ensure that the Nova Scotia Nominee Program is as effective as possible. Can you explain what work the department is doing on this?

AVA CZAPALAY: We appreciated the Auditor General's recommendation in this regard, and that is to come up with a process to ensure consistency. Right now, in order to identify labour market needs, we regularly monitor and access labour market information, both from sector associations and from the federal government - Service Canada - from our labour market economists that we have at Immigration and Population Growth and the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration. Also, employers themselves and employer groups meet with us on a regular basis to give us real-time updates on what they're seeing, hearing and experiencing.

So we access all of this information. We have it at our fingertips. What we're being asked to do is come up with a documented process to make sure it's utilized consistently. We appreciate that and will be doing that.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you very much. My next question is regarding 1.55, on Page 32. The AG also pointed out that the department will need significantly more comprehensive performance indicators in order to reach the ambitious immigration goals of this government. The question is: What progress is being made here?

AVA CZAPALAY: I'd like Jen L'Esperance to answer that question.

THE CHAIR: Ms. L'Esperance.

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: Thank you for the question. The report also said that we are exceeding our current indicators, so we know that the people who we're targeting to come and attracting to come - we're attracting more than we are anticipating. We're remaining consistent with our retention. But we do have aspirations to have higher retention, so we want to see that those performance indicators meet that aspiration as well.

As we grow with our investigations and fraud unit, our targets and our indicators might also encompass that unit, because it is a brand-new unit. As our branch has grown

over the years to meet our ambitious goals, we need to make sure that our performance indicators grow with the growth of our branch, and we are putting that in place now.

KENDRA COOMBES: When will the performance indicators be ready, and how can they be made available to the committee?

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: We release our performance indicators each year with our business plan, so our next business plan would include additional performance indicators.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you very much. I'm going to 1.59 on Page 33, where the AG pointed out the number of issues around monitoring of settlement service providers: "Unknown Whether \$6.4 Million Per Year in Settlement Services Funding is Achieving its Objective of Retaining Immigrants."

The AG pointed out there's no analysis of the department to determine the settlement needs of immigrants, no analysis at the department to determine - sorry. Improvements are needed to assess funding proposals from settlement service providers, ". . . annual audited financial statements not required . . . Department not obtaining sufficient documentation from service providers to assess whether its funding is used for intended purposes is not being obtained."

There are a few things to unpack here. One of those things is the settlement needs of immigrants, and I think this goes to what my colleague Mr. Maguire was trying to get at - that is various needs. It's community needs, it's food, housing, medical care, education for children, all of that needs to be there, as well as culturally relevant food, culturally relevant social gatherings, and things like that.

If we're going to retain people here, what specifically is being done to determine the needs of the immigrant? Whether that is even language barriers, what is being done to specifically make sure that's happening? How are you doing it?

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: It's a really important question, and it's very important to us to make sure that our funding and our supports are directly attributing to those needs of the newcomers, ensuring that they can be successful in our communities and in our workplaces, and we work very hard to do that.

What the Auditor General has identified is that while we've completed research in the past, we have a research document on stayers and leavers to really understand why people might stay in the province, why people might go. We also did a socio-economic profile of newcomers in the province to understand their demographics and a good profile of newcomers in the province. We really needed to go one step further and understand those needs of the newcomers and what those services and programs might be.

Currently, we rely quite heavily on the 18 different service providers across the province that we support with settlement funding. They provide reports to us frequently on the services that they provide. Maybe Ms. Watts can talk a little bit about how the Province is responsive to those needs with the funding. Since the Auditor General began their review, we've also commissioned a report for settlement needs for the province, so we will be looking at that analysis ourselves from a provincial view while still taking into account some of that response from the settlement service providers as well.

KENDRA COOMBES: This might actually go to you, Ms. Watts. Many times it seems there was also first-hand knowledge. What they found was 42 per cent of the immigrants who stayed in the province and 52 per cent that left did not access the settlement services, with some stating they didn't even know they existed. If they don't even know settlement services exist and they have no access to them, how are we determining how we meet their needs if they don't access or they can't access?

That goes to the question of rural areas that's also in the report - there hasn't been a clear acknowledgement of where services need to be put. I'm wondering, Ms. Watts, if you could speak to that issue.

JENNIFER WATTS: I think in response to that, we actively engage with many people in the delivery and design of our programs. As I mentioned in the beginning, we do a very intensive needs assessment with every client who comes through our doors.

Last year we served over 10,000 clients - we gather that information. Because we're a wraparound service, our employment team is always talking to our language teams, because people come in with different needs and different cohorts have different needs. To design static programs is not going to be responsive and flexible to what immigration needs to be to move forward.

We also know that when we have humanitarian crises, they represent a new important response that needs to be tailored and flexible. We have found generally that the response in our engagement with the Province has been very good in terms of defining what labour market need is because we also work a lot with employers, and employers often come to us saying, we have a desperate need for programs. So we sit down, we talk about programs, we work with our partners both in IPG and other provincial departments to develop tailored, specific programs to meet labour market need.

One of the big issues that we find around retention - the key one - is the sense of belonging. It's about people feeling the connection here, because anywhere in Canada, there's going to be a housing crisis, no one's going to have a doctor. I mean, it's not unique to Nova Scotia, so, really, retaining people here in the province of Nova Scotia is about people feeling that they see their future here, and they have the sense of belonging. A lot of it is about building welcoming communities, and we do that in partnership with community groups, employers, the academic community.

There's a whole bunch of people who play a role in that - no one group carries that by itself. That's a lot of our work which is supported by IPG around welcoming communities, building culturally competent workplaces, which is really key.

KENDRA COOMBES: I want to go back to where people have said that they didn't access services because they didn't know they existed, or they were not available in the area the individuals were living in - often outside of Halifax - or were unable to get appointments with the service provider.

I'm wondering if the department can really speak to this. What is being done to ensure that people do have access wherever they are in the province, are able to get appointments, but, first of all, even know it exists?

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: It is something that we're definitely working very hard on. A couple of years ago, when we did our stayers and leavers research, it identified that communication piece. What more can we do to make people know that our settlement services are available? Not everyone needs it. We do have economic provincial programs, that's what we do here, so people are coming with the means to set up a life for themselves, but they still may need that community connectedness. The person who's not the principal applicant, the spouse or the children, might need some additional language supports, so we are aware that there are some settlement requirements there.

What we started doing after that research was when we nominate an individual, we actually provide them communication about settlement services. It seemed like a simple change, but it has seemed to make a difference. Since that time, another change that's happened is that we are now getting more newcomers in more rural areas in Nova Scotia, which is fantastic.

It's something that we've worked really, really hard to achieve: to spread immigration and that diversity and innovation throughout our province, and we're being successful now. That means we also need to provide the supports around the province, so our navigators are a really great tangible outcome that we've had from there. We have six navigators across our province, and they can not only provide that connectivity, but they can connect the services in the areas to make sure that people know where to go to get the right type of supports that they need.

KENDRA COOMBES: I want to talk about the annual audited financial statements not being required. Working with community and community organizations, even for small grants, they have to provide every year their audited statements to government. This is a lot of money happening here, and it said in the report that the annual audit statements were not required. I have a concern for that, because small organizations like Lions Clubs or seniors and pensioners clubs and stuff like that have to continuously provide their audited statements every year. These big organizations that are doing this, whether it's the Cape

Breton or Halifax partnerships - why haven't they been required to happen every year with this amount of money?

[9:45 a.m.]

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: We use a system called Glimpse that has a process for evaluating our grants and contributions, and we ensure we get financial statements, pay stubs, and different documents to ensure that our funding is being used in the way that is required. ISANS would have audited financial statements by an auditor who is - there's a charge to that as well.

One thing we want to do with our funding is ensure that cultural community groups can participate in settlement as well, that they can help newcomers settle in communities because they can help people find that connectivity in communities. We are going to enhance our requirements of financial audits as suggested and recommended in the report; however, the independently verified audit might be a step too far. It might preclude some of these groups from actually participating, so we are a little bit cautious there.

We're going to pay close attention to make sure that we are doing the due diligence we need to make sure that the money is being used wisely while not precluding groups from actually participating.

KENDRA COOMBES: Also in the report, the Auditor General found that there was no training planned for staff responsible for assessing applications to the Nova Scotia Nominee Program or the Atlantic Immigration Program. Management has not assessed the training needs of staff as well.

Is the department working on a training program? What kind of training program is it going to be? I know we all take this thing online, but it's not real training, as far as I'm concerned. That little video that we get to do stuff is not adequate training. I don't think it's even appropriate training for types of things like fraud and understanding fraud or doing sensitivity training and cultural relevance training.

What specific types of program training is the government planning, and when will it be in place?

THE CHAIR: We have just under four minutes left. Ms. L'Esperance.

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: This is an important recommendation for us as well, because we are growing. Again, we have big plans and we are growing to make sure that we're meeting our commitments.

I can assure you that individuals in our office are trained. They have orientation, they have onboarding, they have training for their individual needs. The Auditor General

found that of the large amount of time they spent in our office looking at all of our applications, they were assessed correctly. All decisions were made in the way that they should have been made. They found that 90 compliance and investigation reviews were completed, and they all came to a reasonable conclusion and were dealt with accordingly.

However, we do not have one consistent training manual for our whole office that would account for every position and the requirements that are needed for every position, and that's the thing that we're working on now. I don't have off the top of my head specifically the date that we set for implementation, but it's going to take some time because we do want to do it right.

As you suggested, not all training is as effective as we need it to be, and this is important. This is people's personal information that we're assessing. We want to do it with care and make sure it has the care that it needs to get to the right decision, so we'll be making sure that training plan is comprehensive and really addresses every single position in our office.

KENDRA COOMBES: I was actually going to hand it off to my colleague, but then you said something that I want to unpack a little bit. The Auditor General said in the report that when they took a number of files and went through them, they found that there were various degrees of application processes - whether there were reasons as to why somebody was denied, and there was a full documentation, others just had "Denied." There was nothing that was set. There was no "This is the form, this is how you do it, these are the appropriate steps that you need to take."

When you said they were found done correctly, there didn't seem to be actually a process for how they're supposed to be done correctly. Do you understand what I'm saying? I can't find it now, I just lost it, but in the report the Auditor General did state that this was an issue.

How can we say these documents were done correctly when there didn't seem to be, when the review was done, actually a set correct way to do it?

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: All assessments have an assessment form. It's very clear in the criteria that need to be met. However, there were some assessment forms that if it said, "Language needs to be a CLB 5," some had a checkmark and others had, "Language has been reviewed and it is a CLB 5." That was the inconsistency.

The correct decisions were being made, so it wasn't resulting in incorrect decisions. But those assessment forms could have a process document behind them that would ensure that the way that they were assessed is more consistent, and that's what we'll be working on.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you for the clarity. I appreciate that clarity on what we're discussing, so thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: My questions are going to be around labour shortages. I spent some time living in Alberta when we had labour shortages, and when there were labour shortages, wages go up and increase your cost of living. I think we have the lowest unemployment rate since 1974, which is a good thing, some would argue, and the highest full-time employment rate, I think, maybe ever. Besides that, there are a couple of things I want to talk about - in particular, labour shortages. Can you discuss the current labour shortages and how your department is addressing them?

AVA CZAPALAY: Certainly, it's not lost to any of us here in this room that we still have jobs without people and people without jobs. Even with the low unemployment rate, we are contacted all the time by employers and employer association, and various groups asking us, "Can you find us people?" Everything from, "I need someone to come unload a truck."

One employer told us that he would have 25 people invited to show up some morning to unload a truck, and maybe two would show up and one would quit before the truck was unloaded. There are stories like that, and you would hear all those stories, I'm sure.

We are very well aware that we need a wide array of labour, not just skilled labour. We need all kinds of labour here in Nova Scotia, and if we're growing our population, we need to be very well aware of where those labour requirements are and also being aware of what the needs are in various jurisdictions throughout Nova Scotia.

I mentioned in our initial remarks that we've had a marketing campaign under way for the last year - 12 months - really focusing on skilled trades and on health care workers. That's not to say we haven't had a wide array of other workers indicate an interest in the opportunities in Nova Scotia, but really focussing on skilled trades and health care workers is a priority for us. We also work with the sector associations, various employer groups, the Regional Enterprise Networks just to get a really solid understanding of what the labour shortages are today, what they might be tomorrow, and whether those shortages are inhibiting potential growth in different regions.

With respect to immigration and population growth, that can be a solution. If an employer looks locally and does not find the labour that they need to complete the jobs that they have available, then they can turn to immigration. Oftentimes, they'll reach out to Jennifer or a member of her team and talk things through and indicate what kinds of workers they need and the type of work. Our immigration programs are economic

programs, and employers need to be offering someone a full-time permanent job 12 months of the year.

Jennifer and her team have come up with a whole variety of solutions, working with different organizations to help them meet their labour market needs through immigration.

NOLAN YOUNG: I have an analogy. I think Nova Scotians are like homing pigeons, and we all want to come home. In fact, I'm no different, right? I spent many years out west, and I look at friends and family who have moved back because of the good-paying jobs we have, not only in Halifax but in rural Nova Scotia. I do see growth in rural Nova Scotia. I walk down the street, there's all kinds of new families that we've welcomed into the area, and that's a really great thing.

You did mention the health care sector, and I think MLA Maguire did as well. What are we doing to reduce barriers for new Canadians wishing to work in the health care sector?

JENNIFER WATTS: As I mentioned earlier, the pathway for people to have their qualifications recognized has been a long-term project that we've been working with in the province. We've seen many new developments in terms of reducing those barriers. As I mentioned before, it's about the systemic barriers of working with the actual professional bodies to reduce that. We've had huge success, particularly with engineers and developing programs and moving forward.

We've been very active both with international medical graduates - so doctors and nurses - and also working to address the need around medical lab technologists. Those are kind of the three big areas that we hear a lot about. That is about developing specific programs that help them gain their training - go through the prep for exams to learn about what the situation is at the actual workplace to develop and improve their language skills. Particularly for nurses, this is a very big issue. They have a very high level of English language skill that they need to have through the CELBAN, so we have very targeted programs to assist that. We have fabulous feedback from clients who've gone through.

I was just reading one story about an internationally educated nurse in Baddeck who went through the program, because we're able to deliver these programs virtually. I think in response to some of the previous questions about how does this actually impact across the province, we do a lot of our program delivery virtually, and also go in person when it's important to do that.

Through that type of program, she was actually able to gain the confidence, but she also said about understanding what it's like to work in the hospital by connecting with nurses here. We mentor and match people working here - doctors and nurses - with incoming folks, so that they get that kind of soft cultural communication skill

understanding. It's some very hard skill development, but also soft skill development that really enables people to move forward.

We're seeing some very significant movement forward. I would say particularly in the past year around international medical graduates, there have been some very key changes in the province about enabling people to move forward on having their credentials recognized.

Certainly there's a lot more work. We recognize that, and we're very actively involved. But I think a lot of partners are coming to the table to work on this, because we understand the need around meeting the health care shortages in terms of medical staff, and really responding through the immigrants who are very interested in coming and staying here and putting roots down here - to making that successful for them.

NOLAN YOUNG: Just one more. When we formed government, we brought together immigration and labour and skills into one department. I'm just wondering how we can expect this new structure to better allow us to understand labour market needs through immigration.

AVA CZAPALAY: Well, from my perspective, it was a great move. It works really well. It makes a lot of sense to have immigration tied into labour, especially everything we've talked about this morning in terms of attracting the labour that we need from other countries and from the rest of Canada to come here and meet our job requirements here in Nova Scotia.

Jen L'Esperance has the benefit of the labour market economists who are with our policy branch in Labour, Skills and Immigration. She has the benefit of working with our skills and learning branch. That would be the Nova Scotia Works programs that have offices in 53 locations throughout Nova Scotia helping people be job-ready and get the training and skills they need.

Jen works closely with the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency - you were waiting for me to probably mention your favourite - attracting skilled workers and helping people make sure that their credentials are transferable in skilled labour.

In short, it's been very beneficial. Our department has 500-plus people, and Jen's branch has 58, or almost 60. She's part of a bigger pool of resources within government all focused on helping people connect to work.

NOLAN YOUNG: I just want to say thank you very much for the information. That's awesome work. I'll pass it over to my colleague Mr. Smith.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Smith.

[10:00 a.m.]

KENT SMITH: Thank you again to the witnesses for being here. I want to start by just maybe highlighting a couple of the differences between my constituency and that of my colleague for Halifax Atlantic. I don't wish to be contrary - we're all trying to get along and be nice in this committee - but I just wanted to say that a couple of things that he experiences in his constituency are different than mine.

We have a housing navigator on the Eastern Shore who has been with us for over a year. She is gainfully employed, she works closely with my office - no indication that she's planning on quitting or anything like that anytime soon. She's excited when she gets to help a newcomer or any constituent for that matter.

To that end, we also have a Ukrainian family who wanted to move to rural. It's a mom and two kids who came to rural Nova Scotia. I don't know if they were interested in heading to the downtown core. I think they were familiar with rural living, and that's where they wanted to be. It's a real feel-good story, because the mom actually ended up working at our local tourist museum for the Summer in Musquodoboit Harbour, and then upon the completion of the Summer, she ended up getting a job at the local school. It's a feel-good story that she's come to rural and contributing to our economy, and was resourceful in finding housing for herself.

We do have a target of increasing retention from 71 per cent to 75 per cent, as highlighted in the AG Report. What are we doing to help families like this Ukrainian family who want to be in rural, who want to be here and contribute to our economy? What are we doing to keep her and to increase the retention rate by almost 5 per cent?

AVA CZAPALAY: I think Minister Balsler has been the biggest voice on welcoming communities and retention. When I first started as deputy minister for the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, I remember asking Jen about the retention rate and finding out it was 71 per cent and going, what? Then Jen quickly assured me that it's the best in Atlantic Canada, and close to two other provinces in the rest of Canada - Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

I look at the 29 per cent who are not being retained, and probably with various stories about maybe they weren't happy or maybe they didn't have a good experience. We are very laser focused on increasing our retention rate. We said to 75 per cent, but we would like to obviously increase it by much more than that.

You point out the navigators, and that brings up a really important feature. That personal connection to communities is what will help ensure that each individual has a good experience and stays here. Yes, we have myriad navigators in housing and health navigators, and we have our navigators and so on. What it really boils down to is recognition that it's a personal contact. It's someone who is willing to be helpful and

connect someone to a service or an opportunity that they need to be connected with in order to settle here and to enjoy their life here.

Minster Balsler has been on a bit of a speaking tour, really putting out the word that this can't be just staff in Immigration and Population Growth who call for welcoming communities. It needs to be our settlement associations. It needs to be our MLAs. It needs to be our employer groups, our sector associations, our workplaces, and our cultural associations. We need to wrap our arms around these newcomers and say, we want you, you're welcome, please stay. Don't leave because a neighbour didn't come over and introduce themselves. Don't leave because you're lonely or that you were bullied at work. Anything like that.

We have taken a lot of measures. In our AIP program, we've introduced a required cultural competency program that's online for all employers to take to make sure that workplaces are as welcoming as they can be. We're really just calling on everyone to help us out with this message - that Nova Scotia is truly welcoming, and we want newcomers to stay.

KENT SMITH: I certainly appreciate that. Again, in my constituency we have the Musquodoboit Harbour & Area Chamber of Commerce & Civic Affairs, and we have the Sheet Harbour Chamber of Commerce & Civic Affairs. Those two organizations in those rural communities are actively helping, trying to attract and retain not only health care workers - which is what we need on the Eastern Shore more than anything - but a new workforce in general.

I'll turn my attention just briefly to Ms. Watts, perhaps, who can answer this question for me. I'm interested in the difference between the Atlantic Immigration Program and the Nova Scotia Provincial Nominee Program, and how we're using those assets to the best of our abilities.

THE CHAIR: Ms. L'Esperance.

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: We do have two provincial economic programs: The Atlantic Immigration Program and the Provincial Nominee Program. The Atlantic Immigration Program is really a federal program that we administer the employer portion of that program. The Provincial Nominee Program is a joint jurisdiction, but we have the ability to select the candidates that we need in our economy, and that we need for our employers as well.

We do use them very strategically. The Atlantic Immigration Program has been a fantastic asset to really spread newcomers across the province. Because it is employer led, newcomers are going to where the employers need them most, and in many times, that is to rural Nova Scotia.

To date this year, about half of our endorsements or candidate applications that have come through AIP are, in fact, outside of Halifax. That's a huge benefit to rural Nova Scotia because traditionally, newcomers - about 80 per cent - come to Halifax, so it really has been fantastic there. The Atlantic Immigration Program also requires an individual settlement plan for each candidate. That is where ISANS and other organizations do support that for us. Then with our Provincial Nominee Program, we have a little bit more flexibility with the streams. That's where we can really look at those labour needs.

For example - and I know the Auditor General pointed this out as well - during COVID-19, we realized that we needed more cleaners in hospital, so we looked at what that occupational code was and we added it to a stream we call Occupations in Demand where for lower skilled workers, it would not require that worker to work with the employer for six months before being able to be eligible for our programs. So we could recruit directly overseas, like those accommodations that we've made for transport truck drivers and continuing care assistants. We also have two specific physician streams with our Provincial Nominee Program, so that's where we could be really innovative and responsive - very, very responsive.

We have a fantastic relationship with the federal government. We negotiate, and they allow us to be quite responsive with our programs to identify those labour needs, and make those adjustments where needed. Then the Atlantic Immigration Program is employer driven.

I will mention one more thing about the Atlantic Immigration Program. It has this unique asset where international graduates don't need work experience before coming through the program. That's really unique to Atlantic Canada. It's an attraction mechanism that we can use to say that if you're an international graduate here, yes, you have access to your post-grad work permit, but you don't need to work on that for a year before coming into our programs, as you would in most other provinces.

KENT SMITH: I'm just going to ask one quick follow-up. Ms. L'Esperance, you mentioned 80 per cent immigrants coming to Halifax. Can you give me a breakdown on that? Is that Halifax proper? Because there's a lot of discussion in my neck of the woods that Halifax - HRM - goes all the way to Ecum Secum. When we talk about 80 per cent going to Halifax, are we looking at the downtown core, and do you consider the rural parts of the HRM?

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: It is Halifax County, so the larger Halifax rather than the Halifax city, yes.

KENT SMITH: Thank you. I would love to see as much of a breakdown as you possibly could. It'd be interesting for me and my constituency.

That concludes my line of questioning. I believe my colleagues have some more.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Palmer.

CHRIS PALMER: I just want to quickly expand on the comments made by my friend, Mr. Smith, in regard to the welcoming nature of rural Nova Scotia communities. I represent Berwick and Kingston. There have been many families who were part of those first flights welcoming Ukrainians back in the early Spring. I'm very pleased and proud of the work that's being done with families. I know I've been in communication with the YREACH coordinator in through the Valley. They've been a great resource.

Could you maybe elaborate a bit more? We might run out of time, but I may come back in another round. Can you elaborate on some of the work that's been happening with regard to the Ukrainian settlement, and maybe elaborate a bit on what we've already discussed? Any more details on that, please?

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: We've taken the welcoming and settlement of Ukrainian newcomers very seriously. We have been recognized across the country for the fast and flexible response that we've had. We've never seen anything like this. People coming from Ukraine are coming on a temporary authorization for travel, which is not as a permanent resident or as a refugee, so the eligibility for services is different than other newcomers who are coming.

We've had across-government response with our education and our health care colleagues, and Community Services to make sure that these newcomers can access the services that other newcomers can. I can also assure you that there have been a lot of efforts to make sure that there are safe places to stay for all Ukrainian newcomers as well. There have been temporary accommodations that have been provided to make sure that people have that emergency of response that's needed.

We have a booth at the airport to welcome people. We've worked with ISANS, as well as YREACH, our YMCA program colleagues. There's a website that you can go on at the YREACH site that people can say if they'd like to support Ukrainians, employers can say if they have jobs, and Ukrainians can also register to say if they'd like to have that support.

The coordination around this has really been something that I know has been looked at across the country. That's why we were able to get one of the three chartered flights that the federal government had, which came to Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for PC questioning has elapsed. We'll now do our second round, which will involve each caucus having nine minutes. Mr. Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you for being here today and answering questions. We only have a few minutes, so I need some direct answers, please. Do you feel right now that the Province is in a position to support - and by the Province, I mean our systems. Are

they in a situation to support 25,000 newcomers to this province a year and 2,000,000 people by 2060? Just yes or no - do you feel like they're in a situation to support that?

AVA CZAPALAY: It's our hope that as we grow our population, the systems will grow as well. Bringing in the job-ready people we need to contribute to our labour market means that we're bringing in people who will add to our tax base. As our tax base grows - in order to support that growing population right through to 2060, as you mentioned, we need to grow our infrastructure.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Growing our tax base is kind of putting the cart before the horse. I'll give you a good example. Right now, Elizabeth Sutherland School in my community is over capacity and they just got from Halifax Regional Centre for Education that they now have to have the modules. So that school does not have the capacity to bring in new people. Rockingstone Heights School is at capacity and does not have the potential to bring in new people - also J.L. Ilsley, William King Elementary, Sambro Elementary School.

To say that bringing in new immigrants will grow the tax that government receives is absolutely correct, but there needs to be a sizeable investment before they come, right? There would need to be a sizeable investment in housing, and there would need to be a sizeable investment in education.

We just saw in one of the committee meetings where the President of NSTU, Ryan Lutes, just said that they're in a crisis situation. We saw from Dr. Lynk and Dr. Strang that health care is the worst - Dr. Lynk actually said he's being doing this from the 90s, and that the IWK is the worst he's ever seen it.

Has the department worked with the government to say we need this much investment in infrastructure before we bring people in to ensure that they are successful, and that Nova Scotians continue to be successful? Because bringing them in and hoping that our systems survive - where they're barely surviving now - is not going to work.

AVA CZAPALAY: For us, we go back to the predictability. We know that this year we're going to exceed the 25,000 a year that we need to reach the 2,000,000 by 2060, and we believe that we're on track to exceed that next year as well. The 25,000 per year is that predictability.

Then we're working with our community contacts throughout Nova Scotia to make sure that people see options throughout Nova Scotia - not just in HRM, but also in other centres throughout the province, including rural Nova Scotia. Not every school in Nova Scotia is at capacity, so where are the schools that have the capacity? Helping people understand where the jobs are, and maybe looking at jobs where there are the other community supports that they need depending on their family configuration.

[10:15 a.m.]

As I mentioned before, we're working with people, navigators, to communicate with newcomers to say these are the assets in this community, do you want to come here? Then helping people arrive at the decision as to whether or not they want to come based on what's available.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm just using schools, for an example. We've heard from teachers, the union, and from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development that our schools are stretched thin. When you're making these decisions, you're making them based on some of these things. Which areas have schools that are not over capacity, where new immigrants can come in and be able to be part of those school systems?

AVA CZAPALAY: The very first thing that an immigrant needs in order to come through one of our programs is a job offer. When they have a job offer, then they have to assess, what else do I need in order to settle? Are they coming by themselves? Are they working remotely? Are they bringing a family? What are the size, age and configuration of the family? As you can appreciate, there's a multitude of scenarios there.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Respectfully, this wasn't about the process. Respectfully, the question was: Which areas have school capacity?

AVA CZAPALAY: Respectfully back, immigration population growth is about bringing people here and working hard to help people see what opportunities are in the communities where they have job opportunities, and communicating across all of our departments what our growth will be in the coming year so that the departments know.

People are driven by job opportunities and will choose communities where they have those opportunities. They will decide what kinds of supports and structures that they need - also working with the settlement associations.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I would argue that it's not just about jobs. It's also about housing. It's also about education. It's also about health care. Like I said, we've heard stories about new immigrants who have been homeless to immigrants who are nine and ten people to a two-bedroom. They are going to leave. When we speak to them, they are going to leave. That's what they say to me. The moment I can afford it, I'm leaving Nova Scotia for a place where it's more affordable and I don't have four kids to one bed. That's what's happening. That's not just in Halifax, that's all over the place.

Also, we do have a housing crisis from one tip of Nova Scotia to the next. It's not just in HRM. We know that it's everywhere. If you go to Amherst or you go to Cape Breton or you go to Yarmouth, there's a housing crisis. What I'm trying to get at, and I'm finding

it very difficult to get this answer - again, this isn't on you, but you are part of the solution, I'll say.

We need to know that when new immigrants come to this province, that they're properly set up to succeed so they stay. Part of that is having a comprehensive plan around housing, education, health care, and jobs. Is there a comprehensive plan?

Your department should be at the centre of this to ensure that when someone comes in that they're set up properly and that the resources are there. If there isn't - which we know that there's a crisis - what is the investment that needs to be made to ensure that these new immigrants to our province succeed?

AVA CZAPALAY: Jennifer Watts, did you want to answer part of that question?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Watts.

JENNIFER WATTS: We work very hard when people come to us. If you remember my mentioning about the intake need assessment about strategies to help people figure out how to settle here, we also look in that needs assessment as to who is coming with them, in reference to comments about how to have that family settle and anchor into the community. Really, it is a very interesting and difficult place to be, but it's also a really interesting challenge that the answer to the crises, I firmly believe, in housing and health care are immigrants.

We're in a very tight spot, but to get to that other spot is going to be successful because of the people who come in and provide this very key, strategic work. When you look at the construction industry, it's everyone from the engineers and project managers down to labourers and tradespeople. Everyone in that sector needs to come in.

We develop strategies, we work with people, we help them network into the community. It's a very tactile approach that we have. I think what we hear is that people want to stay and . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. Time for the Liberal questioning has elapsed. We'll now move on to the NDP with Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you thus far for all of the answers.

I do agree with my colleague that it is tricky to sort of drive at this system problem. We know that we lack housing, we lack capacity in education, we lack capacity in health care, and yet we want to bring lots of people in. I totally, 100 per cent, want to bring people in. I just want to make sure they stay because they land well.

I have a few questions about that, but I want to dig down a little bit more specifically on a couple of things that may have already been touched on before I got here. One critical hurdle - and I have a few examples I can talk about around this - is the issue with public health insurance. Because folks don't have insurance - they have to be here a year before they get an MSI card - it leaves a significant group of people unable to access health care.

I understand for certain people, when they are attached to a job the employer then pays for private medical insurance for a certain amount of time. I know that happens with temporary foreign workers. But my understanding is that the insurance is actually not that good, and there's like a \$100,000 max on it. If you have a serious illness while you're here, then that's a big issue.

There are people who have not yet been granted permanent residency, babies in Nova Scotia born to parents who are not eligible for MSI, children and spouses of people who have been granted refugee status but who themselves were excluded, and temporary foreign workers.

Direct question: Is the department working with the Department of Health and Wellness to expand access to MSI?

THE CHAIR: Ms. L'Esperance.

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: We do economic programs. The programs that we have at Immigration and Population Growth are people to come and stay in Nova Scotia for the long term. When they apply to our office, they most of the time have a job offer and they are supported with their employer. We can provide a letter of support for a work permit, as well as a nomination for permanent residence.

The letter of support for the work permit will get them a work permit that is at least a year in duration, and normally two years, as long as their passport is also at least two years out. If your work permit is at least a year in duration - this is my understanding of a system that is not ours - my understanding is that you would get access to MSI upon landing.

I believe that the people who are not eligible for MSI would be the people who do not have work permits that are at least a year in duration. Those would mainly be temporary foreign workers, so employers that would be supporting temporary foreign workers would have that in their plan in terms of attracting them and using that federal temporary foreign worker program.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Recognizing that you are the department that does the work programs, this is the thing that we come up against at Public Accounts Committee all the time: "We're the department that does [this]" and "They're the department that does . . ."

Everybody talks about how they don't want to be siloed and all the deputy ministers are meeting with each other and all of that. Yet it seems strange that if we are trying to attract 25,000 people a year, we wouldn't have a table of the Deputy Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Deputy Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration, the Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness, where people are going, "Okay, what do we do? How do we work together so that this particular person" - so it's person centred - "has all of the things they need?"

That being said, if someone gets a work permit for a year, does that mean their family is covered as well under MSI? Or is it just the worker?

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: It would be accessible for the full family, yes.

SUSAN LEBLANC: That's helpful, but it seems to me that there are people falling through the cracks. I will give an example of someone who came to my office the other day. She was a temporary foreign worker. We have no way of supporting her as she goes through a medical crisis. She's been let go from her job that she was brought here to do, therefore has no medical coverage. She was let go because she's sick. She became sick while she was here.

So she has a choice of paying hundreds of thousands of dollars for a medical treatment in Canada or going back to her home country where she will also pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for medical treatment, or just never get the treatment she needs because she can't do that. If this is the signal we're sending to folks, it doesn't feel super welcoming. Can we address that issue?

I wanted to ask about building welcoming communities, and this is part of it. I will say that in my community, often people come in who are European descent who carry myths with them about newcomers - that newcomers get their rent paid for, that newcomers are taking all the jobs. I know you know these myths. What work is the department doing - and ISANS as well - to prevent those myths from taking hold before people are welcomed into a community? Is there a scenario where I can invite ISANS to Dartmouth North to do a workshop or whatever? How does that work?

JENNIFER WATTS: Absolutely. We'd love to come. We receive funding from IPG, and other funders as well, to do a series of different types of workshops. They would include the Welcome Ambassador Program, which works with community people to help them develop the strength and skills to be able to work in their own local communities to take on a project.

We have intercultural workshops, which are delivered in a variety of different ways and topics, tailored to the need of the community and the workplace. We also have a very active team that works with employers and talks about building workplace culture in the workplace so that people are addressing and feeling more comfortable, and engaging in

discussion. We have a variety of different programs tailored to different groups and needs, and we're very happy to be involved in that.

Through work with a variety of partners, we have also developed a positive messaging campaign, so getting out beforehand. We're not waiting for initiative to come up in the community, but positive messaging about immigration in very key ways. We have a very strong communication team that does a lot of social media work around explaining immigration - the numbers.

Also, we take very seriously our commitment and work with the Indigenous community around reconciliation and understanding that the majority of us are immigrants. We may have forgotten our story about being immigrants, but the majority of us are immigrants and we need to understand our own place within that. I think that's huge - that whole opening up and understanding of culture, of understanding and respecting across many different breadths of our whole community is going to help build that.

That's not the lift of any one group. That is a whole society lift in terms of really responding about what does it mean to have a sense of belonging, and really working to respect that diversity and supporting inclusion. We're very, very interested in connecting.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc, you have 15 seconds.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Oh my gosh. (Laughter) Well, the CCPA put out a report in 2021 that sort of refutes all of the things you were saying when you were answering questions of the Progressive Conservatives . . .

THE CHAIR: The time for NDP questioning has elapsed. Now over to the PC caucus with Mr. Palmer.

CHRIS PALMER: Just a quick general question. The Auditor General indicated that the collection of the report and getting that together was good collaboration and working relationship with the department. It's been over a year now since the work began on some of those recommendations. Just maybe highlight two or three changes and the progress that's been made within your department pertaining to those recommendations - maybe a top two or three snapshot?

AVA CZAPALAY: I'll start, and maybe Jen L'Esperance can add to my response. We always strive to have a good working relationship with the Auditor General's staff when they work with our department. I believe this audit was more than two years. I was half-joking with the Auditor General that we were going to recruit some of her staff - they know our operation well.

It's a collaborative effort. We want to assist them in getting what they need to do a comprehensive audit, and we also want to comply with their recommendations to the fullest

of our ability. We see the whole process as strengthening our branch at a time when it needs strengthening, because we are growing rapidly, and if we are to achieve the two million by 2060, we need a solid infrastructure behind that growth.

[10:30 a.m.]

I just wanted to add that as a preliminary, and then maybe ask Jen to talk about the specifics in terms of some immediate implementations.

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: I do want to echo that we did look at this as a fantastic opportunity to strengthen as we grow. We have a really great group of staff. There's a lot of peer support amongst our staff and peer training, but as we grow, you can't lean on that as much as we used to. We really need that infrastructure behind it to ensure that as new people come on, there's consistency among the process. That is something that we've absolutely begun as we grow our staff.

Another great example is that we have just released our call for proposals for our next settlement round of funding, and the way that we will administer that call for proposals is very different from the way that we have administered in the past. For example, we will have a conflict of interest that is a third line of signing for anyone who's on the review committee to ensure that there's no conflict of anyone reviewing those proposals that come in. There was previous government conflict of interest, but knowing the sensitive information that we deal with, it's again just one heightened piece of awareness.

As of today, there's currently an anonymous fraud reporting system. You can find that on our website. Anyone can go onto that and report any fraud that they might be aware of in the provincial immigration system - anyone who's falsifying documents or taking payment for jobs. We want to know, because we need to counteract that in any way we can. That ability to do that anonymously is now in place because of the work of the Auditor General.

We've also recently completed fraud training with all of our staff. Previously, that might have been for our programs division or for the investigations and compliance unit, but there's been a recognition that from the person who is our receptionist to myself, we all need that fraud awareness training. That is now being completed across the board.

For those policies that we need to link together and the documentation and the full training plan, it's going to take some time, because we really want to make sure we get it done right. But the individual pieces have really begun as of today.

CHRIS PALMER: I will now pass it on to my colleague, Mr. Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: I just want to say this has been a really interesting and informative discussion here. I'm particularly happy to hear the results of rural Nova Scotia. Sometimes they aren't seen - they're not as obvious.

The question that's come to my mind mostly sitting here listening to this and learning is, there are a lot of questions with legitimate concerns that may or may not be created by immigration. I just want to ask whoever the right person is: Where would we be 10 years from now? I understand there are a lot of challenges today, but where would we be 10 years from now if we were not doing what we're doing today to try to increase the population of Nova Scotia?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Czapalay, four minutes.

AVA CZAPALAY: I might end up taking all four minutes. We know that with our natural population in Nova Scotia, the death rate is higher than the birth rate. If we did nothing, our population would shrink for sure. Also, we need to work hard to ensure that all youth who live here see a future here, and that future is through connecting to employment and having thriving communities. We see that ensuring that youth are connected to training and to education opportunities, and see job opportunities here at home, that's really important.

Statistics Canada came out with their official report - it's every July. What they showed year-on-year is from last July to this July, our population grew by 28,860 people. I'm fond of saying the staff told me not to say this, but that's a Sydney. Not the greater Sydney - it's a Sydney. When you think about that, in a normal year if we did absolutely nothing, the population would decrease. Instead, with all of our collective efforts - and I mean everyone in the room - our population increased by 28,860.

In addition to that, we lowered the median age of Nova Scotians. We have the actual number. But that's unheard of. Statistics Canada called it a dramatic decrease. It was sort of within a one-point - we lowered it from something like 44.6 to 44.1 or something. So our population is no longer aging.

Those two things combined are what give me hope that there's a future for everyone here in Nova Scotia. You know the communities. I know them well. Mum's in Parrsboro, and I grew up in Barrington Passage. I know rural Nova Scotia, and I know what those communities are doing to try to survive. They need newcomers. They're not short of entrepreneurial ideas. They're not short of the grit that it takes to carve out a living in rural Nova Scotia, but they need newcomers to add to that population base. I see the richness of our rural population, and our rural communities will only benefit from increased population growth.

TOM TAGGART: Thank you very much. Before I pass it over to MLA Sheehy-Richard, I just want to make this comment: As my children grew up, we fought to keep our

school open - declining enrolment every year. The last two years in that little junior high in Bass River have increased enrolment by, like, 20 per cent. I just think that's amazing. Sorry, thanks for the time.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Sheehy-Richard, you have less than one minute.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Again, I always look forward to when your department comes, because I can feel the passion in your work.

I'm probably just going to make a comment - I'm excited to hear a little bit more about bridging gaps and the numbers that we're seeing in them and moving forward. Maybe a presentation in my community would be something, too - that piqued my interest.

Again, I thank you. It's just so positive. The fact that we're two years post and you've already made some incredible improvements and are willing to work toward the rest of them is happy to hear. We learn to give some credit where credit is due. Thank you for that good work.

THE CHAIR: Five seconds - anybody want to answer? (Laughter) The time for questioning has elapsed. I want to thank our witnesses for coming here today. Do you have any closing remarks?

Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: I just want to thank the committee for keeping a sharp lens on this important topic. We've been here before on population growth and immigration. I just want to assure the committee that we appreciate the complexity of population growth and immigration and the need to proceed with care and proceed with collaboration, not only across government and all levels of government but with our settlement providers, with our community partners, to ensure that people not only come to Nova Scotia but stay here.

I really liked what MLA Leblanc said in terms of landing well. We want people to land well. I thank you for your interest and I feel your support.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Watts, did you have any final remarks?

JENNIFER WATTS: I think just to say two things. One thing that I did not highlight was the innovative programming around pre-arrival support. It is supported federally as well as provincially, which makes a huge difference. People arrive here better prepared and more able to do that. So that's a huge component to our programming as well.

I'd just like to end by saying that we have a huge gift in this province, and it's the people who are the staff people in the settlement community across this province. Everyone who works in a settlement agency day in and day out, responsive to the needs, especially

the humanitarian crises that we responded to and continue to do, have been incredibly beneficial and supportive. Often they're immigrants or refugees themselves. They really give a tremendous amount to making this a welcoming community

I just wanted to make sure that that is highlighted to this group about their incredible work and contribution. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Our witnesses are free to go. The committee is now going to move on to committee business. I would like to move on to, first of all, just getting the correspondence out of the way, and then we can move on to the subcommittee.

We did receive a letter on November 25th that resulted from our last meeting, where we had a number of questions that weren't answered. I just want to make sure that these are reflected in the record of this committee, because often we do get correspondence back and we don't sort of deal with it a whole lot more, so I'm just going to quickly summarize what was in the letter.

Question 1: "Currently, what is the average wait time for a child in the IWK Emergency Room to be seen?" The answer back was the average wait time to be seen by a physician at the IWK emergency department was 338 minutes. By my reckoning, that's 5.63 hours. The average wait time for emergency rooms across Nova Scotia: There's an appendix which I'm not going to summarize because it's big and long, but I do note the general trend is increasing.

If we look at Question 3, "In the last month, how many hours were ERs closed across Nova Scotia?", I do appreciate that we had a quick timeline for return. The attachment does not refer to the most recent month. It's from last fiscal, so I will actually request that. We'll give them more time to answer that one, but we would like to know what that is.

Notices of overcapacities that have come to the public for emergency rooms over the last month: There was one notice. The link is included. How many notices have been put out encouraging people not to visit emergency rooms because of being overstretched or understaffed? That's not answered. It just indicates the purpose of the message is to advise longer than wait times. That question was not answered.

When was the season's flu vaccine first made available? It indicates on October 22nd that happened. Deputy Minister Lagassé was following up with respect to the sufficiency of COVID child booster appointments. As of November 23rd, there were 500 appointments available for children aged 5 to 11 in the HRM area, and new appointments are being added to CANimmunize, and they recommend people check every few days for new appointments in their area.

Question 8 provided the updated figure on what we're spending with Maple. The question was whether it was still half a million dollars or was there more, and it indicates there are two separate contracts with Maple: providing virtual health services, and that was Nova Scotians on the Need a Family Practice Registry get free online medical appointments, and that contract with Maple is \$2 million per year, and VirtualEmergencyNS is a virtual care option delivered by emergency department physicians, and the overall budget for VirtualEmergencyNS is \$1.25 million for this year.

Then we move on to Question 9: What is the average cost of an ER visit using Maple, and is the department able to provide a cost comparison between an in-person appointment at an ER and a virtual care emergency? It says, "We do not have per visit cost associated with Virtual Emergency NS so far . . ." and it indicates there will be evaluations, so we may just ask for that evaluation when it is completed since that was really what the question was about.

Regarding updates on the interest in incentives for emergency room physicians: It says:

"While there are no incentives exclusively for the recruitment of ED physicians, nurses and nurse practitioners, Nova Scotia provides incentives for doctors who commit to working in rural parts of the province for five years."

The new Primary Care Physician Incentive Program encourages doctors to establish a family practice in rural communities. Doctors who qualify can earn up to \$125,000 in incentives-\$25,000 when they sign the agreement to provide service in a rural community and \$20,000 per year for the next five years."

Question No. 11: "Are there any newly recruited physicians working in emergency rooms now?" It indicates that "From April 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022, there were 19 new physicians for emergency medicine. Since April 2022, there have been 4 new physicians for emergency medicine." It notes that some physicians do emergency work part-time.

Question No. 12: "How many unvaccinated health care workers are not working right now?" The answer:

"At Nova Scotia Health, 127 permanent employees in the nursing, health care and support staff categories are on unpaid administrative leave due to incomplete or unreported vaccination status . . . At the IWK, seven permanent employees are on unpaid administrative leave due to incomplete or unreported vaccination status."

[10:45 a.m.]

Question No. 13: “How many Spring 2022 nursing graduates have been offered and accepted a job in the province?” It indicates Nova Scotia Health Authority has hired 344 graduate RN students, 117 graduate LPN students through the formal graduate intake program since December 2021. The majority of hires were permanent, full-time positions.

There were 245 Spring 2022 grads apply to work with Nova Scotia Health Authority, 163 were hired into supernumerary positions: Central Zone, 79; Eastern Zone, 37; Northern Zone, 25; and Western Zone, 18. They hired 37 to core vacancies; 36 declined offers - 12 accepted positions with the IWK, five relocated out of province; and nine applicants did not return calls or emails. It goes on. Ms. Coombes.

KENDRA COOMBES: I just have a question. It says 163 and then 37. Is that 163 total of the 37, do we know, or is that separate?

THE CHAIR: I don't know. We could actually inquire back about that.

KENDRA COOMBES: It's more just a question. I'm just curious.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I have a couple of questions here, because a lot of these questions weren't answered in full detail. I just wonder if we can, as a committee, reach back out to them. We need more detail on emergency rooms across Nova Scotia than just saying that it varies.

One of the questions that I'd asked when they said it varies was, how much was it this month, how much was it last month, how much was it for the year. If we could get specific times for the last couple of months in particular, that'd be great, because that was the question that I'd asked - Question No. 2. This answer does not answer the question that was put forward. It was the same thing they said to us that day.

Question No. 4 and Question No. 5 is actually - I don't know if it's incomplete or it's purposely not being answered. What I had asked was, how many notices had gone out telling people that there would be longer than usual wait times? That was not answered here. They said there was one, and that's frankly not true. Just a quick Twitter search will show you that's not true.

THE CHAIR: I think I think they probably understood a formal notice of overcapacity as a news release coming from Department of Health and Wellness or the Nova Scotia Health Authority or whatever versus something that goes out on Twitter. So I do think they did say there's one notice, but Question No. 5, I think you got to the nub of

it there. We didn't get an answer there, so I do agree that we need to have more information on that.

I will just remind the committee: We asked for a very quick turnaround on this, so we may not have gotten as fulsome an answer as we might have expected. I do think it's appropriate to just follow back to make sure that they're given appropriate time. I can certainly understand. They gave us, for example, the emergency room closures, the number of hours for the last fiscal, but they didn't have the most recent month. Mr. Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: For Question No. 13, the actual question wasn't how many people did they hire. It was more detailed than that. It was, how many graduated and how many of that graduating class were hired? I would ask that we follow up on that and find out how many individuals graduated in 2021, and how many of those individuals stayed in Nova Scotia. The response was that they didn't know. They should have the answer to how many individuals graduated across Nova Scotia for nursing. I ask that we follow up on them for that.

Also, the virtual care. Part of that was we asked what the wait time was for those calling in to virtual care and how many of those individuals have been given the advice to go to emergency room? That question wasn't answered either, so I ask that we follow up with that on the wait time for virtual care because I think it's very important. We're paying a company to do virtual care. I think it's very important that we find out what the wait times are for virtual care, and how many of those individuals who are calling virtual care are being sent to an emergency room or walk-in clinic. That was part of the question, and it wasn't answered here.

THE CHAIR: I will just say that when the clerk and I work on these letters that go back, the clerk goes back and listens to what was said exactly. We'll take a listen to what was said exactly before we respond, and ask for a little clarity on some of this.

Mr. Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: I just wanted to add, this just came out really, and I'm not able to click hyperlinks that are on this page. I just ask for more time to review before we make any decisions about additional questions. This is new, right?

THE CHAIR: It was sent out in our correspondence. It was sent on Friday because we asked for it to come back on Friday, so it did come on Friday and the hyperlinks would be there. I will just say that.

Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just wanted to say, Madam Chair, I appreciate you requesting this information in such a deliberate way - I don't want to say strict. You you

said what we wanted, and we got it. I think that's really helpful. Obviously, I think it's more helpful when witnesses are prepared to answer detailed questions, but I just wanted to appreciate that you asked for this information quickly and we got it quickly. There will be more to do and more to digest in it, but I think it's a really good start, and I appreciate it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr. Smith.

KENT SMITH: I would just say in response to my colleague and friend from Halifax Atlantic that it seems like Question No. 2 is answered in the appendix. The appendix has all of the ERs and all the wait times for the last four years, so I'm not sure what additional information we would be looking for as it goes year by year.

THE CHAIR: The question was for the last month, not for the last number of years.

KENT SMITH: It does have fiscal year 2023. I also contest that Question No. 5 is answered to the best of their ability. The question is, how many notices have been put out to encouraging people not to visit the emergency room; and the answer is, please don't hesitate to visit, but you might experience a longer than expected wait time.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: We're asking how many of those were sent out though.

KENT SMITH: And they answered one in Question No. 4.

THE CHAIR: Our information is that, in fact, there have been numerous alerts that have gone out.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I think they misunderstood the question.

THE CHAIR: I would agree, so I would say in the health authority's defense, they looked at how many news releases had gone out. However, we do know that there would have been alerts that went out over Twitter, that kind of thing. That was not included there, so it's an incomplete answer. We were asking for the number of times communities have been told we're over capacity, et cetera. We know it's more than one, so we do need that information.

The letter went out on 4:18 p.m. on Friday, so that was a number of days ago. I do think we have had time to digest that, so I will prepare a letter to get back to them for the rest of that information.

If we look at the November 28th letter - this was in response to Ms. Leblanc. She had asked for some information regarding budget planning from Nova Scotia Health Authority, and she said, "I would not be able to speak to a government department's budget planning, or resource allocation." I think the letter went to Nova Scotia Health Authority,

but it was about an education issue. I think Ms. Oldfield wouldn't have been able to speak to that. I could be wrong, and if there's further follow-up, please do raise it with me.

Mr. Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: I was just going to say, Madam Chair, with the utmost respect, looking at time, could we move back to the agenda sequentially as presented, please?

THE CHAIR: Absolutely. I think we're done here, so we'll move on.

Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedures Record of Decision: the subcommittee met and did discuss potential topics for future meetings. Members have been provided with the record of decision from this meeting, and I'd like to open the floor for discussion.

Mr. Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: I move that the committee adopt the topics and corresponding witnesses selected by the subcommittee on November 23, 2022, for upcoming Public Accounts Committee meetings.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just wanted to clarify - did we not say we were going to take actual names of people out, in case those positions had changed? I can't remember what we decided there.

THE CHAIR: I think that's in general, because there's so much movement right now. I do believe Ms. Leblanc is right that we needed to do that. We did do that in some places, and we didn't in others.

Mr. Smith.

KENT SMITH: For clarity then, we'll just keep all the titles the same and omit the person's name?

THE CHAIR: I think that makes sense.

With that one change - Mr. Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I second the motion.

THE CHAIR: You don't have to second the motion. (Laughter)

Is there any further discussion?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried - and a round of Kumbaya right now. (Laughter)

The other matter, I believe we are deferring to another day, so with that - any further discussion on anything?

I should let you know when our next meeting is. It is December 7th, in camera, with the Office of the Auditor General re: the 2022 Financial Report.

If there is no further business, I now adjourn the meeting. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 10:57 a.m.]