



**HALIFAX, THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 2023**

**SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE ON SUPPLY**

**3:40 P.M.**

**CHAIR**  
Kent Smith

THE CHAIR: Order. The Subcommittee on Supply will come to order. It is now 3:40 p.m. The subcommittee is meeting to consider the Estimates for the Department of Justice as outlined in Resolution No. E12.

**Resolution E12 - Resolved, that a sum not exceeding \$450,288,000 be granted to the Lieutenant Governor to defray expenses in respect of the Department of Justice, pursuant to the Estimate.**

I will now invite the Minister of Justice to make opening comments for up to an hour and, if they wish, introduce staff as well. The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Good afternoon, Chair, colleagues, and others who may be watching at home. I'm pleased to be here today to talk about the work of the Department of Justice and to speak about our priorities, as well as some of the challenges facing our department in the coming year. I look forward to sharing the significant work of this important government department, as well as the budget highlights for the Public Prosecution Service, Nova Scotia Legal Aid, and other agencies I have responsibility for.

I will say we originally expected to be before the committee next week; however, I am happy that we were able to accommodate the request to appear today. I am joined at the table by my Deputy Minister, Candace Thomas, and the department's Executive Director of Finance, Toyin Akindoju.

As Attorney General and Minister of Justice, I see the tremendous work our team does daily on behalf of Nova Scotians. The work we are involved in is significant. That's why I welcome this opportunity to answer questions about the investments being made in our justice system.

The Department of Justice is focused on keeping Nova Scotians and the communities we live in safe. We continue to address the impacts of human trafficking and domestic violence. We continue to take steps to eradicate anti-Black racism, as well as Indigenous and systemic discrimination in the justice system in partnership with communities, law enforcement, and our Justice partners. We are working hard to make our province more accessible so that all Nova Scotians, regardless of their disabilities, can live, work, and contribute to our province.

We are also fully engaged with the judiciary branch and other Justice partners to keep the courts running smoothly and effectively, and taking lessons learned from the pandemic to expand the use of technologies in the court system. Of course, one of our highest priorities for action over the short and long term will come from the Mass Casualty Commission Report.

Chair, 22 Nova Scotians lost their lives in a tragedy that even today is beyond belief. I can't state strongly enough how committed my senior management team and I are to take all the necessary steps with our federal colleagues to ensure that something like this never happens again.

Today the commission released its final report and recommendations after the unspeakable, heartbreaking event that shook our province and the entire country. The events of April 18 and 19, 2020, forever changed us as Nova Scotians. Our thoughts are with the families, the survivors, and the communities who have endured unimaginable pain. They are in our thoughts and they are close in our hearts.

We have said from the beginning that this process needed to get answers for the families and for all Nova Scotians, and I want to thank the commissioners and their teams for their work. Now it is turned over to us to take what we have learned and make our province safer.

The governments of Nova Scotia and Canada have a responsibility to act, to carefully consider the recommendations. There is much work to do, and we need to take the time to get this right. This will require a cross-government and intergovernmental response because the recommendations from the report call on all of us to address many of the root causes of violence, including intimate partner violence, as well as domestic violence, gender-based violence, gun violence, and the need for more mental health support.

We work closely with the federal government on those areas highlighted in the report that touch on areas of shared jurisdiction: gun violence and controlling cross-border access to firearms.

[3:45 p.m.]

We have not waited for the commission's report to act. Our department has already taken some initial steps to address some of the concerns and vulnerabilities that were identified in the immediate aftermath of the mass casualty event. Last Summer, government proclaimed legislation making it more difficult for someone to impersonate a police officer by restricting access to police items such as uniforms, badges, and police vehicles and decals.

The Police Identity Management Act also prohibited the sale of marked used police vehicles. The use of a replica police vehicle and uniform played a role in the tragic events. The legislation makes it more difficult for unauthorized persons to acquire these items and will help re-establish confidence in the symbols that identify police officers throughout our province.

As many will know, steps were also taken to provide the RCMP and the Halifax Regional Police with direct access to an alert-ready system to allow them to send out alerts directly in a public safety emergency. Protecting the public is serious and difficult work, and we know that in certain situations, alerts are one of the tools that can help to do this. We will continue to do what we can to build a safer community and province.

To that end, we are investing \$700,000 in this year's budget to provide more robust policing oversight and accountability, including six full-time positions in our Public Safety and Security Division. We anticipate this investment will help support recommendations on policing coming out of the Mass Casualty Commission's report and recommendations.

The Mass Casualty Commission's report has many recommendations, and many of them are important that we take time to digest and understand. We have only just received it yesterday, only slightly ahead of you. I wanted the committee and Nova Scotians to know that our work started as soon as we received the report.

We are reading it carefully and focusing on the next steps. While we cannot change what has happened, we know that we can do more to help prevent something like this from ever happening again, and we recognize there is a lot of work ahead of us. The families and the communities will be foremost in our minds as we proceed in doing that work.

Before I leave the topic of the Mass Casualty Commission, I do want to pay special tribute to the Victim Services staff that, led by Executive Director Kristen Tynes, who do great work every day supporting victims of crime in our province. I can't say enough about the work that they do to support clients across Nova Scotia. Along with Correctional

Services staff, they have played a central role in supporting family members and others in the community through the aftermath of the mass casualty event and as the commission hearings proceeded.

Our staff worked tirelessly with families and communities over the past three years, and we continue to do what we can for the families. They were even there with them today in Truro. Staff partnered with other government departments and agencies to provide on-site support for families and the community in the aftermath of the mass casualty, and will continue to do so as we go forward.

This includes providing families and community members information on accessing mental health, counselling, and in-person support during the inquiry hearings. I as the minister personally thank them for their hard work. They are one of the most caring groups of employees that I've ever had the pleasure of working with.

I would like to emphasize that I don't want people to forget that our Victim Services staff left their own families and went to help support others in the aftermath while we were all in lockdown. I acknowledge more can always be done with additional resources, but I certainly applaud them for what they have done. We believe lessons that have been learned from this event and the recommendations of the Mass Casualty Commission will help us to improve services to survivors, witnesses, and families in the future.

There is also another important inquiry hard at work. I want to take just a moment to update the status of the Desmond fatality inquiry. Much like the Mass Casualty Commission inquiry, it too involves unspeakable loss of life. The family and the loved ones of the Desmond family, as well as all Nova Scotians, have been waiting a very long time for answers. Just this week, government extended Judge Zimmer as a provincial court judge, allowing him additional time to continue his work. We look forward to his report and his recommendations in the coming months, which I anticipate will provide us with even more insight that can be used to prevent similar incidents in the future.

I always take an opportunity at Estimates to highlight the scope of work we do as a department and to remind this committee of the day-to-day responsibilities, programs, and services that we have under way. There are a lot of moving parts in the Department of Justice. They include the administration of 25 courthouses throughout the province, which include the following.

Support for the judiciary day-to-day administration and public access, courthouse security, safe transport of persons in custody, and civil enforcement; Correctional Services, which includes community and custody programs and services for adults and youth within five adult facilities and one youth facility within the province; Public Safety Division and Security Programs, including policing and police oversight, as well as licensing and regulation of private security services, cybersafety, and oversight over service dogs; support and services to help victims and witnesses of crime; the enforcement of court-

ordered child and spousal support payments; the implementation of the Accessibility Act and the development of standards for Built Environment education, employment, public transportation, and communications; providing legal services and advice to the Government of Nova Scotia and all of its agencies and Crown corporations and restorative justice oversight.

I also have the responsibility of a number of arm's-length Crown agencies, commissions, and offices, which include Elections Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, the Nova Scotia Medical Examiner Service, the Nova Scotia Legal Aid Commission, the Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner, the Nova Scotia Public Prosecution Service, Nova Scotia Public Trustee, the Serious Incident Response Team, the Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal, and responsibility for the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, plus numerous other pieces of legislation.

As our department takes on increasing responsibilities, and as the challenges we face become more complex, we have strengthened our management team in recent weeks. For the first time, the Department of Justice now has two associate deputy ministers: one to provide guidance and support on our Public Safety and Correctional Services side, and one to manage the Legal Services, Court, and policy side of our work.

Having two associate deputy ministers, Michelle Higgins and Chris Collett, allows us to strengthen our leadership structure to provide additional focus on our important work that we do.

I want to thank Deputy Minister Thomas, Associate Deputy Ministers Higgins and Collett, and the rest of the department senior executive team - most of whom are sitting behind me right now - for the preparation of this department's budget submission, as well as the approximately 1,700 employees throughout the department for the tremendous work that they've done throughout the past year.

I'll now take a moment to highlight some of the investments in the department's 2023-24 budget.

Our budget this fiscal year is more than \$450 million. This year's budget represents an increase of roughly \$34.5 million, or about 8 per cent more than last year. The department's budget is focused on keeping our commitments to Nova Scotians with programs and services that are responsive and accessible. We are making major investments in public safety and policing, accessibility, and in resources to address intimate partner violence, as well as funding to support improved enforcement of child and spousal support orders made by the courts.

As I mentioned earlier, we are budgeting about \$700,000 for six full-time positions to provide enhanced policing governance and accountability. Also in the area of policing

and public safety, there is \$17.3 million to meet our contractual obligations to the RCMP H Division, which includes salary, fleet requirements, and other resources.

In this year's budget, there is additionally an \$882,000 increase for First Nations policing, which will help to provide additional salary and operating funds, as well as an additional \$72,000 for a community consultation group to support this important program in Indigenous communities.

As we all know, internet child exploitation is a growing concern in our communities and right across this country. We must protect children online from serious problems. We are investing \$200,000 to further combat internet child exploitation. Crimes that exploit children and other vulnerable members of society are some of the most horrific we can imagine. The impacts to victims, survivors, and their families can be devastating and life-changing. We know children are spending more time online and as a government, we are taking action to help protect children from dangers in the virtual community.

This funding will help the province support police in undertaking critical investigative work to prevent the distribution of child internet pornography and other things throughout Nova Scotia.

The department is also investing an additional \$431,000 to support the Nova Scotia Medical Examiner Service to address an increasing workload and to support the death review committees, which had been established to investigate deaths as a result of domestic violence, as well as deaths that involve youth who are in the care of the Province.

Our Nova Scotia Maintenance Enforcement Program and the Victim Services Program continue their critical work to support families to get court-ordered spousal and child support payments to the parents who are owed. This is an important program that supports the financial and emotional stability of Nova Scotians. It supports more than 11,000 children and collects and pays out nearly \$230,000 in child and spousal support to recipients each and every day.

We have made many improvements over the last several years to increase support payments to families and reduce program arrears. Arrears continue to be the lowest that they've been in more than 15 years. We continue to remain focused on reducing arrears and improving enforcement. This year, we will be investing \$200,000 to add two more additional positions, which will improve client services.

I would like now to move to Correctional Services. It has been three years since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, and while public health restrictions and pandemic status have been lifted, we still live with this virus today. COVID-19 was extremely challenging for Nova Scotians. It was particularly difficult for our Correctional Services division, which has the responsibility of our five adult facilities and the Nova Scotia Youth Centre, as well as 22 community offices.

Keeping in mind that inmate safety in these settings was obviously a big challenge throughout the pandemic and resulted in restrictions placed on persons in custody due to Public Health directives and managing our facilities with staff, who also became sick.

However, our staff was still able to spearhead new and creative solutions. Video court appearances ensured persons in custody had continued access to their lawyers and courts, ensuring access to justice. During the pandemic, we had more than 19,000 video court appearances throughout the pandemic and almost 8,200 video visits with family and friends, allowing them to stay connected to their support systems.

With no deaths or hospitalizations due to COVID-related illnesses, we did well in Nova Scotia, and we would be remiss if we did not take a moment to recognize the service of our Public Health teams who provided excellent support and guidance. We increased access to clinical and case management services for persons in custody in part by making use of technology that had never been used throughout the court systems previously.

Despite the pandemic, Correction workers worked with community partners and agencies such as the Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia, Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton, and the John Howard Society of Nova Scotia, as well as working across government with the Department of Community Services, the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Department of Public Works, and the Department of Health and Wellness to support vulnerable Nova Scotians in conflict with the law to find safe housing and other supports.

One such solution was the John Howard Society of Nova Scotia's supportive housing hub pilot project, located in Pictou County, which opened in 2022, with supports from Correctional Services, the Department of Public Works, and the Department of Health and Wellness. To date there have been 35 admissions, of whom 31 transitioned from a provincial correctional facility to the supportive housing program.

On March 16, 2023, government reinforced its commitment to support housing. We announced an investment of \$2.6 million in three supportive housing programs through the John Howard Society of Nova Scotia, Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia, and the Marguerite Centre. Funding for this project will cover four years, from 2023-24 to 2027-28, and it will provide \$1.6 million for the John Howard Society of Nova Scotia, \$650,000 for the Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia, \$300,000 for the Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton, and \$50,000 for the Marguerite Centre.

Safe and supportive housing can help people transition out of correctional facilities, overcome barriers, and make positive changes in their lives. These beds, as well as in-kind education programs and social work services provided by Correctional Services staff, will ensure continued support for individuals so they can successfully reintegrate and stay in the community.

[4:00 p.m.]

Working with these community partners, we are helping ensure at-risk men and women have a solid foundation to move forward with their lives. We continue to provide ongoing supports from facility case management and community Corrections teams providing education, social work, as well as programming for anger management, substance abuse management, and healthy relationships.

As COVID-19 also helped drive innovation in the way that we use our courts - the pandemic highlighted the urgency to modernize the courts in Nova Scotia. It forced us to adapt quickly to use technology in the way we deliver court services to Nova Scotians.

During COVID-19, the court shifted rapidly by delivering court services virtually, either through virtual courts, remote attendance at hearings via video conferencing or telephone, and electric filing by email. The use of video and virtual technology for court proceedings increased almost threefold from the pre-pandemic days.

Our court clerks, counter staff, and deputy sheriffs delivered services using new technologies and new procedures to keep these essential services open and working throughout the pandemic. We continue to use these tools, and we also continue to work on technological advances to improve access to justice.

The Digital Task Force, co-chaired by the Chief Justice of Nova Scotia and the Deputy Minister of the Department of Justice, continues to work and explore further ways to transform and modernize the courts. The focus is on improving access to justice, increased efficiencies, and better outcomes for all users at all levels of provincial courts.

In February, the Digital Task Force moved to its next phase of work, launching a website and a public survey seeking input on ways to modernize the courts using technology and digitalization.

The result from this survey will help the task force to consider the next steps by identifying what is working well, what isn't working, and what could be improved in new ways throughout the Nova Scotia courts to incorporate technology.

Sticking with courts, with the support of the federal government, we are investing \$788,000 to fill six positions to provide intimate partner violence programming. This is an investment to break the harmful cycles of intimate partner and domestic violence. Violence against women and children or other family members is unacceptable.

Delivering family justice services and programs that address intimate partner violence is a strategic priority for Nova Scotia's Department of Justice. I want to assure women and children, as well as others experiencing domestic violence, that help is available wherever you are in Nova Scotia. This funding is through a five-year agreement



with the federal government. It will improve communications between family courts and criminal courts and create a family court navigation team to assist with navigation and assessments, as well as improve legal representation.

Government is also addressing intimate partner and domestic violence through investment in police training, two specialized courts in Sydney and Halifax, and an innovative partnership across government, including the Status of Women Office and the Nova Scotia Community College. We have improved our response to domestic violence cases, including improving training for police and service providers.

I will now take a moment to update the committee on a number of my priorities moving forward as highlighted in my mandate letter. When I was appointed Attorney General and the Minister of Justice, the Premier tasked me to deliver on a number of key objectives. They were to amend the Elections Act to establish a fixed election date, which we accomplished in the 2021 Fall sitting, and to amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to give order-making ability to the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Planning for this priority is currently under way in the department.

I was directed to amend the Victims' Rights and Services Act to entitle victims of sexual violence legal representation. Preliminary work is under way to expand existing legal representation programs to fulfill this commitment.

I was also directed to create a human trafficking prosecution team within the Nova Scotia Public Prosecution Service to provide legal advice to police officers and deliver advanced education and training to justice sector employees, to ensure street checks end, and to continue the work in implementation of recommendations within the Wortley Report to address discrimination and build trust between community and our police in this province.

In December 2021, we took additional action to end street checks. After many months of discussion working closely with the African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition, and after consultation with police leadership, I issued a new directive to police pursuant to the Police Act that clarified and strengthened the ban on street checks.

My ministerial directive eliminated a flaw in an earlier directive that had the potential of allowing police to continue to stop and illegally collect and record identifying information of individuals. We heard from the African Nova Scotian community that this is actively disproportionately affecting Black people.

My directives make it clear that police must use the criminal law standard of reasonable suspicion before detaining a person or collecting any identifying information without their consent. There is no place for anti-Black racism or any other form of racism in Nova Scotia.

The work to address systemic discrimination and racism in the justice system continues with this government as a high priority. In September, government accepted all the recommendations of the Wortley Report Research Committee. One of those recommendations was for the minister to mandate the collection of race-based data by police. Information gathering at police stops will be used to identify overrepresentation when it occurs and to help police improve interactions with African Nova Scotians, Indigenous, and other racialized Nova Scotians. This will improve transparency and accountability of police.

Government is committed to fair and consistent policing across this province, and we understand the importance of these recommendations for race-based data collection to strengthen confidence and trust in bias-free police-community relations.

We are currently reviewing data collection systems used by police agencies across the province and working with community and police to identify critical next steps to advance development of the standardization race-based data collection model. We are committed to taking action to advance the recommendations directed to the Province in the Wortley Report, and we will continue to engage with police, community, and other stakeholders as we address the recommendations.

Social justice is a significant focus for my senior leadership team and me. For many Indigenous people and African Nova Scotians, systemic racism and discrimination is a lived reality. That is not acceptable. We are working on Nova Scotia's first African Nova Scotian justice action plan. The public consultation phase of the Nova Scotia's first African Nova Scotian justice action plan concluded last Fall. This two-part consultation was significant and represented progress toward our goals. It will help to address specific and systemic barriers to justice faced by African Nova Scotians.

The voices of African Nova Scotian community members are a critical part of developing this plan. We have engaged 25 African Nova Scotian communities through 32 in-person sessions across the province. A mid-term report was shared publicly with the community members for feedback. We did this work in partnership with the African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition, the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute, the Nova Scotia Association of Black Social Workers, and the Department of African Nova Scotian Affairs.

We are also working with the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute on a proposal for an African Nova Scotia policing strategy, and we continue to support the institute, which celebrated its first anniversary last year. The department was pleased to provide an additional \$4.1 million recently to support its important work. This investment brings its funding to March 2026.

There is also much work to do to improve the experience of the Mi'kmaq and the Indigenous people in our justice system. Indigenous persons too are overrepresented in the

criminal justice system, and this is unacceptable. We will continue to address it. DOJ, in collaboration with the Mi'kmaw community, is working on an Indigenous justice action strategy to ensure programs and services are culturally appropriate and responsive and also address overrepresentation.

To ensure the strategy is reflective of the community's voices, a facilitator from the Mi'kmaw community is working with our team. The committee held its first meeting in July 2022 in a First Nations community. We are committed to working closely with Mi'kmaw leaders in community and other government departments such as L'nu Affairs and the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives to develop a plan that is responsive and respects the unique needs of Indigenous people.

We are also working closely with the Mi'kmaw Legal Support Network, or the MLSN, to support their programs and services. The strategy will be based on meaningful engagement with the community and a critical element and principle of this work is: nothing about us without us.

Important steps have been taken, including the establishment of an Indigenous court in Wagmatcook First Nation in 2018, a wellness court that respects and takes into account the lived experience of Indigenous Nova Scotians. The department also created its first full-time Mi'kmaw court interpreter position, working at the Sydney Justice Centre and a satellite court in Eskasoni Mi'kmaw Nation.

This position expands the interpretation services that are currently provided on a causal basis at both Wagmatcook and Port Hawkesbury courts. It also supports the goal and the vision laid out in legislation introduced last year enshrining Mi'kmaw as Nova Scotia's first language. As you can imagine, individuals appearing before a court of law want and deserve to receive services in their first language. Interpretive services are critical in achieving meaningful access to justice.

It is through greater understanding that we will continue to improve access to justice and transform the justice system for all Nova Scotians, particularly historically excluded communities.

I would now like to share with the members another important area of our department: accessibility. We continue to make tremendous progress toward the 2030 goals for an accessible Nova Scotia by providing persons with disabilities with equitable access to programs, services, information, and infrastructure. The Government of Nova Scotia Accessibility Plan for 2022 to 2025, launched in December, was developed collaboratively with involvement from 26 departments and agencies across government. The plan includes commitments from all departments in many areas, including education, transportation, employment, and built environment.

I am pleased to report we are making good progress on these standards. The Act sets out a process to develop standards with the Accessibility Advisory Board and Nova Scotians with disabilities and impacted sectors.

[4:15 p.m.]

The built environment standard is expected to be the first to be enacted. An interdepartmental working group has drafted the proposed standards, changes to Nova Scotia's Building Code Regulations, and guidelines based on the recommendations of the Accessibility Advisory Board. We are expecting the draft standards to be posted publicly this year for comment. The public will have 60 days for feedback with standards scheduled to be enacted early in 2024.

Three other standards are in different stages of development, including education, employment, and goods and services. In January 2023, the Accessibility Advisory Board submitted Phase 2 recommendations for an accessibility standard in education. This applies to the public and private early-year, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education sectors. Multiple departments are collaboratively reviewing the recommendations. These recommendations will be made public in the Spring. The Employment Standard Development Committee is working to develop standard recommendations that will be submitted to me in early 2024.

In February, applications for membership on the Goods and Services Standard Development Committee closed. Over 50 Nova Scotians from across the province applied to serve on this committee. This Spring, I will announce the committee membership and they will begin their work early this Summer.

Last month, I approved the recommendations of the board to make public transportation and transportation infrastructure the fifth accessibility standard for development beginning this year. As you can see, we are making good progress with the accessibility standards.

Working on the two remaining standards, public transportation and communications, will start over the next two years. We've launched the first independent review of the Accessibility Act last Spring.

In October 2021, the province appointed Dr. Katie Aubrecht, a disability scholar, to conduct the first legislative review of the Accessibility Act. She was selected by a three-person committee that included a member of the Accessibility Advisory Board. Dr. Aubrecht began review consultations in February 2022. That review focused on a standards development process, identifying possible changes to the Accessibility Act and Access by Design 2030, the implementation of the plan to make Nova Scotia accessible by 2030.

About 800 Nova Scotians have participated in the review, including persons with disabilities, community organizations, government staff from different departments, and representatives of prescribed public sector bodies such as municipalities and educational institutions. I look forward to reviewing Dr. Aubrecht's report and recommendations this Spring to learn how we can continue to advance accessibility in this province.

Awareness and capacity-building is a second priority area in Access by Design 2030. Nova Scotians with disabilities have told us that stigma and discrimination are the most significant barriers that they experience. We know that an accessible Nova Scotia will only be achieved by working both to enact standards and by changing how we collectively view disability.

In April, we launched the first accessibility awareness campaign in Nova Scotia. You may have seen some of the social media ads on TV. These ads feature real Nova Scotians with disabilities at home, at work, and in their own communities with a theme of access includes everyone.

Compliance and enforcement are other priority area of Access by Design 2030. As we look ahead to the enactment of the first accessibility standard next year, it's important to note that we developed the compliance and enforcement framework for the Act and the standards. As we do in all our accessibility work, the Accessibility Directorate worked collaboratively to develop the compliance framework with those who will be impacted: persons with disabilities, municipalities, and other government departments and business sectors. There are over 50 people involved in this working group.

In May, the framework for compliance was approved. The focus of the framework is on education and awareness at the outset. Government will provide support to organizations to comply with the Act, standards, and deadlines, and will work collaboratively to address areas of non-compliance.

Another area of considerable focus for the department is sexualized violence, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation. The harms of these crimes are felt by children, youth, adults, families, and communities across Nova Scotia, and have disproportionately impacted marginalized communities. We have and continue to deliver trauma-informed training and sexual violence training to frontline police officers, providing them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and ability to effectively handle the complexities of these investigations.

Having a human trafficking dedicated unit to do this work that operates throughout the province is critical to our intervention efforts and the ability to convict the perpetrators. Government continues to fight human trafficking and provide more support and services for survivors. Between 2018-19 and 2022-23, the Department of Justice has invested \$1.3 million in an integrated Nova Scotia Human Trafficking Unit through Public Safety Canada's Gun and Gang Violence Action Fund. The human trafficking unit was formed to

enforce laws against human trafficking with dedicated support to victims and survivors, and it is comprised of two RCMP and two Halifax Regional Police officers.

Our Public Safety Division and Security Programs fund the Halifax Regional Police members on the integrated Nova Scotia Human Trafficking Unit who are seconded to the RCMP. We are doing a lot, but we recognize we must do more. The department is working with the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking on a national research project on human trafficking corridors. This research will inform service delivery, public policy, development, and police interventions for victims of human trafficking.

I might also point out that the level of serious crime and frequency of gun violence we are seeing in the community recently is concerning. I grieve for the families who have lost loved ones to gun violence. Gun violence has no place in our communities. We want all Nova Scotians to be safe. I'm concerned whenever violent incidents occur in our community. It's upsetting, and I am concerned by that.

Addressing serious crime, including gun violence, is among our policing priorities for this year. The department is committed to adequately resourcing police and working with communities to address firearms-related offences occurring in our province. We will continue to work and identify proactive ways to mitigate these trends, including collaborating with our federal, provincial, and territorial colleagues across the country who, like Nova Scotians, are combatting serious gun crime and violence.

Addressing hate-motivated crime is also a priority of the department. Hate crimes are criminal offences committed against a person or an organization or property that are motivated by hate, prejudice, or bias against an identifiable group. We know racism and other forms of discrimination remain serious issues in Nova Scotia and across Canada. We all need to stand against hate and take action to prevent people from being targeted for their faith, their beliefs, their sexual orientation, their gender, or the colour of their skin. Part of this work going forward will be ongoing cultural competency training and increased analysis and reporting on trends, which will give us more and better information to address this issue.

Earlier I referenced the benefits of technology and increasing efficiency in our courts and in Correctional Services, but it is important to recognize the dangers of technology that is misused. Smart phones, social media, and online channels continue to be used for means of cyberbullying and unwanted sharing of intimate images. The impact of these behaviours can be devastating for victims and their families.

The Intimate Images and Cyber-protection Act was adopted in response to the growth of these issues. Two years ago, the court awarded damages in the amount of \$85,000 in the first successful case brought under this legislation.

This court case, along with greater awareness of the supports available through the department's CyberScan Unit, is sending a message that these behaviours are unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

The Intimate Images and Cyber-protection Act came into force almost five years ago to help protect Nova Scotians from online bullying. A legislative review conducted last year included target discussions with key stakeholders such as victims and their families, police agencies, provincial and police victim services, restorative justice groups, Nova Scotian schools, and legal experts. The report resulting from this review was tabled with the House of Assembly last September.

The review found that the Intimate Images and Cyber-protection Act is achieving its goals of protecting citizens from cyberbullying and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. It also found that it struck the appropriate balance between the freedom of expression - however, it also identified the need to improve the compliance process for victims and raise public awareness of the legislation. The department is committed to developing a plan to implement each of these recommendations.

Still in the area of public safety, I want to take a moment to update on the work between us and New Brunswick on expanding Nova Scotia's Serious Incident Response Team to include New Brunswick. In February, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick reached an agreement to provide oversight for serious incidents involving police in both provinces. The agreement ensures both provinces will benefit from Nova Scotia's Serious Incident Response Team's expertise and independent police oversight in the interest of public safety. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick will share costs as well as resources and benefits of this service.

I also want to add that an additional highlight for SiRT this year was the appointment of Alonzo Wright, King's Counsel, the first African Nova Scotian to lead this important police oversight body.

Before I conclude my remarks, I would like to take an opportunity to once again thank the entire Department of Justice team and each of the agencies for their commitment to the people of Nova Scotia. They accomplish great things every day. I personally thank each and every one of them for what they do. I'm honoured to be the Minister of Justice as well as the Attorney General for the Province of Nova Scotia.

This concludes my remarks and I look forward to the opportunity to respond to the questions of the members.

THE CHAIR: According to the practice that has developed over time in this Legislature, the two Opposition caucuses will share one-hour rotations back and forth. You're expected, if it's negotiated, to share time with the Independent member as well.

Only the minister is allowed to answer questions. The minister is permitted to consult with the department. Only two members of the department are allowed at the table at a time.

[4:30 p.m.]

We will begin with the Liberal caucus. The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Thanks to all the staff who are here and to the minister for the work that you continue to do in a really important, large department with many responsibilities that touch all of our communities.

I'm going to start around the same way that I did last year, talking about access to justice and begin with how we're tracking on the Jordan threshold delays. I'd like to try to figure out if we're going in the right direction.

Last year it was March as well when at budget Estimates the minister had reported that there were 1,230 cases that exceeded the threshold, which at the time was an increase of over 200 per cent. We know that in September of last year, according to government documents, that number was in fact ascending. There were 1,437 cases tracking above the Jordan threshold.

That's a large number. We used to talk about hundreds and now we're eclipsing the thousand area. I wonder if the minister could report on how many cases we are at today that are tracking above the Jordan threshold.

BRAD JOHNS: Unfortunately, we still are tracking higher than we were. We're at 1,534 cases that are currently tracking above Jordan. Some of this still is the backlog in the courts. I know that we can't use COVID-19 forever, but some of this is COVID-related still.

We have recently appointed a number of new court judges throughout the province, and we continue to look toward doing a few more in the future. We're trying to actively decrease that number and get it back down.

IAIN RANKIN: I wonder if the minister can share if there have been any more cases dropped because of the exceedance of the threshold over the last year. It was reported last year that there were 15 since 2016, so I'm just wondering: Have there been any more?

BRAD JOHNS: Of the stays and dismissals granted, there have been a total of 30 throughout the province. One provincial offence, three municipal offences, and 26 federal offences.



IAIN RANKIN: Given that the minister is responsible for the Nova Scotia Public Prosecution Service and accountable for provincial prosecutions, we talked a little bit about one tool that our Crowns have last year. I referenced Section 496 of the Criminal Code. The minister did say that: "It is something that I can certainly inquire into and get back to the member at a future date." I wonder if he can tell me if the Crowns have been utilizing this tool more. Again, I'll read what it provides for them to be able to do:

If a peace officer has reasonable grounds to believe that a person has failed to comply with a summons, appearance notice, undertaking or release order or to attend court as required and that the failure did not cause a victim physical or emotional harm, property damage or economic loss, the peace officer may, without laying a charge, issue an appearance notice to the person to appear at a judicial referral hearing under section 523.1

instead of laying the charge. I know the minister is aware of that tool, and given his responsibility to address the backlog, I'm wondering if he had discussions with the Public Prosecution Service, in particular Crown Attorneys, who have the ability to work with police and utilize this tool.

BRAD JOHNS: I will offer to the honourable member, as he knows, although the Public Prosecution Service does fall under DOJ and the Attorney General's responsibility, we do try to keep PPS at arm's length to be able to have their judicial independence.

I do know that Crown Attorneys across the province are attempting to triage cases, particularly those that may be in jeopardy of Jordan, and they're working hard to set dates earlier where possible.

I would also offer to the member that we have had some change in the management of PPS. Former director Martin Herschorn retired, and we had Acting Director Linda Lee Oland, and we're currently in the process of looking to fill that directorship. We have the deputy director currently filling in. Once we have hired a new director, which we're in the process of looking at, we will be encouraging them to address any delays that might be outstanding.

IAIN RANKIN: Relative to that position, which is an extremely important position to fill, the briefing note that the minister had from last Fall said that an announcement of the successful candidate will be made soon. That briefing note was a half a year ago. The person who was in the position retired in February of 2022. It's been more than a year. I wonder what the minister means by soon. When will that position expect to be filled?

BRAD JOHNS: To be honest, it was a bit harder to find somebody who may want to come to Nova Scotia to do that job. We are trying to find someone - recognizing equity, equality, and diversity. We've been trying to reach out, and we did contract a search

service. Of the candidates who came forward from that, we didn't feel at the time - we wanted to go out and try again. We're still trying. I would anticipate that there is a new competition that's going out very soon. I would anticipate that the hope is within the next few months.

IAIN RANKIN: The search service, am I discerning that to be an external firm that's leading the hiring process? If the minister could share, given the priority of looking at equity as part of the process, are there representatives from the African Nova Scotian community and/or the Indigenous community represented on the interview panel that will be hiring this position?

BRAD JOHNS: We have not yet established the final committee. We're anticipating now that it will probably be an internal committee.

IAIN RANKIN: I will say, given the challenges and the hiring practices that are under review - which I'll speak to in a minute - that within the Public Prosecution Service, keeping the process internal does raise flags. Hopefully there will be representation that reflects the diversity of our communities because these candidates who come forward need to have a deep understanding and appreciation of the historical context of what the Public Prosecution Service is and what it was born of, after the Marshall Inquiry.

I know we talked about the independence and the importance of independence, but it has been more than three decades now - I've made this point before - and we still have not had a person of African descent in this position or an Indigenous person - or really in any position of authority in the Public Prosecution Service. I think the minister would probably agree how that can be problematic.

I'd ask the minister about the review of hiring practices that he referenced last year in Estimates, and I do see it in the minister's binder that the review was initiated on June 1, 2022, and was anticipated to be completed and delivered by December 1, 2022. This is a review of the hiring practices, is my understanding. I just want to ask the question: Was the review completed on time? Who conducted that review?

BRAD JOHNS: The review was completed. It was completed at the end of December, early January. It was done by an external firm, and currently the Public Service Commission and the Department of Justice senior teams are reviewing the report and recommendations that are there.

IAIN RANKIN: I'm wondering if the minister can commit to tabling the findings of this review and share the results with the Legislature.

BRAD JOHNS: At this particular time, we'd probably say no. It does identify a number of human resources matters that I think would be confidential to staffing. At this time probably not, because of the HR impact.

IAIN RANKIN: I would hope that we would see some level of transparency in terms of how we move forward with trying to improve fair hiring practices that involve equity. Presumably there will be recommendations to address some of the barriers that I think we all can agree exist within the Public Prosecution Service. I think the office specifically has issues of not following what the Public Service Commission has followed in terms of their hiring practices. I think I've made my point there.

I'll go back to what we were talking about related to Jordan and the impact on ensuring that we have the judicial appointments filled. I wanted to ask about the change in the way that judicial appointments are going through, which was one of the things the government did. One of the first things they did was revamping how the appointment process works.

[4:45 p.m.]

Can the minister share, now that that process has been in place, his thoughts on the effectiveness of that appointment process and if there's any review of how that's going, if the department is looking at improving that process in general of appointing judges?

BRAD JOHNS: I would point out, which I know that the member knows, the advisory committee of course is an arm's length and independent process. They review the applications that come in and make recommendations to me as the Attorney General. We have seen an increase of diverse candidates being recommended, so I think that overall, the new system is working quite well. We're quite happy with the process.

Before I move on, I want to go back very quickly to what the member was asking regarding diversity of PPS. I do want to reiterate that that will be something that we talk to with the new director of PPS, regardless of who that is. We don't know yet. I think our department has shown a desire for diversity. We want to make sure we have good candidates who are well qualified, and a perfect example of that would be our appointment to SiRT with Alonzo Wright, who is wonderful and has taken over that role.

IAIN RANKIN: I do acknowledge the appointment. It's a good one. I'd like to ask, since the minister has referenced the way that the appointment process has been a positive experience - there was concern about representation on the committee, and there was a member who left the committee - at least one - publicly last year. There were reasons outlined in a resignation letter to the minister. I wonder if the minister can go into the reasons why they left and maybe release a copy of the letter for the public.

BRAD JOHNS: I can't really elaborate much. I know that there was a disagreement within the working group and one person resigned from the group.

IAIN RANKIN: I note that the minister said there's an increase of diverse candidates. In Question Period in November 2021, more than a year ago, the minister

committed to an African Nova Scotian judicial appointment. I wonder if the minister has fulfilled this commitment.

BRAD JOHNS: No, we have not yet. However, we did just appoint three women to the bench, and one of the criticisms previously was a lack of female representation. We just appointed three women a month and a half ago.

IAIN RANKIN: There's certainly value in women being appointed, but that wasn't the commitment the minister had made in the House.

One of the reasons why I'm focused on judicial appointments and ensuring we do have appointments that reflect our communities, especially in a timely order, is that we've seen judicial vacancies climb to as many as four in the Dartmouth area alone. That is having an impact on people getting their day in court - timely access to justice. Intake courtrooms had no judges for extended periods of time, and I wonder if there's any data as to the impact of the case delays that were happening because of these vacancies in the system. I wonder if the minister can share what the vacancy is currently.

BRAD JOHNS: Currently there is one vacancy. We recognize that there are two more that are coming up. We're anticipating that the working group will get together - hopefully at the end of May or June - to start reviewing applications again.

What I will offer is that this is a call that goes out from the Department of Justice, the Canadian Bar Association Nova Scotia Branch, and it's a request for people to apply. The department is limited in who applies. Traditionally, applicants have been from PPS or within government. We have been trying to ensure that people who are not from government recognize that they should be applying as well, and we're certainly encouraging that throughout.

IAIN RANKIN: I wonder if we can get an update on Family Court unification. This was an initiative that has been under way for a number of years and has been expanded province wide. I wonder if there's any feedback on this initiative and if the minister can report back any findings from that.

BRAD JOHNS: If you could just repeat that quickly.

IAIN RANKIN: I wonder if we can get an update on the initiative for Family Court unification and how that's going, if there's anything that the minister can report back in terms of lessons learned through that process.

BRAD JOHNS: Unified Family Court is going very well. We have all judges appointed and it rolled out across the province in July.

IAIN RANKIN: Does the minister plan on accomplishing the FOIPOP modernization as it's set out in his mandate letter?

BRAD JOHNS: An internal review of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act has somewhat started. We're in the process of looking at putting up a website and starting to go out to the public to see what their feedback is. We recognize that over the years there have been a lot of changes since the FOIPOP Act was initiated, both through technology and access to privacy. There are so many changes that we do need to have a review of that.

I have read through the recommendations of Tricia Ralph, Information and Privacy Commissioner for Nova Scotia, and we're considering those as well. It's over 400 public bodies, municipalities, schools, hospitals, that are all affected by the FOIPOP Act - so we do want to ensure that a good, thorough review is done. To answer the direction question, my intention is still to come back with recommendations, and we're still working toward doing that.

IAIN RANKIN: I happen to know that there are multiple internal reviews sitting within the government side over the last number of years, so they can check those. I'll ask the question directly, since it was an election commitment: As part of the review, will the minister reiterate that they will give the commissioner order-making power?

BRAD JOHNS: What I would say is that it would be premature to commit to anything at this time prior to that public review and consultation happening. Once the report is done, we'll be bringing recommendations to the Legislature.

IAIN RANKIN: What I'm hearing is the election commitment is no longer a commitment. You're saying that there is no longer a commitment to give the commissioner order-making power. Do I have that right?

BRAD JOHNS: Once again, we are doing a review, and part of that review will be to see whether we give order-making power. Once the review is done, we'll have recommendations and move forward at that time.

IAIN RANKIN: Good enough. I tried. I'll hand it over to my colleague for the rest of this hour, and then I'll come back after the NDP go.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: We'll switch gears now. We've heard a lot in the House and elsewhere over the last few days about non-disclosure agreements - NDAs - and confidentiality agreements. I have to confess, I've been doing some reading, and I can't quite figure out the difference between the two. I was wondering if we could get an explanation between a confidentiality agreement versus a non-disclosure agreement.

[5:00 p.m.]

BRAD JOHNS: I certainly will say that they are similar tools that are used when parties want to protect confidential information. Non-disclosure agreements are designed to create a confidential relationship where two parties agree not to share information. Both are often used as a settlement tool in civil matters. That's what I could offer.

What I would suggest, not being a lawyer but having a really smart lawyer with me, they'd be two legal concepts that would probably not be easily explained.

KELLY REGAN: I have done some reading. I couldn't see what the real difference was between the two and thought that I might take advantage of the deputy minister's presence here to make it a little clearer to me.

One of the things that I thought I was picking up from these fairly tense explanations was that in the case of an NDA, there's a financial penalty if the confidential matter is disclosed beyond whatever was agreed to. I'm just trying to figure out if that is the difference between the two, if that's a fair characterization.

BRAD JOHNS: It's funny, when I became the Attorney General, one of the things a friend of mine said was, "You're not a lawyer. How are you going to be Attorney General?" I said that I don't have to be a lawyer, I've got 178 really smart lawyers with me, and I rely on them every day.

The terms of the contract would be governed by the parties' agreement, including what penalties or damages if breached. I think, through discussions with NDAs, one of the things that I've heard is it's not as straightforward as some may think because it's contract law.

KELLY REGAN: Does the Department of Justice or any of the agencies that report to the minister, such as the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, the Nova Scotia Office of the Ombudsman, do they employ the use of NDAs?

BRAD JOHNS: If the member could just repeat that again, sorry.

KELLY REGAN: Does the Department of Justice or any of the entities that report to the minister like the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission or the Nova Scotia Office of the Ombudsman, do they employ the use of NDAs?

BRAD JOHNS: I just want to highlight the fact that both the Office of the Ombudsman as well as the Human Rights Commission are independent. As far as I am aware, no, but they are independent, and we would have to check with them directly to see.

KELLY REGAN: My understanding is in fact they do use them, and that people are being told, even before their cases are looked at, that they're going to have to sign an NDA or confidentiality agreement. I find that concerning, because it could have the effect of stifling people who feel that they may need to talk about what happened after something.

I am just going to put that out there because this is what we're hearing. Again, someone may say to me, I had to sign an NDA. I'm not clear that it was an NDA. It might have been a confidentiality agreement. That's why I was trying to find out what the difference is between the two and what the implications are for people.

My concern would be that people would refuse to even go down the path of having an incident or pattern of incidents investigated if up front they're told, "You have to sign this, and whatever happens here, you never get to speak about it again." For some people, I think that would have great emotional harm for them.

I'm just going to leave that for the minister, because I want people to think about that. If that is indeed what is going on there, I would say that I don't think the minister or any of us would want the offices of government to inadvertently intimidate people into not pursuing justice.

Then we get back to the whole issue of NDAs. We know what a jurisdictional scan is, and we know how long it takes. You look at comparable jurisdictions and what they are doing; it doesn't take 19 months to do a jurisdictional scan. That was the answer last year, that folks were doing a jurisdictional scan. You have lots of lawyers at your disposal. If you couldn't have a jurisdictional scan done within a week, I'd be shocked. I think perhaps the minister may want to see how it's working for different provinces. I'm not sure that can be categorized as a jurisdictional scan.

I'm just wondering exactly what progress has been made on this jurisdictional scan in the year since you were first asked about this, because I think you were asked about this a year ago. Maybe you could just answer that.

BRAD JOHNS: What I would put out is that, as I've said in the House, P.E.I. is currently the only province that has enacted legislation. Their legislation hasn't been tested. The initial hope was to look at jurisdictions across Canada. That hasn't happened because no other provinces have come forward. Other provinces have had discussions in regard to NDAs, but nobody else has instituted them. We've actually broadened our scan, particularly to look at what was happening in and throughout the United States, as well as looking more broadly in Europe as well.

As we continue to research what they're doing - that's only been within the last couple of months that we've broadened that, because we had initially anticipated and hoped to see other jurisdictions within the country come forward with legislation. When that did not happen, we then broadened that review in our research.

KELLY REGAN: Thank you for that information. My concern is that this has been identified as an issue, particularly for survivors of sexual harassment and sexual assault. My concern would be that we are just going to sit here and wait for somebody else to try it to see how it works. There's been a problem identified with this. Is this a giant game of chicken?

My understanding is there are a couple of other provinces that are actively looking at this particular issue as well and implementing that. We don't always wait for other jurisdictions to do it. New Jersey has one. Have we heard about problems with their legislation?

Again, I get it - it's fairly new. It happened just within the past year, but my concern would be that the harm that is done by not being able to speak, or the harm that is done by not even being able to proceed with an investigation because you're being told you cannot speak to anyone about this afterward, I think we have to look at that. I would urge the minister and his staff to move more quickly on this.

BRAD JOHNS: Through my own personal limited research on this, I think contract law is a complex thing. I think that in researching, although not everybody may agree - there are times and pros and cons to NDAs, and that's why we're asking staff to do that thorough research, to ensure that we don't disenfranchise somebody from opportunities. We want to make sure we get this right, and to do that, it's to do the proper research.

I've said in the House, I say again, I honestly feel there's nobody in our party or within the House who wants to see victims silenced. We want to provide support to people who are sexually harassed or discriminated against. We want that, but by the same token, I want to ensure that we have legislation that is good and fair for all Nova Scotians as well, so we've broadened our scan and our research.

KELLY REGAN: Now it's just fair for one side and not the other. I will just leave that with the minister. I think we'll just move on to Nova Scotia Legal Aid.

I was in the Chair recently when Nova Scotia Legal Aid came before the Public Accounts Committee. Nova Scotia Legal Aid is doing yeoman's work. They work hard, they have a high caseload, but once again, their funding has remained static in this year's budget. When you have static funding in an inflationary environment, that means it's pretty much like having a cut.

It means that once again there's no opportunity to expand the scope of their services at a time when legal issues being faced by the public are increasingly complex, and more and more in areas that we don't currently support.



For example, there's been a huge increase in the need for immigration and refugee claim services. My question is: Why hasn't there been a budgetary increase to Nova Scotia Legal Aid?

[5:15 p.m.]

BRAD JOHNS: I want to start by actually recognizing Nova Scotia Legal Aid and the work that they do. I personally had an opportunity to visit the Dartmouth office, and I've met on a number of occasions with the board over there and toured the office. They do great work. They're defending people who need it. I'm very supportive of that.

I will say that overall, they are up \$670,000 this year from last year's budget, and I do want to highlight that the Halifax Refugee Clinic is who deals with refugee and immigration. It's not Nova Scotia Legal Aid directly, but the total funding is up.

KELLY REGAN: Both Dalhousie Legal Aid Service and the Halifax Refugee Clinic do in fact provide those services as well, but they have extremely limited sources of funding. Nova Scotia Legal Aid could pick up the slack if there was more money there, is what I'm saying, if you expanded the scope of their services.

I just think that these are issues of fundamental justice in our society. I think that as more and more people come to Nova Scotia, some of them may need help with immigration, some of them may need help as refugee claimants, so being able to provide that - and what we do know and what we heard at committee the other day is that a dollar spent at Nova Scotia Legal Aid saves six dollars elsewhere in society. It's money that has a good return.

We also heard at committee the other day that for some people things can start as one small matter, and then they become compounded if they're not dealt with. For example, if we can deal with a landlord tenancy issue early on, it can prevent that person from having further involvement with the justice system, or it can prevent them from having their children removed because they're homeless. The Department of Community Services is trying to ensure that their children are safe.

I would just put in my two cents' worth on a dollar's worth of services. This is money well spent, and if the minister has the opportunity to advocate for money for legal aid, I think it's money well spent.

BRAD JOHNS: Just for clarification, the Province does not fund the Dalhousie Legal Aid Service, and in regard to the immigration and refugee - that's separate funding as well through the feds. We did help them to secure that funding.

Directly answering the question, as I said previously, I certainly support Nova Scotia Legal Aid, and I have been over to them, and it is something we're looking at adding additional funding to. I recognize the same issue, dollar for value, value for dollar.

KELLY REGAN: We've also heard directly from the Dalhousie Legal Aid Service about an increase in the number of people they're having to turn away for services for various reasons. Sometimes it's because they make just over the threshold, or it's because they're not able to make the terms of contribution agreements. You can very easily make too much money to get legal aid.

I do appreciate that they have the free legal advice for anybody at any hour of day. If you are arrested, you can get that advice very quickly, but for people who are dealing with substantial issues who don't have a lot of options, that really is the thing about not having money - you don't have options.

For folks who are just over the threshold, I'm wondering: What is the department doing to help those who can't do the contribution agreements and are just making a little bit too much money to be able to get legal aid?

BRAD JOHNS: We at DOJ certainly recognize that there are more and more Nova Scotians who are struggling. Times are rough and we know that. We are looking at trying to review the threshold to see if there's an opportunity there, and we'll continue to look at it as we move forward.

KELLY REGAN: We're talking about money here. The decision to freeze income assistance rates has a number of implications above and beyond that you can't buy food, et cetera. For some, it actually is an issue of access to justice. While Income Assistance program clients do qualify for legal aid, it can be part of the qualification process.

Has there been any conversation at all at the ministerial level about the impact of not raising the income assistance threshold, which, again, would maybe give more people the opportunity to actually have access to legal services?

I'm not explaining this very well, but tables used for eligibility at Nova Scotia Legal Aid mean you have to earn less than \$1,067 per month to qualify, as a single person. Basically \$12,000 per year, or as a parent of two kids, you would need to earn less than \$1,400 per month. These are quite low, given the cost of living crisis Nova Scotians are currently facing. Again, we have people who don't earn a lot of money, and then they also can't get legal aid.

BRAD JOHNS: To the initial part of the member's question, the answer from my perspective would be no, I have not had those discussions when they're being had, but I certainly will bring that perspective to the table. I'm quite willing to do that. I certainly agree.

What I would also offer is that through working with other partners - federal, provincial, territorial partners - we've been trying to work with and advocate with the federal government to see an increase in funding. We have brought this up at numerous provincial-federal meetings, the most recent one of a full agenda being in Dartmouth last year at this time. We'll continue to do that federally, and I will certainly bring this suggestion up at the larger table.

I also want to offer that with the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute, the funding that DOJ is putting toward there, that should also be able to help alleviate some of the stress that Nova Scotia Legal Aid is going through as well. We're hoping that by funding - part of the goal of that institute will be to be able to address some of the stresses as well. I certainly thank the member for her questions.

KELLY REGAN: Perhaps when the honourable minister is there advocating for more money for legal aid, maybe also Dalhousie Legal Aid Service and the Halifax Refugee Clinic could use some advocacy on their behalf as well. (Interruption)

I have two minutes. When Nova Scotia Legal Aid is conflicted about a file or at capacity, they have to issue a legal aid certificate that a criminal or family client can take to a private bar lawyer, but tariff rates have been frozen since 2014. They start at \$70 per hour, which is very low for a lawyer, and max out at \$95 per hour, and that's for a very experienced lawyer working on a homicide, is my understanding. I think they have to have over 10 years of experience . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. That concludes time for the Official Opposition. We'll have a brief recess. We're now in recess.

[5:30 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[5:34 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. We'll reconvene the Subcommittee on Supply.

The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Thank you to the minister and his staff for being here. I do want to go back to the issue of NDAs. This is something that, in the first session after the government was elected, was identified by many members of the government as a priority and then that changed. I want to ask why, but I want to frame my comments in some of the conversation that was had last hour. One of the pieces is that in the bill that we put forward - which doesn't have to be the way that the government deals with it, but is the model legislation and what's in place in Prince Edward Island - there is the opportunity for confidentiality.

Yes, contract law is complex. Also, the law can be a very misogynistic instrument. I think that the misuse of non-disclosure agreements - which have a very valid and useful original use, which was to protect trade secrets - the misuse of that instrument to silence women is, I think, now widely accepted even much more so than it was a year ago as completely inappropriate.

I want to probe this idea that the government agrees that the misuse of NDAs is wrong and yet refuses to legislate. I want to understand why this commitment to addressing this legislatively changed. We heard, "We want to do this, we're going to do it", and now we hear, "We're undertaking an interminable jurisdiction scan." I wonder if the minister can address that question.

BRAD JOHNS: What I was thinking the other day is one of Premier Houston's quotes that he often uses: faster - going faster. I'm not a faster guy - I'm a cautious guy. I think that's one of the reasons I'm good in this role, I'm a little bit more cautious. I do want to say, we have not said no. We said that we want to review and slow it down. Anybody who is around often, I would say I'm the one who's saying to the Premier to slow things down. We're not saying no. I want to ensure that we have really good legislation.

I know that there are other jurisdictions that do have legislation. Some of those may or may not be good legislation, and I want to make sure we have good legislation. The other thing I would offer is initially, when this came, I thought this was a very straightforward issue. Having done some research, I don't think it's as straightforward as I first thought. I also want to say, I know that NDAs do predominantly impact women. I do want to say that I think they impact men as well. I do know men who have had to enter into NDAs as well.

I go back to the fact that I think that there's nobody in the House who wants to silence victims of sexual abuse. I think we all respect and recognize the harms that can be done through harassment and abuse. We want to address those, but I want really good legislation, and part of that is to continue to do a jurisdictional review and to do the research that's needed. At the end of the day, I've never said no.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The minister has never said no, but he did say yes, and now he's saying maybe. Acknowledging that men are impacted by NDAs, absolutely. I think we saw that very starkly in the Hockey Canada scandal. I just want to press, is this legislation that is coming or not?

Not saying no is one thing, but I also want to point out that we are in the context of a conversation right now about gender-based violence, and acting cautiously is permitting more harms to occur. We have to understand that in the context of this conversation.

These agreements - which the Premier has agreed, you have agreed, we've all agreed - can silence victims, and in fact, can perpetuate further abuse because people are

protected from consequences. If we agree on that, then of course due diligence needs to be done, but it has been quite a long time that we've been looking at this. When we delay action, we know more abuse is happening.

My question is: Is there a commitment to legislating this, and by when?

BRAD JOHNS: What I would say is, I understand, and I hear what the member is saying. I am not at a point in time yet to make a decision on this one way or another. I do know that there are other jurisdictions across Canada that also seem to be in the same place as Nova Scotia, where they're continuing to do research and review and haven't made commitments one way or another.

Recently I gave the direction to expand the review, expand and look at other jurisdictions and other places other than Canada, because currently P.E.I. is the only jurisdiction. It's never been really used in P.E.I. that we know of, so I want to see what the broader implications are. We have expanded that review, and we'll continue to look at it. That's all I can add right now.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'd like to dig into this jurisdictional scan, then. First of all, the legislation being enacted in Prince Edward Island means that it is being used. It means that perpetrators of harm know that they cannot be shielded from perpetuating that harm through a non-disclosure agreement because it is illegal. Whether and when that law will be tested - just because it hasn't been tested in a case does not mean that it is not functioning.

It's a real head-scratcher to me. I have an understanding of what jurisdictional review means. It means you check out what the other jurisdictions are doing, you look at it, you study it, and then you decide whether or not you're going to do it. What I'm hearing here is that because more jurisdictions are doing this, the review is going to take longer, which to me is an absurdity. Presumably, if more places are legislating this, then de facto it makes more sense for us to do it.

I wonder if you could comment on that. Is a jurisdictional review a never-ending research project? What are the parameters, and when does a decision get made?

BRAD JOHNS: That is part of the issue with P.E.I.'s legislation. It's enacted, it's never been tested. It is contract law. Will it stand up? We don't know. Do we expect to see some kind of a result from P.E.I. that we can base a decision on anytime soon? Probably not. It's less than a year since that legislation has been enacted, thereby we've expanded our research and our review to see if it's been tested and where else it might be.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: There's some dissonance going on with this government, because we hear all the time about the need to act faster, and the Minister of Justice, in his remarks, he's not a fast guy - that's okay - but we need to act faster. When we talk about

that in the context of health care it's, we need to act faster because we need to address people's health care needs. I have never once heard: "We need to act faster as long as the thing we're going to act on has already been tested in 27 other places and we know that it's okay." We do it because we think it's going to work. We've done the due diligence, and speed is required. I would argue that the same is true here.

That leads me to ask the minister: What are we waiting for? Are we waiting for more jurisdictions to pass legislation? That seems, quite frankly, like a cowardly approach. Are we waiting for another scandal?

[5:45 p.m.]

In all the other jurisdictions, including Prince Edward Island, where this was enacted, it was in response to a moral outrage about something terrible that had happened where NDAs had been used to cover up that terrible tragedy. In P.E.I. it was widespread abuse at a university, in Ireland it was the mother and baby homes, in the United States it was Harvey Weinstein, and then at Fox News Channel, Roger Ailes - all of these well-documented, awful situations of serial abusers and abuse. Are we waiting for that? What are we waiting for?

BRAD JOHNS: Very respectfully, what I would say is once again, as I pointed out earlier, regardless of the Premier's stance or health care stance or anything else, this minister's stance is a little bit slower and a little bit more cautious. I don't rush. I recognize that in some cases someone may refer to that as cowardice. I would refer to that as cautious and erring on the side of caution.

If any of the members have done any research, which I'm sure they have - and I don't want to get into a moral debate and a fight here - there are pros and cons to NDAs across the board. Staff are researching to see how other legislations are dealing with this, how they're being used across not just Canada now but throughout the United States and even into other countries. Then we'll make a decision on it once I have more information.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'm curious what kind of consultation and engagement the department is doing. I just want to say, I'm not casting personal aspersions. I'm not calling the minister a coward. I would not do that. I am saying that the approach, this approach of an overabundance of caution, to me, is not a brave approach. It's not an approach that acts to protect women and victims as quickly as possible. I want to just clarify my comments in that regard.

I want to say: What engagement are we doing? The minister says there are both sides, but I will tell you that I wonder if that's what the minister will hear if he engages with groups who are impacted by these legal instruments and groups that have been subject to these legal instruments. I have engaged with those groups, and I don't hear a lot of equivocation about whether these are useful or not.

BRAD JOHNS: I basically have said everything I'm going to offer today in regard to NDAs.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The minister won't answer the question of whether there's been engagement with stakeholders?

BRAD JOHNS: In conclusion, what I would offer is there is external as well as public information. There are court cases that we're trying to look at, other jurisdictions, and we're trying to engage with colleagues across the country. We did bring this up when we had our FPT. I have talked with other jurisdictions and other Attorneys General and Ministers of Justice, Solicitors General to see what their stances are, and will continue to do that.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: If engagement hasn't happened, I hope that it will, because this is a legal instrument that impacts people's lives very directly. I would like to encourage that, and encourage reaching out directly to not just Attorneys General, but to advocates in this jurisdiction and others who have made it their life's work to make these changes because of the terrible impact that these legal instruments have had. I don't know if the minister has another comment; otherwise I will switch gears.

Just before I turn it over to my colleague, I do want to mention, because the minister mentioned in his comments the Mass Casualty Commission, I want to mention the member for Colchester North is here, who I saw this morning in Truro, and acknowledge that this is a really hard day. I just want to put that out there. It's a hard day for a lot of people.

I won't put this question to the minister, because I'm assuming that he won't answer it, but I will say that for years, our caucus has been pushing for a public review of policing in Nova Scotia. We have been told time and time again that we need to wait for this report. This report calls for that review, and it is our sincere hope that that is undertaken soon.

With that, I'll thank you for your time and I'll turn it over to my colleague.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I have a few general questions that I'm going to ask. Our caucus was deeply saddened to learn of the recent deaths in the correctional facilities in the province; 37-year-old Sarah Rose Denny was a Mi'kmaw woman who died last week at the Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility with pneumonia. My question is: What is the department doing to improve access to health care in its facilities?

BRAD JOHNS: I can't really get into the particulars - which used to be so frustrating when I was in Opposition to hear this, and I'm sorry, but I really can't get into particulars of any individual cases. I do know there was an inmate who passed away at the

Dartmouth General Hospital who was an inmate at the correctional facility in Burnside. Other than that, I can't get into particulars around individual cases.

What I do want to offer, though, is that of course, at the Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility is the East Coast Forensic Hospital that's there, and the Department of Health and Wellness and we work very closely with them. We're trying to increase that relationship. It's a pretty good relationship now, but we constantly try to work with them, increase that relationship. There may be some things in the works that hopefully this time next year, I might be able to sit at the table and share a few more things that are happening that should be positive in those directions.

SUZY HANSEN: I just want to clarify this. Improving the access to health care in these facilities, we're utilizing the outside sources to offer those services to folks who need it. You said the East Coast Forensic Hospital is nearby, or is that where folks are located?

BRAD JOHNS: One of the benefits that I've had, I've really appreciated being able to go and visit facilities across this province. I've been to all correctional facilities in the province. The way that the Burnside unit is set out, there's one wing of that that is health care. The health facility is actually right on site as part of Burnside. In a lot of cases, they can deal with things up-front and be there. In some more severe cases, they would have to take somebody out of the institution.

SUZY HANSEN: My next question is: Racialized people are overrepresented in the justice system. Can the minister please table the most recent update on race-based representation within remand in custody?

BRAD JOHNS: I don't think anybody who is involved in justice could not say that they recognize that there is an overrepresentation of African Nova Scotian and Indigenous people in correctional facilities. They are approximately 14 per cent in both cases.

I recognize in some cases - people will say, "You've been in the role now for just over a year and a half", but some of these things have been long-standing. We are looking at ways to try to address these. Some examples being as spoken about in the opening speeches, the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute or Indigenous justice. We're trying to fix some of these problems.

The other thing I would offer is, it's really interesting when you go and visit the facilities. You have an opportunity to talk to the staff and people who are there every day. Sometimes they'll explain to you what some of the issues are as well, first-hand knowledge, being told why those numbers are higher. We are trying to address some of those concerns now with staff, and also working with other partners as was previously mentioned, the Elizabeth Fry Society and the John Howard Society of Nova Scotia, to try to provide opportunities.



Not everybody who may be in custody needs to really be in custody, and I think of a friend of mine whom I knew who was in the Elizabeth Fry Society - she was in Holly House in Dartmouth. The traditional correctional facilities would not have benefited her at all, but alternatives were there. We're trying to continue to work with our partners to address some of these issues as well. I'm well aware of it.

[6:00 p.m.]

SUZY HANSEN: You did mention the John Howard Society, and I received a question to ask you about why their funding was cut. In the beginning statements, you did mention that they would be receiving multiple-year funding, is it, 2023 to 2028? That would equal out to be \$320,000 per year, because it's \$1.6 million. Is that for the five years?

BRAD JOHNS: The answer to the question is \$1.6 million over five years, specific to the John Howard Society.

SUZY HANSEN: My follow-up question for that would be: I know that they had a pilot program, the bail program, and that's no longer being funded by the Department of Justice. I'm curious to know why that is not being funded through the department.

BRAD JOHNS: That was a one-time funding thing that was done through the Safe Restart Agreement, which was a COVID program. That's where the funding originally came from for that program.

SUZY HANSEN: As we know, it was a successful program, and we know that one year is not a sufficient amount of time to really gauge that. I'm just wondering if the Department of Justice plans on continuing this particular program in community.

BRAD JOHNS: We anticipated that the \$1.6 million would help to offset the loss of that funding for the bail program.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm hoping that won't be something I'll have to ask a question about later, but I just wanted to mention it, because this is what has been asked of me. They also mentioned that part of the pilot project was to oversee the electronic supervision in partnership with DOJ - the ankle bracelet for eligible cases. They've heard that the electronic supervision could cost an individual up to \$600 to \$700 a month if they had to pay for it privately. With the pilot project - which this will hopefully cover - the funding that you're offering to the John Howard Society - that would mean access to the free electronic supervision will also be discontinued if they can't afford that. I just wanted to put that forward for future thoughts. Hopefully we don't have to revisit it.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission called on governments to eliminate the overrepresentation of Aboriginal adults and youth in custody and jails and report on progress doing so. Does the department report publicly on progress, and can it be provided?

BRAD JOHNS: Is it fair to say I'll get back to you and we'll look at it?

SUZY HANSEN: For that question, I have a few more, but I'll save them and we can talk about that another time so you can be able to respond.

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls called on governments to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous women in correctional facilities and ensure culturally appropriate programming and services for incarcerated Indigenous women. My question is: Can the minister provide an update on this work?

BRAD JOHNS: I want to say that I recognize the limitations that I have sometimes based on my own culture in not recognizing other cultures. I emphasized earlier about getting out and talking and seeing and being first-hand, and I'm learning things that I didn't know. Those are some of the barriers that Indigenous women are facing not only going into custody, but also being able to get out, and some of the barriers that they face that I never knew about.

I will say that I'm learning those things and because I'm seeing them from a different perspective. I'm asking staff, "Can we address these things? Why does this exist like this?" We have to address it.

The other thing I will say is the department itself, we do recognize the unique needs of not just women but Indigenous and Black women. We funded the Mi'kmaw Legal Support Network for \$4 million over the last five years. We continue to support them.

We're making changes in Correctional Services where a number of years ago there were no such things. We did not have in our facilities Gladue Courts; we now have those. Sweat lodges at facilities, we're doing those. We're certainly trying to incorporate the needs people are facing that allow them or don't allow them to get out and reintegrate into society.

I don't want to use examples because I don't want to show my own ignorance if I'm wrong, but I'm out listening, and then I come back and I research and I see. Is what I'm hearing there right? We need to fix that. It's something we're looking at.

SUZY HANSEN: I thank the minister for even acknowledging that, because as we know, a lot of times we don't see it the way that other folks see it because of their experience. I appreciate that and I'm thankful that the minister is very honest about that.

My next question is: We've heard from volunteers with Books Beyond Bars that they are still not being allowed back into the Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility to run their important program. Can you explain this and why that is?

BRAD JOHNS: What I would offer is very similar to what we're seeing with Nova Scotia Health. Although a lot of the rest of society has moved past COVID, we're all sitting in this room, I think there are a couple of people with masks on, but most aren't. In our correctional facilities, we're still operating very much like COVID because of everyone being confined in a very small area. Masking is still a requirement, handwashing is still a requirement, and all of those. We've limited the number of people who are still going into the facilities.

What I would offer is that we're really hoping and trying to get back to normal as much as we can, but it just takes a little bit longer when you're dealing with large numbers of people in small spaces. If I could add on that, I would say staff are saying that they're anticipating by about May we should be back to regular operations, hopefully.

[6:15 p.m.]

SUZY HANSEN: That would have been my next question - around when - but that makes sense. In this climate that we're in, it would be dependent on the cases and how we want people to continue to be safe.

According to the Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton, the Province is going to give the bail program to probation. They are concerned about this change and its impact on people on probation. Can the minister confirm this change and what is the reason for this change?

BRAD JOHNS: What I'm being told is that there's no decision and we don't really know about this. Once again, staff are aware. If maybe I can give that to you another time?

SUZY HANSEN: I'll highlight that so I can make sure you have that information. Another few questions from the Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton: Women in Cape Breton are incarcerated in Burnside, so after their sentence, they need to get a bus. Release times don't align with bus schedules. Sheriffs used to bring them back and forth, but now they won't. Lawyers and judges are onside and requesting that when these women are released, they be transported back to a court in Cape Breton. Is this being addressed, and how?

BRAD JOHNS: I'm told that this was a practice during COVID that sheriffs were doing, but that we provide transportation and return people home now. There were concerns at the time with public transit and other things.

SUZY HANSEN: What I'm hearing is it's been addressed, there is no longer that issue with Cape Breton prisoners being left at a bus station or not being transported back to Cape Breton. I just want to be clear.

BRAD JOHNS: Yes.

SUZY HANSEN: It's also a major access to justice issue that women can't be incarcerated on Cape Breton Island. Is this being addressed, and how?

BRAD JOHNS: As far as I'm aware, this is not a discussion that we've had at this particular point in time.

SUZY HANSEN: Just because I want to be clear on this as well, there is not a space for women to be incarcerated on Cape Breton Island, or is it that they're only being transported to Halifax?

BRAD JOHNS: Currently there is only temporarily holding in Cape Breton, and the main one is Burnside.

SUZY HANSEN: Legal Aid lawyers in Cape Breton are also struggling to contact their clients, and Burnside is uncooperative. Women can't access their own court appearances if they can't access the video booth. Will the Province invest more resources to support Cape Breton women in Burnside?

BRAD JOHNS: We're not aware of this complaint. I think that the resources are there. I'm not aware of people not told that they cannot access their lawyers, and the department has just made some further investments into technology, as I spoke about earlier, to try to maintain and increase opportunities through teleconferencing and video conferencing.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm glad to hear that. This is what has been said, and I just want you to know so that if this does come up, maybe you can look into it. Maybe this is something that's happening infrequently, but it's still on the radar.

Cape Bretoners don't have the same access to justice as mainlanders. According to the Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton, a root problem is that women are being taken off the Island when they haven't been convicted of a crime. Ideally there would be small facilities across the province so folks don't have to migrate to Halifax. They are asking for beds to be disseminated to new women's or gender-diverse facilities. The Blueprint for Change was a model to correct this, but it hasn't happened. Is there funding in the budget to address this, and how much?

BRAD JOHNS: What I would say is that the facilities in Cape Breton are currently limited. We're reviewing how to address some issues, but the facility in Cape Breton is an older facility, so there are challenges because of that facility as well.

SUZY HANSEN: Another question: I understand that the Nova Scotia Health Authority is responsible for health care provision in correctional facilities. Is the minister aware of increases in the budget for primary care and wellness supports for inmates?

BRAD JOHNS: That is probably something that has to be asked to the Department of Health and Wellness.

SUZY HANSEN: We hear too often of poor health outcomes for incarcerated people. One recent example is someone who contracted meningitis in Burnside and didn't receive adequate early care. They ended up with worse outcomes than they should have because it took too long for them to be seen. What is being done to avoid these types of situations?

BRAD JOHNS: As I said, some of these would have to go be questions to Health. What I will say is that especially with Burnside, because it is so integrated with the health unit, when we have issues, inmates typically get seen relatively quickly because the unit is right there.

SUZY HANSEN: Earlier this week at a public meeting of the Public Accounts Committee, one of the issues raised was the freezing of fees for Certificate Legal Aid Lawyers. These amounts have not been increased since 2014, and I think my colleague mentioned the same thing.

The minister indicated that a working group was currently looking into this issue. Is there participation from the legal aid community certificate lawyers in this group, and how long has this working group been looking at this issue?

BRAD JOHNS: Just for clarity, would the member re-read the question?

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Halifax Needham with a reminder that her time ends at 6:34 p.m.

SUZY HANSEN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Earlier this week at the meeting of the Public Accounts Committee, one of the issues raised was the freezing of fees for Certificate Legal Aid Lawyers. These amounts have not been increased since 2014, and the minister indicated that a working group was currently looking into this issue.

Is there participation from the Legal Aid community and Certificate Lawyers in this group, and how long has this working group been looking into this issue?

BRAD JOHNS: What I'd offer is that, as I said yesterday when I was interviewed, we recognize that those rates haven't increased since 2014. It's not an external working group - it's an internal working group where we've been talking with DOJ and Legal Aid to try to get a right fit.

SUZY HANSEN: In recent years, we have seen continued declining numbers at the Nova Scotia Youth Centre in Waterville, and reductions in this year's budget seem to reflect that. I understand the IWK Health Centre has already taken over some unused

portions of the building. How else will the department utilize the extra space and resources, and will they be downsizing to a smaller facility?

BRAD JOHNS: One of the things I asked for when I came on was an inventory review so that we can maximize the use of all our spaces. That's ongoing, and staff are going to come with some recommendations I hope soon. It's not foreseen to remove the youth from the facility, and we have partnered with Nova Scotia Health. There are a couple of youth who are in there for Health as well.

[6:30 p.m.]

SUZY HANSEN: The department estimates that the province's rate of persons with disabilities will continue to rise as our population ages and have released a road map, Access by Design 2030, to address growing concerns of accessibility. This year's budget showed a drop in funding to the Accessibility Directorate. Can you explain this?

BRAD JOHNS: I do want to take the opportunity to recognize our director, Dawn Stegen, who's with the Accessibility Directorate, and she's here today. They do great work, and the amount of work that has come forward from that is just incredible. What I would offer is that it was one-time funding, and some of that work has already been done, so there was a decrease this year.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Halifax Needham with four minutes left.

SUZY HANSEN: Can you provide an update on the uptake progress in Access by Design 2030's actions, and will progress be regularly tracked and reported to the public?

BRAD JOHNS: I've been there. I hate when people eat your time, and I'm sorry. I do believe that we just submitted the plan in December. The plan was just submitted with the Speaker in December, so a lot of those questions are in that plan.

SUZY HANSEN: I'll get this last question in. Events at the Halifax Alehouse last year brought public attention to the lack of private security regulation in the province, an issue the legal community has identified as a serious legislative gap. The minister indicated that he asked the department to look into legislative options. Has this study taken place, and can we expect to see legislation come forward in the future?

BRAD JOHNS: If I can offer, of course, there was a bill that was never proclaimed. Staff have gone back in conjunction with... (interruption)

Fundamentally, what I do want to say is I recognize the families that were impacted by that. Our thoughts are certainly with them. We've been working with the Alcohol, Gaming, Fuel and Tobacco Division to review the legislation to see whether it's still

relevant and whether we proclaim it, if there's some other way that may work better with that.

We have been working and doing a review of the Security and Investigative Services Act, and we're very close to coming forward with some recommendations.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Halifax Needham with 13 seconds.

SUZY HANSEN: I just want to say thank you so much for responding and as well for the folks who are in your department. I know that they do a lot of hard work and I appreciate that.

BRAD JOHNS: Just before MLA Hansen leaves, thank her as well.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

IAIN RANKIN: I was listening to the discussion around bail, and I wanted to revisit that while it's top of mind. I was also made aware of the cut to the John Howard Society of Nova Scotia.

I'll just start by asking what the department has for a calculation on what it actually costs, an average daily cost for an adult to be incarcerated in custody. Do you have a figure for the cost of what that is today?

BRAD JOHNS: I'm sorry, we don't.

IAIN RANKIN: I do have the figure from the 2019 numbers from the correctional key indicators. It amounts to \$323 in 2019, so I think it's fair to say that it's gone up since then. I think the point I'm trying to get at is - I'll ask the question but I'm not sure if the department would have this on hand - what is the cost of supervising someone in the community, and how would you compare that cost with someone who's incarcerated?

BRAD JOHNS: We don't have the specific number, but I think staff and I would agree that it's significantly less. What I would say is I think that there are factors at play other than just the dollar. If we can have somebody transitioning back into society in some cases - earlier I used a friend of mine who was at Holly House. If she had been housed in a correctional facility, she may not have had the same outcome right now. People have looked at her as a model of how Holly House has worked to help. Sometimes I think there's more at play than just the dollar value. We try to look at the social impacts as well.

IAIN RANKIN: I appreciate that there's a recognition that from a cost perspective it's better, and even from a social perspective. I think you've said something similar, that we should be trying to find ways beyond just keeping people in a corrections facility if there is a way to do that because of the impacts.

The John Howard Society of Nova Scotia had a successful program by all accounts unless, correct me if I'm wrong, there's something about it that the department does not like, but the bail supervision program is shutting down because of this. That's what Correctional Services had advised them. It wasn't about trying to find money within, because I know the Treasury Board does that sometimes. I sat on the Treasury Board for years.

When there are constraints, we try to make it work, but if the department values this program and all of the reasons why it's better than incarcerating people, why would we not try to make it work with the John Howard Society? The question really is: Will the department commit to ensuring this program is reinstated and that the John Howard Society gets the funding they need?

BRAD JOHNS: I always hate when I'm asked if I'll commit to do anything. I just wish you'd commit me to go look at it. That I can do. In all fairness, the honourable member has been there too. When somebody asks you to commit to things, it's hard. We have looked at it. I want to reiterate that \$1.6 million was provided to supportive housing, and it was intended that there would be a bail component and other wraparound services included with that funding.

As I said earlier and I'll say again, the bail supervision funding really was a one-time thing. What I'm willing to commit to is to go and have a further discussion with staff on this issue, if that's okay.

IAIN RANKIN: I definitely appreciate that genuine feedback, I think. I'll go back to that point that I made. This is the second time from Estimates last year around Section 496. We've had the discussion back and forth about independence and the Minister of Justice's role overseeing the Nova Scotia Public Prosecution Service. I do want to see if I can find out any more on the data that Section 496 is being used. It was provided last year that it was used 12 times between 2019 and 2021, I think. I don't have it directly in front of me from my questioning last year.

The question - and you might need to ask staff behind you on this: How many administration-of-justice cases are currently before the courts now?

BRAD JOHNS: I don't have that number with me, and I know that staff are feverishly looking. We don't have that information right now. I can certainly commit to getting it for you. We'll certainly get that for the honourable member.

IAIN RANKIN: I'm trying to be constructively partisan, but I think really what I'm trying to do is, looking at the Jordan numbers that we discussed - 1,230 last year, 1,400 when it was checked in September - we're up to 1,500 and some now beyond the threshold. There are a lot of non-violent breaches that are before the courts that could be looked at,



and all the tools utilized within the Crown. That relates to the prosecution, that relates to needing a director who's culturally competent in the role.

I think the minister knows where I'm coming from in this and trying to be helpful. I would ask, to the extent that he can, respecting the independence, that Section 496 of the Criminal Code be looked at. In my non-expert opinion - from what I'm told - when it's only used a handful of times and there are that many cases before the courts, then it seems to me it would be something that the minister should consider discussing with the prosecution staff he has.

[6:45 p.m.]

Shifting gears a little bit here to Correctional Services. We've heard about the Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility and the conditions there from both the people inside and the employees. We hear that there's very little counselling support available and that the facility is more of a retributive facility rather than a rehabilitative environment. I want to ask the minister if he can elucidate on any efforts that may have been made since he's been in this role to improve conditions at our largest incarceration facility in the province.

BRAD JOHNS: What I would offer is we do try to take a rehabilitative approach. To the member, I would offer that there are tiers. A correctional facility is a correctional facility, then we have transitions like the John Howard Society that we spoke about. You're going to hear different things depending on whom you're listening to. What I would say is, we do have extensive services at the Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility. There are teachers who are there, social workers who are there, programmers who are there, therapeutics is there, the health system is there.

There are a lot of services that are offered there, and as I said previously, we are still in COVID-19 mode in our correctional facilities. I don't know if you were here when we discussed it earlier, but we're hoping that by May that we're not going to be in that mode. If you go visit prison, you're still restricted around certain things, and that's because of the number of people in confined quarters. I don't know if that helped answer everything.

IAIN RANKIN: We're hearing about staffing shortages there that can lead to issues with inmates like excessive turnover, which could be a snowballing impact if you're continuously short-staffed. I wonder if the minister can share how many staffing vacancies currently exist at the facility, and if he has any information relative to the turnover right there.

BRAD JOHNS: Before I give you the answer, what I'll say is that I think one thing I've discovered throughout Justice - not just in regard to the correctional facilities, but sometimes getting staff, whether it be for policing, whether it be for Correctional Services,

whether it be for - we are in a time where it's challenging sometimes to get staff to do things, whether it be sheriffs or courts. We hear that all the time.

We constantly recruit. We've just recently started a pilot project with the Nova Scotia Community College where we're training people to go into Correctional Services. As it stands right now, we have no vacancies.

IAIN RANKIN: Is there anyone off on physical injury incidents or stress or mental health leave at that facility?

BRAD JOHNS: Yes.

IAIN RANKIN: Is there a number that you can give, the number of people who would be off on stress leave, mental health, or other health-related issues?

BRAD JOHNS: I suppose what I would say is it fluctuates - sick time fluctuates daily. We can't really go into the specifics per day based on compromising security at the facility. We know that people call in sick or whatever, and we have to call people in to fill in. That's what I would offer right now. We have no permanent vacancies there.

IAIN RANKIN: Are there any measures taken to ensure staff are culturally competent at the facility and receive diversity training? There's an example that we've heard about where individuals have been denied specific combs for their hair type due to fear that it could be turned into contraband, for example. I'm wondering if there are steps being taken to improve that at the facility for staff.

BRAD JOHNS: What I would say, of course, is security of inmates and staff is a priority. Staff at both DOJ and Correctional Services are continuously reviewing a variety of things to ensure that - with priority on safety, I think, which it should be in a correctional facility.

We do offer, as I mentioned earlier, we've entered into a training agreement with the Nova Scotia Community College - we've partnered with them. We also offer an eight-week orientation. There's mandatory cultural competency training for all staff. The African Nova Scotian equity, diversity, and inclusion worker is on site, as well as well as an Indigenous worker. Correctional facilities are constantly updating and working on that cultural training with L'nu-way and Umoja. Workers also receive unconscious bias training. There is a lot of training that goes on.

IAIN RANKIN: That's helpful. I just want to see what the minister can share about the Serious Incident Response Team agreement. I'll just put in one question. The agreement between us and New Brunswick, is there any way for us to see the details of the agreement, or just explain how it works in terms of funding? What role would our director have - which

is a good appointment - and how would he be involved in things that happen in New Brunswick?

If there's anything that P.E.I. is considering in terms of joining this - my understanding was they were originally planning to, I'm not sure what happened there. Just a general question around SiRT: What you can say about it and what our role is and how the funding all works?

[7:00 p.m.]

BRAD JOHNS: I think that this is a model, in my opinion, of where we need to be going with certain services that this province offers, and this is one of the first of its kind that I'm aware of where we've entered into this partnership with an additional province. The member is correct - we were originally looking at doing a Maritime SiRT. That idea has not gone away. We just needed to get this phase done first.

The director here, Alonzo Wright, whom I spoke about before, oversees the entire unit now, and we will have an office in New Brunswick, as well as the office here in Nova Scotia. We will be increasing the complement, the number of people who are there. Currently it's six. We are increasing that. I don't have my numbers to where we're going, but I know that New Brunswick, any of the costs that were associated with New Brunswick are paid for by New Brunswick, so there are no costs to Nova Scotia in this, any office spacing, anything like that.

It really does open up an opportunity for Nova Scotia, because we can now ensure that we have a bilingual SiRT as well, because we can tap into that. One of the criticisms I think in the past was that members from a particular area might be reviewing complaints on members from Nova Scotia. We now have the ability to move some members within that, depending on what the complaints are.

It's new. I feel quite optimistic about it. There are no costs to Nova Scotia, and there seem to be a lot of benefits.

IAIN RANKIN: Just wondering if we could get a cursory update on the Land Titles Initiative. There's quite a bit more funding that was put in for compensation funds and commissioners appointed for cases that were looked at by multiple parties. The last I could find in numbers, overall 299 parcels were cleared. I think it's incumbent upon us to continue to track that number and ask where the number is now, and maybe you can share how many active files are under way.

BRAD JOHNS: Not to pass the buck - the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives. What I would offer is DOJ basically provides the legal services advice and commissioner aspects, but it really is probably a question more for the Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs.

IAIN RANKIN: Recently, Canada's Black Justice Strategy was announced by the federal government. I just want to ask the minister if he could maybe say what he thinks are the main issues from a Nova Scotia context to flag as this strategy starts to roll out, and if he's had any conversations with his counterpart on Canada's Black Justice Strategy.

BRAD JOHNS: Just curious on the time.

THE CHAIR: We still have 30 minutes for the Liberals and 10 minutes for the NDP. The hard stop time is 7:44 p.m. I'm still in discussion with the Official Opposition on the ending.

BRAD JOHNS: Just two things, Madam Chair: When there's an appropriate time, if you could let me know, I'd like to step out for a moment. I just need a washroom break. Also, if we could ensure that . . . (Interruptions)

I want to make sure that I have time for closing. I don't know if I'm coming back or if today's the one day, so I just want to make sure I have those times as well.

IAIN RANKIN: I'll make this easy, because I was going to share my time with my friends with the NDP, so I'll just conclude now and they can finish up with my remaining time. Then you can do your closing. We don't plan to bring you back for another day.

THE CHAIR: Perfect. We will take a four-minute recess after I recognize the honourable Minister of Justice.

BRAD JOHNS: Thank you very much to the member.

[7:06 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[7:12 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. It ended up being six and a half minutes, but here we go.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: I'd like to go back for a couple of moments where we left off when my friend, the member for Halifax Needham, was asking about the Security and Investigative Services Act, the bill which had not been proclaimed. I think it was from 2010. The reason I'm asking about this is that the recent case having to do with the Alehouse, et cetera, brought into public view the fact that the provisions of that law had never, in fact, been in force.

This was particularly upsetting to the family of the individual who had lost his life in an incident prior to the bringing forward of the Security and Investigative Services Act.

They had very understandably felt some ease in their minds when that Act was brought into force, and I think it naturally created a feeling for the family that the tragedy they had been through - some good had issued from it. It was very upsetting to them recently to learn that in fact the set of regulations around bars, bouncers, training regulations, and so on that had been in that Security and Investigative Services Act all these years, since 2010, had never been in force.

I wonder: Can you offer any insight into the possible reasoning why - what purpose might have been served by the bill having been held in abeyance and not proclaimed?

HON. BRAD JOHNS: In all fairness, I can't speculate on why a previous government did or did not do anything. What I can offer is that when this most recent event happened with Mr. Sawyer down at the Alehouse, and when DOJ was advised that the Security and Investigative Services Act was never proclaimed, one of the things I had asked staff to do was to go through our department and see if there was other unproclaimed legislation.

[7:15 p.m.]

What I would say is that the Security and Investigative Services Act was not the only one. There were probably about 15 different pieces that had been passed, and some of those go back a long time. A variety of reasons why - sometimes legislation isn't raised and proclaimed, sometimes there's an election called in the middle and the legislation may have just passed third reading so it doesn't go forward, sometimes government just decides not to move it forward, changes in government and different priorities. I don't know, I wasn't there at the time. I know it didn't happen.

What I would say is that we realize that it's an issue that does need to be addressed. I can't speak specifically to the piece of legislation of the Security and Investigative Services Act, but we do know that something has to be done. It highlighted that it was never enacted, and we are working in conjunction with Alcohol and Gaming to see what is the best fit today and 10 years later. It's something we're taking seriously. What I would like to offer to the family is that we do know and we are taking this seriously and we're trying to rectify this.

GARY BURRILL: I take what you're saying to mean that there has been something of a vacuum, and that the department is now engaged in bringing forward things that will fill that vacuum. Is there any more that you can say about what the department will be bringing forward in terms of provisions, regulations, or possible legislation on the subject of the bill which had not been previously proclaimed?

BRAD JOHNS: Unfortunately I can't give a lot of details right now. What I do know is that, as I said, we are reviewing it. We have some very preliminary suggestions

coming forward, and I would anticipate that we're going to see that come forward sooner than later.

GARY BURRILL: I certainly understand that you may not have the answer to this ready to hand, but can you say anything possibly about what form that might take? Thirteen years ago, the thought was that it would take the form of legislation. Are we thinking now that it might take the form of regulations in the different departments you'd mentioned, or policy? Can we characterize a little the shape of what might be brought forward?

BRAD JOHNS: I think it would be premature to suggest anything one way or another. The discussions are whether or not it would be new legislation. There is a discussion going on around whether it would be regulations. There are discussions currently going on in regard to what department would be responsible for it. It would really be premature to indicate one way or another. We do know that it's a gap and we are looking at fixing it.

GARY BURRILL: Just going back to the aspect of bills not being proclaimed, as the minister and Attorney General, I wonder if you could say anything about if you find it reasonable or understandable that people would feel some dismay that a bill that had been through third reading and received assent but had not been proclaimed, that having felt through the years that it was in force and then to find out that it was not in force, from your point of view, is it an understandable thing that this would be upsetting to them?

BRAD JOHNS: Once again, I wasn't there. I was on council at the time, but I was not in provincial government as an MLA at the time or in Cabinet at the time, and I don't know why it wasn't passed to the Lieutenant Governor. I would agree that if somebody feels that something has happened a certain way, there's probably surprise and disappointment when they find out that there wasn't. Now that we know that it was never proclaimed, we are trying to take action to fix it.

GARY BURRILL: I was part of the debate in 2010, and I was as surprised as the family to find that the conclusion of that debate had not issued a new law. I want to thank you for the explanation you've given and for your words of understanding toward the family that you directed earlier in answer to my colleague's question.

BRAD JOHNS: You're welcome.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: My question is: Common-law couples in Nova Scotia still do not enjoy the same rights as married couples. Despite recommendations in 2017 from the Law Reform Commission to correct this, the last Minister of Justice undertook public consultation on this, but no new legislation arrived. I'm curious to know: Have you taken

this on as a project in your ministerial position, and will we see legislation finally come forward on this?

BRAD JOHNS: Phase One of the Matrimonial and Property Act has been completed. We are moving on now to Phase Two, and we plan on doing engagement in regard to that.

SUZY HANSEN: Is there a timeline for when that might be, or is that just - can we be updated as the time goes along?

BRAD JOHNS: A couple of quick things. I absolutely hate giving a time frame because then you come back next year and say, we said this and this. What I would offer to answer the question is we're anticipating bringing forward proposed amendments in 2024, but once again, it's dependent on everything else goes. What I will offer is the recommendations that came out today from the Mass Casualty Commission are pretty significant and pretty weighty, and they may push our time frames on some things. Next year don't say you said so, if you're okay with that.

I feel so bad, Madam Chair, for poor Toyin. Toyin is one of the smartest finance people I've ever met, and nobody's asking any finance questions. They're asking everything else. Toyin is sitting there with a whole book, waiting for - sitting there . . .

THE CHAIR: Toyin, how are you feeling this evening?

SUZY HANSEN: I appreciate the honesty in that. I will look back at this and I will ask. You know that I will ask regardless, but not in that type of way. I understand the magnitude of this report coming forward.

Recently the department stated that it was committed - and you might have already answered this question, but so many questions have gone - to introducing an African Nova Scotian justice action plan. My question is: Will we see this come this year? Is the funding for the action plan coming out of the funding for the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute, or has it been otherwise funded in the budget?

BRAD JOHNS: As I said during my opening statements, we have gone out and done two rounds now of consultation with African Nova Scotians across the province. We've had over 200 people actually attend. Now that Round One of the consultations was completed in 2022, there is a What We Heard report that's been prepared, and we went back out for Round Two during October and November just past to try to validate the results of what we had so far. We continue to push that forward. It is a bit of a priority, and we'll keep moving forward with it.

I want to recognize, before I move on, we have been working with a number of community partners, and we appreciate what they bring to the table. We'll continue to work with them on this plan as well.

SUZY HANSEN: My second question: Is this coming out of the existing funding for the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute, or is it otherwise funded in the budget?

BRAD JOHNS: The intention, I guess, is to try to finish doing the consultation, get the plan together, and then we'll probably be looking to try to acquire some federal funding, and then the Province at the time as well.

SUZY HANSEN: Can we expect to see an African Nova Scotian policing strategy? When can we see that?

[7:30 p.m.]

BRAD JOHNS: The answer is yes. We're working with the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute and with consultations with African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition too.

SUZY HANSEN: I've received complaints in my constituency about police brutality and harassment. For example, there was a recent incident on a schoolyard with teenagers with a disproportionate police response, specifically towards the young African Nova Scotian youth and none towards the other youth who had ski masks on.

I know that Halifax Regional Police is ultimately responsible, but my question is: What guidance or support does DOJ provide to ensure that police responses in community are proportionate and safe while also maintaining a positive relationship with communities?

BRAD JOHNS: This gives me a bit of an opportunity to have a quick discussion. A lot of times I think people misunderstand what the role of the Attorney General and the Department of Justice is. I do not directly administer policing for municipalities. Each municipality does have a police board and work with their individual force. We look at policing from an overall safety and provincial perspective.

What I would offer is that it is a requirement for forces in Nova Scotia to have use-of-force training, as well as cultural competency training. The expectation is that forces in the province are ensuring that their officers have that kind of training. I would also offer that we are currently reviewing policing standards and looking at what exists today in developing new standards. This is something that we're looking at addressing as we move forward too.



SUZY HANSEN: Our caucus has advocated for legislative change to ban the use of street checks in Nova Scotia. I know it is banned by ministerial order, as we talked about previously, we know that sometimes things change, governments change, elections happen - all these wonderful things. Communities would benefit from the certainty of legislation about this issue. I'm wondering: Is this being worked on at all?

THE CHAIR: The honourable Minister of Justice, with a reminder we will be having a hard stop at 7:45 p.m. That gives you time for your closing speech and for us to finish what we have to do here.

BRAD JOHNS: You're telling me talk this out for 10 minutes? I would not do that to the member. (Interruptions) I remember the frustration when that happens. All the members here today have been very cordial and respectful. I think we've had a great discussion, and I appreciate that.

What I would offer is, we're not really considering looking at legislative changes right now. There is a ministerial directive. It's strong, it's legally binding under the Police Act, and police have to comply. It would be somewhat redundant, so I'm not looking at that right now.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm just saying that, because when I come back in the next election, I'll have to ask this same question hopefully, maybe to yourself - just saying. My next question is - I'm sorry, I just got completely thrown right off.

THE CHAIR: It's all right, it's been long days.

SUZY HANSEN: This is actually maybe a financial question: Does the Department of Justice have any contracts with Fivestar Bailiff & Civil Enforcement Services? How much are the contracts for? What are their services?

BRAD JOHNS: Toyin is going through that book. I don't want to take the wind out of her sails. I'm told we do not.

SUZY HANSEN: That was an easy question. I like that. Is there increased funding for Victim Services in the budget? If so, how much?

BRAD JOHNS: Before I answer this one, I'm going to back to the previous question. We don't use process servers in the Province of Nova Scotia, I'm told. We don't use any bailiff services like that.

In regard to this current budget with Victim Services, there is none there right now. Part of that is because we were waiting to see what came out of the Mass Casualty Commission and whether we had to adjust for there. We anticipate that there will be some changes.

SUZY HANSEN: Advocates have asked for amendments to the Human Rights Act to add social disadvantage and systemic discrimination as protected grounds. Is this being considered? (Interruption) I can ask again.

Advocates have asked for amendments to the Human Rights Act to add social disadvantage and systemic discrimination as protected grounds. Is this being considered?

BRAD JOHNS: The office hasn't been asked to look at it.

SUZY HANSEN: I will send you the details. I know we don't have a whole lot of time, but my next question is: There remain significant backlogs in the court system left over from the COVID-19 pandemic. Is there funding in the budget to address the backlog, and is there a plan to address that?

BRAD JOHNS: I was going to give an answer, and Toyin's going through her book. I don't want to answer pre-emptively. Two million dollars, and that's directly related to Jordan. I know that we're almost going to go . . .

THE CHAIR: About two minutes.

SUZY HANSEN: I will say that I do have a few other questions, but I can address them to you at another time. I want to say in my time that I have left that I truly appreciate having these conversations, as well as having discussions about some things that are really important to Nova Scotians, especially when it comes to the justice system. Like I said previously, I truly appreciate the work that is being done by your department, and hopefully we can continue this dialogue moving forward.

BRAD JOHNS: Just before I start my closing, I do want to recognize that I think just about everybody who's behind me right now who's left in this room is from DOJ. I want to once again reiterate the great staff that this province has working for them, looking after the Department of Justice, Correctional Services, and all the aspects of justice in this province. There is a wonderful team of very smart people in this province. If you're ready.

THE CHAIR: I just have to say a magic sentence here. I have to say, this is the fourth one that I've done, and this has been the most fun, especially this last hour. Sorry, Minister Morrow, but it was like watching a seed grow.

Thank you to the members. I will now close it to the Minister of Justice for his closing remarks, with a reminder that we have a hard stop at 7:51 p.m., but that does not mean you have to take the whole time.

BRAD JOHNS: I will just move the resolution on Estimates for the fiscal year of April 1, 2023 - March 31, 2024.

[7:45 p.m.]

THE CHAIR: Shall Resolution E12 stand?

The Resolution E12 stands.

**Resolution E19: Resolved, that a sum not exceeding \$1,191,000 be granted to the Lieutenant Governor to defray expenses in respect of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Review Office, pursuant to the Estimate.**

**Resolution E21: Resolved, that a sum not exceeding \$2,997,000 be granted to the Lieutenant Governor to defray expenses in respect of the Human Rights Commission, pursuant to the Estimate.**

**Resolution E24: Resolved, that a sum not exceeding \$442,000 be granted to the Lieutenant Governor to defray expenses in respect of the Nova Scotia Police Complaints Commissioner, pursuant to the Estimate.**

**Resolution E33: Resolved, that a sum not exceeding \$29,293,000 be granted to the Lieutenant Governor to defray expenses in respect of the Public Prosecution Service, pursuant to the Estimate.**

THE CHAIR: Shall Resolutions E19, E21, E24, and E33 carry?

The resolutions are carried.

With that being said, the time is now 7:47 p.m. That concludes the subcommittee's consideration of Estimates for today. The subcommittee will resume consideration when the House again resolves into Committee of the Whole House on Supply. Please return to your seats in the Legislative Chamber. The Committee of the Whole must rise and report before the House concludes its business for the day. Adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 7:47 p.m.]