



**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, APRIL 3, 2023**

**SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE ON SUPPLY**

**5:12 P.M.**

**CHAIR**  
Nolan Young

THE CHAIR: Order. The Subcommittee of the Whole on Supply will now come to order.

It is now 5:12 p.m. The Subcommittee is meeting to consider the Estimates of the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage as outlined in Resolution E3.

**Resolution E3 - Resolved, that a sum not exceeding \$170,492,000 be granted to the Lieutenant Governor to defray expenses in respect of the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, pursuant to the Estimate.**

THE CHAIR: I will now invite the Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage to make opening remarks for up to an hour, if they wish, and if they wish to introduce their staff to the committee.

The honourable Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage.

HON. PAT DUNN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To your delight, I've decided to scale down my opening remarks from an hour to much less. I thought that would bring a smile to your face and perhaps a few others.

Good afternoon, folks. I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the traditional territory (inaudible) . . .the Deputy Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, and Robert Paddock, Director of Financial Advisory Services, to my right. Of course, probably one of the best staffs in any department in the history of the province is sitting here behind me. We certainly don't have enough time to introduce each and every one of them, but I can say this much: They are a terrific, committed and dedicated staff.

[5:15 p.m.]

Our government's top priority, it's no surprise, is health care. Budget 2023-24 helps move our province forward, investing in health care and many of the things that are important to Nova Scotians. We will do whatever it takes to deliver the care that Nova Scotian families need and deserve. We are moving on solutions that work and building a province that thrives from end to end.

We also know that while we are making progress, it's going to take time. Our focus on health is broad, and we recognize the important role that other areas of investment have on our health and well-being. Making our communities healthier and more sustainable is part of our plan to fix health care. By addressing the factors affecting health and well-being, supporting families and youth, and investing in our communities, we can help improve the quality of life for all Nova Scotians.

As Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, I can say proudly that this department plays a vital role in Nova Scotia's health and well-being. We contribute to healthy, vibrant communities where Nova Scotians can be physically active and socially connected, and where visitors are drawn to the best of what our province has to offer.

We support and invest in so many organizations that are at the heart of our communities: libraries, community centres, rinks and recreation centres, museums, arts and culture organizations, and the list goes on.

Our work with partners has a direct impact on Nova Scotians' health. I'll start with libraries as an example. It's amazing how much their roles have grown over the years. When I was a child - and that certainly wasn't yesterday - I mostly thought of a library as a place for books. That's still true, of course, but a teenager today might visit the library to take a cooking class, record a song, attend a mental health youth support group, or borrow sporting equipment. The list goes on.

Libraries are often leaders in finding ways to help people access the services they need, including health services. In 2022, the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library partnered with Nova Scotia Health to deliver the Virtual Care @ Your Library project. A dedicated virtual care technician helps people in communities like New Glasgow, Westville, and River John navigate setting up appointments for virtual health care.

The libraries also offer space for people to hold their appointments if they need access to technology they might not have at home. We are providing funding to extend this program into Antigonish County this year and extend community navigation to all virtual health services.

Libraries were hubs for important health information and resources during the pandemic, and they continue to supply people with tools to care for their health. Halifax Public Libraries now lend out carbon dioxide monitors so patrons can check the air quality in their homes, and we have ordered the equipment so other regional libraries can begin doing the same thing.

Our province is growing, and we live in a time of change. We need to think about new and creative solutions for many issues, including community health. Our libraries continue to excel at that kind of thinking. We see it too in how libraries welcome and support newcomers, with everything from English language classes and conversation groups, to help with filling out forms or navigating transit systems.

They are truly community hubs. The regional libraries also launched the Same Page project in 2022. This partnership between eight regional library systems gives people across the province access to more than one million materials held in 60 library branches. The vision is that all Nova Scotians will have equal opportunity to connect to library resources for learning, discovery, and improved quality of life. That's a great vision.

Libraries and museums also serve as places of comfort. When Hurricane Fiona hit Nova Scotia in September, wherever museums and libraries were able, they opened their doors for people to stay warm, charge their devices, and have a hot drink. We know it's important for people to have a safe place to go during extreme weather or other events, and that's why we instituted the Community Generator Program in 2022.

It was launched as a \$2 million program, but demand was so high that we increased the funding and provided a total of about \$6 million to 180 organizations. Recipients included volunteer fire departments, First Nations, the Black Cultural Centre, and community halls across the province. We are helping these centres support their communities in times of need. We are offering the program again in 2023/2024.

We know that climate change is a challenge we must face across the province. We've been taking proactive steps both within the department and with our partners to prepare now for the future. We've leveraged about \$44 million in federal funding from the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program and the Green and Inclusive Community Buildings Program to invest in more efficient and sustainable community infrastructure, including projects like the Mariners Centre in Yarmouth, the Glace Bay Youth and Community Centre, and the new Nova Scotia Native Women's Resilience Centre in Millbrook First Nation.

We are upgrading our own sites to prepare for future weather events. We are working with partners to make environmental sustainability an important part of strategic planning in tourism.

A big part of our department's work is helping Nova Scotians lead healthy lives through our support for sport, recreation, and physical activity. Through our Let's Get Moving action plan, we fund programs that encourage people to incorporate movement into their daily lives. We work with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to deliver the Nova Scotia Before and After Program, an affordable, school-based program focused on outdoor play and physical literacy for elementary students before and after school.

We also support municipalities in Mi'kmaw communities to develop physical activity plans and put them into practice through the Municipal and Mi'kmaw Physical Activity Leadership Program. Our investment, about \$1.3 million in 2022-23, helps fund staff positions such as Active Living Coordinators that serve 44 municipalities, 11 Mi'kmaw communities and one village, as well as the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre. These coordinators find ways to reduce barriers to activity, and get people engaged and moving in ways that work in their communities.

We invest in new and upgraded infrastructures so people can have access to be active. When a child plays on an accessible playground in Parrsboro, or skates in the Antigonish area; when a young family goes for a walk in the Sackville Lakes trails; when a group of seniors enjoy a game of pickleball somewhere in the province - this department has worked with communities to bring these opportunities to life. Our investments today will help more people stay healthy and stay active.

Infrastructure, like rinks, is at the heart of communities, but many of them have been neglected for years. We are fixing that. Our government made it a mandate and priority to launch the Rink Revitalization Fund, which provides \$1 million annually in grants up to \$150,000 to help rural rinks undertake repairs. In the first two years, we've supported 58 rinks with almost \$2 million through the fund.

Of course, for some rinks, a cap of \$150,000 doesn't cover the work needed. In March of this year, we invested more than \$20 million to help rinks from Shelburne to Sydney make major repairs that will extend their life spans, help them operate more efficiently, and allow them to serve their communities for years to come.

One project we are especially excited about is our \$8.2 million investment in the Cape Breton University Canada Games Complex. It's been closed for years in disrepair, and it's going to be revitalized as a hub for female hockey, one of the only sites of its kind in North America. This rink will be the home of the Blizzard Female Hockey Association, and it will allow more girls from Cape Breton, Eskasoni, Membertou, and many underserved communities to get on the ice.

One of the players who spoke at the announcement of this investment, Samantha Morrison, was the captain of the women's hockey team that won a silver medal at the Canada Games in Prince Edward Island this winter, thrilling us all with the heart, hustle, and teamwork they showed on the ice. It was one of the highlights of a history-making Winter Games for Team Nova Scotia. Our young athletes brought home 24 medals, our most ever at a Winter Games, and captured the Centennial Cup as the province or territory with the biggest improvement from one Winter Games to the next.

Nova Scotia also won the Jack Pelech Award, given to the team whose athletes, coaches, managers, and mission staff best combined competitive performance, good sportsmanship, and a spirit of fair play, cooperation, and friendship. We are very proud of Team Nova Scotia, not just for the results but for how they represented the values of our province so well.

That speaks to another top priority of ours - not only increasing access to sport and recreation, but making it more inclusive, welcoming, and safe for everyone. When young people especially have positive experiences in sport and recreation - when they feel like part of the team - they feel more connected, they often do better in school, and are more likely to maintain healthy habits for a lifetime.

As we work with our partners, we've been leaders in safe sport education and training in Canada. We held our first Anti-Racism in Sport and Recreation Week in November, and we are working with the Restorative Research, Innovation and Education Lab at Dalhousie University to build restorative pathways for those who experience harm and maltreatment in sport. We also continue to support the Black and Indigenous Coach Mentorship Program to help develop more leaders in sport who reflect the communities they serve.

We are the first province or territory to reach an agreement in principle with the federal Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner on adopting their independent mechanism to address harm in sport. We continue to advocate for a national coordinated approach to make sure sport is safe for everyone.

Before I move on from our Communities, Sport and Recreation division, one of many divisions in the department, I want to mention how we also help Nova Scotians access healthy food. The \$200,000 Community Food Access and Literacy fund supports community gardens and programs where Nova Scotians can learn to shop and prepare healthy meals on a budget. This fund also supports the Mobile Food Market, which gives low-cost access to fresh produce to people in the Halifax Regional Municipality.

The Community Food Security Initiatives Program provides \$1 million to programs like Meals on Wheels, food pantries, and community meals. This fund supported 21 community projects last fiscal year, including a program through the Farmers' Markets of

Nova Scotia that allows low-income families to access local fresh produce, meat, and other products in a stigma-free way at farmers' markets across the province.

We know that health also goes beyond the physical when we engage with arts, music, or theatre. When we take pride in Nova Scotia's unique and diverse cultures, it makes a difference to our personal and collective well-being. Arts and culture bring communities together. They challenge us and inspire us. They build understanding and empathy across cultures and experiences.

They also make a huge contribution to Nova Scotia's economy, which helps pay for services like health care. In 2019, just before the pandemic, the creative sector provided more than 12,000 jobs and contributed \$970 million to Nova Scotia's GDP. Yet the sector has faced many challenges in recent years. I have heard first-hand how tough it has been through travelling from one end of the province to the other and from many meetings.

Over the past few years, the department has responded with emergency funding to help arts and culture organizations navigate the impact of the pandemic, but that alone isn't enough. As my colleagues here in front of me are well aware, arts and culture organizations haven't seen an increase to their core operational funding for almost two decades. The last increase came in 2006. That's far too long, and I'm pleased to say we are changing that.

In this 2023-24 budget, we are increasing operational funding for arts and culture organizations and community museums by \$5.1 million. This funding will support 180 organizations across these sectors, including new organizations that haven't been able to access operating funding because budgets were frozen.

Our funding supports organizations that help shape the cultural landscape across the province, like Music Nova Scotia, the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia, and the Acadian Culture Federation of Nova Scotia. It also helps sites that have a direct impact in local communities, like the Mermaid Theatre in Windsor, the Queens County Museum, and the Millbrook Cultural and Heritage Centre. Our increased funding will allow organizations to do more than struggle to stay afloat. It will help them continue to create jobs, draw visitors, and inspire communities.

We'll be working with sector partners to determine how the increases will be allocated once the budget is passed. In the meantime, I want to say to our sector partners: We have heard you. We want to see arts and culture thrive in Nova Scotia. It's a vital part of who we are.

We are also providing \$2.6 million to 17 locally managed provincial museums and the iconic Bluenose II operations. These museums, such as Ross Farm, Highland Village, and the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre, help tell the stories of Nova Scotia's past, present, and future. Our museums and vibrant arts and culture sector help enrich Nova Scotia's quality of life. We have seen visitation make a strong recovery over the past year, helped

by compelling exhibits like Body Worlds Vital and the Age of the Mastodon. Some of our museums are seeing numbers like they haven't seen since 2019.

Museums and archives also support our film industry, sometimes as venues for filming or as important places of research for film projects. They also encourage tourists to choose this province as a destination - another important focus for our department; 2022-23 was the first full fiscal year since Tourism joined Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, and we saw some encouraging growth as we continued to rebound from the pandemic. We continued to reap the benefits of having tourism align with the broader department, such as working closely with the Events Nova Scotia team as we hosted international events that drew thousands of visitors to the province.

[5:30 p.m.]

We welcomed almost 2 million visitors last year, a million more than 2021, and a great leap from the lows of the pandemic. We especially saw an increase in visitors arriving by air and room night sales across the province actually surpassed 2019's pre-pandemic numbers. This tells us that we are on the right track. We saw significant recovery last year, and we are expecting a strong 2023.

Prior to the pandemic, tourism was a \$2.6 billion industry in Nova Scotia. We are committed not only to helping tourism return to pre-pandemic highs but to making our industry stronger than ever. It was a commitment in my mandate to boost the tourism marketing budget to support local operators.

Last year, we introduced the new Compelling Tourism Communities Initiative, which helped 120 communities and operators with market research, advertising, website development, and digital marketing training. As an example, Tourism collaborated with the Cliffs of Fundy UNESCO Global Geopark to capture the timelapse drone footage of the world's highest tides. This will help showcase what visitors can experience at the park in promotional videos and marketing materials.

In March, we invested in an additional \$2.7 million to start marketing earlier and extend the reach on our new campaign, called Your Ocean Playground. We are excited about this great campaign, which will run in Quebec, Ontario, and northeastern United States until the end of the summer. We also have our campaigns in Germany and the United Kingdom and our year-round advertising, of course, across Atlantic Canada.

Overall, we will invest about \$8.6 million in tourism marketing in 2023, as we anticipate another strong year. We continue to work with tourism industry partners, with our airports, and with our film industry to showcase the best of what Nova Scotia has to offer.

Events came back in a big way last year, contributing to the strong rebound in tourism. In 2022, we welcomed the International Canoe Federation's Sprint World Championships to Lake Banook and the World Sailing Championships to St. Margaret's Bay. We worked with New Brunswick to put together a bid on short notice to bring in the 2023 Men's World Junior Hockey Championship, a hugely successful venture that filled hotels and restaurants in late December and early January, when things are typically a little on the low side.

The economic impact of these events is in the millions. We don't have final numbers of the World Juniors yet, but preliminary numbers show that the tournament generated about \$21.9 million in economic activity in Nova Scotia, during what is typically a quieter time for tourism.

We are looking forward to welcoming more great events in 2023-24. As many of you know, in July we'll host the North American Indigenous Games, which will draw more than 5,000 athletes, coaches, family members, and spectators to the province. It will be the largest sporting event ever held in Atlantic Canada, and it's a great opportunity to showcase and celebrate Mi'kmaw culture, while welcoming visitors from across the continent.

In March 2024, Halifax will host the Juno Awards for the first time since 2006, bringing the best of Canadian music to the province, along with industry professionals and thousands of fans. In Summer 2024, southwest Nova Scotia will welcome Acadians and Francophones from around the world for the World Acadian Congress.

We saw another strong year in film and television in Nova Scotia as well. Like tourism and events, the film industry helps strengthen our economy, creates job opportunities, brings investments into Nova Scotia, and ensures our culture is shared around the world. For example: in 2022, the Disney series *Washington Black*, filmed here in locations from Peggy's Cove to Louisbourg. When viewers across North America and beyond tune in as the series airs - likely later in 2023 - they'll be treated to beautiful views of our province.

Through the Nova Scotia Film & Television Production Incentive Fund, the department approved 97 projects and invested a total of \$29.4 million in 2022-23. And in return, film production generated a \$137.5 million in direct spending in Nova Scotia last fiscal year. That means that for every million we invested through the film fund, it generated more than \$4 million in direct spending.

This fund has a baseline of \$25 million, and over the past few years, governments have invested more mid-year to keep up with demand. This year we know we are expecting another strong year, and we have committed an extra \$14 million in this year's budget to bring the fund to \$39 million for 2023-24. As the industry continues to grow and thrive, we are proud to support a healthy balance where we are attracting large international



productions that bring jobs and investments, while giving our local directors, writers, actors, and creators the tools they need to shine.

We invested \$15 million in March of 2022, in a five-year Nova Scotia Content Creator Fund to help local creators flourish. And we continue to support Screen Nova Scotia in developing a soundstage that will allow for year-round productions.

Another important focus in all my portfolios is the importance of equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. We must continue to address systemic barriers, right historic wrongs, and build a more equitable province where everyone has access to opportunities and resources. We have 77 grant programs at Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, for everything from trail development to facility improvement to supporting active communities. We've been working through a program improvement process to make sure our grants are more equitable and accessible.

This has included interviewing people in groups who have been historically underserved by government, to adjust our approach so we can better meet their needs. In this coming year, we'll be launching a new online tool to help people find the grant or program that best fits their project, without sorting through a dozen different guidelines to find out if they're eligible.

A good example of what I was just talking about was, earlier today, at noon, I took part in an announcement in Lucasville where we invested \$100,000 to the organization there to help them take the first step, the first phase of creating a transportation hub, as far as being able to move from community to community. They're not main highways, but there's very little opportunity or space for people in the communities to walk safely along the side. They're into Phase 1 - a lot of planning - so again, just one example of many communities across the province that we're helping in many ways. Not only by being active, being physically active, and being able to move from community to community, but having the opportunity to connect.

This is going to make our processes simpler and more user-friendly for community organizations, which are often run by volunteers juggling multiple responsibilities. We are excited to launch this new tool soon, and I want to extend my thanks to staff who've been working diligently on bringing this to life. Again, that's on our website. What they're working on is to make it much, much easier for communities and organizations to go to the website and find out the proper program that fits what they would like to request.

We also have two grants, the Business ACCESS-Ability Grant and the Community ACCESS-Ability Program, that are designed to help businesses and community facilities become more accessible. Each program has a budget of \$1 million, and last year they supported a combined 90 projects. One recipient was the Wolfville & District Lions Club, which is a focal point for a lot of seniors' activities in the community. Our grant allowed them to install new accessible doors.

In African Nova Scotian Affairs, we officially opened three new regional offices this year. In Digby, serving the Southwest and Annapolis Valley region; in New Glasgow, serving Pictou, Antigonish and Guysborough Counties; and in North Preston, serving North Preston, East Preston, Cherrybrook, and Lake Loon.

I may have mentioned - well, perhaps I'll mention it now. - these offices are added to existing regional offices in Yarmouth, serving the South Shore; Truro, serving the Northern region; and Sydney, serving Cape Breton, alongside our central office in Halifax. We have coverage across the province so African-Nova Scotian communities feel informed and empowered to services, programs, and support through all government departments.

We have worked alongside community-led organizations to help them build capacity and plan for future development and advancement. In 2022-23, we provided special funding to the Black Cultural Centre, the Africville Heritage Trust and the African Nova Scotian Music Association, toward strategic plans that will ensure their sustainability and success for the long term.

In the coming year, we'll be working to develop an African Nova Scotian cultural tourism strategy. We have a rich history and culture here in Nova Scotia, across the province and within our 50-plus African Nova Scotian communities. We know there's more we can do within the tourism sector to help organizations, business and tourism operators showcase their unique offerings to visitors.

We continue to support innovative housing initiatives in African-Nova Scotian communities. Through Associate Deputy Minister Provo and ANSA, we work closely with Municipal Affairs and Housing to provide \$3.5 million for ongoing repair, maintenance, and the transfer of up to 50 community-based housing units in the Preston area.

We reached a memorandum of understanding with the Preston Area Housing Fund to explore opportunities to support long-term housing needs in the area that will remove systemic barriers and support community-based housing. We know the community organizations know the needs and strengths in their communities, and we want to give them the support they need to succeed.

Last year also saw the launch of the Fair Care Project, with support from the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives. Through this project, Nova Scotia is now collecting race-based data in health care. This is something that communities, especially African Nova Scotian community health leaders have been asking and seeking for a long time. Collecting and interpreting race-based data will help identify and address unfair differences in equities in health care. It will also help the health care system work with communities to meet specific needs in an accessible way.

We also continue to make significant progress in the Land Titles Initiative. In the five LTI communities, North Preston, East Preston, Cherry Brook-Lake Loon, Lincolnville

and Sunnyville, we have now established clear title to 325 parcels of land. Since Part 1 of the Land Titles Clarification Act moved to the office in November of 2021, we have issued 30 Certificates of Claim or Title. That's 30 in 17 months. By contrast, the average prior to 2021 was about 7 per year.

I have to give the LTI team credit for working closely with community members to advance this project and help more people gain the equity and security that comes from having clear title to their property. We have also expanded the LTI's legal services, in partnership with the Department of Justice, so that people have easier access to the services they need, all free of charge under this initiative.

[5:45 p.m.]

This year the office will continue to develop the Equity and Anti-Racism strategy required by the Dismantling Racism and Hate Act, which we were happy to introduce and pass last spring with the support of the all-party committee, and input from more than 70 community organizations. We continue to draw on what we have heard from communities as we develop the strategy, and we look forward to introducing it by the end of July.

There are many other programs and stories I could highlight from this portfolio, but I'd like to close my remarks by highlighting just how effective this department is at making a difference with the dollars we have. The Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage budget for 2023-24 is, as mentioned earlier, \$170,492,000, which is certainly a significant amount. To put things in perspective, though, it's a little more than one per cent of the provincial budget of \$14.4 billion.

I want to highlight the ways that our creative and resourceful staff help partners and community organizations to do great things with smaller sums. Here are some of things we help bring to light with grants under \$50,000: a deaf theatre festival through Zuppa Theatre Company; a Black playwrights' circle with the Charles Taylor Theatre; an animated Gaelic teaching tool for young families; a splash pad in Port Williams; an accessible washroom at the Ecum Secum Fire Brigade; a new roof for the Isle Madame New Horizons Senior Citizens Club; the Festival acadien de Clare; a generator for the Upper Hammonds Plains Community Centre; an accessible baseball field for Amherst Little League; and African Heritage Month events around the province.

Those are just a few examples out of literally hundreds that I could choose. I'm happy to share more when I field questions shortly, but I bring this up to highlight how many different aspects of life in Nova Scotia we manage to touch, with comparatively small investments that go a long way toward building a healthy, vibrant community. When we talk about the social determinants of health and addressing the factors that affect Nova Scotia's health and well-being, this portfolio is such a positive influence in those areas.

I am pleased - and I know the arts and culture sector is especially thrilled - that we can increase some of our funding this year, so our partners don't have to be quite so creative in stretching a dollar. I want to thank the staff of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage who work every day with those partners across the province, who advocate for their needs within the department and across government, and who are dedicated to helping communities thrive.

I also want to thank my colleagues from the Legislature in the room who help identify and champion projects and opportunities in their regions. You know how much the work we do matters to the families in your communities. I'm looking forward to doing even more positive things with you together in 2023-24.

With those short few words, Mr. Chair, I'll see you tomorrow.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Just to confirm, will you also be speaking in your capacity for the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives?

PAT DUNN: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Okay. As I've already read E3 before, I'll read E28 now.

**Resolution E28 - Resolved, that sum not exceeding \$4,681,000 be granted to the Lieutenant Governor to defray expenses in respect of the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives, pursuant to this Estimate.**

THE CHAIR: According to the practice that has developed in the Legislature, the opposition caucuses take turns asking questions for approximately one hour each. During each caucus's turn, the members within the caucus may take turns examining the minister on the Estimate Resolution. Only the minister may answer the questions, and caucuses are expected to share time fairly with the independent member.

To begin the examination, I now recognize the member from the Official Opposition, the Member for Cole Harbour.

HON. TONY INCE: Thank you for providing us quite an in-depth detail of what's happening in the departments. I also would like to take this opportunity to thank your deputy and the staff behind you, who have helped you prepare all the stuff, and I have an idea of how challenging it is. Thank you so much.

In January, a memorandum of understanding with the Preston Housing Area Fund was launched, and discussions about inequity were explored, and opportunities to support long-term housing in these areas, including the work to transfer up to 50 provincially owned housing units into Cherry Brook, Lake Loon, North Preston, East Preston, and

Westphal to a non-profit organization. The government is also providing \$3.5 million to support the ongoing repair and maintenance and sustainability of these units.

My question to the minister is: Just give me an update on what's happening with that, please.

THE CHAIR: The honourable Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage.

PAT DUNN: It's certainly an important initiative that's happening in that community. Probably a better question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, but also, we are supporting that endeavour, so I can certainly speak somewhat on it.

We're working with Municipal Affairs and Housing with regard to the Preston area and the provincially owned housing units, and just creating opportunities so that more people there can have community-owned and operate affordable housing developments going into the future. So you're correct: on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2023, there was a memorandum of understanding that was signed addressing housing inequities.

Going forward, there's going to be - and there is now, and will continue to be - discussions exploring opportunities to support long-term housing needs in the area, including work to transfer those 50 provincially owned housing units, to transfer them over, in Cherry Brook, Lake Loon, North Preston, East Preston. They're going to be turned over to the Preston Area Housing Fund.

I mentioned earlier in my opening remarks that the province is investing \$3.5 million to support the ongoing repair and maintenance and so on, and make sure that it's a sustainable operation for the units. This funding is coming through the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. That \$3.5 million is not coming from CCTH.

TONY INCE: Minister, can you explain to me the community organizations that are involved in this, as I'm asking more of an update, if you can provide for me where they are with this? Who's having the conversations within the community? Would you know?

PAT DUNN: Like I mentioned earlier, the memorandum of understanding was of course with the Preston Area Housing Association, the group. The Municipal Affairs and Housing are leading that initiative. Although we're supporting it through African Nova Scotian Affairs, they are the lead on this here.

At this moment I don't have a lot of details, outside of that I know there's discussions going on, the memorandum was signed, the \$3.5 million was invested, and they're also looking to expand that. To expand where there are more people in the community who have their own living accommodations going forward.

TONY INCE: Okay, I'll move on. Thank you, minister. I'll try to get some ideas from the Minister of Housing.

In January, the province is supporting the African Heritage Trust to develop a strategic plan, and to ensure a sustainable future. A \$150,000 investment will allow the organization to refresh programming and to develop strategic operations and plans. Can you give me an idea of where we are with that, and what's happening with the Africville Heritage Trust and this investment?

PAT DUNN: My understanding of what's happening now is the Department of African Nova Scotian Affairs, under the leadership of ADM Provo is working with the committee in the community to develop a strategic plan going forward. That's basically the stage of where they are right now.

TONY INCE: Are you telling me that it's a work in progress at this time and you don't have any updates for me at this point?

PAT DUNN: Yes, that's exactly correct. There are no updates at the moment. It's still a work in progress.

TONY INCE: Do you have a timeframe of when this is to be done?

PAT DUNN: My timeframe has always been, "The quicker the better." So although I don't have an exact date, like July or October or whatever, our goal is to move along as quickly as we possibly can, making sure we cross all our t's and dot our i's, to make sure that we do it right. It's not something that's going to carry on and carry on. We want to get to business and get these things completed for the communities involved.

TONY INCE: Okay. My next question would be for the other organization that you had mentioned. In November you had provided \$225,000 to the Black Cultural Centre. Can you give me an update on that one?

PAT DUNN: Thanks for that question. That investment there, again, is to assist the Black Cultural Centre as far as sustainability to help them in the work that they do during any fiscal year. And it's also to support strategic planning in, basically, long-term financial liability. The board itself - its focus is on many, many things. African Heritage Month would be one of them. Their main focus now is to advance the strategic planning in the Centre and across the province.

TONY INCE: Am I to understand that part of that money is for operational funding? Is that part of operational?

PAT DUNN: The answer would be that the majority of that funding would be - the main reason is investing in the strategic planning going forward. I think your question was,

“Is this for operating?” It’s more for the strategic planning. Also, because of our investment in arts and culture, they’re going to be helped out and assisted through arts and culture funding also, going forward.

[6:00 p.m.]

TONY INCE: I’m not sure if you would know this, but I’ll ask. Can you give us an idea - and you may not have it right now - but can you give us an idea of the sort of direction that the centre might be moving in with this strategic planning?

PAT DUNN: It’s a little premature for me to be saying too much, but I can say this to the member, that it’s moving ahead with the strategic plan to be more connected with the 50-plus communities across Nova Scotia. Actually talking with them, listening to them, seeing what their needs are, and from that information that they’re already involved in, coming up with a strategic plan to be more accessible to these communities.

TONY INCE: I take it, then, that would mean that they would have a greater reach across the province than the other communities, as opposed to being so centrally located?

PAT DUNN: I guess that could be one of the expectations. But it’s what the communities want. As you well know, being a former minister, it’s not for us to fire out even suggestions. We want them to do their work for their own communities, and from the details from that work, they’ll be able to come up with a strategic plan.

The plan will develop. The plan will show us if it’s going to be a thorough expansion across the province or not. I could say more, but I’d be sort of guessing, because the plan hasn’t been developed yet. They have to do their due diligence.

Just to finish off, the plan that they have been working on - and they have been working on it for quite some time - they haven’t reached a point where they’re going to implement it. They haven’t reached that road yet. Hopefully soon, they will.

TONY INCE: I wasn’t suggesting that you were making suggestions, or you should. I was just wondering if you might have had some insight on that direction. I’m going to move on now from there, and I’m going to move on to something that’s dear to me. And that’s the International Decade for People of African Descent. That ends in the upcoming fiscal year, 2024.

Many Nova Scotians were invited to partake in this incredible, important endeavour, but we have not heard an update about this important issue. And it sort of appears - and again, I’ll just use that lightly, minister - it appears that there doesn’t seem to be anything going on, not a mention. Can the minister please give the members of my and me community some idea of what the government may be planning for the end of this decade?

PAT DUNN: I'll begin to start to answer your question, beginning with DPAD and so on. My understanding is, we're going to continue to work with DPAD to continue to strengthen our relationship with DPAD, and just working with them to support the goals that they have in supporting the communities. Those discussions have already started and are going on with DPAD. Exactly what may occur or will occur - it looks like a deadline or whatever - I'm not sure at the moment, because those types of discussions are going on.

You mentioned an end there, questioning what's going to happen when we reach that point. As I said, we're working with the organizations and so on. And just because we're coming to the end of it, it doesn't mean that that work is going to stop. We intend that the work is going to stop. We intend that the work is going to continue.

TONY INCE: It's good to hear that the work is going to continue. Have there been any other communities, other than DPAD, reach out to the Department of African Nova Scotian Affairs to discuss the decade, to look for any assistance or help in trying to coordinate any event for the end of this?

PAT DUNN: Our focus with the discussions going on with DPAD at the moment, what's suggested is their lifespan and so on. The discussions that have been happening are more to the level of advancing the work of DPAD, advancing the action plan through ANSA, through other organizations. There are several other organizations in the various communities. That's been the focus at the present.

TONY INCE: We know that the topic of justice and addressing the barriers - now, part of this question you might defer to the Justice Department, but I'm going to throw it at you anyway - addressing barriers in the justice system of diverse communities should be of key importance for the office. Last May we heard the initial plans to begin the African Nova Scotian Justice Development Plan that was released in May. Can you, minister, please give us an update on that plan?

PAT DUNN: Having played a few years of ball, I could probably catch that ball coming towards me, but I have to throw it back because that's really a question for the justice minister.

TONY INCE: Thank you, minister. A really important program that we have in Nova Scotia is the Nova Scotia Brotherhood Initiative. Can the minister please provide some information on how much is in the budget or how much was allocated for this initiative this year?

PAT DUNN: Again, there's not too much information I have personally on that, because that's more of an initiative through the Department of Health. I think it's in the area of approximately \$200,000. But again, that would have to be a direct question to the Department of Health that are pushing that initiative forward.



[6:15 p.m.]

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

ALI DUALE: First of all, I'd like to acknowledge the members of the leadership of CCTH. As a member of this Legislature, I'm grateful for your service that you provide the people of this province. We know most of the time politicians and ministers take the credit, but the credit belongs to you. You are the ones who do this work, and I'm grateful to have this opportunity today to meet all of you and to shake your hands. I look forward in the future to be in touch and to work with you.

Secondly, thank you, minister, for your notes. I will be more than happy to work with you. I'm going to start my first initial question, because within your notes, this is something that touched my heart, and oftentimes I like to speak my mind rather than the notes that are in front of me. Just taking that note for the library and the initiatives and the benefits and the purpose of libraries.

To say that, I can make my personal testimony coming here as a refugee. My first class that opened the doors for me was the library. If I look back at my recollection, there was a program that was designed for mature students - adult student - to give basic math and English skills. After I finished that program - it was a one-year program - and if I'm not making a mistake, that program was funded through HRM.

After I graduated, after I finished that program, I was able to attend an adult high school. So my testimony is that if that program was not there, I would not be able to sit in a high school class. Coming here as a refugee, I didn't have that - I missed that life of seven years within the refugee camp. I'm wondering, is there any initiative that has been taken to foster these kind of programs, and is there anything pertaining to these kinds of programs in this budget?

THE CHAIR: The honourable Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage.

PAT DUNN: I wholeheartedly agree with everything you're saying. Before I attempt to give you an answer, I want to also agree with you about the wonderful staff that I'm with at the table, and the staff behind me. I always think I have the easiest job. They are the people that are committed, are dedicated, and do some great work, day in and day out. In fact, often willing to work extra hours, and put the time in sometimes on the weekends, when there are deadlines and things have to be done. And they always do it in a very pleasant way, with a smile on their faces, which makes my job when I arrive at the department in the morning. Again, they're great people to work with and I'm enjoying every minute interacting with them, and they're very helpful.

I'm glad that you were able to take part in that particular program. The libraries in the province are continuously expanding their network, expanding the things that they do. I think every year they increase the types of things that they do to help people in the communities. And we really saw that during the two-plus years of the pandemic, that they went over and above and beyond things that they did prior to, in helping community members.

The dollar value investment in the budget that you were referring to is, again, \$16.5 million for this coming fiscal 2023-24. I can also tell you that - I can stand to be corrected, but I think by 2026 there'll be perhaps a new funding formula. They're currently working on a new funding formula for all the libraries across the province. That will be a significant milestone - and again, this funding formula, it's all about sustainability. They can plan a year, two years, three years ahead, as far as a lot of their programs and a lot of their staff - who they can retain, and if they can get more staff and so on - to offer more programs.

Again, this is sustainable funding over and above project funding. There are also project fundings, too, that the libraries can apply for and come up with some very significant and worthwhile projects in their communities. The examples of projects under the Nova Scotia Library Association Professional Support & Development Fund in this past year - the Colchester East Hants Public Library and its Voices for Change speaker series, to elevate and amplify the stories and perspectives of community members on social justice and environmental action topics. There was an investment of a little less than \$19,000 for that particular project.

There was another project where we invested roughly \$20,500 at the Western Counties Regional Library Digital Literacy Program. And that's just for providing the tools, training, and devices needed to navigate health, government, and basically better online services. They're a couple of examples.

I mentioned earlier in my opening remarks about the Pictou-Antigonish Library with the Virtual Care @ Your Library. They have done a tremendous job piloting that project of virtual care. I personally know lots of people that have gone into the library to be assisted as far as virtual care, to use computers, and so on.

As I'm talking about the libraries and things that they do, for example, a lot of people will go there and get their income tax completed. Especially seniors, where they'll visit the library and there's quiet, private places there where they can get their income taxes completed because they just don't have the technology at home to do that.

Again, I'm a big fan of the library system. Throughout my previous career of 30 years, I sent a lot of students to the library to do some projects, do some research on a variety of things throughout the years.

ALI DUALE: I think stories matter, and I'm glad that I didn't narrate somebody else's story. I'm somebody who sat in front of you and shared with you my impact of the library. That itself is a testimony. What I'd like to know is: This estimate budget, first of all, what was the last year, or prior to this office, what was the budget of the library? I think you mentioned, at this time, \$16-something. Also, you have mentioned you have an intention in the future to have a better plan to budget for the libraries.

My question is: Where are you today, and where are you heading? Would you mind to clarify that?

PAT DUNN: Library funding is shared between the province, the municipalities, and the library board, and it's based on a funding model which was implemented in 2020-21. At the moment, as I mentioned earlier, they're working on the funding model, and they hope to have that completed by 2026. This model requires a minimum contribution from the municipalities and also from the board.

This is the first year, 2022-23, that the increased level of municipal contribution under the new funding model was mandatory. As we all know, libraries are facing escalating costs. We're working with our partners to review the funding model. And at the same time, as we're working from 2023-24 up to 2026, we're also providing some bridging funding, because we know they have to be sustainable between now and when the funding model is complete.

The key to that was an additional \$500,000 to help these libraries during these transition times, for their operational needs. And money to help them - they're always creating innovative projects and so on. Again, as I mentioned, going forward they've expressed that they are facing significant operating costs - pressures - and are very receptive of this bridging funding that they are receiving. Fortunately, that's helping them with their operational shortfalls and so on in the current fiscal year that's starting now, 2023-24.

CCTH will form a library funding formula committee in 2023-24, to review and enhance the library funding formula to support continued sustainability of Nova Scotia public libraries.

I'm going to take the opportunity, just as I close - you mentioned about libraries and stories and so on. I'd like to share a very quick short story. Things sometimes that we're not aware of - about three or four weeks ago I was invited to attend a meeting down in Upper Big Tracadie. This community wanted to let me know, and others, that there is a third Birchtown in Nova Scotia, which I didn't know. I knew there were two Birchtowns in Nova Scotia, but a third, no. The Guysborough Historical Society had been doing a lot of work over the last few years to determine this, and they have found proof - yes, this community of 28 homes in Birchtown near Manchester, not too far from Boylston.

A gentleman at that meeting who frequents the library is an elder in the community and he started talking about the community. He said the last person that lived in that community - and he mentioned the gentleman's name and his wife, the last person of the 28 families - they moved to New Glasgow. He said his name, and as soon as he said his name I said that I know this gentleman. He has passed away since, but I knew him for years, but never talked to him about where he came from. I knew he came from Guysborough.

[6:30 p.m.]

The different stories that come across depending on who you're talking to and where you are and so on, very fascinating. They are looking forward to enhancing that area as a site for tourism.

ALI DUALE: Quite honestly, the libraries are not anymore the library that we knew. Which was that you go there, you pick up books. We see what libraries do these days. It's over their capacity, it's over their mandate, but all those programs are worthwhile, because they have an impact for our communities. Whether it's the vaccine, whether it is actually even sometimes making people a place for shelter, especially in the Wintertime. A lot of people have listed that for a couple of hours, it's a place where they can stay and get warm.

Quite honestly, I don't see that effort has been made this budget. I don't see that vision being made this budget. I will encourage in the future, I really believe that the status of libraries has changed, and the way we fund it also should reflect that change. That would be something that I would advise to you as a minister, and also to your staff.

My next question is another question that is in the minds of Nova Scotians. We know the new art gallery project was halted last year. We know, as Nova Scotians, how much we value culture and heritage and arts. It's unfortunate I can't speak in arts, because I have two wonderful colleagues who are sitting beside me who are artists and champions of arts, and I'm leaving most of those questions with them - I'm sure they have a lot. I'd like to know where that project is now.

PAT DUNN: I guess the quick answer would be that it's still on pause, but we are absolutely, definitely committed. If I continue to talk, it'll be fewer questions for the colleagues to your right there, with regard to arts and culture. I'm jokingly saying that - but no, it's on pause. We're absolutely committed to it. There is constant dialogue going on weekly with department staff and the board of the art gallery. We believe in our arts, in our culture sector. We continue to support the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia as a vital community space for education, for wellness, for growth in the sector and through the arts.

We work together with the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia to update their legislation, to modernize governance in operations, and to appoint board members so that they have quorum, which they do now. That helps position the gallery for not only the present, but

for success and into the future. Again, the new gallery project has been affected by severe cost overruns, and through our dialogue with them, they realize that. Of course, they want to get it built, and get it built yesterday, but they know we are committed to that.

We all know the construction projects - not only in this province but in many provinces - are through the roof. To finish answering the question, we value the arts and we want to make sure there's a home for the arts. A new art gallery down on the waterfront will be a great place to share, not only with people from our province, but people coming into our province.

At the very moment, it's not the right time, but it's still on the books and there's still constant dialogue going on. It's not something that's been put on the back shelf. There's a lot of dialogue going on with our staff in the department with the board.

ALI DUALE: What I'm gathering from your answer is that no decision has been made. What I'm looking for, and what Nova Scotians are looking for, is an answer. That answer, whether they can count on this project and be optimistic and hopeful, this will become in reality, a project.

Would you be able to give that optimism for Nova Scotians, and to say we missed this budget, but we're hopeful this project will flourish, and we're committed for next year's budget?

PAT DUNN: I'll reiterate that we are committed to an art gallery under the approved budget. We are hoping that construction prices will peter off, level off, to the point where we can sit down with the board and look at the realistic costs to build such a facility. Another part of your question there: Is there a possibility in the next budget? Again, that would be very premature for me to even guess at what might happen in the next budget.

Am I optimistic? Yes. Do we want to see a new art gallery? Yes. Again, it's on pause and we all know the reasons why. But I can still say we are absolutely, definitely committed to seeing that facility in Halifax at the waterfront.

ALI DUALE: I always like to be optimistic. I'm grateful for your office and your leadership. The \$500 tax credit for the children that are involved in sports, I think that is a great initiative. Though sometimes we make decisions believing it's the right thing to do, sometimes those decisions also have an impact in a different way.

My first question: Is it possible for that funding to be increased because of the current situation that we live in? The cost of living is skyrocketing. People are not able to afford even to buy groceries, cannot afford to pay their rent. Is it possible to increase this amount and to take away this burden for those parents?

PAT DUNN: Thanks for that question, it's certainly a question that I'm very keen and interested in as well. That's something that we are discussing and looking at. It's a possibility. The \$500 helps parents and guardians, as we know it offsets costs to register their child in sports. Here's something that I have found out: so many parents or guardians don't realize that it also is a \$500 tax credit for the arts.

So many people just think it's sports, but it's definitely arts. Art programs like literary arts, visual arts, performing arts, music, media, languages are all eligible for this particular tax credit, along with sport and physical activity programs. I'm not sure if I ever ran into someone that knew that summer camps for arts, they're eligible to claim on income tax – or anything to do with summer camps dealing with sports or physical activity, for that matter.

It can also be used for rental of equipment. It can also be used for rental of a facility to participate in a sporting activity or art programming or whatever else. No application is required, it's just a matter of filling out that line on your income tax.

Going back to your direct question, that is something we're discussing and looking at in the department with regard to the current \$500 tax credit. In addition to that - again, it is a \$500 tax credit, and this is an initiative led by the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, this particular tax credit. Again, we are certainly open to exploring that, the fact that you were talking about it a few seconds ago. Exploring ideas how to perhaps increase.

There are other programs with regard to helping out groups and so on. One is called KidSport, where there's funding available through KidSport. And other organizations with other groups. I don't have the names of them right at my fingertips, but I can certainly get them very quickly for you. Over and above the \$500 tax credit led by the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, through our department we also have other initiatives that help out youth to break down those barriers for communities that may not get the opportunity.

That's something that I know personally is very, very important to members of the staff in CCTH who work with these programs. They're always spending time in discussions trying to break down those barriers, trying to make things better, trying to stretch the dollar to help our youth be involved, be active, be part of the community socially, culturally, mentally, and so on.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale with a reminder that there is a little over two minutes left of your time.

ALI DUALE: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't think I could have two minutes to finish, quite honestly. I just actually got a phone call before I arrived at the House today. It was a gentleman who is organizing a refugee youth soccer program. He was pleading to

me today, he was saying: I don't think I can continue this program. I am spending my own money. This is the reason, actually, that I am interested in this credit.

[6:45 p.m.]

One of the only questions that I have pertaining to this tax credit: Is there any provision for this tax credit for those who have low income, in a marginalized community, will they have an opportunity and they will not be disadvantaged because of this kind of credit? Are there any places that this information is available so they can have access in order to benefit from this service?

PAT DUNN: My understanding, not to the \$500 tax credit, but I'd be happy to get together with you afterwards to make contacts with some of our staff to inform you of some other things where we could possibly help, which you can pass on to these community groups. I think there is some help and assistance there, in other avenues that might be very beneficial to these groups.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale with 15 seconds.

ALI DUALE: Thank you for the public service and the leadership of CCTH. I'm grateful today to be with you. This question is not to you, but you are the experts who have the knowledge, and we thank you for your response. I look forward to engaging with you in the future. Thank you, all of you.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I want to thank all the staff for being here as well. I know it's not easy to just sit and listen, but I'm grateful that answers will come our way.

I'm going to start with some funding questions. My question is: Can the minister please tell us what funding is available this year to the African-Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent. I know we were talking about that earlier, but we didn't actually specifically get any funding details. I'm just wondering how much is allocated this year for DPAD?

THE CHAIR: The honourable Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage.

PAT DUNN: With regard to DPAD, \$200,000 is in - that's the same as the previous year, \$200,000. Also, under DPAD, we look at DPAD as a road, or a tree, with branches going off. There are a lot of related things going on in the communities with DPAD. To my knowledge there's funding involved in all those too, connected with DPAD.

SUZY HANSEN: Is this a multi-year agreement, or is this just year by year?

PAT DUNN: The answer would be that those discussions are going on right now with regard to what's going to happen in the near future and beyond that, with the DPAD Coalition and other groups connected with it. Again, because those discussions are happening, I'm not too sure where they're going to lead, but I'm sure it'll be a positive road.

SUZY HANSEN: I want to just point back to the minister's beginning statements and some of the pieces I pulled out of that were sustainability and committing to the funding and making sure that we're able to continue to have these relationships within community, and DPAD is one of that specifically. You mentioned as well, the tree with the roots, and yes, they are rooting out, but we do know there is a real importance to make sure that what is there is sustainable and it's going to stay.

That's why I ask: Is there a multi-year? I know I asked the same question last year specific to that. Is it on the table that their funding could be cut? Or is this something that is not on the table at all? You will be continuing to fund it?

PAT DUNN: Again, like I mentioned earlier, we're still in discussions with DPAD and with several other community groups. When those discussions come to fruition, then we'll know better with regard to what's going to happen, what road they're going to take. Those things are on the table, discussing with them now. There are many other areas like - I don't want to take too much of your time, but I do have a list of a lot of communities where they have received funding, and how much funding - for various projects in all kinds of communities.

The ANSA grants and contributions to - I'm not sure if you are . . .

SUZY HANSEN: I might come to another question.

PAT DUNN: Yes - interested in that or whatever. I'll just hold off for now.

SUZY HANSEN: Yes. Sounds good.

PAT DUNN: For example, I mentioned earlier, the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, \$226,000. The Africville Heritage Trust, \$100,000. I mentioned earlier in my opening remarks - or I mentioned it a few minutes ago - over in Lucasville, there was an investment today in Phase 1 of \$100,000, as an example. Yes, I could give you all kinds more information if needed.

SUZY HANSEN: I will continue on questioning because you gave me a segue. The Africville Heritage Trust, the money is to go towards a strategic plan. As we know with these organizations - as well with the Black Cultural Centre - they need multi-year funding. We've had many conversations with community and with these organizations, and that is one of the major things that they've talked about.



We know that as elected parties, we have so many years in government to sit and make these huge impacts in community, and these are some of the ones that you're mentioning right now. The Africville Heritage Trust, I know they need sustainable funding. They need multi-year funding, as well as the Black Cultural Centre. I'm asking: Is this going to be an ongoing commitment, and not just a one-year investment?

PAT DUNN: We spend a tremendous amount of time with different organizations across the province based on that same type of question - sustainability, operational funding going forward. I guess there's multiple-year funding going forward for the Black Cultural Centre.

You made reference to the Africville Heritage Trust, and again the funding there was \$100,000. At the moment, that's not marked down as going forward. However, they're involved in their strategic planning and that could change everything. Once that's completed, further discussions will occur and the possibility of that happening could occur.

At the same time, the department is open to any organization, any group that is having operating pressures. I welcome all of them to contact someone in the department, or in your case, you can speak to me privately and I can make sure they get the right contact for them to start the process to help them out.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm going to circle back to the MLA from Cole Harbour's first question about the Preston Area Housing Fund, and how there are ongoing talks between the community and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on the next steps. As we know, \$3.5 million was a part of the MOU in January. Once again, I'm wondering: Is this a one-time investment to this community for that particular housing need, or is this going to be ongoing because we do know that within these communities there is a necessity for sustainability?

PAT DUNN: Again, it's certainly a question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, but if you'll permit me, I'll say a few things about it. Our role in that - ANSA's role in that - is that we're listening to the communities, we're involved with the communities, we're doing everything we possibly can to find out what the communities need and want, let's say with regards to this particular initiative, the housing initiative.

As we're doing that, we're bringing that information back to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to let him know exactly what we are hearing on the ground. That doesn't answer your question directly - if that will \$3.5 million continue. But the needs of the community and the pressures of the community, we will hear that, and we will certainly let the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing know.

SUZY HANSEN: Shortly after this government was elected, our caucus dedicated a significant amount of time and energy on an all-party committee designed to develop a bill on addressing racism and hate. The minister did say that they were having

conversations with communities, and those conversations have been happening. I'm wondering if this department is going to start a commitment on reparations, together with Black Nova Scotians.

[7:00 p.m.]

PAT DUNN: I do know that the office is working on their strategies, and they're doing the same thing that happened when the all-party committee did their - they're out in the communities, they're talking to the communities via many, many ways.

They are trying to find out what the community needs are - the desire for the community with regard to issues that they are faced with, and have been faced with for such a long time. We're trying to move along as quickly as we possibly can so that they can actually see improvements.

Besides a lot of dialogue that's happening in coming up with the strategy goals and so on, as we're all aware, there's an all-party deputy committee that is meeting on a regular basis. It's an all-government approach where they're - they're just not working in CCTH and ANSA, they're working across all the various departments on an equity lens to - in my words - it's time to wake up and make things better. We have to make things better.

This is something that the deputies are asked to do, to look at their own departments to improve through this lens, regardless of whatever practices are happening to make them more open to people who perhaps had barriers and doors closed before. I'm very pleased to see that facet, that part that's happening right now, that it's not an isolated group trying to do this. It's spread right across the various government departments. I'm hoping that we'll see the dividends from that going forward.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm really glad to hear that. I think all levels of government need to be able to have these conversations, as uncomfortable as they may be. We all need to be able to open our eyes and understand that it's not like that for everyone, and we all have unique experiences that we bring to the table.

I'm going to ask this question, but I'm pretty sure I know this answer, because I just heard it earlier, but I'm also going to respond to it. Bear with me. Is the department - do they have a commitment to develop an African Nova Scotian policing strategy?

PAT DUNN: That question, again, would have to be directed to the Minister of Justice, really. Having said that, our department, especially through ANSA, are always - will always be there to support any initiatives. Although it's something that the Department of Justice would be involved in, we would be very pleased - and the reason being is one

thing I can say about this department, including ANSA - we have our pulse on every spot in this province, because of the nature of the department.

The department has tentacles everywhere, because there's so many things going on in that department. There are 77 funding grants, as an example. There are so many things going on with public libraries, with book publishers, arts and culture, sports and recreation, that we're definitely connected to every community in the province.

One thing that I like about the department is that something will be brought to my attention, I'll go back to the department to talk to someone in that particular sector, and they already know about it. They know about it because they've got feet on the ground in that community. They know what's going on. It just makes life so much easier, and you can move things so much quicker with that.

Having said that, absolutely we're there to support any initiative that the communities want, and if there's any way that we can assist or help or move things along, mainly because we're into a lot of the communities talking to them. We'll leave it at that for now.

**THE CHAIR:** The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**SUZY HANSEN:** I'm glad you said that because I was going to say I spoke to the Minister of Justice during Estimates, and he said the exact same thing. So he's passed it off to the department. I'm like, Well, if it has to do with African Nova Scotians, you should be very aware of what is happening within all of those departments. Thank you for that answer.

I'm wondering if, because all of these parties - I mean, all of these deputy ministers are having discussions across government - I'm wondering if maybe we could table a piece of legislation that speaks to that, so we make sure that it goes to any other piece of legislation moving forward. I think that was one of the pieces that I wanted to amend through the bill - making sure that we brought forward a number of these initiatives when it comes to discussing how we look through things through an equitable lens. That was not a part of the bill that we brought forward. I'm hoping that maybe this might spark a piece of legislation to move forward.

I remember when we were sitting in the all-party committee, you yourself expressed a commitment to the idea of a Standing Committee of the Legislature on issues of equity and anti-racism. I'm curious to know: Are you still committed, and will you make it happen?

**PAT DUNN:** Right at the very moment, I don't remember saying that. However, that doesn't matter as far as - my answer to that is, at the present time my understanding is the government is interested in working across all government through a committee of the

deputy ministers. It's supposed to be, at the present time, a standing committee. Right now, as it stands, that's the route they decided to take. We're going to get all our deputies together, and that's going to be the top priority. We want to see some action and some improvement across our various departments in government.

SUZY HANSEN: Going back to the bill, I'm just wondering, is there any funding that ANSA has put forward for this strategy? We talked about how they're doing consultation and stuff now, as a part of the bill that was put forward. Is there any funding attached to that now, based on the work that they're doing with the strategy and consultation?

PAT DUNN: The short answer to your question would be, it's not ANSA's OEA that is handling that. There's, I believe, considerable expertise in that office, and the need for additional funding right at the moment doesn't seem to be a factor in the work that they're doing.

SUZY HANSEN: So, it sits in the OEA's bracket, they're actually working on it within that department. Then I'm curious to know: Have you hired a new DM CEO of the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism? And is there a report that was done within that office that maybe we could take a look at?

PAT DUNN: Right at the moment there has been no DM hired. Deputy Thomas, of course as we know, is the Acting Deputy Minister for OEA at the present time, and will continue until such time that there is a possible new DM.

SUZY HANSEN: That's a lot of work. It's a lot to take on, being Deputy Minister of Justice and of the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism, and it's been for some time. I'm surprised we haven't put that out yet, to be able to get someone in that seat. We have a number of folks who are really, really, really smart to do that work.

The minister will know that Black beauty services are an integral part of Black culture, and also that skilled providers have faced discrimination and barriers to culturally appropriate and supporting licensing, apprenticeship, and economic opportunities. My question: Is the department working with the Ministry of Labour, Skills and Immigration on this issue? How are they doing that?

PAT DUNN: It's an LSI issue, but what I can say is, there's a considerable amount of dialogue going on, if I may call it, in the industry. The dialogue going on, of course, is having people that are interested in this industry to be heard, to have their skills recognized, for example, and to become certified practitioners in the province. Certainly, that dialogue is happening.

We know how important that is in the culture in many of our communities. There have been a lot of communities that have been involved in the consultation in this process,

and engagement to share what they believe. A voluntary trade program for natural care services could be provided and would be provided in our province.

[7:15 p.m.]

“With the designation of a Black Beauty Culture Hair Innovator as a trade, existing practitioners and those new to the occupation ...will have access to a new training program”, board, and be able to have the skills that they have and the skills that they’re going to learn recognized through the certification program.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I just want to make sure that I’m hearing that you, as the Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs, are advocating on behalf of those beauty services to be able to make sure that they can get the accreditation that they need?

PAT DUNN: Again, as I mentioned earlier, it’s an LSI issue, but at the same time, our job is to make sure that they hear what the community wants and needs. That’s where we come into the picture. It’s important to ensure community members and entrepreneurs can continue to practice natural hair care services without unnecessary regulatory burden, or infringement on these cultural practices.

That’s where we come in, as far as listening on the ground to exactly what’s going on, what’s happening, so we can be their voice in this whole process.

SUZY HANSEN: I only have one more question left, and then I’m going to give it to my colleague here. I want to thank the minister as well, for the responses.

Akoma is doing really important work together with African Nova Scotian communities, and as the minister would know, the housing crisis is having impacts on people’s ability to maintain an ongoing presence in historically Black communities, and to help shape and grow our communities.

We did a tour - I know that there were a number of ministers that did a tour of Akoma - and they were speaking to us about how they were having barriers in building their affordable housing. They’re encountering barriers, including the municipal by-laws and such. I’m just wondering once again, the same as the previous question: Has the department been advocating on behalf of this particular organization, to make sure that we can help build affordable housing for those Black communities?

PAT DUNN: I guess the short answer to that is, we’re working with the board and key partners. It’s sort of like an all-community perspective or endeavour. Through ANSA, they are currently and will be - they’re working with the key partners, I guess is probably my best answer for the present.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you, minister, and all of the folks from CCTH for being here. Lest I run out of time, I would say obviously I'm very happy about the increased funding in the Arts Nova Scotia and the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. Unfortunately, I only have 25 minutes or so to ask questions, so I'm not going to talk about that. I wish I could. I'm going to rip through a bunch of questions.

The first one I have is: The minister talked about the after-school program, Before and After Program, that are connected to the Let's Get Moving Project. How much money is in the budget for this program this year? Is it an increase from last year? How many spaces are funded and - a question that's not on my paper but I'm curious about - I didn't realize that these programs or these spaces were connected with Let's Get Moving.

How do we make sure, or how does the department make sure, that the programs actually get kids moving? Is there a curriculum, are there checklists, are there outcomes that we are looking for? That kind of thing.

THE CHAIR: The honourable Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage.

PAT DUNN: I will attempt to answer those 13 questions.

SUSAN LEBLANC: It's only four, actually.

PAT DUNN: Only four. Anyway, I'll make some comments and then from that, you'll be able to circle and come back and ask more. The dollar value for the food security in the province, of course . . .

SUSAN LEBLANC: Sorry, not food security. After-school.

PAT DUNN: Sorry, the after-school program. It's a Canada-wide agreement, and it's funded by Education and Early Childhood Development to us. The staff work closely with their regional physical activity managers, as far as on the outcomes. Delivery standards have to be followed, as well as training of staff to support facilitating active outdoor play.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Great. And then the other questions I had were: Is the funding for this program an increase over last year? How many spaces are funded?

PAT DUNN: The budget for 2023-24 has increased. It has increased by approximately \$400,000. There are 1,300 spots, and at the moment, I don't have it on my fingertips just exactly how many, as far as the Before and After Program. It's information we can probably get, but I don't have it at my fingertips.

SUSAN LEBLANC: That would be great. If it's possible to get that information after tonight, and also, just because I don't have much time, if there is a projection - if the increase is going towards new spots, that would be great to know, but don't answer that now.

I want to ask about film and television for a quick second. There's an increase in the Film & Television Production Incentive Fund for this year. Is that because it's expected that there will be more film and TV happening, and requests made to the fund?

PAT DUNN: I guess what I'd like to say is there's an extra \$14 million that was invested into that - I believe it is with regard to this year with *Washington Black*, with the cost pressures and so on. I think I would like to be able to say that we are encouraging anyone and everyone that if they want to come and set up shop here in Nova Scotia to come and talk to us. If that means that we might have to juggle our budget, increase our budget or . . .

SUSAN LEBLANC: Additional appropriations.

PAT DUNN: Yeah. We're very open to that sector.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Great. I'm sure the minister has heard of the Unama'ki Motion Picture Co-operative, which is a pretty exciting going concern in Cape Breton. Unama'ki, but also other folks in the film industry, have been talking about the incentive fund being sort of massaged, as it were, to create incentives of different tiers.

For instance, right now the incentive fund is the city and 30 kilometres out, so say to St. Margaret's Bay. That's one level of the incentive fund. Then anything beyond 30 kilometres to the rest of the borders of the province is another tier. But it makes sense that anyone who is shooting in Chester, for instance, is getting a higher incentive, but their crews can drive back and forth to Halifax, for instance. It costs them less money for a better incentive.

That disadvantages people in Yarmouth or Sydney or places that are actually far from the capital. I'm wondering if the department is looking at a tiered incentive fund to encourage more film and TV activity outside of the centre.

PAT DUNN: It's kind of ironic that you mention that, because just recently we've been discussing that and talking about that, and we are definitely considering this request. There's ongoing dialogue as we speak.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Great. I'm glad to hear that, and I will ask for an update, probably in the Fall session. Would the minister be able to provide an update of what's happening with the funding for book publishers in the province? The total amount of

funding for this year over last year, and the timeline for applications and distributing the funding. Given that it just went through an overhaul.

[7:30 p.m.]

PAT DUNN: Quick answer to that is the funding is the same: it's \$700,000. Having said that, the staff are definitely working with the book publishers across the province with regard to their specific needs. The Creative Industries Fund is one fund that's available to them for additional funding to suit their specific needs.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Okay, thank you. I'm going to move into some tourism questions. We've now arrived at the deadline by when tourism accommodations had to be registered. My first question is: How many have been registered?

PAT DUNN: The quick, short answer would be about 3,000.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Does the department know what proportion of rentals have registered? If so, how do you know, or how does it know?

PAT DUNN: This information I'm going to pass on to you is as of today, okay? It's new information. The breakdown is 13 per cent hotels, inns, motels, resorts, bed & breakfasts, 13 per cent. Cottages, cabins, tiny homes, unusual lodging like domes, camping trailers, and so on, 31 per cent. Entire apartments, condos, houses and vacation homes, 36 per cent. Rooms in a home, self-contained secondary suit - like a basement apartment or a loft in a garage - 20 per cent.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Great. Thank you for that. Will the government do inspections or enforcement of registration?

PAT DUNN: First of all, the focus is going to be on awareness and education. That's our first focus. The other thing is if someone is wishing to operate one of these - let me call it a facility or a room or whatever - the platform operators that they would go to to put their place on the website, they have to be - they have to have a registration number and they have to be registered in order to do that.

Platform operators have been told that they are absolutely not allowed to put anything on their website if this particular - let's say if I have an apartment that if I don't have a registration number, they are not permitted. Hopefully starting off, we'll see how it works through awareness education, working with the municipalities, we hope that this, going forward, will be successful and that there will be - the data that's collected is something that the municipalities want also.



Hopefully, it appears the platform operators are on board with what's happening. I don't know what platform it is, but at least one of them right now has been very busy putting places on their websites as we currently speak.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Right. Essentially, anyone who has a rental unit has to register it, that's a rule. Anyone who wants to put their rental unit on an online booking platform has to be registered, and the booking platforms are not allowed to take them unless they have registration number.

Take Airbnb, for instance, which is a huge organization. How are we ensuring that Airbnb won't take some not-registered apartment? Have we checked to make sure that there's a way of putting - when you register your apartment, if you live in Nova Scotia, that you have a registration number that goes into the back end of the program? How does all that work? Because for sure, Airbnb doesn't care about our rules, right?

PAT DUNN: We've been working with Airbnb and my understanding is - yes, they're on board. Their registration numbers have to be shown, and if they're not they're violating the . . .

SUSAN LEBLANC: Okay. When will the government begin collecting fees from the registrants, and how much revenue is estimated from the registry for this year?

PAT DUNN: The quick answer to that question is to date we're about \$190,000, and we're anticipating projecting about \$250,000.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Will the revenue be earmarked for anything, or is it just going into general revenues?

PAT DUNN: It does, you're correct, it goes into general revenue, but it's also used for administering the program and the fee structure and some other incidentals.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Great. How do we know if someone doesn't register their property and therefore is liable for a \$7,500 fine? And how many fines of \$7,500 have been issued for people who are operating short-term rentals, or platform operators that have not registered?

PAT DUNN: Up to this point there have been no fines. Again, some of these changes occurred April 1<sup>st</sup>, just recently. Up to this point there have been none to date.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Okay, I'm just going to switch gears again. I'm sorry. In the minister's opening remarks he mentioned the very exciting hockey centre in Cape Breton for girls and girls' programs, but in the remarks the minister mentioned that girls from Eskasoni and Cape Breton and Membertou and other underserved communities would benefit. I'm wondering if the minister can talk about how that will be ensured.

PAT DUNN: I'm excited for wherever they can put these facilities into - I like to see every community have facilities like that. In Cape Breton, the female organization hockey in CBRM, I believe they actually have more females playing hockey than they do males. And of the number of females that are playing, 30 per cent of them are from minority groups. There's a large number of female hockey players from Eskasoni, from Membertou, that are playing in the organization.

What's so important to have this place resurrected after it not being used for a few years, is the fact that - I've talked to, had several conversations with the organization, with the president and so on. I looked at a provincial report about female hockey in the province. Literally it was, in my words, kind of disgusting, the fact that these female teams rarely had the opportunity to invite teams into Cape Breton Island to play a home game, because there was just no ice available.

I've coached for a pile of years, and I've seen that too often and too much. Of my six kids, three are girls. They all played hockey; they played university hockey. It was painful at times. Just to have that facility - I think it's the first one in Canada, maybe North America, as far as a home rink.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I only have four minutes left. Can I ask a follow-up?

PAT DUNN: Yes, I could talk for four hours on that.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Great. Me too. I'm excited. I'm a hockey mom now. It is life-changing in many ways, but it's really expensive. We in Dartmouth North have a four-pad, so hockey is accessible to the underserved community of Dartmouth North, except that people in Dartmouth North can't afford to play hockey.

My last question is: How is the department going to make sure - is the funding for this facility tied to accessibility for underserved and underfunded communities, as it were? How are we going to make sure that all of those amazing girls can afford to play hockey too?

PAT DUNN: Moving forward, if that's a barrier, that's an obstacle, we'll be trying to knock those doors down. An example I mentioned earlier is KidSport Nova Scotia. The investment is \$405,000 which supports children who need financial assistance with sport registration fees, and also equipment costs. There were I think, over 1,600, 1,650 youth supported in this past current winter.

The BGC Greater Halifax, formerly Boys & Girls Club of Halifax, there was an investment of \$50,000 for an accessibility project to provide children with the equipment they need to meaningfully participate in sports. We've had a number of discussions with regard to that question that you have, because it's critically important. Can I keep talking about sports?

[7:45 p.m.]

SUSAN LEBLANC: Last question, the minister has talked about how the deputy ministers look at everything with an equity and diversity lens. I'm wondering if there is anything you can table, or that any of the deputy ministers can table about what the lens is. When you take a piece of legislation, does it go through an equity and diversity lens, and then it's graded? Is there a metric? Is there any information about that?

Because just to say something goes through a lens doesn't necessarily mean it has a passing grade when it goes through the lens. How are we making sure our legislation is good?

PAT DUNN: A quick answer to that is looking through this equity lens, it's looking at all of the programs and policies and practices of each individual department - what their policies and programs look like, their hiring practices, their training - their EDI training within a specific department. All those types of things are happening, and the OEAs are pushing that. And the deputies meet and . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. That concludes the questioning for the NDP. I believe all parties indicated that concluded their rounds of questioning. I would entertain the minister for some closing remarks.

PAT DUNN: How much . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: You're done. We're done.

PAT DUNN: Oh, I've been Dunn all my life.

AN HON. MEMBER: We're done-done, Dunn. (Laughter)

PAT DUNN: So, in answer to my question, I have two, three minutes?

THE CHAIR: Whatever you need.

PAT DUNN: Oh, whatever I need. That's the wrong answer. (Laughter)

I want to thank my colleagues in the Legislature, everyone who had the opportunity to ask questions. I want them to know my door is open all the time. Feel free to approach me, call me, trip over me, whatever you have to do to get my attention. I'll do everything to make sure that the right contacts are there for you and that you'll get the answers that you need. Because I think that's our job and that's what we should be doing every day in our work and in our community.

Also, I want to thank the people I work with, my deputy, my associate deputy, my ADM, all my executive directors and directors and managers and staff. I've heard the word, I'm blessed. Well, I am. I'm blessed with a tremendous number of good, good people in our department. I'm sure MLA Ince would agree with me, it's the best department in government.

It's one department that is, I think more than most - not all, but most departments - it's connected to everything. We're just literally connected, every community, we have a finger or thumb in there doing something across the province. Just because of the nature of what the department is comprised of. There are so many tentacles out there it's incredible.

I want to take this opportunity to thank my department. They've had one busy last couple of months, working very hard to make sure things were tidy at the end of the day, March 31<sup>st</sup>. I certainly greatly appreciate that. Mr. Chair, if they can get along with me, they can get along with everyone or anyone, so we know that also.

THE CHAIR: Shall Resolution E3 stand?

Resolution E3 stands.

**Resolution E28 - Resolved, that a sum not exceeding \$4,681,000 be granted to the Lieutenant Governor to defray expenses in respect of the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives, pursuant to the Estimate.**

THE CHAIR: Shall Resolution E28 carry?

The resolution is carried.

Thank you, minister. We'll take a short recess while we get set up for our next set. We're now in recess.

[7:52 p.m. The House recessed.]

[7:59 p.m. The subcommittee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order, please. The Subcommittee on Supply will come to order. It is now 7:59 p.m. The Subcommittee is meeting to consider the Estimates for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, as outlined in Resolution E6.

**Resolution E6 - Resolved, that a sum not exceeding \$1,873,505,000 be granted to the Lieutenant Governor to defray expenses in respect of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, pursuant to the Estimate.**

THE CHAIR: I will now invite the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development to make opening comments up to an hour, and if they wish, to introduce their staff to the committee.

The honourable Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development.

[8:00 p.m.]

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Thank you for the opportunity to join you today. It is my pleasure to speak with you on behalf of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. As minister over the past two years, I have had the privilege to be engaged and involved in work that provides positive, lasting impacts for the future of all students, teachers, early childhood educators, and support staff.

Although I have the honour and pleasure to share details of our efforts, the credit is not mine to take. This progress is not possible without the hard work and dedication of the incredible staff within the department, the seven regional centres for education, and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial.

These thousands of staff share a moral imperative, to do their best to support the achievement and well-being of Nova Scotian students. Their dedication to this objective and to serving Nova Scotians is inspiring. Nova Scotians have a lot to be proud of in our education system, and our budget and investments reflect that.

I would like to take a moment to introduce my colleagues sitting next to me today. Elwin LeRoux is the deputy minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. Jennifer Wood is supporting us from Financial Advisory Services. I will also note that there are several executive directors and other supports from our department and Financial Advisory Services who have joined us today, along with our associate deputy minister, Sara Halliday.

They will assist me today in answering your questions. Before that, I want to share with you our key priorities and some more details on the work and accomplishments of the department. If there are any questions we cannot answer, we commit to providing you with the information in a timely manner.

As you know, the provincial budget helps move our province forward by investing in health care and many of the things that are important to Nova Scotians. Health and learning are intrinsically connected. Children and youth have a greater capacity to learn and succeed when they are healthy, and when they live in healthy, supported communities.

By addressing factors affecting health and well-being, supporting families and youth, and investing in our communities, we can help improve the quality of life for all Nova Scotians. We will do whatever it takes to deliver the care that Nova Scotian families

need and deserve. Healthier people are the foundation of a strong economy and strong communities.

Before we get into greater details of the work of the department branches, the regions and the CSAP, I want to take a moment to highlight just a few of the incredible milestones and accomplishments from our last year. The breadth of these achievements speaks to the commitment of our government in making communities healthier and making life more affordable for families and children in our province.

In the last year, we celebrated Nova Scotia's first Black Excellence Day. We introduced a new literacy framework for our young learners. We provided additional mental health and wellness resources to teachers and to students. We continued to add inclusive education support positions in our schools, now totalling more than 1,000 positions over the last five years.

We cut parent fees for child care in half. We created 1,100 new child care spaces across the province. And we made monumental investments in better wages for early childhood educators working in licensed child care facilities, increasing wages for most workers by 14 per cent to 43 per cent.

These are a few of the accomplishments that we as a government are proud of. I am very excited to speak of some highlights of the 2023-2024 budget, and our plan to enhance the already strong public school system and build on our early childhood learning and development sector.

The department's total 2023-2024 budget is over \$1.87 billion. This is an increase of \$122 million, or 7 per cent from the 2022-2023 budget. The most significant increases include the compensation framework for early childhood educators, public education funding and classroom hardware for students and teachers. I'll speak more about these areas shortly. This budget reflects our commitment to making a real difference in the lives of children, students and their families.

I want to start with the early years. Our government is committed to building a high-quality, early learning and child care system that is affordable, that is inclusive, and that is accessible. Now more than ever, Nova Scotians need an early learning and child care system that delivers. Children deserve care that gives them the best start in life. Parents deserve care that is affordable, regardless of their financial means, and available where they live and when they work.

To meet these needs, we are increasing our investment in early learning and child care by \$83 million, for a total investment of \$277 million; \$42.1 million of this new investment is funded by the federal government under the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. But importantly, \$40 million of that is new investment funded

by the province to support ECEs compensation framework, and another \$1 million is for workforce initiatives.

These funds are in addition to our dedicated provincial and federal investments in early learning and child care, through a subsidy program to make child care more affordable and accessible to families who need the support most; for grants to child care centres to help offset wage and operating costs; promote and embed inclusive practices; and for specialized services through the Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services to support families of infant to five-year-olds who either have a risk for or a diagnosis of developmental delay.

Nova Scotia is proudly transforming its early learning and child care system and delivering on its promises. Since the Canada-wide agreement was signed in July 2021, we have made incredible progress, with truly transformational work. We have created 1,100 new spaces in licensed child care centres, family homes and in our before and after school programs.

We have cut parent fees by 50 per cent on average as of December 31, 2022, and plans are on track to achieve an average of \$10 a day for child care by 2026. We've introduced a wage scale and have increased wages for 95 per cent of ECEs working in licensed child care facilities.

Over 1,400 students have enrolled in ECE training programs. Over 200 students graduated in the Fall of 2022, and we anticipate another 400 ECE graduates by August 31, 2023. Over half of these graduates are new to the sector.

This year we will also see the first graduating class of the ECE Advanced Practitioner Program which is being offered to provide experienced ECEs the opportunity to enhance their skills in specific areas of specialization, like infant care or outdoor play. In recognition of this enhancement, we are introducing a \$1.50 per hour wage premium for ECEs with an Advanced Practitioner Program certificate.

Work is also ongoing to ensure a culturally relevant play-based curriculum and accessible professional development to build capacity in this important sector. Early childhood educators are skilled, talented professionals, and they are at the heart of our children's early learning journey. As promised last Fall, through our partnership with the federal government, Nova Scotia made one of the single largest investments in early childhood education in our province's history.

We delivered higher wages for ECEs, increasing wages of ECEs in licensed child care by 14 to 43 per cent. We made wage increases retroactive to July 4, 2022. As part of our commitment to regular wage increases, we tied ECE wages to public sector increases for the first time ever. ECEs in child care have already received their first public sector increase, another raise of 3 per cent as of April 1, 2023.

In addition, we are planning to roll out a standardized level of benefits and retirement savings by the end of this year. The work of standardizing and professionalizing ECE wages was decades overdue, and it is a foundational step to delivering high quality child care and transforming a patchwork market of child care to a publicly funded and publicly managed system.

Child care in Nova Scotia is delivered through independent operators, non-profit and private organizations who are vital to this important service. We have worked to support our operators as we navigate this historic change. Through our early learning and child care engagement table, and through conversations with operators across the province, we have worked to understand the challenges faced by operators and to respond with support.

Recently we announced child care operators will receive more funding for infant spaces, rising operational costs and staff wages under new annual agreements with the province.

The new funding agreements include a one-time grant with a median rate of about \$17,300 for centres that will help address rising operational costs. It will be available to centre-based operators, family home providers and the Nova Scotia Before and After Program. It includes grants for family home child care providers who are trained ECEs. They include additional funding to centres for untrained staff to reflect minimum wage increases.

In addition, the daily funding amount child care operators receive for infant programs will more than double to support the addition of infant spaces across the province. The new amount is \$10 per day infant space for child and home-based operators alike.

The Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement will result in a major transformation of the child care sector in Nova Scotia. We are committed to working with the sector as we move through this transformation.

Through my meetings with the Early Learning and Child Care Engagement Table, I am also hearing firsthand about the work, challenges, lessons, and innovations taking place at child care centres across the province. I'd like to share two first-hand testimonials about the impact this work is having on families and on child care centres.

The first one is a parent who is also a member of my Early Learning and Child Care Engagement Table. She writes: "The second 25 per cent fee reduction had a tremendous impact on my family. I am a lone parent with a limited budget, and with the rising cost of basic necessities, this reduction alleviated financial stress and concern. I am grateful for this much-needed support from the government and appreciate that family financial needs are a top priority."



This message from a private operator: “In my capacity as an owner and Level 3 director, we have always kept our fees low to help our parents, and as a result our pay was always on the low side. My staff and I were happy with the new wage compensation package. It was above anything that we, in our sector, have ever seen. I have 11 staff from Level 1 to 3, and on behalf of them and myself, thank you.”

This continued engagement has been invaluable to the work of the department, and I am grateful and thankful for the insights and expertise being shared through these discussions. Our government wants more child care in Nova Scotia, not less. It will take time and collaboration, but I am confident that working together, we will continue to make smart investments and decisions as we build a child care system for all Nova Scotians. The future is very bright for Nova Scotia’s children and families, and my commitment is that we will work together to make this a reality.

I’d also like to share with you two new programs being offered at Nova Scotia Community College for individuals studying to become ECEs. They are the Africentric Early Childhood Education Diploma program, and the Mi’kmaw ECE Diploma program.

The Africentric Early Childhood Education diploma program is a unique program offering students an opportunity to learn in an entirely Africentric learning environment with respected African-Nova Scotian educators. Last November the first 18 graduates of this program were celebrated by family and friends, the campus and broader community in a ceremony at Akerley Campus in Dartmouth. These new grads are now taking their next steps to reshape what representation looks like in the early learning field across Nova Scotia.

The Mi’kmaw ECE diploma program, also part of our supporting quality through workforce development, is a collaborative project with Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey, or MK, who support Indigenous education initiatives and the NSCC. This program, designed specifically for Mi’kmaw students, began in April 2022 and provides a part-time opportunity for those working in the sector to gain their ECE diploma. We are pleased to announce that a full-time program will begin in September of 2023.

Children benefit from seeing diversity in their environment, not just hearing about it. Congratulations to all who graduated from these excellent programs. I also want to give a big thanks to NSCC for immersing these amazing programs into their curriculum.

Now I’d like to speak to our public education system, from pre-Primary to Grade 12. Every student deserves an education that enables them to succeed. As we recover from the pandemic, it is more important than ever that we work with educators to provide families with an education system that meets our students where they are and supports them to be the best that they can be.

As we all know, teachers are important to students, families, and our communities. They are the role models who guide students in developing their skills and helping to build their futures. We have more teachers per student in our Nova Scotia public schools than ever before. There are approximately 10,000 teachers and 2,600 substitutes, including almost 100 new classroom teachers that were hired this school year.

[8:15 p.m.]

As of September 2022, we now have a total of 129,121 children from pre-Primary to Grade 12 in our public schools, an increase of almost 4,000 students compared to last year. For the first time in many, many years, we have seen enrolment growth in every single region in our province. This is a reflection of our province's population and economic growth, and we are happy to welcome all children into our schools.

The total budget for the public education funding this fiscal year is \$1.289 billion, compared to \$1.27 billion last year. With all sources, the overall budget for public education funding has gone up by \$57.5 million, or an overall increase of nearly 4 per cent. This funding will hire more teachers for our growing enrolment, address inflation and provide additional supports for newcomers across our province.

There is \$6 million more to refresh classroom technology, including Chromebooks for students, and \$2.7 million more for the pre-Primary program to increase classroom supports. Additionally, our provincial Capital Plan allocates \$241 million more to build and renovate schools across the province, including \$24 million more for capital repairs, and \$40 for new modular learning spaces.

We've been successful in hiring and retaining more teachers for our schools, together with the Regional Centres for Education, Conseil scolaire acadien provincial and the Nova Scotia Education Common Services Bureau. We continue to collaborate to create coordinated, multi-layered initiatives, and I am proud of the work we have done thus far.

That work includes establishing a teacher recruitment and retention working group, adding more than 1,000 inclusive education supports, programs, and positions to the public school system over the past five years; increasing the number of days retired teachers can substitute, from 69.5 days to 99.5; providing graduating B.Ed students with the opportunity to substitute while completing their practicum last year, an initiative we hope to repeat again this year; issuing over 400 permits to substitutes to date within the 2022-23 school year; supporting the professional learning teachers; and continuing to maintain class collaborations throughout all grade levels.

None of these accomplishments could be done without the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, the Public School Administrators Association of Nova Scotia, Nova Scotia universities and all of our other educational partners who help us champion the opportunities for our public education system.

I want to take this opportunity now to mention a few exciting partnerships and innovations taking place. The first is the creation of a new community-guided pilot project called Equity in Action Mi'kma'ki, which has been made possible through a partnership between departmental Mi'kmaw Services Branch, Sipekne'katik community members, and Chignecto-Central Regional Centre for Education staff.

Their goal has been to identify and address systemic barriers impacting the well-being and achievement of Mi'kmaw and Indigenous students. This is a collaborative process where first-voice of Mi'kmaw and Indigenous students, families, and communities are valued and essential towards guiding the creation of meaningful change.

Next, a new partnership with the Delmore “Buddy” Daye Learning Institute is facilitating the delivery of part-time B.Ed programs for African Nova Scotians, enabling participants to continue to work while completing their B.Ed program.

A Mi'kmaw language course can now be taken by students to fulfill their second language requirement in Nova Scotian schools. This curriculum is not organized by grade, but by stages of language development, to meet the needs of all learners, based on their level of language development.

A three-year partnership with PREP Academy is providing supports for African-Nova Scotian students in Grades 10 to 12. This academy is a community-based non-profit organization that supports access and success in college and university for African-Nova Scotian students.

Last, but certainly not least, we're developing a ground-breaking new pilot course beginning in February 2024, called Netukulimk and the Environment 11, with a focus on land-based experiences. Netukulimk is the way of life for Mi'kmaw people as it embeds understandings of how a person should live their life on Mother Earth, where spirit guides the heart, mind, and actions. Two-eyed seeing, or etuaptumumk, as it's known in Mi'kmaw, is a blending of the strengths of Indigenous knowledge with western science.

These are just some of the examples of relationships that elevate our important work and the innovative programming that these collaborations can yield. We look forward to strengthening these relationships further.

How are our students doing? This is a fundamental question that all parents and guardians have, and one that I ask our educators regularly. It is the root of every conversation we have, and all of the work that we do. As we know, Nova Scotian children are bright, they are creative, and they are eager to learn. As minister, I see a system that is dedicated to the success and well-being of those students.

One of the ways that we assess how are students are doing is through provincial assessments. Nova Scotians can see the results of the latest provincial examinations and

assessments online. Like other jurisdictions, the results from last year confirm that Nova Scotia students were impacted by COVID-19.

What are we doing to ensure ongoing success? I'm proud to say that we are working in partnership with our educators who are some of the best in the world. Together we have many new and ongoing programs and supports that will help our students be the best that they can be. We're working to boost student achievement and well-being to address long-standing barriers that impact achievement, including those experienced by Mi'kmaq students and students of African descent, and address the unique challenges caused by some of the learning interruptions during the last three years.

Some examples of that work include a new approach to literacy, especially in Primary to Grade 2, with a great focus on phonics and phonological awareness. This approach was introduced this year, and we are continuing to work with teachers and other school staff on implementation. An enhanced focus on reading and writing, including a better balance of non-fiction and fiction, to ensure that reading material in school engages and excites all of our students. Software to support student learning in mathematics, in reading and in writing. A new physical activity framework in September of 2023.

Continued investments and supports under our inclusive education policy. Ongoing support for treaty education. New professional learning opportunities for teachers, such as in the areas of mental health and Mi'kmaq ways of being and knowing. Expanded learning opportunities in skilled trades and other subjects, including environmental studies, such as through a new program for Grade 12 students rooted in the Mi'kmaq guiding principle of etuaptumumk, which encourages the use of both Mi'kmaq knowledge and western science.

I want to focus in now and share with you, some details of the exciting work taking place in our public education system. My first area of focus is on literacy and early reading skills. In our public education system, we know we have talented students and skilled teachers who are committed to student success. Student outcomes in literacy achievement show that our entire education system needs to do more to support students and teachers.

Our literacy strategy identifies how we will do that, and how we will measure our success using six pillars of effective reading instruction. They are oral language, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading fluency, and comprehension. When children are learning to read, word reading accuracy accounts for the largest proportion of their reading comprehension. This is why phonological awareness and phonics are so important. Reading fluency is connected to motivation for, and enjoyment of reading.

Children in Primary enter school with diverse lived experiences and ways of learning which are assets for each child's development as a reader and a writer. Teachers know their students as individual learners and plan appropriate next steps of instruction to meet those individual students' needs. The department is committed to supporting teachers in this work by identifying appropriate resources and strategies that they can use. It is

important that all students have access to a variety of strategies for decoding and comprehending what they are reading.

The department will work in collaboration with the Regional Centres for Education and the CSAP on developing and implementing new curricula. The regions will be working with their teachers to provide professional learning on the topic with support from the department.

The second aspect of the public education system I want to spend time on is inclusive education. Inclusive education is the principle and policy that commits to providing each student with high-quality, culturally and linguistically responsive and equitable education. It reflects a commitment to support the well-being and achievement of every single student. All students should feel that they belong in school, accepted, safe and valued, so that they can best learn and succeed.

Nova Scotia's Inclusive Education Policy, created by the department, has been in place since September of 2020. Teachers, staff, administrators, students, and families are working collaboratively to ensure every student succeeds in our education system. Successful inclusive education requires a number of things:

- It requires safe, caring schools that welcome families and include the broader community as key partners in education.
- It requires teaching and supports based on evidence that promote students' physical, social, emotional, and behavioural well-being and achievement.
- It requires promoting the independence of every single student, and developing their resilience as they progress through school.
- It requires focusing on equity by supporting success for students who are historically marginalized and racialized, or who come from other groups that have been traditionally underrepresented and underserved. These groups include, but are not limited to, students with disabilities, newcomers, 2SLGBTQIA+, and those experiencing poverty. Stimulating and accessible learning opportunities are required to keep every student engaged, challenged, and inspired.
- It requires ensuring that every student sees themselves reflected throughout their schools, in learning resources, and within their learning experiences.
- And it requires that everyone, including partners in the Department of Health and Wellness, the Department of Community Services and in community are working together to support student strength and help address their challenges in a culturally and linguistically responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive manner that honours all students' cultural identities and values their experiences and their world views.

I'm truly proud of this work, and we are just getting started.

I'd like to take the opportunity next to share with you two stories reflecting this work. The first is the Grade 5/6 class of the 2020-2021 Nelson Whynder Elementary School, who launched a book entitled *The ABC's of North Preston*. This project combined research and writing that allowed the students to learn about the history and role culture plays in African Nova Scotian communities. The finished project was entered into the Delmore Buddy Daye Learning Institute African Nova Scotian History Challenge and earned an honourable mention.

The second example is a student at École secondaire de Par-en-Bas who wrote and performed at Les Étoiles du CSAP. Her song "Back à Par-en-Bas" was featured in the rankings of the local radio stations in Atlantic Canada and made the Top Ten.

[8:30 p.m.]

The third area of focus I want to discuss in more detail today in relation to public education is work being done in the regions and the CSAP and the department to enhance mental health and well-being supports for staff and students in Nova Scotia public schools.

Programs and supports which are available in schools include:

- an online classroom-ready resource for teachers about mental health;
- an annual investment of \$2 million for the Healthy Schools Fund which provides more than \$5,000 per school for programs and activities that support mental and physical health or cultural awareness;
- 70 new school counsellor positions and 19 new school psychologist positions which have been created over the past five years;
- the services of 54 schools plus mental health clinicians co-located in schools;
- As mentioned earlier, more than a thousand new positions within the inclusive education field over the past five years to support students and teachers;
- a secure telehealth virtual platform purchased in 2020 that has extended the reach of available services to students and families.

There are 1,000 licenses currently allocated to specialists within the systems. We have recently announced a new mental health and wellness grant and additional online resources for every school.

Mental health and wellness resources are for the overall well-being of everyone in the public school system. These initiatives will also provide teachers with deeper insight and knowledge relating to mental health and literacy when interacting daily with their students.

Another area that helps improve the lives of students, families, and teachers is innovation. Innovation is an ongoing process that boosts creativity and confidence, drives

productivity, provides a competitive advantage, helps create success, strengthens community, and enhances education.

The Education Innovation Programs and Services branch in the department oversees the many projects and initiatives that are designed to meet the unique and focused needs of students and families. This year we transferred the pre-Primary program from the Early Learning and Child Care branch to the Education Innovation Programs and Services branch. This will better align approaches and supports for children as they transition into their Grade Primary year.

The pre-Primary program lays the foundation for school success and lifelong learning by welcoming children into the school environment. We are also providing an additional increase of \$3 million for classroom support, making the total investment of \$62 million for pre-Primary.

The Education Innovation Programs and Services branch also plays a key role in delivery and enhancing technology use within schools and the department. It is responsible for finding new and innovative ways to teach students by incorporating the modern technologies of today's world.

I'm happy to say that we are providing additional approved increases of \$6 million to support the purchase of classroom hardware for students and teachers and associated infrastructure. This is in addition to \$4 million in technology purchases from 2022-2023. These investments allow us to put modern technology in the hands of our students and teachers so that they can thrive in their classrooms and at home.

One program that falls within the Education Innovation Programs and Services branch is Options and Opportunities, otherwise known as the O<sub>2</sub> program. I'd like to share a good news story from a high school student who graduated in 2022 and took the O<sub>2</sub> program. It illustrates the value of this program in introducing students to and setting students up for success in the trade sector.

This is what the student said:

I have been working construction for a little over a year now and I am now part of the union, which was my goal when I decided to make carpentry my future career. I got into it six years earlier than I expected. I am now an apprentice in the Local 83 Carpenters Union. I will be working towards my Red Seal to become a journeyman and will be able to take on students and apprentices like I was taken on. All of my education is paid for through the union too, and I will be going through quite a bit of training. I thought you'd think this was cool, because I probably wouldn't have even gone down this path if I didn't go into O<sub>2</sub>.

That is just one example of why we're increasing our investments to the Education Innovation Programs and Services branch of the department, and why we are promoting skilled trades, especially to our junior high students.

Another area of focus for the Education Innovation Programs and Services branch is virtual schooling options. Because of today's modern technologies, more and more people around the world are studying and learning through a variety of virtual options, and we need to keep up with this demand.

To that end, Nova Scotia has developed Nova Scotia Virtual School, an online high school providing courses to enrolled and attending students as part of their course timetable. We are investing \$530,000 for additional teachers to support that exciting work.

In the 2022-2023 school year, over 2,000 students from across the Regional Centres have enrolled in a Nova Scotia Virtual School course, and that number continues to increase. That means the number of teachers supporting the program also needs to increase. There is a combined total of 152 Nova Scotia Virtual School courses being offered this school year. This includes both first and second semesters, those taken in the RCEs and CSAP, and newly added courses such as Mi'kmaw Language 11.

Although innovation and the work of our Education Innovation Programs and Services branch is essential to keep our educational practices current, there are elements of our system and practices that are tried and true. We have long understood the value of learning multiple languages. Language learning helps improve skills, strengthen cultural ties, and increases lifelong opportunities.

The department's French Language Programs and Services branch is committing to providing quality educational programs and services that promote Nova Scotia's Acadian and francophone communities while supporting proficiency in both of Canada's official languages for all of the students in our province. That is why we are investing \$6 million to increase funding to support the Official Languages in Education Program agreement, of which \$2.7 million is federally recoverable.

Under this program, the federal government provides financial support for supplemental costs when providing minority language education and second language instruction. The program is based on bilateral agreements between the federal government and the provinces and territories and supports new initiatives, like all French immersion classroom teachers from primary to Grade 9 being provided the opportunity to add books to their classroom libraries to ensure equitable access to age-appropriate second language reading materials across the province; like the provincial centre for pedagogy, now able to expand its support as a province-wide lending library for French resources, to teachers and families to the FSL community, as well as members of our Acadian and francophone community; and increasing the capacity of virtual learning in French as a second language



by adding core French courses is allowing students in small, rural, and remote schools access to courses that they may otherwise not be able to take in person.

Physical activity is also well understood to be important for health and for well-being. With the importance of that in mind, I'm pleased to share with you an update regarding the physical activity framework. Our department has taken significant consultation with a wide range of educational partners in the development of this.

The framework focuses on reducing sedentary behaviors, including before and after school; increasing opportunities for movement throughout the school day; and creating increased opportunities for outdoor learning. The physical activity framework will be fully implemented for the 2023-2024 school year.

Similar to physical activity, we understand the importance of access to healthy food and nutrition for our students. To help expand healthy learning minds, we need to ensure they have access to healthy food. As many may know, the Province has been funding breakfast programs since 2005. In 2018, increased funding allowed every school to offer a breakfast program. In addition to providing nutritional value, these programs provide students with opportunities for education on healthy eating, leadership, and a chance to connect with friends, classmates, teachers, and volunteers.

We continue to work closely with RCEs and the CSAP and Nova Scotia Health to ensure that all students receive healthy nutritious food in our schools and that existing food opportunities are adequately monitored. This is one of the reasons why we are piloting new programs to expand the availability of food in our schools, including a salad bar pilot, and an initiative to provide fresh fruit to students.

We recognize the importance of healthy food, and we continue to ensure that no student goes hungry in our schools. We believe in the importance of expanding access to food in schools, and we continue to work with our federal counterparts on the future of school lunch in Nova Scotia to secure their support for a universal lunch program.

No conversation about student well-being is complete without considering safety. Student safety is particularly top of mind for Nova Scotians following the recent situation at Charles P. Allen High School. I want to take a moment to thank HRCE for their work in helping students, staff and families respond to and recover from that frightening situation.

My heart goes out to the school community, to those who were physically injured, and those who experienced this unfortunate event at school. Thank you to the staff and the students for their quick action, following the emergency management training, and ensuring no one else was injured or more seriously harmed.

I want Nova Scotia to be assured that we are committed to ensuring the safety of our schools. The foundation of school safety is strong school relationships which are

supportive and protective of students. The school code of conduct provides guidance for appropriate behavior and support and guidance to staff when responding when incidents do occur. Schools also prepare for incidents through emergency planning and the practice of drills. Make no mistake, safety is an area that demands continuous improvement. We can and must always do more, and we are committed to that.

Our government holds a strong belief that Nova Scotians have insight and wisdom that can drive positive and beneficial change. I believe that our educators and our communities have ideas and understanding that can enhance Nova Scotia's education system and achieve better classroom outcomes. This is why I have asked teachers and educators, including principals and vice-principals, for ideas on how to improve educational outcomes and experiences for students. This work is under way now.

Since Premier Houston appointed me to this position in 2021, I have been meeting regularly with teachers, principals, and vice-principals across the province. So far, I've had the privilege of joining 33 school staff meetings across the province in addition to numerous in-person visits. I've spoken with hundreds of school staff members to hear their successes, their challenges, and their advice.

Interacting one-on-one with teachers, with school staff, and with students is not only incredibly enjoyable, but importantly, these connections help build my understanding of the dynamics in our schools. These conversations help me to understand all of the good work that's taking place and also the things that need to change. I will continue to meet directly with teachers and school staff as well as with PSAANS and with NSTU leadership.

In talking about the valuable work and input of educators, it is timely to mention that Education Week is coming up, from April 16th to April 22<sup>nd</sup>. It is another opportunity to show appreciation to all educators and administrators, who work every day to ensure the success of all of our students across the province.

This year's theme, Active Learning = Engagement, recognizes how school communities promote active learning in many ways, from outdoor and land-based learning to experiential, hands-on classroom opportunities, and find ways to address the needs of learners they support, which results in authentic learning, movement and improved well-being outcomes.

I want to thank all teachers, public administrators, ECEs and support staff who work to help improve the lives of all students. And I want to thank the Education Week committee for their commitment year after year to host a wonderful event that showcases and promotes excellence in education.

As we listen to teachers, we are also listening to families, to staff, to students, and others who are a part of our school community. We know we will create a stronger education system by enhancing local voices in it, so we have been listening and engaging

school communities for the past number of months, working with school advisory councils and the CSAP equivalents, the CECs, as well as with parents, guardians, students, custodians and operation staff, ministry advisory bodies and others to understand how people currently connect with the education system and how they want to better connect in the future.

The goal is to listen and better understand how education would benefit from enhanced local voices, the opportunities that exist for enhancing local voices, as well as any challenges that prevent local voices from being heard. We've conducted surveys, focus groups, and online town halls. Overall, we have heard from thousands of people and conducted focus groups with hundreds of people, including students.

[8:45 p.m.]

Our government is listening to Nova Scotians and developing solutions to improve student achievement and well-being. Data has already been collected and we will report back on what we have heard in the coming months, and we will share potential actions. This is an exciting initiative.

Finally, although we have great departmental initiatives under way, these programs and supports will not meet students' needs without well-maintained learning environments available to all students. Our government is committed to investing in the maintenance of existing schools, valuable and important centres of learning and centres of community.

We are also committed to building new facilities to meet the needs of our growing communities. The department's multi-year capital plan sees investments made in building new schools and making major renovations to existing schools throughout the province.

As I mentioned earlier, Nova Scotia's population is growing and our school enrolment is growing as well. We currently have an enrolment of 129,121 students in our public schools. That is a year-over-year increase of almost 4,000 students, with the majority of that growth happening in the Halifax region, but not all of it.

This is, in fact, the first year in many that we are seeing growth in every region in our province. To enable us to respond quickly and flexibly to this growth, the 2023-2024 capital plan includes \$40 million in modulars to support enrolment pressures.

Modulars are a group of classroom units connected by common hallways, and they include washrooms. Each is equipped with heating, ventilation, and technology, creating safe, comfortable spaces for students and teachers. Modular classrooms can be installed in a timely manner, and they are an important interim measure for responding to population growth. The Halifax Regional Centre for Education has successfully used a number of modular additions to address enrolment pressures in various areas.

The 2023-2024 capital plan also includes an additional \$24 million for school capital repairs, an increase to the annual \$6 million TCA envelope, which focuses on upgrading existing facilities. It also includes an investment of \$5.9 million to refresh school buses. As we look to the future, we are excited about exploring electric school buses as part of our fleet.

New schools with an anticipated opening date of September 2023 are the elementary, junior high, and high schools on Broad Street. In the coming weeks, our government will be sharing an updated five-year school capital plan, with details about additional new schools. This will be exciting news for the province.

Before I come to a close, I want to say that our province is growing and times are changing. We are creating solutions that work and building a province that thrives from end to end. Education and early childhood development will continue to be priorities for this government. Our decisions and our actions will be centred around the successes of children and students across Nova Scotia.

It goes without saying but I cannot leave it unsaid: None of the accomplishments would happen without the ECEs, teachers, principals, administrators, and other support workers of Regional Centres for Education and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, who work to ensure the success of students and families across the province. I want to thank each of you.

I also want to thank the families, community members and volunteers, who are also essential members of our school communities. Thank you for your efforts in making the early learning and public education system in our province the best it can be in support of our students. There is, of course, more work to be done, but together we can create the best possible start for Nova Scotians so they can have the best possible future. Thank you.

We are ready to take questions.

THE CHAIR: According to practice that has developed in this Legislature, the Opposition caucuses take turns asking questions for approximately one hour each. During a caucus's turn, the members within a caucus may take turns examining the minister on the Estimate Resolution. Only the minister may answer questions. Caucuses are also expected to share time fairly with the independent member.

To begin the examination, I now recognize the Official Opposition. The honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Thanks, Minister, for those opening remarks. It's nice to see some familiar faces sitting around you, too, and I know that they're ready for all the tough questions. I have a bunch of prepared questions, and there were a number of things that came to mind during your opening remarks.

One that really doesn't have a solid place in my question planning but something that piqued my interest was in your opening remarks you talked about reading materials and a mix of fiction and non-fiction. I'm really curious if you could get into specifics about that. Are these going into individual, specific classrooms? Are these for schools? How much is being spent and what can each school look forward to? Nerdy question off the top. This is easy. It's like low-ball.

THE CHAIR: The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I'm a bit of geek, too. The books excite me also.

Just as a bit of background, there's a wide variety of books that are available for education within classrooms, and what materials are chosen is really guided by our educators and schools. They select from books that have already been authorized through the Nova Scotia School Book Bureau. What's really important is that we have a wide range of books that reflect all of our learners so that all of our students see themselves reflected in books. In addition to that, a wide variety of interests are reflected in books.

One of the things that we've come to realize - and I just use this as an example as it resonates for me as a mother of a boy - we know that boys often are more engaged by non-fiction books, and historically we've tended to focus more on fiction materials in the classroom. An example of one of the ways that we're expanding access to materials that will engage all learners is by adding additional non-fiction books to broaden that range of interests.

Another example is our work to expand access and the availability of books that reflect our African Nova Scotian learners. Our African Canadian Services branch is working to expand access to those.

PATRICIA ARAB: Just to indulge me a little bit further - that's going to be an expansion of what titles are available through the Book Bureau, not necessarily a grant that would be given to individual schools to go purchase on their own?

BECKY DRUHAN: I think that I'd mentioned in my earlier answer that through the Nova Scotia School Book Bureau, educators can access and purchase and have available books. We have \$7.2 million in credit allocation that's available through the region's two schools to access books through that programming.

I should also say, though, that literacy is also supported by our expansion in software and tech. We do have software programming that also supports access to books. The software is not only being funded - we've acquired in our funding the software - but in addition to that, our investment in technology of \$4 million in the past fiscal year and the \$6 million in the coming fiscal year is being used to support the acquisition of

Chromebooks, of laptops and of iPads. All of those devices will better enable our students to access those literary resources that are also being provided through software programs.

PATRICIA ARAB: We'll get into some of the line items within the department's budget. Looking at child care and licensing, I see that there's a decrease, about \$15.9 million. I'm curious how the minister and her department feel that will impact the Province's efforts to create more child care spaces.

BECKY DRUHAN: I'll start pretty big picture with the explanation of this, and then if you have further questions we can drill down, because there are significant investments in this entire sector.

We know there's a significant transformation under way in child care, and that involves every aspect of child care. That involves the construction of new spaces. That involves staffing initiatives like the increase in wages that we're supporting our ECEs with. It involves certification and upscaling and workforce development. It involves operator support, both from a financial perspective, but also work around licensing. We also can't really talk about our child care and our early learning sector without acknowledging the pre-Primary work as well.

When we look at the finances around child care, we have to look at a few different branches to release the entire picture. We partner early learning along with child care licensing, and what we actually see, if you look at those numbers all together, is that we're actually up in terms of expenditure. The total budget for the early learning branch and the child care licensing branch together is \$276.5 million, compared to \$252.9 million last year. It's actually gone up by \$83 million, which is an increase of 43 per cent.

In fact, though, we have to look at the third piece of it: That \$83 million increase isn't reflected in the branch estimates, because I mentioned we have to consider pre-Primary as well. Pre-Primary used to be within that branch, but I think I described in my remarks earlier that it was moved over into the public education, into our innovation branch. That actually reflects \$59 million that is still part and parcel of early learning, but it now lives outside of those two - the early learning branch and the child care licensing branch.

PATRICIA ARAB: Okay, so those removals are offset somewhere else. I'm sorry, sometimes you have to just dumb it down for me. It's a lower number because it's now located somewhere else within the budget, not because it was an actual decrease if that is correct.

BECKY DRUHAN: That's right.

PATRICIA ARAB: It doesn't help that we're sitting next to each other, either. (Laughter) Mr. Chair, for French programs, the budget estimates \$10 million - or an

estimated \$10 million in 2022, but spent \$19 million. Now the budget says that they'll be close to \$17 million. My question to the minister is: Why was there an increase in funding needed in 2022? And why did you budget less than you will spend in 2022-2023?

[9:00 p.m.]

BECKY DRUHAN: One of the things I think it's important to understand about the French programs and services funding is that there's a significant contribution through the federal government, through the Official Languages in Education Protocol federal funding, which is referred to as the OLEP funding. Our estimate forecast variance for 2022-2023 was in relation to that funding. It all related to federal funding provided under OLEP.

There is also a matching component. Whenever the federal government provides funding under OLEP, there is a provincial contribution as well. The estimate and forecast were really driven by the OLEP federal funding.

PATRICIA ARAB: You're forecasted to spend \$1.4 million for education innovation programs and services in 2022, but you're only budgeting \$362,000 for this year. Can you explain what these programs are and why it seems that you're cutting them by 75 per cent?

BECKY DRUHAN: We'll see quite a significant shift in the numbers - a couple of really big funding line shifts in the Education Innovation Programs and Services branch that - I'm glad you asked the question.

The first really big shift from last year to this year is the pre-Primary shift that I spoke about earlier. Pre-Primary services have moved from our Early Years branch into EIPS. We see that budget line item move over to EIPS. We're continuing to offer those programs. We're expanding those programs to meet increased enrolment needs, but we've just shifted the folks and the budget that provides those services into EIPS. You'll see that reflected significantly next year as a result of that realignment.

The other thing that I want to talk about in relation to the change in estimate forecast, and then ongoing . . . (Interruption)

THE CHAIR: A quick recess?

BECKY DRUHAN: Sure. Thanks.

THE CHAIR: We'll take a short recess. We're now in recess.

[9:08 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[9:09 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. Order. I call the Subcommittee on Supply back from recess.

The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: We were just talking about the estimate forecast and the variance associated with the Education Innovation Programs and Service branch, and we talked about the shift from pre-Primary. We saw some of that money pick up - move from Early Learning into EIPS this year, and then the bulk of that will happen next year.

The other thing that we see happening in that department is the grant that I spoke about earlier for tech. The \$4 million grant associated with the purchase of Chromebooks in this fiscal year will be reflected in the EIPS budget items. That's really about adding technology resources to schools to support students having access to devices to enable and facilitate learning.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I guess what I'm not understanding is that if these spends are to happen in the future, wouldn't that mean that the forecasted budget would be higher, not less than? The way that I look at it is it looks like it's a 75 per cent decrease. Or are you saying that these items have already been purchased and that's why it was a higher number, and that's why it's going down? Page 8.6.

BECKY DRUHAN: I want to clarify to make sure I see what you're asking. Are you asking about the first line under EIPS, where you see \$598,000? Okay.

That is another example, then, of a shifting of administration costs. You'll see the next line down, there's a significant increase in the estimate in the coming year. You'll see 64. The funds that you're looking at that you see as being a decrease actually moved into that line item. It wasn't a reduction. It won't be a reduction in spending.

PATRICIA ARAB: Minister, why is the Innovation curriculum and pre-Primary program - maybe you've already answered this, but for clarification, why are both of those going from \$2.2 million in 2022-2023 to \$64.4 million in 2023-2024? You've probably already touched on a lot of this, but I'll give you a chance to say it again.

BECKY DRUHAN: That line item there, the \$64 million for the 2023-2024 estimate, does represent the pre-Primary funding moving, and it's two things. It's first a transfer of the current amount reflecting current levels of service, which is \$59.3 million, and also a target increase to support increased staffing and enrolment of \$2.7 million.

PATRICIA ARAB: Looking at targeted increasing, a topic that we speak a lot about is inflation. We see that the budget for the P-12 base funding is only budgeted to rise about



1.2 per cent but inflation has gone up 6.8 per cent. I'm curious why the decision was made to not match the funding with inflation.

[9:15 p.m.]

BECKY DRUHAN: In the coming year, in 2023-2024, we are actually forecasting an increase of \$57.5 million for our public education funding. I'll explain what that's comprised of and where the additional funds come from. The funding is comprised of a \$46.5 million increase in operation funding to the RCEs and the CSAP and that's to address a number of things. It's to address additional staffing for enrolment growth, based on our projections of increased students, and the need for additional teachers and staffing.

It reflects, as well, a recognition of and supports for newcomers, in terms of adding settlement services and teachers whose focus is on settlement and ensuring that newcomers to Nova Scotia communities and schools are supported in their transition into public education. And that's supporting English as an additional language. It also reflects increased utilities and insurance as a result of inflationary pressures and a number of other things.

The reason it's not showing up, though, in that line item as totalling \$57.5 million is the line item that you are seeing is the provincial contribution, but public education is also funded in part through the municipal education tax. The funding comes from those streams, and both of those together total a \$57.5 million increase to support those inflationary and growth pressures.

PATRICIA ARAB: Okay, thanks. I can't do that math fast enough, but with that increase, does that mean that we are matching inflation? These operational costs are really external costs more than anything else, so it's not things that you can do in-house. It's things that you're reliant on the general public to go out there and do.

That's kind of the sticking point, where it is money but you don't really have a lot of control over what the costs are going to be. Is that 57.9 - does that match inflation or get us closer to inflation? Anybody? Any math nerds over there know the answer to that?

BECKY DRUHAN: The quick and dirty answer is yes, it does reflect inflation. The nuanced answer to that includes a couple of additional points. The first is that not everything, actually, is subject to inflation. A significant portion of our costs, for example, is associated with wages and salaries. Those go up in accordance with negotiated agreements, not inflation necessarily, so those are addressed when they happen.

The other thing to note is when we forecast and budget for future costs, it's really related to what the current experience is, and sometimes there are changes to that. The forecast would be based on the current inflationary expectations. If there are changes to

that, we see those changes reflected in variances as those need to happen to support students' learning experience.

THE CHAIR: You have approximately 15 seconds. The honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park.

PATRICIA ARAB: Well, to be continued tomorrow, I think. That sounds good to me.

THE CHAIR: Order. It's now 9:21 p.m. That concludes the Subcommittee's consideration of Estimates for today. The Subcommittee will resume consideration when the House again resolves into Committee on the Whole on Supply. The meeting has adjourned.

[The Subcommittee adjourned at 9:21 p.m.]