

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Tuesday, June 20, 2023

COMMITTEE ROOM

Update on the Seamless Canada Agreement

Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Chris Palmer (Chair)
Danielle Barkhouse (Vice Chair)
Larry Harrison
Tom Taggart
Nolan Young
Hon. Ben Jessome
Hon. Tony Ince
Gary Burrill
Lisa Lachance

[Danielle Barkhouse was replaced by John A. MacDonald.]
[Nolan Young was replaced by Trevor Boudreau.]

In Attendance:

Tamer Nusseibeh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Department of Intergovernmental Affairs Nova Scotia
Darryl Eisan, Director of Canada-United States Relations

Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services
Laurie Ogilvie, Director of Military Family Services

Department of National Defence
Pamela Chiasson, Director General Military Personnel



HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JUNE 20, 2023

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

2:00 P.M.

CHAIR
Chris Palmer

VICE CHAIR
Danielle Barkhouse

THE CHAIR: Order. I call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. My name is Chris Palmer, MLA for Kings West and Chair of this committee. Today we will hear from presenters regarding an update on the Seamless Canada agreement. At this moment, I'd like us all to please put our phones on silent or turn them off. In case of an emergency, just remind everybody that we would use the Granville Street exit and walk up to the Grand Parade.

I would like to welcome our guests both here in the room and virtually. Welcome to you all. At this point, I would like to ask all of our members to introduce themselves with their name and their constituency. We'll begin to my left with MLA MacDonald.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Welcome to our committee. MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: As I would in the House, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE CHAIR: Permission granted.

TOM TAGGART: With us here today is Jaeger Laird. He's a friend of mine from Colchester North, and he's going to work with me some over the Summer. He has a keen interest in politics, and hopefully I don't turn him away.

THE CHAIR: Any friend of MLA Taggart's is a friend of ours. Thank you and welcome to our committee room today. With us today is Chief Legislative Counsel Gordon Hebb to my right, and Legislative Committee Clerk Tamer Nusseibeh to my left.

We will move on to our presenters. Welcome to all of you. At this point, I'd like to ask you to all introduce yourselves, and then we'll get into opening statements after that. I'll begin with Mr. Eisan to introduce yourself, and then we'll do a reverse order for opening comments. Mr. Eisan.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: At this point, we'd like to give you all an opportunity to give some opening comments to our committee. We'll begin with Ms. Chiasson, if you'd like to offer your opening comments.

PAMELA CHIASSON: I'll be offering opening comments for myself and Ms. Ogilvie. I'd like to recognize that today Ms. Ogilvie and I are joining you from the traditional unceded territory of Anishinaabe people. I'd like to open by thanking the committee for its interest in Seamless Canada. This is our second opportunity to present in front of the standing committee. Ms. Ogilvie and I will do our best to answer the questions you may have regarding the Seamless Canada initiative. If not, we'll be happy to find the answers for you and communicate them back to you.

As many of you are aware, the demands we place on military families are significant. Along with separation for training and operations, there's also the chronic impact of relocation on family stability and welfare, including access to health care, impacts on child and youth education, including access to daycare, and eliminating barriers to spousal employment.

Our military families are at the heart of the CAF's operational effectiveness, and they are truly the strength behind the uniform. It is with this in mind that DND and the Canadian Armed Forces launched the Seamless Canada initiative five years ago to help address - with our federal, provincial, and territorial partners - the mobility challenges faced by military families when they move between jurisdictions. Since 2018, we have had a number of in-person and virtual meetings to work through some of these challenges.

Although Canadian research findings suggest that the majority of military families are resilient and well-supported within a healthy Canadian Armed Forces community, greater family stability is at the top three reasons why members decide to leave the

Canadian Armed Forces. It is therefore important to ensure that we are addressing the needs of the military families in order to retain our valuable CAF members.

Seamless Canada is a key enabler in ensuring that the contemporary reality of families is identified and the inherent challenges to the military lifestyle are considered. Over the last five years, each province and territory within Seamless Canada has provided critical contributions that have helped us unpack potential mobility solutions to better support our CAF members and their families.

Keeping in mind that this is our second opportunity to appear in front of this committee, I would just like to briefly remind the committee that our mobility challenges are grouped under three themes, namely: child and youth education, including access to child care; access to health care, which includes the accessibility to provincial and territorial services, including physicians and specialists; and finally, spousal and partner employment, with the ability to transfer professional accreditations and licences across jurisdictions raised as one of our main issues.

Through the Seamless Canada initiative, I would like to highlight that collectively we have achieved the following for CAF members and their families. We have waived the standard 90-day waiting period for access to health care services in Canada's 13 provinces and territories; we have implemented virtual health care for military families; we've designated CAF members as essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic; we've developed a military spousal employment network, which is the employment and training support services for military spouses; we've reviewed education barriers for students relocating between jurisdictions; and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada is currently developing a new student transfer guide.

Since our June 2022 appearance at this committee, I'm happy to inform you that we have made some significant strides in close partnership with our provincial and territorial partners. In June 2022, in-person and provincial and territorial delegates signed a terms of reference for the Seamless Canada steering committee, thus solidifying Seamless Canada as a formal federal, provincial, and territorial committee. Virtual participants signed the TOR leveraging the regional joint task forces across Canada, ensuring that all provinces and territories were afforded the opportunity to commit to the initiative. The TOR is a significant symbol, solidifying the strong commitment of each province and territory to working with us to alleviate military family mobility challenges.

Coinciding with the signing of the TOR, the Minister of National Defence and Member of the Legislative Assembly Mary Wilson for New Brunswick were named as co-chairs, forging more collaboration amongst the named delegates of the Seamless Canada steering committee. In December 2022, a governance framework to support the new terms of reference was endorsed, which means that we will now meet twice annually for the delegates to discuss persistent mobility challenges and gain consensus on opportunities to overcome those challenges.

Much work occurs behind the scenes to support these engagements, and that is where my team comes in. To support the semi-annual meetings, we have both subcommittee and thematic working group meetings with participating jurisdictions. My team works with participating jurisdictions in both forums to help unpack the potential solutions facing our mobility challenges.

For example, at one of the working group meetings, the collective identified that in many jurisdictions, a military spouse must be considered a resident of a province or territory to access some of the employment supports available. This means that in some provinces, the military spouse can only apply for some employment supports after residing in the jurisdiction for 90 days. At the recent Seamless Canada Steering Committee annual conference in May 2023, there was general support that the military families would not have to wait the normal 90-day waiting period to have access to employment supports. This challenge will continue to be a topic of interest at the next working group meeting later this month to help unpack the solutions.

In terms of next steps, we have our next working group scheduled for June 26, 2023. We will continue to discuss related spousal and partner employment later in the Summer or early Fall. A second themed working group will be launched focusing on access to child care for military families. The Seamless Canada team, along with its stakeholders, will be preparing for this activity over the Summer months.

I would also like to add that for the first time, an annual report for the Seamless Canada Steering Committee will be published as an external-facing document this year, and it is currently under development. We are thankful for the support and willingness of all the provinces and territories, specifically Nova Scotia, to collaborate with us on reducing the mobility barriers our military families encounter. Thank you for the time, and we are available to answer your questions.

THE CHAIR: I'd like to pass it over to Mr. Eisan for some opening remarks.

DARRYL EISAN: I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to your committee discussions, and to provide an update on the Seamless Canada initiative as it pertains to the role of military relations in the province of Nova Scotia.

As I'm sure everyone is aware, Nova Scotia is home to a significant portion of Canada's military assets, including the country's most populated military base, Canadian Forces Base Halifax. The defence presence in Nova Scotia is a strategic asset for the province, and retaining and expanding this crucial asset is a priority for the Government of Nova Scotia.

Importantly, military policies have considerable implications for the province as they impact employment, health care, international relations, public safety and security, research and development, business development, attraction and retention, and the overall

livelihood and well-being of our veterans, military members, and their families. As such, the Honourable John Lohr, Minister Responsible for Military Relations, was tasked with two mandate letter directives:

1. Ensure the important contributions of our military members, veterans, and their families are recognized within all areas of government; and
2. Work with the federal government to ensure Nova Scotia's defence sector continues to be a driving force of innovation and economic growth for our province.

In recognition of these two priority areas, the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs provides support to Minister Lohr on this portfolio to ensure military members and their families continue to be recognized as a critically important asset to our society and our economy. As such, Intergovernmental Affairs actively engages with the military's many facets to ensure CAF personnel, their families, and Nova Scotian industries connected to the defence sector have a line of communication to DND and CAF.

One of these many areas of engagement is through the Seamless Canada initiative - a partnership strongly valued by the province. Since my colleagues presenting alongside me today have provided their insights and background on the Seamless Canada initiative, I will speak solely to updates related to the province's engagement with this federal initiative since Seamless Canada's appearance before this committee in June of 2022.

Since Seamless Canada's launch in June of 2018, Intergovernmental Affairs has remained actively engaged in this file. In June 2022, Minister Lohr - along with other federal, provincial, and territorial representatives - signed the terms of reference which ratified the Seamless Canada Steering Committee. Following the signing of the terms of reference, Intergovernmental Affairs has been an active participant, proactively engaging with all elements of the initiative.

For example, with respect to health care, the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs worked with the Department of Health and Wellness to implement the 90-day waiver initiative. The 90-day waiver initiative was established for military families to receive access to health care when undergoing interprovincial postings. Prior to implementing the 90-day waiver, military families had to self-advocate throughout the application process to pursue an exemption to the policy that imposes a 90-day waiting period for access to health care upon relocation. By the Fall of 2022, Nova Scotia had fully implemented the 90-day waiver, as well as ensured that the information was visible and accessible on the Department of Health and Wellness website.

Additionally, the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs has participated in the first series of working group meetings on spousal employment that were launched earlier this year. Briefly stated, the working groups are a platform where subject matter experts

and federal, provincial, and territorial representatives gather to discuss challenges and barriers experienced by CAF members and their families as they pertain to the initiative's three policy areas, as well as to identify potential solutions.

[2:15 p.m.]

Given that the first series of working group meetings were on spousal employment, Intergovernmental Affairs worked with colleagues at the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration and the Public Service Commission to ensure that the right sector experts were at the table to provide critical insights on this topic. Nova Scotia's work with the spousal employment working group has led to the development of several navigational tools that could assess a military spouse upon relocation. Additionally, the province's public employment services were identified to support military spouses in finding employment as we welcome them to our province - both prior to and after they arrive.

As a result of this collaborative work, these provincial employment supports and programs are now visible on the Seamless Canada webpage for increased awareness and accessibility to military members and their families. As Nova Scotia continues to be engaged in Seamless Canada discussions, the same collaborative approach will be conducted when working groups are established later this year on the remaining two priority areas of health care and child care and dependent education.

Mr. Chair, those are my opening comments. Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today. I'd be very pleased to answer any questions that the members may have. If I cannot answer your questions today, I'll ensure to get those answers back to you as soon as I can.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Eisan, and thank you all for your opening remarks. I think we're in for a very good conversation today, and look forward to the progress and hearing about what's been happening since our last meeting last June.

I'd like to remind all of us to remember not to speak until I recognize you and your microphones, those who are here in the room and those who aren't. We also will be doing a show of hands for our questioning, as per the protocol of this committee. I will do my best to keep an eye on the hands for questioning.

If our guests online would like to add a comment on a question that may not be directed to you, make sure you please put your hand up through the online Zoom. Don't use the mic. Just raise your hand - that's fine. I'll do my best to keep corralling everybody as I can.

We will open up the floor. We'll go until 3:45 p.m. We will open up the table for questions at this point in time.

We'll begin with MLA MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I'm not sure who is going to take this one. At the time of our last update, there were 32 Military Family Resource Centres across the country. Has that number changed at all?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Eisan.

DARRYL EISAN: I don't believe that number has changed in Nova Scotia. I still believe there are three military family resource centres in Nova Scotia, located at Windsor Park, in the Annapolis Valley 14 Wing Greenwood, and also 12 Wing Shearwater.

My colleagues at Seamless Canada could tell us if, in fact, the numbers have changed outside of Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: MLA MacDonald, would you like one of our other guests to add any context to that?

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Yes, if they could.

THE CHAIR: Would either one of our guests online like to respond to that question?

Ms. Ogilvie.

LAURIE OGILVIE: I would be pleased to take the question. There are still 32 MFRCs located in Canada. We also have military family support networks across Europe and the U.S. As well, we've just expanded support through the rest of the world, which are families who are located in countries that are not in Europe or the United States.

What we have added during COVID, and continuing to do, would be a 33rd MFRC both in Canada and internationally. It's our virtual MFRC, providing all the support to military families that is available at an MFRC but also from a virtual context.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I will allow for a quick supplementary question for each MLA, but again I remind everybody that it's not meant to be a second question. It is a follow-up to the previous question.

With that little warning, MLA MacDonald, we'll pass it back to you for a quick supplementary.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: So no preamble, Mr. Chair?

Quickly then, I'm just wondering: Are there plans to have expansion of the centres in Nova Scotia?

THE CHAIR: Is that directed to Ms. Ogilvie?

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I'm looking for him to decide.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Ogilvie, you raised your hand, so I'll allow you to answer that question.

LAURIE OGILVIE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. At this time, there are no plans for the expansion of MFRCs themselves. In 2020, we launched a new strategic framework for the delivery of military and veteran family services. As a result of that, we're looking at different delivery mechanisms, both within the MFRCs but also by providers that are located in each of the communities.

An example of that could be our connection with Kids Help Phone, that is providing mental health support for children and youth who are in crisis. We're looking to expand service offerings, not necessarily brick and mortar facilities.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: My question will be to Ms. Ogilvie or Ms. Chiasson or both. What specific programs does Seamless Canada promote to provide support to military families on matters of mental health and addictions?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Ogilvie, would you like to begin with that? It's hard for me to see all the screens. All I see is Ms. Ogilvie at this moment. Ms. Ogilvie.

LAURIE OGILVIE: I will start the answer, but then I'll pass it to my colleague Pam to do more a specific answer around Seamless Canada. From a programming perspective, we have a variety of services that are available for mental health, from psychoeducational programming all the way to crisis intervention and mental health counselling for our military families, both in person and virtually.

For addictions specifically, we don't have any programs, but we do partner with organizations to provide referrals to areas where families or people who are connected with the military are able to access that level of support. We are not specialists in addictions support, so we don't offer it. We refer to specialists out in the community. I'll pass it over to my colleague Pam right now.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Chiasson.

PAMELA CHIASSON: I would just like to potentially provide a little bit of clarity about Seamless Canada. Seamless Canada is a platform whereby the federal, provincial, and territorial partners are getting together to talk about mobility challenges with respect to our CAF members and their families moving across the country. Seamless Canada itself does not actually provide any programming. Programming that's provided to our military families is actually done by our CFMWS, Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services. My colleague Laurie is specifically responsible for the military family piece to that, because Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services is a much bigger organization. Over to you, Chair.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart, did you have a follow-up?

TOM TAGGART: I do. I guess I'll switch back to Ms. Ogilvie. On the mental health piece, I'm hung up on that. When you talk about services through Seamless Canada and the military, part of these are current, serving members. The whole family is covered - it's a two-part question. Am I correct in that the whole family is covered under the Canadian Armed Forces? Secondly, does either one of you do anything within Seamless Canada to support the veterans' mental health when they leave the armed forces? That's really the sticker for me. We have had others before us at this committee to speak about mental health, in particular PTSD and that sort of thing in the military, which is a huge concern of mine. The idea that when they leave the armed services, they lose that support that they have from Canadian Armed Forces.

To go back to my question: Does the Canadian Armed Forces support family members with mental health needs the same as they do the actual soldier?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Ogilvie.

LAURIE OGILVIE: The Canadian Armed Forces supports military families. There is a policy - and I'm blanking on the actual name of the policy - where there is mental health support within the familial unit, where supporting the family or the spouse with the support to the military member - that exists. However, on a stand-alone or families directly by the military, no, which is why the Military Family Services Program was established. That is where within the Military Family Services Program, we do provide mental health counselling to members of the families or anyone who's connected to the military who is experiencing a challenge. We do that in person through the Military Family Resource Centres. We also do it virtually through our virtual MFRC. We've seen an uptake in the number of virtual counselling sessions that we're doing within our virtual MFRC.

When I talked about our out-of-country locations, we have social workers and psychologists who are available for our families outside of Canada as well to provide, again, direct or virtual services. There's also something called the Canadian Forces Member Assistance Program, which provides support to members and their families. That is a program that's offered by the Canadian Armed Forces, and provides a certain number

of sessions for military members and their families to deal with some of the challenges that they're facing with the military lifestyle. Within there as well there is also a bereavement support component to that where families of the fallen or anybody who's been affected by a fallen member - whether it's related to service or not - can access specialized bereavement support services.

I'll fast-forward to those families who are going through the transition process - so leaving the Canadian Armed Forces for whatever reason it happens to be. There are transition centres that have been established or are in the process of being established at most of the bases and wings across the country. Within there, we have family liaison officers, who are mental health professionals who support the families through the transition into becoming Veterans' Affairs clients or leaving the Canadian Armed Forces. We also have family transition advisers. That's a relatively new addition to the transition centres to support families who may be struggling with a transition.

Once a member has been released within Veterans' Affairs, for those members who are released for illness and injury, there is also at every one of our MFRCs across the country a veteran family program coordinator. This is a partnership between our organization and Veterans' Affairs that provides dedicated support to families and veterans who are experiencing challenges with post-release from the Canadian Armed Forces - especially around mental health and PTSD. That is one of those significant areas.

The last thing I'll mention on that is there are some significant educational programs. There's something called the Road to Mental Readiness Program that has been created by the Canadian Armed Forces. We have worked very closely with them on also developing a family component to that. We take it from all areas - from crisis intervention, which I sort of talked about to the education preparing families and members for any of the experiences that they're having as a result of the military lifestyle.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. Ogilvie. MLA Jessome.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Ms. Ogilvie and Ms. Chiasson, thank you for your time today. Mr. Eisan, good to reconnect. I appreciate your ongoing work on this file and many others with respect to military families and veterans. Perhaps directed at Ms. Chiasson or Ms. Ogilvie, could you dive a little deeper into the expectations outlined in the terms of reference that were signed by all jurisdictions in Canada, please?

THE CHAIR: I'll go to Ms. Chiasson first for that one.

PAMELA CHIASSON: If I understand your question correctly, you're wondering what the terms of reference state in terms of liability. The terms of reference are non-binding. We rely solely on the goodwill and the best intentions of provinces and territories to continue to work with us. Our organization is set up there to work very collaboratively.

[2:30 p.m.]

Seamless Canada itself recognizes that all the things that are in our themes, all of the problem sets that are in our themes are in the jurisdictional space of provinces and territories. This is their legislative authority, so whatever work we can do, whatever problem sets that we uncover that we can develop solutions bases for will be done working with individual provinces and territories based on their comfort level, based on their jurisdictions, based on their ability to accommodate some of our challenges. I hope that answers your question.

THE CHAIR: MLA Jessome for a follow-up.

BEN JESSOME: I appreciate that response. I will say that I had the opportunity to participate in the inaugural and subsequent meetings of Seamless Canada in 2018. So this has been a personal interest on behalf of my constituents and military families for some time. I have motioned at this committee to open up the discussion at our committee, change the mandate of this committee to involve military families. I will note that this motion was rejected by the government.

However, what I would like to ask is, perhaps again directed at Ms. Ogilvie and Ms. Chiasson: Can you speak to other jurisdictions in the way that they approach the Seamless Canada initiative? For me, I felt that an all-party committee directed at serving military families was a reasonable step in supporting the government's intention to support the Seamless Canada initiative. From your perspective, looking at all jurisdictions, are there examples that you can provide this committee with on how they are intentional about supporting Seamless Canada?

THE CHAIR: I'll go back to Ms. Chiasson for that.

PAMELA CHIASSEON: I think it's really important to understand that each province and territory is going to approach this very differently. I can offer to you that since we've started our working groups, we have had wonderful participation from all provinces and territories. Everyone has shown up. We've asked for remits to help us understand what's available inside the provinces and territories. Most have been very good at providing feedback to us, giving us a steer, because most of these issues are not in our SMEA - subject matter expert areas. I would say in total, provinces and territories are very open and collaborative with us.

In terms of what we've actually been able to tangibly produce yet, we're early days and really trying to dig into these themes - theme by theme, problem set by problem set. Our themes have many different layers and levels to them, and we're still unpacking them on our own. I know that's a very generic answer, but the fact that people are coming to the table, they're talking, they're providing ideas, they're providing information, is going to get us to where we need to be.

We don't have an end state per se, other than the fact that our military families are well-supported as they're moving across the jurisdictions. That may look very different from one province or territory to another. We're not here to compare those things. We're here to try to ease the transition of military families.

THE CHAIR: Our next three MLA questions will come from MLA Ince, MLA Boudreau, and MLA MacDonald. MLA Ince.

HON. TONY INCE: My question is for Ms. Ogilvie. The Military Spouse Employment Initiative has program eligibility requirements. Can you talk about those program eligibility requirements?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Ogilvie.

LAURIE OGILVIE: Yes, I can talk about the eligibility requirements. To give a little bit of background on the Military Spousal Employment Network, we have a specific amount of resources that we're putting toward it. We would like to expand it. We're actually in the process of expanding it.

What our focus has been on - and I'll get to the eligibility requirements in a second - has been on supporting those spouses who are transitioning and are having trouble re-establishing employment during the transition process or because of the challenges with transferring credentials between provinces and territories.

We have had to limit the eligibility for the Spousal Employment Network to be able to, one, ensure that we can provide the best support possible within the resource allocation. As I mentioned, that's been expanded. In this current fiscal year, we will be doubling our capability within the Spousal Employment Network, as well as looking at increasing the number of employers who are going to be part of the Spousal Employment Network, which is going to allow us to expand our capacity to be able to deliver to, potentially. That's what we're researching right now: an expanding eligibility to the Spousal Employment Network.

TONY INCE: Can you explain or tell us - have the labour shortages affected the spousal/partner employment programs?

LAURIE OGILVIE: I cannot say specifically that that is the reason. What I can say is that the employers that have been part of our Military Spousal Employment Network are very active. We are connecting a significant number of employers with military spouses. There are a significant number of military spouses who have received employment as a result.

One of the bigger challenges, I would say, was the very quick pivot we needed to do with the career fairs during COVID. It was creating a virtual career fair platform where we

could connect those employers with the spouses. I will say that the availability or the option for virtual work has really been a positive for our military spouses. They can port their employment as they're moving across the country, because they're working in a virtual capacity.

So not really a specific answer, but what I am saying is that the labour shortage is an issue across Canada, as it is with all employers, but we have worked to try to mitigate or look at other solutions to be able to connect military families. They are at a greater disadvantage because of relocation.

THE CHAIR: MLA Boudreau.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: I was going to ask a different question, but I'm going to follow up on MLA Ince a little bit with respect to the spousal employment working group, or that network. It's one of those three themes that everybody's working on.

Can you tell us a bit more about what that working group is made up of, what they do, and how they come to the conclusions or supports that they can provide? I guess I'm kind of just asking in broad strokes, what is that group? How do they function?

THE CHAIR: We haven't heard from Mr. Eisan in a while. Let's begin with Mr. Eisan, and then if any of our other guests would like to add to that, we'll allow that to happen. Mr. Eisan right now.

DARRYL EISAN: Certainly, Pam or Laurie can add to what I put in front of you with respect to spousal employment. Following the signing of the terms of reference in Ottawa a year ago, the steering committee decided that there would be three priority areas of focus, and spousal employment is the first one that provinces and the federal government have tackled.

We have established a subcommittee of federal and provincial representatives. My colleagues with me today are on it. The Department of Intergovernmental Affairs is supported by colleagues at the Public Service Commission and also the Nova Scotia Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration.

What we've done so far is that Seamless Canada has asked us to provide back to them a number of navigational tools that military families who are transitioning to Nova Scotia can have these tools at their disposal right away. That is now available on the Seamless Canada website. There are other areas that, as the working group continues to meet, we're going to look at as well as it relates to spousal employment.

We've had two working committee meetings thus far. It only started at the turn of the year. Our next one is coincidentally, on Monday, June 26th. We'll just continue to work as federal-provincial-territorial colleagues do when it comes to issues like this. Pam or

Laurie might be able to add some additional details as well from more of a macro perspective with respect to the MSEN.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Chiasson or Ms. Ogilvie - one of you raise your hand and I'll recognize you. Ms. Chiasson.

PAMELA CHIASSON: I'll just piggyback on my colleague Darryl's response to you. The working groups were set up because in the past, at the Seamless Canada Steering Committee meetings, they were just annual meetings and we were talking about our issues, and highlighting what our military families' challenges were in terms of moving. It was a great platform. We had great support from all the provinces and territories around the table, but there wasn't a lot of focused work being done inside the themes. How do we make these changes? How do we get things done? What do we need to do?

The working group concept was devised in order to be able to dig into these things and peel back the onions just a little bit more to try to determine where the actual barriers really are. Our data, from a CAF-DND perspective, is quite high-level. For example, in terms of military spouse employment, we were told that it would be great if provinces and territories would offer employment supports, if our credentials and licences would be recognized, et cetera.

In our first working group, I shared some of that information. First of all, I gave everybody a background of what we do and what the problems there were in terms of military spousal employment. Of course, around the table, provinces and territories are like: We have lots of spousal employment supports; we're not really sure where those friction points might be. As we asked provinces and territories, the first was a remit. Can you give us an example of programs that are available to military families, what that would look like for them as somebody new coming into the province? Provinces and territories have a plethora of employment supports available to their constituents. There's no question about that, and that was quickly seen.

In order to provide a little bit more context to provinces and territories, we developed a scenario tool to say: Okay, Joe Bloggins is moving to this province. His wife has this experience. What would be available to them? We just recently received those remits from provinces and territories. It's actually really a working group. Here's our problem, and then we're peeling back the layers to try to really determine what the friction points are for military families.

The very first one that was very prevalent to us is the fact that in order to gain access to some employment supports - and it's not across the country because every province and territory is just a little bit different - but one of the things is the 90-day wait in order to be able to access. You must be a resident. What does it mean to be a resident? Generally - and again, it's different in some so I can't speak to all - in order to be considered a resident, usually you're there for 180 days or 90 days.

Trying to understand what that real problem faced is, what that real friction point is for military families, when they're moving and trying to figure out, what can we do about that? What supports are available? Can we offer some career counselling as soon as they walk in on their military house-hunting trip so they can go and find lodging and things for their families? Can they walk into the employment supports and see what's available? Can they start some career counselling once they get there on their house-hunting trip in order to access so that they're ready to go when they hit the ground versus having to wait 90 days to get there?

[2:45 p.m.]

That's an example of what the working group is looking at and how it's functioning right now. I hope that provides the clarity or the insight that you were looking for. I'll pass the floor over to you, Chair.

THE CHAIR: MLA Boudreau for any follow-up?

TREVOR BOUDREAU: More of a comment than a follow-up question. That was very helpful. My brain was going around in terms of if a family member is moving with their military partner, they go to a province, and if you're like me and a chiropractor, you have to get your licence. Your licence would have to be changed. You have to go to a provincial one. Although this isn't specific to military families, some of the new

Although this isn't specific to military families, some of the new legislation that we put forward in the Spring will allow for some of that change to happen with at least health care workers - to allow health care workers to move into our province in a smoother transition. I know it's not related specifically to military families, but I do think it provides our province with a step up that we've been trying to look at as a global issue. That's just my comment on that. I'll have more questions later.

THE CHAIR: MLA MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: To go back to the Military Family Resource Centre, I live in East Hants. I have a fair amount of military along there. I'm just wondering: How are the services from the Military Family Resource Centre done outside of the centre? How is a decision made that there should be some services in a certain area?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Eisan.

DARRYL EISAN: I believe that my two colleagues would probably be better suited to answer that question.

THE CHAIR: We'll begin with Ms. Ogilvie.

LAURIE OGILVIE: I'm happy to take the question. MFRCs - and I'm talking bricks-and-mortar MFRCs - have been established for years where they're located. It really has to do with what the request is by the Canadian Armed Forces for the delivery of services within their area of responsibility. What each MFRC does - and I will say it's different across the country - is there's outreach as well. Where there are pockets of families who are located not close to where the bricks-and-mortar MFRC is, then the staff within the MFRC will go out to the community and provide supports.

With the advent of the virtual MFRC, it's also another option where families can access services. Again, not the things that need to be done in person, but the ones that can be done virtually. We're seeing a significant increase in the number who are accessing from a virtual perspective.

If there is a demand from a particular community, we will consider establishing an MFRC in that community. The most recent example of that was in Charlottetown, P.E.I., where a number of families - as well as the Canadian Armed Forces leadership that's responsible for P.E.I. generally - asked to have more tailored services for their families, and we established an MFRC in Charlottetown.

It's not off the table, but there's a process for us to be able to look at where that large pocket of families is, how we can best support those families, and what options are available, based on the ones I've just explained right now.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: You mentioned that the demands are growing for the MFRCs. How do you feel with the current number of MFRCs that we have? Are they able to meet the demands that are coming not just in Nova Scotia, obviously, but all across the country?

LAURIE OGILVIE: We conduct community needs assessments every couple of years in each of the communities across the country to assess what family experiences are with the services that are available, and then what those unmet needs are. We take all of that information, and then we are continually modernizing what our approach is to the delivery of services for families and what programs and where they're located.

I mentioned, P.E.I. - also at the Ottawa MFRC. It extends all the way into the Cornwall region, which is significantly far away from the Ottawa area. What we do is use those results of the community needs assessment to determine where our areas of gaps are, and also where potential areas of duplication are and how we can offset those. Can I say hand on heart right now that absolutely, there are enough MFRCs and absolutely, the demand is being met with the existing MFRCs? No, I can't say that, because the demand continually evolves and moves, especially as families are moving outside of the core geographical area where our bases and wings are located. Halifax would be an excellent example - because of the cost of housing - of where families are moving further away from

the actual core Halifax or Shearwater locations are, so working with the MFRC on what the needs are in that particular community.

THE CHAIR: Our next round of questioning will come from MLA Harrison, MLA Jessome, and then MLA Burrill.

MLA Harrison.

LARRY HARRISON: I understand that there was a Seamless Canada steering committee conference in Fredericton. It's kind of an open question, but can you just share some of the highlights of the information that was shared at the conference?

THE CHAIR: I'll begin with Mr. Eisan.

DARRYL EISAN: Certainly. My colleagues can add to what I tell you as well. The annual conference was in Fredericton May 24th and 25th. The honourable John Lohr attended as the Minister Responsible for Military Relations.

The meeting, as far as highlights go from a Nova Scotia perspective, was that Minister Lohr certainly highlighted to the table the good work Nova Scotia has done over the past several months with respect to spousal employment. As my colleague can attest, we've been quite engaged on the spousal employment working group. We have provided to Seamless significant information about how we can make the transition with respect to spousal employment a little bit easier in Nova Scotia.

I think that as we're looking forward, we have working meetings coming up, and then our next meeting of the steering committee will be later this year. That's always a virtual session. As far as other highlights in the meeting go, certainly there was engagement from all provinces and territories. There was full attendance, either in person or virtually.

If Pam or Laurie wants to add to that, I encourage them to do so.

THE CHAIR: It looks like Ms. Chiasson has her hand up. Ms. Chiasson.

PAMELA CHIASSON: I would like to echo my colleague Mr. Eisan's comments. Nova Scotia has been extremely present and engaged inside of the working groups. They have provided us really significantly remits, which we really appreciate. In fact, we're using some of the information that Nova Scotia has provided to us to generate more conversation around the table in the next working group on Monday.

In terms of the steering committee meeting that happened on May 24th, attendance was exceptional. The discussion - the fact that we're starting these working groups and

having these more fulsome discussions peeling back the layers of some of the information - we spent 30 minutes talking about spousal employments around that table.

Now, spousal employment is kind of divided into two categories. There's the stuff that's only done by provinces and territories: spousal employment offices, support programs that are happening - or not spousal, but the employment support programs that are offered inside each province and territory. Then there's the credentialling and licensing piece. That's been handled by ESDC in the Labour Mobility Working Group. We try not to touch into that space too much. We can link into it, but we try not to duplicate those efforts. Everybody's working really hard to look at all of these challenges from a different lens.

We had some significant conversation about spousal employment and what that could look like inside the provinces and territories. I can offer that there was extreme support that military families shouldn't necessarily have to wait that 90 days to have access to provincial or territorial services. Obviously, that is within the jurisdiction of each province and territory, but overall, that was the conversation.

Later on, we had another focused area of conversation inside the steering committee. That was about child care. My colleague can speak more to that, but in general terms, CFMWS - Military Family Services - they have looked into the child care issue for our military families: what that looks like, what are the gaps, what are the things that we need to be looking at? That information - some of that information will help us launch into the next working group that we're going to start later.

I hope that answers your question on the steering committee. Laurie, would you to provide any more information on that?

LAURIE OGILVIE: I presented as well on the child care work that's been conducted in the last 10 months. What I talked about at Seamless Canada was the background and the research that was done on the gaps and the challenges that military families face accessing child care, and the impact of not being able to access child care has on the operational capability of the Canadian Armed Forces.

I also spoke about some of the next stages of the child care strategy. There has been a child care strategy that has been drafted. It has not been actioned or any of the pieces reviewed with the goal of implementation. That's the process that we're in right now. We have been able to, as part of the development of the child care strategy, implement I think about 19 - I don't have my notes here - pilot initiatives to be able to offset some of the challenges that families have told us they're facing in accessing child care.

The one piece I'll leave you with, and that I was very clear on - and in Nova Scotia more specifically it's been a challenge - is the lack of ECE or early childhood education workers. It's not about building facilities. It's not about the number of children, because getting the facilities, the number of families who want access to child care, absolutely exist.

It's finding the qualified staff to be able to ensure the operations. Part of the strategy that's been developed or drafted addresses that as well. I can't talk more about that right now, because we're just in the stage of reviewing what can and what cannot be accomplished.

We are working closely with Employment and Social Development Canada and the federal child care strategy implementation across the provinces and territories to make sure that there is alignment as well.

BEN JESSOME: To Mr. Boudreau's comments about breaking down the barriers around introducing new health care credentialing - making it more efficient for health care workers to approach our province and work in this province - I will tip my hat to the government for that initiative. It's one that we as a party were supportive of. I use this example. My wife worked as a first responder EMT out of jurisdiction. She actually studied a textbook that was written by a former health minister from Nova Scotia. But although she had worked on an ambulance out of jurisdiction, she could not come seamlessly - pun intended - into Nova Scotia and hit the ground running for our people here.

Seamless Canada, while it focuses on the military and military spouses with respect to employment, I've always felt that this initiative could be a catalyst for a broader reach extending to interjurisdictional migration, period. So while this is a priority from a military perspective, I hope that the work that is done at Seamless can be influential in a more broad-reaching context.

To our team visiting us virtually, I do appreciate the intention not to compare jurisdictions. I respect and appreciate the ability that provinces have to put their own spin on supporting the cause. What I would ask from our guests is: Could you please provide the committee with a list of governance models that the different provinces have to support the work that Seamless Canada does, as well as to some of the changes that have been adopted in other jurisdictions to support families specifically? Not to compare and contrast effectively, but also I believe that Nova Scotia should, given its population of military families, be a leader.

My intention behind this question, in providing these two streams of accomplishments or intentions, is to ensure that Nova Scotia is a leader, and if there are things that we can do that make sense in Nova Scotia. I'd just like to do a bit of a jurisdictional scan of what's out there.

THE CHAIR: Let's go to M - (Laughs) I was going to call you an MLA, Ms. Ogilvie. Probably a demotion for you, but Ms. Ogilvie.

LAURIE OGILVIE: Thank you for that. I've always wanted to be an MLA. I'm actually going to pass it over to my colleague Pam, because this is the work that she's been doing as part of Seamless Canada.

[3:00 p.m.]

THE CHAIR: Ms. Chiasson.

PAMELA CHIASSON: I can tell you that I have not actually sat down and written out all of the governance models of all the different provinces and territories, and how they support Seamless Canada. How we have been operating to get the right people at the table is we use our intergovernmental affairs people inside of our departments, and they reach out to their intergovernmental affairs personnel inside the provinces and territories, and the networks they have developed to get the right people at the table for us.

It's a really interesting question with respect to how we're going to get some changes made. This is a space that's actually quite new for me. It's going to be very interesting. Hypothetically, if we decide that the 90-day issue is really an issue, and we want to get provinces and territories to waive that 90-day wait for military spouses for employment supports, how do we do that? That's a new space for me. It's not something that I have delved into as of yet, so I wouldn't be able to give you a governance model that we would be following.

In terms of how different provinces and territories are going to get this enacted, I think that is based on how their governments are set up, how their legislative assemblies can get things moved through. Is it a big-P policy change or is it a small-P policy change, is there legislation attached to any of these ideas? I'm not sure. As much as I would be very willing to provide whatever information that I have, I don't have any to give you at this point to answer your question or to answer that kind of a remit.

BEN JESSOME: I appreciate that information might not be readily available at this point in time. I think from an accountability and progress perspective, though, that it would be useful to provinces to have a list of milestones or accomplishments that have been established across Canada in order to ensure that all provinces keep on track, and keep up with other jurisdictions to the extent that they're able to do so within provincial capacities.

Posed to Mr. Eisan: Can you perhaps give us a sneak peek of the things to come from your office with respect to Seamless Canada, be it with respect to the governance and supporting Seamless or to actually have that face value impact on military families?

THE CHAIR: Before I recognize you, Mr. Eisan, I just want to remind all our members that our follow-up questions are to be supplementary to our previous question. Let's try not to sneak in second questions. We'll wait for another round. (Interruption) No, no - I would just like to remind, that's all, just to follow up supplementaries for similar questions.

Mr. Eisan.

DARRYL EISAN: The way we support Seamless is that - obviously the Minister Responsible for Military Relations, the Honourable John Lohr, is a member of the steering committee of Seamless Canada. He is supported in that role by me and also by a direct report to me in Intergovernmental Affairs. Certainly, we work within our office to provide any type of support that the minister requires for anything that comes up with respect to Seamless.

I can say that since the terms of reference were signed a year ago in Ottawa, the activity has been significant. As my colleague, Pam Chiasson, alluded to, we've been at the table and providing feedback to any ask that Seamless has made, especially as it relates to the spousal employment file. As far as governance goes, it is managed through Intergovernmental Affairs, and as far as supporting families goes, we take the ask that we received from Seamless Canada very seriously.

We certainly understand the importance of military families in Nova Scotia. We understand the importance of the military in Nova Scotia, and we understand the importance of the CAF in Nova Scotia. When Seamless Canada comes to us and says they'd like to see this type of feedback from the government or from the bureaucracy or from public service, we provide it. We've been doing that over the last several months on the spousal employment. We look forward to continuing to do it as the other tables, with respect to the other priorities, get established in the months ahead.

THE CHAIR: MLA Burrill.

GARY BURRILL: Ms. Ogilvie and Ms. Chiasson, I wanted to ask you about mobility challenges a little bit more broadly. We know that in addition to the areas that you focused on - spousal employment and education and health care - that there is the overall issue of the impact on family coherence at the broadest level, of repeated uprooting and displacement and moving. It does seem that the forces are - just from my distance - much more sensitive to this now than was the case a number of years ago. I want to ask: Are you aware, has there been a lengthening, an increase in the average length of postings in recent years?

In other words, I'm thinking about how often personnel are having to go through the transitions that we're talking about this afternoon. Is this the same as it was in recent years, or in fact are these transitions being experienced, particularly for personnel with families, less than was the case a few years ago? Do we have any information about that?

PAMELA CHIASSON: That's a very interesting question. It is a little outside of my lane. Generally speaking, I can tell you that the CAF moves people around in order to meet its operational effectiveness requirements. Someone might be in one location for 10 years, someone else might be moving every two to three years, depending on what their career path is and what the needs and requirements are of the Canadian Armed Forces.

I'm not sure that we have any data that says that the CAF has lengthened postings from one point to another. I can certainly try to see if there's some information with respect to that, but I know that the CAF is very sensitive to these issues. They are sensitive to the impact that moves have on our military families, hence the reason they dedicated resources to something like Seamless Canada. At the end of the day, the Canadian Armed Forces is there to be an arm of the government and to provide that operational effectiveness that the government requires of it. They do that based on what their inner needs are.

That's as specific as I can get. I can try to come back to the committee with some information on whether or not we've lengthened postings, but generically speaking, we do move people around in order to meet the CAF operational effectiveness - and that is the priority.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Ogilvie, did I see your hand up? Ms. Ogilvie.

LAURIE OGILVIE: I was scratching my ear, but I do have something to add. With the release of the defence policy in 2017 - Strong, Secure, Engaged - there was a direct reflection on the impact of relocations on familial health and well-being. As a result, there have been a number of initiatives that have been implemented since that time to try to mitigate some of the challenges that families are facing around relocation.

Now COVID placed a different landscape or context on postings, on families, as well as the change in the economic health of our country right now, around the postings of families to communities where they can't afford to live as a result of just how the cost of housing or the cost of living is in a particular community - especially in the west coast, I would point out, more specifically.

There is a strong - and as you mentioned, there is definitely a reflection that postings have an impact. We are doing everything we can to try to mitigate, but as my colleague Pam said, our postings are based on operational requirements, so there has to be a balance of both of those.

GARY BURRILL: I think the question of whether or not there are changes in the amount of seamlessness that's being required for personnel overall is germane to this discussion. Any information you'd be able to provide, the committee would be glad to receive.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. If there is any more pertinent information about that, it can be sent to our clerk, and we can have that read at a future meeting.

Our next round of questioning will come from MLA Ince, MLA Taggart, and MLA MacDonald.

MLA Ince.

TONY INCE: This question is for Ms. Ogilvie. Ms. Ogilvie, you had stated and made a comment about the challenges for housing. My question for you is this: How have the shortages for housing affected the relocation for folks coming to Nova Scotia? How has that affected your work?

THE CHAIR: Ms. Ogilvie.

LAURIE OGILVIE: I can't speak specifically to the impact that housing has had on the relocation of military members to Nova Scotia specifically, but I can talk about the support that's provided to families when they do relocate to any province or territory, and more specifically Nova Scotia.

Where families are experiencing any kind of financial disruption as a result of a move or there's a specific challenge, we do have a number of avenues to support families. SISIP, which is within CFMWS, is our financial division. They can provide emergency loans and grants to support families when it's a disruption as a result of relocation, if it's something that has happened.

We also have Support Our Troops, which supports families when they are relocating or if they're having any kind of crisis. The example I can use there is - and it's not specific to housing - we have a Christmas hamper program that we offer at Christmastime for military families who may be challenged with accessing all of the personal resources they need to be able to have a successful holiday with their family.

I will say that there was a significant increase in the number of asks this year for the holiday hamper program. We're taking that data right now and truly understanding what the reason for that is. Then we're going back to talking with our colleagues in director general compensation and benefits on why and what are the trends that we're seeing to better support military families as they are relocating across the country - especially as our economic barometer right now kind of moves around in the country.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart.

TOM TAGGART: This may be a little bit of a rambling question. I think it's for Ms. Ogilvie. We've got a lot of great information here today. Certainly, I think it's clear that you folks work very closely with the provincial Department of Intergovernmental Affairs and Military Relations folks. You spoke about how they're present and engaged.

There are probably things that you guys talk about that are maybe the next concern or whatever. A couple of things have come to mind here today that I hadn't thought about. For example, housing and child care and that sort of thing, and the comment about - I wrote it down as affordability. If you're moving from Halifax to Vancouver Island or wherever, that must be a huge challenge for military families.

[3:15 p.m.]

The thing I'm asking is: What do you see? What's the next challenge? Have you had that discussion with our Intergovernmental Affairs folks?

THE CHAIR: Who do you have that directed to, MLA Taggart?

TOM TAGGART: Ms. Ogilvie, I think.

THE CHAIR: We'll start with Mr. Eisan, and then move from there.

DARRYL EISAN: As we've alluded to today, there are three priority areas with respect to Seamless Canada, and we're dealing with spousal employment now. I suspect we will deal with child care in the Fall, and then dependent education is the third priority. Those are the three priority areas that have been identified by the steering committee for officials to work on.

We are moving along with spousal employment. As Pam alluded earlier, we have our next officials call this coming Monday, and then those discussions will continue. I suspect sometime in the Fall, we will head to child care, and then following that, dependent education.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Ogilvie or Ms. Chiasson, would anyone like to add to that? Show of hands. Ms. Chiasson.

PAMELA CHIASSON: I would just like to offer to support what my colleague, Mr. Eisan, has said. Seamless Canada has three focus areas. I will gently correct that our focus areas are access to health care, child and youth education, and spousal employment. We focused on spousal employment at this particular point in time because we thought it would be a really good proof of concept for the working groups in how well we would be able to execute those working groups. The working group concept is relatively new for us, and Seamless Canada is the department's only FPT that we deal with or that we're involved in. It makes it a very interesting space to work in.

We started with spousal employment as well because of the economic factors that are so relevant to our CAF families. As they're moving from one jurisdiction to another, the cost of living is very different across the country, whether it's the price of houses or it's the cost of groceries or it's the changing of the credentials for a military family member to be able to be employed when they move with their military spouse. Wanting the military family to stay together is something that we strive for. We think that it provides a lot of family stability. So if we can make sure that unit is gainfully employed so that they aren't suffering, we can mitigate some of the economic fluctuations that they may have as they're moving across the country. That's our goal, in terms of the employment support piece for military families.

We get back to the Seamless themes of trying to reduce the mobility barriers as they are related to spousal employment, access to health care, and youth and child education. Next will be child care, because it is actually very closely related to spousal employment. If you can't find child care for your children when you move to a new jurisdiction, that means that somebody probably has to stay home with the children. Oftentimes that's the non-military spouse. It becomes more problematic when both are military, but it is the space that we're in. These are the reasons why we're trying to leverage the Seamless Canada platform to work with our provinces and territories to reduce some of those barriers for our families.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart for a follow-up.

TOM TAGGART: Just a quick follow-up. It's important to me that we're looking down the road and that you're working hand-in-hand with our Department of Intergovernmental Affairs. Am I correct in assuming that you guys have a close and productive relationship with the province with respect to Intergovernmental Affairs in the current problems and looking down the road? Do you have those kinds of conversations out there?

THE CHAIR: I'll go to Ms. Ogilvie. Don't mean to put you on the spot, but I'll go to you first.

LAURIE OGILVIE: I'm actually going to defer to my two other colleagues. I'll pass it to Pam first.

PAMELA CHIASSON: I can say that the Seamless Canada relationship with Nova Scotia specifically is quite good. I feel like we have an open line of communication. I know that Mr. Eisan doesn't hesitate if he has a question for Seamless. He picks up the phone and calls me. If I have a question for him, I either send him an email or pick up the phone and call him, as it relates to Seamless Canada themes.

Nova Scotia has been a great partner for us. The relationship that I share with the IGA section inside of Nova Scotia is very collaborative and it's very supportive. All I can hope for is that it continues down this vein, and that we can work together to tackle the issues that our military families have.

DARRYL EISAN: I certainly appreciate Pam's comments. It is a good working relationship. In the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs, a big part of our business is building relationships. Given the importance of this file, we - myself and colleagues within my department who support the Military Relations file - have strived over the last number of years to build a strong relationship with Pam and her team. It's worked very well. I look forward to the next number of months and continuing on this file, because it is important to military families, and the military is important to Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: We have around 23 minutes left for our questions. I'll pass it over to MLA Boudreau, then MLA MacDonald, then MLA Jessome.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: It sounds like the department is doing a lot and working a lot with Seamless, and the relationship is really strong. That's positive.

I was curious about the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs- how it supports Minister Lohr in the military file and other parts. Are there other ways that the department is supporting Minister Lohr and the military file outside of the great relationship with Seamless Canada?

DARRYL EISAN: Thank you, sir, for your question. That's a very good question. When I reflect back on the two mandate directives that Minister Lohr was given in his mandate letter as minister responsible for Military Relations, one deals specifically, for instance, with the commemorative element of the military, et cetera. If the minister or other members of the government, are invited to commemorative events - and the military tends to have quite a few of those, as you probably know, in your local communities, et cetera - we will support Minister Lohr or whoever's been delegated or assigned to that event to go. We will provide any type of briefing notes, speaking notes, any type of logistics - anything that the minister or the member of the government needs to attend an event. So that's one part of it. That's an important part of it as well.

Certainly, when I look at the mandate directives on the Seamless Canada piece, that does take up a lot of time as well, from more of a policy element. At the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs, we do policy work inside of our department, but also we have to work with colleagues in other departments. Reflecting on the spousal employment work over the last months, we've had a tremendous relationship with the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration. Their team has been extremely supportive to us, and so has the Nova Scotia Public Service Commission.

It's been extremely collaborative across government. So far, so good. As we approach the other priority areas in the next number of months, we'll be looking to other departments to support us as well.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: I'll go back to the relationship with Seamless Canada. Something that's been mentioned - I think Ms. Chiasson talked about it - was the 90-day waiver period program. It's my understanding that in Nova Scotia that waiver program has been implemented or is planning on being implemented here.

DARRYL EISAN: Are we talking the 90-day waiver for spousal employment? That is part of our discussions right now with the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration in terms of doing that work. It's interesting, when Pam was speaking earlier - I don't think a day goes by when we don't talk. We're going to be having bilateral discussions with Pam with respect to that and other issues that when we've provided our

feedback to Seamless Canada with respect to spousal employment. We have to have some further discussions, which are probably going to take place, I think, in the latter part of July. The 90-day waiver is part of that.

THE CHAIR: MLA MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Just before I ask my question, I believe it was Ms. Chiasson - what's ESDC? I may have missed that. You'd like to comment on remits - as I love to say for the millions of people watching us - so they know what those are in case I missed them, the definition.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Chiasson.

PAMELA CHIASSE: ESDC is a federal government department: Economic and Social Development Canada. Inside of that organization, they deal with a plethora of programs on behalf of Canadians. They have a labour minister's working group dealing with the Canada free trade agreements. That is what I was referring to initially.

When I say remit, we asked the provinces to provide us with some information - provinces and territories, sorry. I don't mean to exclude our territorial partners. Inside of our working groups, I have twice now asked for them to take away something and provide us information back. When I say a remit, that's what I've asked for.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: My question is going to be a little different because I need definitions. I hope you're okay with that, Mr. Chair. Remits is normally when I have to pay Canada Revenue Agency. That's why I was trying to figure that out. I believe I might have been of benefit of some of your documents because I was at the Navy LCC 65th anniversary, and the notes that came were very detailed, and they were very impressed. From the sounds of it, it may have come from your department, because they were very detailed. I learned a bunch of stuff, and they were impressed on that. I just wanted to make that comment that if it was, then thank you. That's it, Mr. Chair.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for keeping it in the rails loop. MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: Along the same lines of questioning as Mr. Boudreau, thank you for the work that you're doing to support our minister. If he ever needs a sub for a mess dinner, feel free to tag me in.

I do appreciate and respect the testimony that there is a great deal of work ongoing to support the Seamless Canada initiative. I'm wondering if Mr. Eisan could provide the committee with some particulars about interactions or organizations that have been identified, and regular contact as a form of outreach to acquire feedback to direct the work that may be brought to the Seamless Canada table.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Eisan.

[3:30 p.m.]

DARRYL EISAN: Are you asking for a formal document that outlines work to date with respect to Nova Scotian Seamless Canada?

BEN JESSOME: Not necessarily a formal document. Just looking for some context. The Military Family Resource Centre would be an obvious stakeholder, but generally at this point the intentional behaviour you have to reach out to different stakeholders.

DARRYL EISAN: We can certainly put something together that outlines the stakeholders that we deal with in the military community in Nova Scotia, for sure.

BEN JESSOME: As a follow-up to that, if we as MLAs are to advise the broader military community and the general public about how they would provide feedback to the minister and the department with respect to military families, could you advise on how we would tell people to engage with your office?

DARRYL EISAN: That's no problem at all. Certainly, we can provide the contact information from our department in terms of the individuals who directly support Military Relations and support Minister Lohr with the file. That's not an issue.

THE CHAIR: MLA Harrison.

LARRY HARRISON: I would like to say, before I ask a question, thank you for what you do. It's extremely important to our veterans and families.

Has the steering committee worked to promote education access to the military families?

THE CHAIR: We'll go to Ms. Ogilvie, maybe, for that one.

LAURIE OGILVIE: Family education has been one of the key themes of Seamless Canada. From a programming perspective, what we do in support of military families and education is - on January 1st this year we stood up an education cell within our virtual MFRC to provide dedicated support to families in Canada. Previous to this, most of the focus of a division of the Canadian Armed Forces - called Children's Education Management - was focussing on the support to children moving to an OUTCAN posting being educated OUTCAN, more specifically in Europe, and then returning back to Canada.

While there was some support to military families for interprovincial moves around educational supports, it wasn't extensive. So on January 1st this year, we did stand up that

cell specifically to provide the dedicated support for families who are moving interprovincially, and that are also children with special needs or with special educational requirements. Then just in the next little while, we'll be launching a tutoring program as well - so additional support to military children and youth who because of interprovincial moves may be behind or need some catch-up for whatever the educational curriculum is moving into a new province. A lot of the changes that we've made to our educational portfolio have been a result of information that's been provided to us through the Seamless Canada initiative.

LARRY HARRISON: Are there any fields of interest that you're focussing on as an option for families?

LAURIE OGILVIE: Can I ask for a bit of clarification? Is the area of interest specific to education or generally to family support?

LARRY HARRISON: Specifically, education.

LAURIE OGILVIE: Yes, our growing focus is on education - not just looking at children and youth education but, as I mentioned, the early childhood education, so child care as well, which I talked about, but also adult education and linking adult education into the employability component. This will be looking to launch likely at the beginning of 2024 - looking at what educational programming we can provide to military families from all ages to be able to support not only the education and awareness of families but also the employability.

We also have a scholarship program where we provide varying amounts of funding to military family members to be able to access post-secondary education. That is funded exclusively through our Support Our Troops program, so we have benevolent sponsors who provide funding to us to offer this scholarship program. It's very successful. We can receive up to 500 to 600 applications a year, and on average, are providing between 200 and 300, depending on the availability of funding and the actual amount.

The next kind of evolving piece, as I've mentioned, would be around the special needs - the individual education plans and supporting military families when a child or an adult has a more specified educational need - what are the things we can do to be able to ensure that as the family locates across provinces, that educational plan can continue to be activated.

Where that is looking forward into the future, where we're sitting right now - we don't have all of those pieces together.

THE CHAIR: MLA MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I believe it was Ms. Ogilvie who mentioned about inflation and financial resilience. I'm just wondering, how do you feel the programs provided through MFRCs work to offer stability to our military families on this issue of financial stability?

LAURIE OGILVIE: Within the Military Family Resource Centres specifically, they don't offer a lot of programming around financial education or financial stability. However, SISIP Financial, the division within the Canadian Armed Forces that is our insurance and financial education and counselling section, does provide financial educational support to military families.

There is a SISIP counsellor, not located on every single base or wing across the country, but they are in the process of expanding their program to be able to offer more support for military families, and more so when a military member joins the organization - not when families or a member are in financial crisis, but to be able to develop the financial planning for military members and their families as they navigate through the various stages of life, and what the financial counsellors are able to do to provide that support to military families.

From an MFRC perspective, that's not their area of expertise. However, within CFMWS, we do have that area of expertise that is really a growth area right now because of the needs of military families.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Is there any one program that you really haven't been able to talk about that the MFRCs are doing? I'll leave you with that, and that will be my follow-up.

LAURIE OGILVIE: As I mentioned, in 2020 we launched a new strategic framework for the delivery of military and veteran family services. Because we're looking at it from a whole stage of the lifestyle of military members and their veterans - can I say that there's something that's not being done right now? No. However, what I can say is that we don't know what tomorrow or next week or a year from now is going to look like. I think the pandemic definitely taught us that we need to be very agile. We need to be prepared to evolve and modernize the program and how the delivery of our services are offered to be able to match with what military families' needs are in the moment.

One of the questions earlier that I didn't jump in on was that the Canadian Armed Forces also does a quality-of-life survey with military members and some families, usually about once every three years. The administration of the most recent survey has just concluded. They are pulling together the results of that. Seeing that data will be very rich and will be able to provide us with what the area is we need to move into to be able to offset the challenges that military families are facing. As I mentioned, we couldn't have predicted five years ago that the financial resilience of most Canadians right now would be where it's

at. Canadian Armed Forces is no different - so that's the growth of the SISIP counselling and support program, to be able to offset those challenges that military families are facing.

Ten years ago, the biggest navigational requirement that military families needed was around deployments and the number of military members who weren't in Canada who were overseas fighting for the Canadian Armed Forces. We're not seeing that anymore, but who knows? In a year, two years, that might be an expansion to our deployment support program. What we do is we really ebb and flow based on what military families are telling us that they need.

The whole new strategic framework is based on a coaching type of strategy, where rather than being this is what we have, pick from what we have - military families come to Military Family Services and say: This is what my experience is, what is available to be able to support my unique and tailored experience? Then we connect people, families with those services - whether it be locally or nationally - to have them be able to address what their specific needs are.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart, with just over three and a half minutes to go.

TOM TAGGART: This is great, because I've been sitting here wondering how I could get my question about rural Nova Scotia in here. I don't want to disappoint anybody. I know it's predominantly Navy. I live in Bass River, about 150 kilometres from here, and there's a significant number of folks there who are currently serving. I guess because of my age, most of my friends are aging out soon and retiring. With respect to easing the transition of moving to a new community, I might be wrong - it would be the first or second time today - but I think there are stats out there that talk about how rural Nova Scotians in particular have a history of being overrepresented per capita in the Canadian Armed Forces of all levels.

I reflect to my friends, and some of them are currently serving, it's always been a battle with them. They've chosen to live outside of the urban core. It's always been a bone of contention with them. I've seen a map that they have that has a circle drawn on it and all that stuff, where they were not able to receive any support from the Canadian Armed Forces with respect to living outside of the urban core. Has that ever been a challenge for you? Is that something that has been raised with you, Ms. Ogilvie, with respect to transitioning when folks - particularly in the Navy - are coming home from the west coast or wherever? You've got the gist.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Ogilvie, I'm going to allow you to answer the question, but if you could be concise - we have about a minute and a half left of our question period - if that's possible.

LAURIE OGILVIE: I'll be very concise. From an MFRC perspective, we don't place geographic boundaries on support to military families. For example, if it's a single

military member and their parents live in a completely different province, we provide the support to the families as a unit. From a Canadian Armed Forces perspective, I can't answer what those geographical boundaries are, and if there have been any changes made to them.

[3:45 p.m.]

THE CHAIR: I don't dare give MLA Taggart any chance. I want to thank you all. That concludes our question and answer period. It was a wonderful conversation. Before we finish up this part with our guests this afternoon, we'd like to offer you any closing comments you'd like to make. I can begin with our online guests if you'd like. Ms. Chiasson, do you have any closing comments?

PAMELA CHIASSON: I would just like to thank the committee for the opportunity to come today to answer your questions. Any opportunity to talk about Seamless Canada, and to educate and share the plight of our military families, and the great work that we're trying to do to reduce those mobility barriers is always a great one. So thank you very much for inviting me.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for joining us. Ms. Ogilvie, any closing comments?

LAURIE OGILVIE: On behalf of military families, I would like to thank each of you for your interest in military families for improving their experience. This is very heartening. I very much appreciate the time spent and the willingness to listen to what the challenges are, but also what collectively we can do together to make it better for military families, so thank you.

DARRYL EISAN: Thank you for the opportunity to be here this afternoon and to contribute to an incredibly important discussion. Military members and their families are the backbone of our province, as they represent a significant component of Nova Scotia's social and economic fabric. I want to thank this committee for the work that it does as it creates awareness of the importance of military members and their families, who are in communities in our province.

I also want to extend my utmost thanks and gratitude to my colleagues here with me today from both the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services. Nova Scotia values our relationship with the Seamless Canada initiative, and we look forward to continuing these joint discussions to ensure the needs of our military members are met. Thank you all for your time today.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Eisan. As an MLA who represents the great community of CFB Greenwood, I thank you all for a conversation. It's been something we all need to know, and thank you very much for the update.

That concludes this portion of our committee. We're going to take our two-minute recess, and then we'll come back to our committee business. Thank you to all our guests again for coming. We stand adjourned for two minutes.

[15:47 p.m. The committee recessed.]

[3:50 p.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. I call our meeting back to order. Just to go through a few pieces of business here, the only topic that I have to bring up is just correspondence that was sent to committee members from Landing Strong. Did everyone receive the letter? We had made a decision as the Chair directed the clerk with our topic already selected for this month that there just wasn't time to have them in this meeting today. Is there any discussion on the letter that was received?

GARY BURRILL: My understanding about our agenda is that access to our agenda is through our caucuses - that we bring recommendations and then decide on it through an agenda-setting process. So is it in order for me? If it is, I would like to move that this request be advanced to the caucuses to consider if any caucuses would wish to bring it forward as part of their agenda-setting list.

THE CHAIR: That's reasonable. Do we have general agreement? (Interruption) I agree. Thank you, MLA Burrill.

Is there any other business?

BEN JESSOME: Directed at the government members - and if an answer can't be provided today, I would request that a follow-up be provided at the next committee meeting. We have advanced a motion that was denied: to expand the scope of this committee to include military families. We have advanced an agenda item, which was rejected by the government to discuss the expansion of this committee's mandate. The government did commit to bringing it forward again at a later date, but I'm not clear on when that will come up again.

So my question to the government members at this committee - or perhaps something that they can take back and report to the committee at the next meeting - is: When will we have that discussion about broadening the scope of the committee's mandate as committed to by members of the government party?

THE CHAIR: There's really no motion - you're just putting some comments on the table. Are there any comments? MLA MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: As I'm sitting in for the member, I wouldn't comment on hers, but I know that the Chair reports back to his members in the caucus, so I'm not going to comment on behalf of MLA Barkhouse.

THE CHAIR: MLA Taggart, did you have a few comments?

TOM TAGGART: Well, the words "government committed" is kind of bothering me. I don't ever remember making that kind of commitment. Somebody might have, I don't know, but the idea that we committed to this (Interruption) Absolutely. On that, I'm certainly happy to take it back, but I've got to tell you, I sat here today - they were here 12 or 13 months ago, and I sat here today. It seems like they have an awesome relationship with our Intergovernmental Affairs people, so I don't know. Do we want to start that precedent of bringing change in our committee's structure? I don't even know the last time a committee structure was changed. I have no idea. That's a question I would want to know before we even go down that road.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I would just like to say as Chair, I do report our committees to our caucus on a regular basis. It's something that we can just have more conversation about, but I just think at this point in time, I don't know if we can put any kind of firm commitment behind any times or anything like that. MLA Jessome.

BEN JESSOME: I'd just like to suggest that there is a record of our conversation. This was a commitment that was made by the government to revisit the conversation about the scope of this committee, keeping in mind the interests of military families. We have modernized our committee structure. The most obvious example to me is the introduction of the Health Committee, which I know all parties support and participate actively in, and have participated on either side of the government bench on.

It's important that we modernize. It's important that we keep up to speed with the issues that are facing military families. This particular committee, labelled as Veterans Affairs, I believe would be suitable to a conversation about how we provide support to military families as well.

Again, I'm happy to bring the documentation back to the committee next session if it would be helpful to remind the government that it was, in fact, a commitment that was made. I'm happy to do that. I don't believe it to be necessary, but if we could have some feedback on that by this time next month, it would be greatly appreciated.

THE CHAIR: Seeing no other comments.

Any other business?

Our next meeting will be September 19th. Our topic at that meeting will be the Impacts on Veterans and Military Families Amidst a Cost-of-Living Crisis. The witnesses

will be the Department of Community Services, the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Royal Canadian Legion N.S./Nunavut Command, and the Emergency Management Office.

At this point, this meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 3:56 p.m.]