



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature  
Third Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Families and Communities

Ministry of Children's Services  
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, April 18, 2017  
9 a.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 29th Legislature  
Third Session**

**Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND), Chair  
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W), Deputy Chair

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)  
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (ND)  
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)\*  
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)  
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)  
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (ND)  
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)  
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)  
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)  
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)  
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)  
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)  
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)\*\*  
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

\* substitution for Dave Rodney

\*\* substitution for Deborah Drever

**Also in Attendance**

Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)

**Support Staff**

Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Clerk
Shannon Dean	Law Clerk and Director of House Services
Trafton Koenig	Parliamentary Counsel
Stephanie LeBlanc	Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin	Manager of Research and Committee Services
Sarah Amato	Research Officer
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Corinne Dacyshyn	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Jeanette Dotimas	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

## **Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

### **Participant**

Ministry of Children's Services  
Hon. Danielle Larivee, Minister



9 a.m.

Tuesday, April 18, 2017

[Ms Goehring in the chair]

**Ministry of Children's Services  
Consideration of Main Estimates**

**The Chair:** Good morning. I would like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Children's Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials that are joining you today at the table. I'm Nicole Goehring, MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs and the chair of this committee. We'll continue, starting to my right, with our deputy chair.

**Mr. Smith:** Mark Smith, MLA, Drayton Valley-Devon.

**Mr. Yao:** Tany Yao, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**Mr. Ellis:** Mike Ellis, Calgary-West.

**Mr. Cooper:** Nathan Cooper, MLA for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

**Ms Larivee:** Danielle Larivee, MLA for Lesser Slave Lake and Minister of Children's Services. To my left is Darlene Bouwsema, my deputy minister. To her left is Mark Hattori, ADM for child intervention. To my right is Darrell – I don't know how to pronounce your last name – Dancause, the SFO for Children's Services.

**Mr. Sucha:** Graham Sucha, MLA for Calgary-Shaw. I would like to wish Nathan Cooper a happy birthday as well.

**Ms Miller:** Good morning. Barb Miller, MLA, Red Deer-South.

**Ms McKittrick:** Bonjour. Annie McKittrick, Sherwood Park.

**Ms Luff:** Robyn Luff, Calgary-East.

**Mr. Horne:** Trevor Horne, Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

**Ms Jansen:** Sandra Jansen, Calgary-North West.

**Mr. Hinkley:** Good morning. Bruce Hinkley, MLA, Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

**Mr. Shepherd:** David Shepherd, Edmonton-Centre.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'd like to note the following substitutions for the record: Mr. Ellis for Mr. Rodney and Mr. Sucha for Member Drever.

Please note that the microphones are being operated by *Hansard*, and the committee proceedings are being audio- and video streamed live. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. Before we proceed with the consideration of the main estimates for the Ministry of Children's Services, I would like to review briefly the standing orders governing the speaking rotation. As provided for in Standing Order 59.01(6), the rotation is as follows. The minister or the member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes. For the first hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may

speak. For the next 20 minutes the members of the third party, if any, and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent members and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes private members of the government caucus and the minister may speak. For the time remaining, we will follow the same rotation just outlined to the extent possible; however, the speaking times are reduced to five minutes as set out in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).

The speaking rotation is set out in the standing orders, and members wishing to participate must be present during the appropriate portion of the meeting.

Members may speak more than once; however, speaking times for the first rotation are limited to 10 minutes at any one time. The minister and the member may combine their speaking time for a total of 20 minutes. For the final rotation, with speaking times of five minutes, once again the minister and a member may combine their speaking time for a maximum total of 10 minutes. Discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not the speaking time has been combined. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. If members have any questions regarding the speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or speak directly with either myself or the committee clerk about this process.

A total of three hours has been scheduled to consider the estimates for the Ministry of Children's Services. With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone oppose having the break? Seeing no opposition or hearing none, I will call the five-minute break at the midpoint of the meeting.

Committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may participate. However, only a committee member or an official substitute for a committee member may introduce an amendment during a committee's review of the estimates.

Ministry officials may be present and at the direction of the minister may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon by the minister, have access to a microphone in the gallery area. Ministry officials are asked to identify themselves for the record prior to responding to a question. We have pages available to make deliveries should any notes or other materials need to pass between staff in the gallery and the table. Members' staff may be present and seated along the committee room wall. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table; however, members have priority for seating at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to the three hours, the ministry estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and we will adjourn. Today we will adjourn at 12 o'clock p.m.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run.

Any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled by the minister in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

The vote on the estimates is deferred until consideration of all ministry estimates has concluded and will occur in Committee of Supply on April 19, 2017.

If there are amendments, an amendment to the estimate cannot seek to increase the amount of the estimate being considered, change the destination of a grant, or change the destination or purpose of a subsidy. An amendment may be proposed to reduce an

estimate, but the amendment cannot propose to reduce the estimate by its full amount. The vote on amendments is deferred until Committee of Supply convenes on April 19, 2017. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. Twenty copies of amendments, including the original, must be provided at the meeting for committee members and staff.

I will now invite the Minister of Children's Services to begin with her opening remarks. You have 10 minutes.

**Ms Larivee:** Thank you and good morning. Politicians often like to say that children are our future. These are important words, but of course they mean nothing unless we back them up with action. We need to invest in our future if we want it to be bright, and I'm proud to say that our government has shown the political will to act on the need to invest in Alberta's children. The level of that commitment to children is demonstrated by Premier Notley creating a dedicated ministry to focus on the well-being of children and youth in Alberta.

One thing every parent knows is that laying the foundation for childhood success doesn't begin in grade 1. Our government is keenly aware of that fact, and that is why we are keeping our promise to improve access to affordable, quality child care throughout Alberta.

Every child deserves a loving home where they can grow up strong and healthy, and as we all know, children do not exist separate and apart from their families. Helping children means helping families. Our Alberta child benefit is designed to do exactly that. The Alberta child benefit is one of the most significant investments in generations, making life better and more affordable for families. We designed this benefit to make important things like winter clothes, dance shoes, and extracurricular activities more affordable for parents. We increased funding for the child benefit in this year's budget so that all eligible families continue to receive this important support. It helps parents make ends meet and better enables them to prepare their children for success. I encourage all of my colleagues and all parties to remind their constituents to file their tax returns so that eligible parents can access these and other important financial supports.

Budget 2017 is about making life better and more affordable for Albertans. For our ministry it's about ensuring strong, often life-changing supports for Alberta's youngest citizens and the families that love them. A dedicated ministry for supporting children and youth allows us to focus on improving the supports we provide for young people and their families.

As Albertans we have a collective responsibility to the vulnerable children in our communities. We can't wait for the economy to bounce back and the price of oil to rise. We have to support them now. I have children, and I know that many of you do as well. When our children need us, we don't ignore them. We don't walk away and leave them scared and alone. We help. I'm here today to tell you that that is exactly what we are going to do. Our new Ministry of Children's Services is taking a socially responsible approach to keeping children and families healthy and safe.

But it takes more than good intentions. It takes a plan, and it requires funds. In 2017-18 the Ministry of Children's Services will provide stable, predictable funding for services that make life better for Albertans in need of early intervention and prevention services, children who need intervention and supports, Albertans who need child care, and Albertans who need extra help with child-related expenses. Ministry funding increases of \$60.4 million in Budget 2017 are targeted to support these increased caseload pressures. Overall funding includes \$103 million for early intervention services for children and youth, \$763 million for child intervention, \$321 million for child care, and \$174 million for the Alberta child

benefit. Our budget ensures that these critical services will continue to be there for our children when they need them.

**9:10**

Our government is focused on strengthening our relationship with indigenous people, addressing the overrepresentation of indigenous children in the child intervention system, and increasing supports for front-line workers.

As a former front-line care provider myself I know how important it is for front-line workers to have manageable caseloads and a responsive and up-to-date support system in their work. In 2017-18 we will increase the number of full-time front-line positions by an additional 60 FTEs. This will help to alleviate some pressures on our current staff members, which will in turn better support the children in our care.

To further support our staff, we are improving training for employees. We want to ensure that our interactions with indigenous children and families are culturally appropriate. Staff have been participating in cultural training, including the blanket exercise and Gently Whispering the Circle Back residential school training, which are delivered in partnership with Blue Quills college. These are experiential training sessions that help participants understand the historical and intergenerational impact of residential schools and foster healing practices.

While we are working to build intercultural understanding in our ministry, we are also looking outward. We are committed to working with and listening to our indigenous partners and other stakeholders so we can address the challenges we know are impacting our kids in the child intervention system. This is a major priority for our ministry. We are committed to aligning our policies with the principles of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous people and to addressing the TRC's calls to action.

There is nothing more heartbreaking than the death of a child and no task more important than stopping preventable deaths. To that end, we will continue to forge ahead with the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. We have built on the strong start the panel has made by gaining a foundation of knowledge about the child intervention system and child death review processes. The panel made recommendations to streamline and strengthen the review process.

Over the next few months the panel will continue its work to investigate the root causes of why families become involved in child intervention and examine current supports for families. The panel has already met with some indigenous groups, and more meetings are planned in the future to ensure that their recommendations are reflective of indigenous culture and beliefs. As a ministry we will continue collaborating with indigenous people and communities to improve outcomes and address challenges.

Another priority for our ministry in 2017-18 includes Alberta's new early learning and child care centres. On April 6 Premier Notley and I announced grants to 22 successful early learning and child care centres. We are focused on providing affordable and flexible quality child care for nearly 1,300 children in Alberta. With these grants we will see an additional 119 new jobs for child care staff, and these centres will lay out what a new, universal, quality child care system could look like based on \$25 per day for every child.

In conclusion, I will say again that our children are our future, and our government will continue to invest in children so that Alberta's future will be bright.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Mr. Cooper, would you like the timer to be set for 20-minute intervals so you're aware of time, or would you prefer to let the full hour flow without interruption?

**Mr. Cooper:** Twenty-minute intervals, please, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

A few reminders: members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time, and discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not speaking time has been combined.

Mr. Cooper, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister's?

**Mr. Cooper:** I would like to.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Cooper:** Well, thank you, Minister, for your opening comments. I, too, believe that children are our future. The future of so many Alberta children is so bright that they ought to wear shades, if we're making song analogies this morning. But in all seriousness, thank you so much for being here today. Thank you to your staff that were able to attend this morning. The work that your ministry does is so critical to our province and so difficult in many respects. It's very, very important and often difficult work that is often very challenging and messy. I have had, as you know, some significant interaction with the department in my own life and the lives of our children and so appreciate the work that so many do.

I'd like to begin by just speaking briefly about your opening comments and some of the things that you highlighted there, and then we'll speak about the child panel and a number of other things. In your opening remarks you spoke about 60 new full-time front-line workers. How does the department define a front-line worker? What is the breakdown for those 60 employees?

**Ms Larivee:** Thanks for that question, and thank you for your comments. Before I start, I would like to wish the member a happy birthday as well.

**Mr. Cooper:** Thank you.

**Ms Larivee:** Certainly, the work of the front-line workers is tremendously important, as you've talked about. I mean, essentially, they are acting on behalf of the government in a parental role for those children, often in many ways, so it's essential that they have the support they need and essential that we have enough front-line workers so that they can provide the children with the supports that they need.

Based on caseload pressures, we felt the need to address that, and this is specifically for child intervention, not broadly spread out through the ministry but 60 FTEs specifically within the child intervention system. The 60 FTEs will be part of the workload assessment model rollout that is anticipated to begin implementation in July for the child intervention casework protection staff. That, again, addresses some of the immediate caseload growth pressures experienced in the supports for permanency caseload, the supports in financial assistance caseload, and the advancing futures caseload as well. The additional positions will be strategically allocated to programs located where the need is greatest.

In terms of a definition of front-line supports, essentially they have to have face-to-face contact with clients to be considered front-line workers.

**Mr. Cooper:** If I understand you correctly, the rollout will happen in July, and you're making the best guess that 60 is what you actually need, or you determined that 60 is what you need, and then you're going to be fanning them out across the province, for lack of a better phrase.

**Ms Larivee:** There is a combination of two parts with that. The first is addressing some immediate caseload growth pressures but also that the workload assessment is going to demonstrate that there need to be some challenges. So there will be a substantial number of positions that are rolled out immediately.

**Mr. Cooper:** How many do we anticipate in the first half of the year compared to the last half of the year?

**Ms Larivee:** Well, I would say that July is the first half of the year, so all of them as soon as possible.

**Mr. Cooper:** I guess the heart of the question is: how many of them are in the immediate category, and how many of them are in the post-July category?

**Ms Larivee:** I'm asking the staff within child intervention, but I believe it's approximately 50-50 . . .

**Mr. Cooper:** Okay.

**Ms Larivee:** . . . or 30 and 30.

**Mr. Cooper:** We'll likely come back to some of that around compliance and the lack of compliance of some of the filings.

Perhaps this is a bit of a gap filler for you, but let's talk about the child panel if we can. Which budget line item does the child panel fall under? I anticipate it falls predominantly under line item 1, but I'm just curious to know if you can clarify that for me.

9:20

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. Thanks for that. I mean, certainly, the work of the panel falls within our child intervention budget, and strategic services is where the majority of the budget is coming from. As well, within child intervention, if you look at lines 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3, the staff within there are absorbing the supports for the panel within their budget. So there's not specifically a line item for the panel. They are within the child intervention services primarily as well as some support from strategic services on delivering that so that they can do their work of figuring out what the challenges are and move ahead.

**Mr. Cooper:** Okay. Do you know what costs have been associated with the child intervention panel to date?

**Ms Larivee:** To date the majority of those would have been in the previous budget year, which is not something I necessarily . . .

**Mr. Cooper:** That's fine. It's not the biggest portion of this question. It's fine.

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. I mean, essentially, it's absorbed within the budget, so to date we have been utilizing staff within the department to allocate time to provide support. We'll see in the coming year, depending on what the engagement strategy looks like, what costs may be involved. But at this point in time the panel hasn't ascertained what that process is going to be.

**Mr. Cooper:** How much do you anticipate phase 2 of the child panel to cost?

**Ms Larivee:** Well, at this point in time, again, we're utilizing all staff that currently exist within the department to provide support to the panel to do the important work that they are doing. The costs are going to be dependent on whatever engagement strategy the panel comes up with. Clearly, it's important that the panel has the opportunity to truly engage with Albertans, those with lived experience, with our indigenous partners as well as many other stakeholders across the province. Certainly, the panel will be developing what that engagement strategy looks like so that they can really feel comfortable that they've heard the voices of Albertans in that process.

**Mr. Cooper:** So the panel will essentially determine the costs?

**Ms Larivee:** Yes.

**Mr. Cooper:** And you anticipate that just to be absorbed into the department?

**Ms Larivee:** That is what is going to happen, yes.

**Mr. Cooper:** What other opportunities do you think will not happen as a result of the costs being absorbed into the department?

**Ms Larivee:** Well, certainly, you know, when we talk about the staff who are committed to doing this, I mean, primarily they are the staff within child intervention who've been committed to supporting and moving forward with strategic direction already. They've certainly directed a lot of their energy to ensuring that the panel has the support to do that.

In terms of what the engagement is going to look like, actually, at this point, because the panel has not decided on an engagement strategy, I don't know what the costs are. At this point we'll have to ...

**Mr. Cooper:** Did the department look into what it would have cost to contract *Hansard* so that there would also be a written record compiled, and do you know the costs of what you're paying for the audiostreaming and recording of the panel meetings?

**Ms Larivee:** I can get back to you on that.

**Mr. Cooper:** On both?

**Ms Larivee:** I can get back to you on the current costs. No, we did not look into having *Hansard* document all of that.

**Mr. Cooper:** Do you know why you didn't?

**Ms Larivee:** Well, I think that the work the panel is doing has been understood to be somewhat different than the work that you would expect of committees. It's an opportunity, for example, to actually have experts as members of the panel as opposed to it being primarily just elected individuals. It was an opportunity for members of the public and staff to be engaged in a way that's different than often happens. Everything was set up in such a way that people felt more comfortable than they might feel in the kind of situation such as what we have here today, in which it is live streamed and every word is recorded. Certainly, you and I are used to that kind of engagement.

**Mr. Cooper:** People hardly ever ask me questions.

**Ms Larivee:** But many of the other individuals – for example, our expert panel members – you know, aren't necessarily used to that. Especially with there being members of the public there, we just

wanted to create a more free-flowing, more relaxed environment than would have happened.

**Mr. Cooper:** Do you have any money reserved in the budget in case the panel recommendations have funding implications? One of the panel recommendations from Thursday evening is to do an audit within one year of existing communication and technology tools, protocols, and procedures that support information sharing. Presumably that audit comes with some costs. Is the current plan only to absorb costs inside the department? If there is a significant cost for implementation, what is your plan for that?

**Ms Larivee:** Well, thanks for that. Certainly, I don't have a crystal ball to know what the panel is going to say. Knowing exactly what the outcomes are going to be is difficult to guess at this point. Certainly, it would be irresponsible for me to earmark a whole bunch of unallocated funds in the budget just in case for this particular situation. Certainly, there is a recognition that the work of the panel is tremendously important. Clearly, we know that there are challenges in the child intervention system, and they need to be improved.

But one of the questions is: is it going to require additional financial resources? We did just allocate an additional 60 FTEs to provide additional front-line supports, which I think is taking a lot of pressure off the caseload management perspective. I'm going to assume that we will hear feedback that means that we'll need to make policy and legislative changes. Whether or not there need to be significant financial resources allocated or not, I don't know.

So I look forward to hearing the work of the panel. If there are significant financial implications that come from that all-party panel, then that's the conversation that I will have with Treasury Board at that point in time.

**Mr. Cooper:** Thank you.

Initially you had suggested that phase 1 would be eight to 10 weeks. Obviously, it's been significantly longer than that. Are you comfortable with the progress in terms of timelines, and do you anticipate phase 2 also to be significantly delayed?

**Ms Larivee:** I would say that, actually, the work of phase 1 was done relatively close to the eight to 10 weeks. I mean, I think we're maybe at the 12-week mark now even with all the recommendations having been done. So I want to say thank you to all the panel members for the tremendous commitment of time and effort that it took to be there. It was a major endeavour on a very crucial issue. They really, certainly, committed to making that happen. I think that's the reason we actually – eight to 10 weeks was a very aggressive timeline, and being only a couple of weeks off is, I think, quite reasonable.

Certainly, according to the terms of reference I do expect that the panel will be finished by August, as determined. Again, they've shown their commitment, and I look forward to continuing to provide support to them to make sure that they're able to get all their work done.

**Mr. Cooper:** Yeah. As you know, we advocated for a record of meetings because I think it can be not only beneficial to the panel but also on a go-forward basis. You know, I think it's a bit unfortunate that we didn't wind up with a *Hansard* record. Experts testify before committees all the time, whether it's PAC or otherwise. I'm certain that they would have been capable. I guess, at the end of the day, it's not the end of the world, but I think that it would have been very, very advantageous, particularly because we didn't even know what the costs may or may not have been.



But we will move on either way. On page 25 of your business plan you list reconciliation as a key risk facing your ministry's ability to achieve its desired outcomes. This is referring to engagement and collaboration between indigenous and nonindigenous people. Do you plan to add indigenous representation to the child intervention panel during phase 2?

9:30

**Ms Larivee:** Thanks for that question. Certainly, I come from Treaty 8 territory. I have 12 First Nations in my riding, and I cannot say enough how important it is that we address reconciliation in a truly respectful, engaged way to address the long-standing harm that has been done as a result of many actions, including residential schools and beyond. That kind of engagement takes time and takes commitment, so right across the board we're continuing to ensure that we engage our indigenous partners as much as possible.

Certainly, one thing that I am considering very strongly is the addition of a First Nations person to the panel. At this point in time that has not been established. I look forward to updating you on that at some point in the near future. However, I do want to say that as the minister I'm certainly working very closely with a number of indigenous partners already, and I expect that the panel will be placing a key priority on engagement. In fact, it's a requirement that they engage well with our indigenous partners across this province. You know, having a First Nations representative person on the panel may help engage with the recommendations, but truthfully there are many indigenous places across this province that have not been heard for far too long, so I expect the panel to give the opportunity for them to share that perspective from right across this province, from many of the First Nations right across this province who are concerned about the future of their children.

**Mr. Cooper:** Great.

Let's move on to child intervention. We've already spoken today about high caseloads being a problem for front-line workers. You've identified that it's your intention to bring in 60 front-line workers. How many front-line child intervention caseworkers does the department currently employ?

**Ms Larivee:** Thank you. You know, I just want to take a moment to recognize the valuable work that our front-line workers do. As you said earlier, they often do it under a lot of pressure in very difficult circumstances, and often the only time the public hears about them is when things go really badly, which is really unfortunate because there are a number of tremendously committed workers who provide incredible care and support to families and children in this province, so they certainly deserve more recognition than they get on a regular basis.

In 2016-17 within child intervention we had 1,749.5 FTEs, and the increase is actually going to bring us up to 1,811.

**Mr. Cooper:** The manager-to-caseworker ratio, I believe, last year for the combined ministry was approximately 13 to 1. Do you anticipate an increase to managers as well out of the 60 FTEs or in addition to the 60?

**Ms Larivee:** Again, front-line care providers have to have face-to-face contact with clients in order to be considered front-line workers. Having said that, there is a supervisor role, and the supervisors play a very key role in engaging with families and providing support to their team, which allows workers to not make decisions all on their own. It's important that they have somebody who also knows the client and an opportunity to talk things over in a knowledgeable and informed way. So it's possible that potentially that would be the only role, but again those 60 FTEs specifically

are for front-line workers. This will make a difference to the well-being of children and families in this province, and they have to be there to enhance support for families on an ongoing basis.

**Mr. Cooper:** Okay. On page 25 you note that the benefit of a person-centred . . . [A timer sounded]

**The Chair:** That's your first 20 minutes.

**Mr. Cooper:** Super.

On page 25 you note that "the benefits of person-centred, integrated service delivery will be realized most effectively with investment in, and co-ordination of, underlying infrastructure across ministries such as data, business analytics, evaluation mechanisms, and strategic workforce planning." We've been hearing a lot about paperwork for caseworkers, that the work that they have to deal with is very cumbersome. Is that why we see this note in the business plan? What is at the heart of this particular note in the business plan?

**Ms Larivee:** Okay. First, you brought up the challenges of a lot of paperwork for front-line workers, which I can certainly relate to in my previous role as a front-line nurse. It's always a challenge to make sure that you have all the documentation you need to ensure that you can communicate with other members of the staff team, to ensure that care is documented as legally required, and sometimes that includes a little more paperwork than front-line caregivers would like. However, that was not necessarily what this particular line item was looking at.

What this line item was looking at is the fact that, first of all, we share the same families with human services and other ministries, so making sure that we continue to work with other ministries to deliver those services in the most client-centred way. We need the families, the children to be at the centre of it. Certainly, we're working closely with Community and Social Services, now that we have the two different ministries, to ensure that the separation of ministries doesn't affect or impact families.

Also, one of the challenges that happens sometimes with paperwork is old and outdated IT systems that don't meet the needs of the care workers or the families they're providing service to. We are providing increased support to information technology in the coming year to upgrade and ensure that they have access to the kind of system that actually allows them to provide the timely, quality care that they want to provide.

**Mr. Cooper:** What are you doing to make the documentation less cumbersome, then? What do those IT updates look like?

**Ms Larivee:** Certainly, it's a more up-to-date system that allows them to enter information in a way that's more user friendly and more intuitive and allows the opportunity for them to access the information in a timely fashion. Those are the kinds of IT systems that people need nowadays, with moving more away from paper to online systems, to have access to a system that actually meets their needs.

**Mr. Cooper:** I noted in the Child and Family Services Council for Quality Assurance annual report, standard 4, caseworker contact, that files met all requirements as applicable, and the provincial result was 16 per cent. I can only assume that this is a paperwork problem and not a problem with our caseworkers not actually getting to see individuals, that it is a problem with caseworkers not getting files done in an appropriate manner or on time. That doesn't change the fact that 16 per cent is completely unacceptable. Is this predominantly due to documentation issues, or is the caseworker contact not actually happening most of the time?

**Ms Larivee:** Thank you for that, and thank you for understanding the challenges that our front-line workers are often faced with. We certainly believe that it is the case that there's a difference between actual care provided versus what is documented sometimes. Examples of that include that in areas where we've worked hard with the staff to improve their documentation compliance, that improved very quickly. I don't think that if it was a matter of being able to provide care, we would see the changes as quickly as we do. Certainly, there is recognition of the fact that improving the IT system will be helpful with that. It is an investment to allow us to have the kind of tool for them that's more user friendly.

9:40

Certainly, we will continue to work across the system to identify the challenges, and I expect that the panel is going to hear a few things as they hear from front-line staff on what the challenges are. I certainly expect that I will continue to hear of things. I know that the statutory director and our ADM for child intervention are very dedicated to supporting the staff to enhance the quality of care that they are providing.

I also expect that providing some additional FTEs to take some of the stress off the caseload burden is going to also free up opportunities . . .

**Mr. Cooper:** Do you have targets set for this compliance?

**Ms Larivee:** Absolutely, we do. The statutory director in particular has identified three key areas of practice to ensure that they're documented: that face-to-face contact time with the child be documented, that there be accurate placement information, and that accurate legal authority information be clearly documented. We'll continue to work with our staff to increase compliance in that.

**Mr. Cooper:** What is the balance that the ministry is trying to strike between the ability to share information and having an IT platform that doesn't require significant, cumbersome paper files? I know from my own experience that I've always been surprised by the amount of data that would be collected, say, in a home visit of a social worker while we were in the middle of the adoption process. Then I can only imagine the amount of time that it would take back at the office for the social worker or in this case the caseworker to compile that data and information. Is this the key area where you're trying to reduce the duplication in workload, and do you think that the IT change will create a much better balance?

**Ms Larivee:** Thanks for that. Certainly, it's always important that we have adequate documentation, again, to ensure quality care but also to ensure that the workers have met the legal standards of ensuring that they document that care for the purposes of our being able to know what happened with that child. Of course, with that comes making sure that systems find an opportunity to make that the least cumbersome possible. I think that right across the board there is continued transition from the paper-based days of old, in which – who knows? – once in a while records would go missing, or it would be hard to keep track of them, and they would be less accessible to those from other sites, to an online platform. That transition always is a bit of a challenge to make sure that we meet all the standards of privacy and the laws around ensuring that we protect private information as well as making sure that it's a tool that works well for everyone and allows all staff to transition well.

Certainly, we're taking some big steps forward with improving the IT platform. We're also looking at tablets for workers so they can enter data in the home so that it wouldn't be a matter of double entry. For example, at one point when I was an RN and doing home visits, we tried taking tablets in there with an air card, and it just

wasn't fast enough. The timing was really bad, and that was a tool that fell through.

It's always a challenge finding the right tools for everyone, but we believe that this IT platform is going to be a significant improvement, and we also think that the tablets for workers . . .

**Mr. Cooper:** What's the timeline for the rollout of that? Or is it already under way?

**Ms Larivee:** That investment is being made this year primarily. It is already, actually, under way, and we're looking forward to seeing our workers being able to make that happen sooner rather than later.

**Mr. Cooper:** Line item 1.3, human resources. I'm just curious to know what resources are available to social workers who are under an incredible amount of stress right now due to casework. What procedures are in place to relieve these workers if they need a break? What are we doing to get them back to work after such a time?

**Ms Larivee:** Thank you for that. Again, I really appreciate your recognition of the hard work and dedication of our front-line employees and the fact that thousands of Albertans are touched and their lives are changed for the better because of the commitment. I recognize that the stresses of doing such an important and challenging job do place stress on our front-line staff and that they need to be supported well in order to do so. Certainly, we continue to engage with our staff to find out what their needs are and provide a number of supports as well. I mean, you mentioned specifically caseload demands. We're continuing with a workload assessment model in order to measure workload in front-line delivery roles and to identify approaches for managing those workloads. The goal through that is an organizational culture and environment where workload is proactively measured, managed, and leads to the engagement of employees. That's one piece of what we're doing.

We also provide support for learning and development for staff. It's important for them to feel valued and feel that they can continue to develop as individuals and as professionals. We provide some flexible and alternative work arrangements, some respectful workplaces e-learning programs to ensure that the workplace is as healthy as possible. We're collaborating with the U of C on a workplace violence study to address workplace violence. We provide funding to work sites to conduct wellness-related activities through the wellness your way program. We also have partnered with Shepell to provide an EFAP program. They provide mental health awareness training to employees and leaders as well as employee support.

**Mr. Cooper:** Excellent. I, in my own personal experience, have had some wonderful interactions with some front-line workers. I have also had some very, very, very ordinary ones, including an adoption breakdown because of a lost piece of paperwork, which was more than a bit disappointing, and also some other significant challenges. While I appreciate a lot of the great work that takes place, we also need accountability within the system. How are front-line staff monitored to ensure compliance with procedures? How are front-line staff also held accountable? You know, we see compliance rates of 16 per cent or 52 per cent of face-to-face contact every three months. My assumption is that there are some costs associated with monitoring compliance. How are staff held accountable, and what are the costs associated with that?

**The Chair:** Hon. member, I'd ask that you keep the questions to the budget line or the business plan. If you could identify what part of the estimates you're speaking to.

**Mr. Cooper:** Sure. My assumption is that the costs are associated with line item 1.3, human resources, and in outcome 2 in the business plan. Both are around issues that we've spoken about.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms Larivee:** Thank you for that. Certainly, the work of Children's Services is completely dependent upon the work of our front-line workers and their commitment. In a professional situation it's always a unique balance between respecting the incredible professionalism and commitment of our front-line workers but also recognizing that there's an expectation that they be held accountable on their behaviour as well. Certainly, I and the deputy minister are committed to ensuring high-quality front-line services as much as possible. I mentioned a supervisor earlier. The supervisors work in very close contact with the front-line workers to ensure, again, that they can function as a team to provide quality care.

**Mr. Cooper:** What role does the College of Social Workers play in this dynamic?

9:50

**Ms Larivee:** If a particular caregiver was a social worker and if there was a particular concern or complaint about a specific social worker, then they would have to investigate that complaint if a complaint was, again, made to the college.

**Mr. Cooper:** Okay. Let's move to preserving families and the Children First Act. Under outcome 2 of your business plan it notes that "the ministry supports preservation of families." I couldn't be more clear, as an adoptive father, that I wish we lived in a world where adoption wasn't necessary, where every family could stay together. You know, if we didn't have a need for your ministry, that would be a fantastic place. Unfortunately, that isn't the case. I, too, even as a father who has adopted two children from child and family services, support the preservation of families. But your ministry continues to work to pursue reunification of children and their parents. There's this incredible, unique balance between intervention and not. There have been times when the department had a policy about the number of times that a reunification attempt would take place. Is there any current government policy or guideline from the department that would limit the total number of reunification attempts?

**Ms Larivee:** Thanks for that question. I certainly very much feel the same way as you do about the fact that if the child intervention part of Children's Services wasn't required because we had a hundred per cent healthy families in Alberta, I would be tremendously happy. Unfortunately, that is unlikely to happen, so we need to continue to have that resource there.

You know, there's been a lot of research done in recent years talking about the devastating impact and, in fact, actual brain changes that happen when children are apprehended from their families. There's a recognition of the fact that while we certainly need to be cognizant of the impact and risks of abuse and neglect on children, the actual apprehension of them from their families is a tremendously traumatic, life-changing event that should never be used without incredible caution and risk analysis. We talk about the impact of the '60s scoop in terms of families and in terms of culture. That's an example of how not understanding that had a tremendous impact on a number of families.

Thanks to that research and that understanding of families and of children, there have been some recent practice shifts. Those practice shifts have been built on the child intervention practice framework

and leading practice tools such as signs of safety. The practice changes now emphasize working with families in a different way during our initial involvement, so determining what the needs and strengths of the family are, connecting families to community resources, doing a lot more early intervention and prevention work and other supports so that, whenever possible, children can remain safe at home with their family. Those practice shifts are showing promising results.

The number of children receiving child intervention services, not in care and in care, both indigenous and nonindigenous, has been declining steadily since then. We really find that those practice shifts in the framework have made a real difference in that more than 85 per cent of the children who received services do not require additional services a year after the file is closed.

**Mr. Cooper:** So there's no overarching, guiding principle that would, say, prevent a child from reunification attempts four, five, six, seven times, being apprehended into foster care, placed back into the care of a biological . . .

**Ms Larivee:** Thank you for that and for highlighting the importance of permanency and stability as well. As much as we recognize the challenges of apprehension, we also recognize that children do need some stability, and we need to always be thinking of what permanency will look like for those families.

For the cumulative time of care, our targets are nine months for those under six years of age and 12 months for those over six years of age, with one extension of six months. Those would certainly be the targets that we're aiming for with that.

**Mr. Cooper:** With respect to the Children First Act, it is my understanding that large portions of the Children First Act have not actually been proclaimed into force despite receiving royal assent. Why is that?

**Ms Larivee:** Well, certainly, I think that it's important that we recognize the fact that there are challenges right now with the system. We do have a panel ongoing at this moment, so it's important that we look at whether there need to be legislative changes going forward, whether indeed it did hit the mark, and whether there are any ongoing questions on that. I mean, I certainly think that with expecting the recommendations from the panel to be coming this summer, it would not be timely, you know, to be moving forward with legislation when there are currently a lot of questions on the floor.

**Mr. Cooper:** Do you have specific concerns about items that are currently in the Children First Act, then?

**Ms Larivee:** I think, again, the fact is that there is actively an all-party panel looking at whether or not there needs to be . . .

**Mr. Cooper:** Right. But do you have any concerns?

**Ms Larivee:** You know, at this point in time I don't necessarily have any concerns with that. We just need to make sure that whatever we move forward with, whatever we choose to get the whole ministry moving forward in the same direction on, it should be in compliance with the panel's recommendations. So pre-empting that work would be inappropriate at this point.

**Mr. Cooper:** Pre-empting a three-year-old act, though?

Your website says that the Children First Act is to "increase access to justice by allowing children under 12 to appeal court orders made under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act

and allowing parents and guardians to apply for a review of the permanent guardianship order.” Is this happening in practice?

**Ms Larivee:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Hon. member, I think these are really important questions. However, I would like you to tie your questions to the current estimates that we’re reviewing today, please.

**Mr. Cooper:** Sure. They’re all associated with outcome 2 key strategies in the business plan.

To be clear, my next question with respect to indigenous children in care can fall both under outcome 2 or outcome 3 in the business plan. An article in the *Calgary Herald* earlier this month talked about – and I’ll use their words, not yours, I don’t believe – how efforts have been “stalled” to place indigenous children in care with indigenous families. I recognize that this is always desirable, but mathematically I understand that it’s difficult given the total number of children in care who are from an indigenous background and the total number of approved homes. My question to you is: how are you handling this particular issue? Is your ministry pursuing any sort of alternative goal or target to support indigenous children in retaining their culture?

**Ms Larivee:** Thank you. Those are fantastic questions. I think one thing to be proud of is that with the new changes to the practice framework the total number of indigenous children in care has actually fallen substantially. So as to the proportion of them, there are fewer children in care. We are successfully providing the kinds of supports and early intervention that are actually keeping children in healthy families.

**10:00**

Having said that, there are – I could probably talk all day about this particular topic – a number of issues with it. I mean, obviously, indigenous children continue to be by far overrepresented in our child intervention system. A lot of that has to do with intergenerational trauma and the kind of historical trauma that comes from residential schools and other actions that we’ve taken. I’m really looking forward to the work the panel is going to be doing in terms of engaging with our indigenous communities to talk about what the issues are at their community levels and what potential solutions there are to reduce the number of kids who are brought into care in the first place.

Having said that, we’re left with a situation in which we continue to have a large number of indigenous children in care. It’s a key priority for us, to recognize the fact that culture helps us understand who we are and helps us feel connected to where we came from. It’s an incredibly important part of building our own self-understanding. With that, we’re very committed to ensuring that our indigenous children have connections to their culture and providing supports to staff to have understanding of their culture and, of course, to caregivers to assist with that as well.

**Mr. Cooper:** Sorry. I will speed up the process a little bit here. I want to ask a very brief question on adoption, and then I want to head to daycare. Line item 2.3, supports for permanency. Just for a point of reference with respect to adoption, as you know, I asked a question not that long ago about adoption numbers that have been finalized in the province of Alberta, and all across the board we have seen a decrease in the finalizing of adoptions. Can you just provide some brief context on why you think those numbers are dropping? In British Columbia and other provinces they set targets for adoption. Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?

**Ms Larivee:** I certainly think that children need stability in order to understand, to feel confident and safe where they’re at, and to feel that they have a permanent place in this world. So I certainly recognize that transitions should be minimized as much as possible and that we should seek to have children be in a permanent home as soon as we can. We’ll continue to work with our stakeholders throughout the panel process, but I’m reaching out to a number of community members as well and working with the department to talk about how we can best achieve permanency within the current framework, as much as possible supporting the integration of the children with their family of origin but also recognizing the fact that we need to find the right balance of permanency and then, once that decision has been made, to find a solution as soon as possible. I look forward to seeing what recommendations come from the panel on that, and we’ll continue to be doing some work internally as well.

**Mr. Cooper:** Yeah. I might just add that, you know, in my experience in this area there seems to be a bit of a them and us that takes place between the department and some of the others who provide adoption services in the province. If we can find ways to break down some of those barriers, we all would be better served.

Let’s move to child care in the last 10 or 15 minutes that we have left together. I presume that your pilot project that has been recently extended falls under line item 3.2, child care subsidies and supports.

**Ms Larivee:** That would be correct.

**Mr. Cooper:** Perfect. Your announcement in November of last year said that it would take around \$10 million to initiate a \$25-per-day child care program. Was this figure accurate?

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. We actually managed to have 22 different sites instead of 18 as originally planned, and that is just shy of \$10 million. We actually found some efficiencies by utilizing staff within the department to provide some of the supports to that so that we could actually provide additional support to more sites than originally intended.

**Mr. Cooper:** What is the expected spending on the program for this year?

**Ms Larivee:** Well, we certainly have been working with a number of the sites to be up and running as soon as possible, so as close to that \$10 million as possible.

**Mr. Cooper:** Have you done any market research to determine what the average cost is for daycare facilities of similar size to what’s being currently considered?

**Ms Larivee:** Absolutely. There are across this province huge variations in the cost of child care. For example, an infant space can cost as low as \$650, which is actually tremendously low, to as high as well over \$1,300 a month. The costs vary depending on the particular location and site across this province. The average, though, is \$65 per day.

**Mr. Cooper:** Is it possible to have you table the research that you’ve used to arrive at your conclusions?

**Ms Larivee:** Are there specific questions you would like to have answered in terms of what information you’d like?

**Mr. Cooper:** I would have a written question asking for your department to provide all of the market research done to determine the average cost for daycare facilities so that we would also have access to that, or you could provide it, whichever is . . .

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. We don't need to do a lot of research, actually, on our daycare program. If it's a licensed daycare, we have information on all the programs across this province.

**Mr. Cooper:** What are the operational costs per child for your pilot project?

**Ms Larivee:** Sorry?

**Mr. Cooper:** Like, it's going to cost you this if you have this many children involved in it. What are the actual costs per child? Is it actually \$25 a day? How does the breakdown work?

**Ms Larivee:** Essentially, the family will be paying \$25 a day. That will be their cost.

**Mr. Cooper:** Right. What are your costs?

**Ms Larivee:** The cost of the grant is partially to subsidize the cost per child for bringing it down to the \$25 a day. Some of the dollars were to provide assistance with the development of new spaces. Some of the dollars were to help with implementation of the quality care piece of that. All of the sites are expected not only to deliver \$25 a day, but the quality aspect was incredibly important. They have to deliver that care within a framework that ensures quality early childhood development as well. There's some staff training as part of that, some collaboration with community agencies.

**Mr. Cooper:** In your announcement you had mentioned providing government infrastructure, be it schools or seniors' facilities or hospitals. I can't remember all of the ones that had been identified as potentials. Have you been providing any government infrastructure for child care centres, or do you intend on doing so still?

**Ms Larivee:** Certainly, we see the importance of ensuring access to high-quality, affordable child care, and we see the possibility that the child care spaces would be part of that going forward. That direction was given to the Infrastructure minister, so I would direct you to . . .

**Mr. Cooper:** He's not a good listener.

**Ms Larivee:** He's a great listener. It's just the wrong portfolio.

**Mr. Cooper:** I'm just teasing you.

What research was done – there are other individuals who already receive significant subsidies, predominantly based upon income or, you know, a number of factors. Is there potential that this program could actually have a negative impact on those who are receiving other subsidies? The overall line item and the types of grants in terms of child care subsidies and supports is actually quite complex, with many, many moving parts. How are the pilot project and, one can only assume, a larger rollout once the pilot project is done, those two things, going to interact?

**10:10**

**Ms Larivee:** Thanks for that question. Certainly, there is a recognition that while families who make \$50,000 per year do qualify for a subsidy, families that make over \$50,000 still can't afford to pay essentially a second mortgage payment for one child, let alone if they had multiple children, and a recognition of the fact that this is a tremendous financial burden and is actually oftentimes keeping a second parent from participating in the workforce, which is really unfortunate. This particular program was used to enhance the programs that we already provide, so they will be integrated together. The subsidy will continue to be utilized to provide

assistance to facilities for those who qualify for the subsidy. Then the grants will be used to provide additional supports in order to meet the requirements of the early learning and child care centre requirements.

**Mr. Cooper:** To clarify, budget line item 3, key strategy 1.1, with respect to subsidies and grants: a family receiving a full subsidy for child care currently in Alberta is paying about \$14 per day. Under the new program would the same family pay \$25, or will there still be the additional subsidy?

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. They would continue to pay what they would have with the subsidy. There are families, though, who are receiving the subsidy and are paying over \$25 a day. If you think of the \$650 a space, the subsidy is enough to bring them below the \$25-a-day margin, but if you look at those who are paying in the \$1,350-plus range, the subsidy is not enough to bring them below that. The grant would allow them to come within the \$25-a-day margin.

**Mr. Cooper:** Okay. Are you building your model based upon the Quebec model?

**Ms Larivee:** Absolutely not. This is a model that was built for Alberta to meet the needs of Albertans.

**Mr. Cooper:** How are the two models different?

**Ms Larivee:** Well, certainly, the fact is that \$25 a day is a bit further from what Quebec is offering, but we haven't at this point branched out into providing private day home providers with this. We'll continue to explore that possibility or option. Again, it's like you said; there are many different moving parts of the child care system. This is to move forward and enhance the support for Albertans.

**Mr. Cooper:** Is this program on a first-come, first-served basis, or are there measures in place to prioritize families with greater financial need?

**Ms Larivee:** Thanks. Certainly, our goal with the pilot program is to demonstrate what an affordable, accessible, inclusive child care system based on \$25 a day would look like through Alberta. It is a pilot program, and those 22 sites have been granted support so that the people who are clients of those specific programs, those specific not-for-profit businesses can provide that to their clients.

**Mr. Cooper:** So it's on a first-come, first-served basis?

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. Each of the programs is responsible for creating and managing their own wait-list.

**Mr. Cooper:** Okay. Last year the then minister of human services noted that not all child care spaces or subsidies were being used. They were at an 85 per cent capacity. Presumably, the demand is down because of the economy. What capacity is the child care subsidy program at now?

**Ms Larivee:** I think one of the challenges with our licensed child care spaces is the costs. I mean, if you think of, for example, a family in Calgary having to pay \$1,350 for a licensed child care space for their infant, some of them just make the choice not to go with a licensed space. There are a number of people who end up entering into private arrangements in order to have access to affordable child care. Certainly, while I'm sure there are many wonderful private providers, it lacks the supports that comes with a licensed child care space and the commitment to quality and safety that comes with that.

What we're anticipating, actually, is that if we actually made licensed child care affordable, we would see people taking up a number of those spaces. Having said that, as of right now there are 115,000 licensed spaces available and 88,000 enrolled across the province. We certainly targeted as much as possible a number of the ELCC sites to those locations in which there was a demand for new spaces as well and supported those locations to develop new spaces.

**Mr. Cooper:** Performance measure 1(a) on page 23 of the business plan is "percentage of licensed child care programs compliant with the Child Care Licensing Act and Child Care Licensing Regulation," at last actual 70 per cent. Last year's performance measure was for the percentage of licensed daycare programs and contracted family daycare agencies . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Cooper:** We can get back to it.

**The Chair:** At this time I would like to invite Mr. Ellis from the third-party opposition and the minister to speak for the next 20 minutes. Mr. Ellis, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister? Go ahead.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, staff, colleagues, thank you very much for being here. You know, I can't think of a more important ministry than a ministry that has to do with children. Of course, the challenges that the system has faced for a great many years have certainly been significant, so I actually do wish you all the best in attempting to make some positive changes to the system as it pertains to all children that are in care, including those in the indigenous culture as well.

I'd like to apologize in advance if I duplicate any of the questions from my colleague from the great constituency, as he likes to say it, but some of these questions are certainly, indeed, very important. Maybe we can go to child intervention. You know, I think it's fair to say, Minister, that the heartbreaking issues that human services faced, especially as it pertained to Serenity's case, shone a huge spotlight on the child intervention system itself. Outcome 2 on page 23 refers to the child intervention practice framework, which is also key strategy 2.1. What stage are you at in implementing the child intervention practice framework?

**Ms Larivee:** Thanks for that. Certainly, there has been tremendous work done with staff right across the ministry, right across child intervention, to ensure they have awareness of the practice framework. Certainly, there have been promising outcomes in terms of the implementation of that to date. A new framework and the practice changes that come with it were actually a substantial culture change within child intervention. I'm proud of the work that I'm seeing coming from workers. I think there's more to be done to ensure consistency across the board with that. Certainly, there's awareness of it. People are using the tools, and more and more we're seeing some very positive outcomes coming from those changes.

**Mr. Ellis:** Culture change, of course, is a significant challenge, but what are other challenges that your department might be facing as you try to reform this system? What are the challenges other than culture?

**Ms Larivee:** Well, you know, certainly, that's one of the great questions that we'll be working on and hearing from the panel on. Right now there are the challenges of the increased downturn and

the stresses that that puts on families in Alberta, including those who are delivering services and are caregivers across this province. I mean, with the increased unemployment and life stress with that, with the potential for increased family violence that comes with that, economic downturns are never an easy time for families in the province.

We have some population growth going on, increasingly complex cases as well, so there are a number of challenges, but I think that in order for us to see the very best outcomes, we really need to have conversations with those who are in care or have been in care, with those who are caregivers, with our indigenous partners, with our front-line workers to talk about what the barriers are to the outcomes we all want to see. We all want to see children in a loving home if they can be, but most importantly we all want to make sure that Alberta's children are safe and have the supports they need to thrive. Clearly, we do not see every child having those outcomes in the province, which is, you know, obviously a tragedy and something that we're all committed to resolving. I'm looking forward to seeing the recommendations from the panel as to what we can do to change that going forward.

10:20

**Mr. Ellis:** You talked about increased stressors. Of course, I agree with you that Albertans have stressors that are coming at them from various angles. If we stay on outcome 2 on page 23, you know, we always ask our front-line workers to do more with less, and I think that's a pressure that's always put on by any sort of management. Do you have any checks in place to ensure that the front-line workers' mental health is being taken care of? If it's maybe even recognized in a line item, that would be awesome as well. They're facing significant stress on a daily basis as well.

**Ms Larivee:** Certainly, in terms of line items it would be incorporated in 2.1 and 2.2. Obviously, caseload is very important to a worker to enable them to be able to provide the very best quality of care to our clients but also to make sure that they can be healthy as human beings and feel respected and valued and happy about the care that they're able to provide to clients.

A key important piece of that is the workload assessment model that's being used to help measure the workload of front-line workers and to start looking at approaches for managing that workload and engaging employees through that process to make sure that we find that right balance. Obviously, we have accountability to Albertans to make sure that we're spending their dollars wisely, so we need to find that right balance between managing budgetary challenges and making sure that workers have the support they need to provide the care to children. I certainly think the workload management tool is going to be an important part of that going forward.

**Mr. Ellis:** The system that you were just referring to: is this also a system that would ensure – and this goes for any business, I have to say – that no cases are slipping through the cracks? Is that what that system is in place for?

**Ms Larivee:** The workload assessment model is specifically looking at how much time cases take, how much time they require, complex versus more simple cases, and just finding that right balance for workers, to have an assignment that is appropriate for them and manageable and is the best use of our resources all the way around. Certainly, we're committed to making sure that workers are accountable and providing the very best care to clients, so we continue to, you know, work with their supervisors to make sure that they're meeting expectations around delivering care.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you.

Minister, when the file is completed by a front-line worker, I'm assuming here – please correct me if I'm wrong – that a supervisor would then review this file. Is that correct?

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. The supervisors work very much in partnership with the caseworkers, and they very much function as a team. When we talk about these situations that are very much not black and white but are very grey and require decision-making, it makes sense that you have two minds focused on working together to make sure that the actions are taken that would lead to the best outcome for children.

**Mr. Ellis:** If a deficiency is found in a file, what checks are in place? That, I guess, would include a possible time frame where the front-line worker's file – that's your main point of contact for the people that are in the system – is then returned. You know, is it all recorded?

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. I mean, there's an expectation, you know, in modern-day professional work that they appropriately document what they're doing. Clearly, there are challenges always with finding that right balance in terms of documentation. I'm so proud of the work we're doing to bring in a new IT system that will offer a tool for workers to be able to record their work in a way that's more intuitive and more timely going forward. Certainly, the supervisor is aware of what's happening with a particular client, as is the manager. The statutory director is also engaged in doing regular quality assurance activities and ensuring that we do that kind of work to make sure that the general quality across the board is high for Alberta's children.

**Mr. Ellis:** Minister, you had mentioned earlier, when we were talking here, about the child intervention practice framework. Now, your website indicates that you're accelerating the framework. Maybe you can expand on that, regarding the acceleration and the purpose of that acceleration.

**Ms Larivee:** The work of the framework is essential for making sure that we provide the kind of wraparound services that help families and children to thrive. Part of our plan to make life better for Albertans is ensuring that we do the kind of preventative work and early intervention work for the families who need that, and what we're seeing is that the framework is having very positive outcomes. It's the kind of strength-based approach providing that support to families and building integration with communities that actually is having very positive outcomes. Certainly, it is important that we continue to move forward and make sure that that framework is fully implemented consistently across the board in the best interests of Alberta's families.

**Mr. Ellis:** When do you anticipate the implementation will be complete? Any time frame on that?

**Ms Larivee:** I'm going to assume that you're referring to the business plan at this point in time. Certainly, again, I made reference to the fact that this is about a massive cultural shift. Typically, if you look at these kinds of endeavours, the kind of culture change that's required takes many years in terms of having full integration. However, we're doing a substantial amount of training and evaluation and providing support to accelerate the integration of the practice. There are very positive results happening with that, and the kind of change that we're seeing is actually significantly faster than has been seen with other examples of this kind of adoption of a new framework. We're very proud of

the work that's going on with that and hope to see it continue in that fashion.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you, Minister. Of course, we're still on outcome 2 on page 23.

**Ms Larivee:** Sorry. I completely missed that in the midst of my sneeze.

**Mr. Ellis:** No, no. I'm just saying that we're still on the same part of your business plan, outcome 2 on page 23, the child intervention practice framework.

I want to just expand a little bit. My previous colleague was talking in regard to the indigenous community, especially as it refers to cultural sensitivity. What is your expectation regarding how that sensitive issue will be addressed in the framework? It's such a critical piece.

**Ms Larivee:** Right. Certainly, within the framework it is about identifying strengths for families, and part of the strengths of families and part of the strengths for children is cultural connection. Within that, we certainly have a number of strategies. One is the cultural understanding framework, that will help Children's Services implement a long-term co-ordinated strategy for the staff within Children's Services to ensure there's a consistent and co-ordinated approach to culturally relevant training. We expect it to address recommendations from the Child and Youth Advocate and the Auditor General around enhanced cultural understanding. That framework will be completed this summer and implementation started within the fall.

Having said that, we're not waiting around till the framework has been done. We've been improving staff training around indigenous culture and history in collaboration with indigenous communities across the province. We're doing some pilot training programs to augment and complement current training to increase staff knowledge. Delegation training provided to all new workers now includes three days of training related to working with indigenous communities, and all training is developed collaboratively with indigenous leaders and communities. We're refreshing all training to ensure it reflects current leading practice.

Two pilots we're doing. The first is Gently Whispering the Circle Back, again aimed at improving staff cultural awareness and understanding, which is an interactive, experiential two-day training session on residential schools. They have the opportunity to participate in cultural ceremonies and activities with elders, learn about the meaning of the circle process, hear stories of residential school survivors, and it is all guided by an indigenous trauma specialist.

**10:30**

The second pilot is the blanket exercise, which is a half-day activity that engages staffs' minds and hearts in the historic and contemporary relationship between indigenous and nonindigenous people. That was developed in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations and other indigenous communities. Certainly, the perspective has been very positive in recognition of the fact that staff have to understand the culture of the children that represent such a broad part of the children in our system.

**Mr. Ellis:** As you know, we're currently reviewing the Child and Youth Advocate Act. Just staying on the same lines as cultural sensitivity, I know that one of the concerns out of one of the meetings I was at was with the African-Canadian community. They wanted to make sure that, you know, their cultural sensitivity needs were met as well. I guess, other than the indigenous community,

what steps is your ministry taking to ensure that other cultures, including the African-Canadian culture, are being addressed as well?

**Ms Larivee:** Certainly, while we have such a large number of indigenous children in care, we're taking extensive measures to address cultural competency around understanding our indigenous children and families. Obviously, the intergenerational trauma is a story that is profound and needs to be heard, but beyond that, there's the recognition, again, that culture is a key part of children's reality and a strength within families and individuals. So it's an expectation that the staff utilize culture as a strength.

For example, there's a multicultural partnership in Calgary in which there is a whole team that's dedicated to understanding various different cultures. They come from all around the world, the team does, and have an understanding of language, but their main job is to help workers understand the culture that that child came from, that that family is a member of. What does it mean for them and their understanding of what it means to be a parent, of what it means to be a child? For example, in some parts of this world, you know, corporal punishment, extensive corporal punishment, is still acceptable. For a new family, coming here and not having the opportunity to be culturally integrated, that's a huge challenge. So how do we work? How do we understand where they came from? How do we help bridge that gap and help them understand what it means to be children and families here? There's great work being done on that.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you, Minister. That's great to hear.

If I can just spend the last two minutes – and I just want touch briefly on, again, what my colleague was talking about regarding child care. I guess I'll just refer to page 23 of the business plan, key strategy 1.1, improve access to quality, affordable child care. I'm just trying to get an understanding of where the number 25 comes from for \$25-a-day child care. Is there some data to support that? Why not \$20? Why not \$30? Why not \$10? I'm just trying to understand that.

**Ms Larivee:** Certainly, you know as well as I do that there's no magic, a lot of times, to figuring these things out, but there is a recognition right now that paying the equivalent of a second mortgage for child care is completely unacceptable and that the government needed to take steps to increase access to high-quality, affordable child care for Albertans.

Certainly, we understand the early learning and child care centres to be pilots in which we can look at how these particular centres are making a difference for the children and families that they're serving. I certainly look forward to the rigorous evaluation process that will allow us to determine what continued funding or possible expansion of the program might look like.

Again, it's completely unacceptable that families cannot afford to even work because child care is such a cost. Either they can't work, or they're putting them in centres that are unlicensed and potentially not as safe, so we certainly support that endeavour.

**Mr. Ellis:** Can you just confirm that you don't have any income testing at this time for your pilot projects?

**Ms Larivee:** No. The pilots are to give us an example of what universal child care would look like.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

For the next 20 minutes I would like to invite Dr. Swann, leader of the Alberta Liberal Party, and the minister to speak. Dr. Swann, it's my understanding that you would like to take the first 10 minutes to ask your questions and the next 10 minutes for the minister to respond. Is that correct?

**Dr. Swann:** Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Madam Minister and staff for joining us today. We've had a lot to do with each other over the last two months, and I would applaud the minister for jumping in to this important new role and, I think, a progressive decision by the government to separate child services from the massive human services ministry in the interests of a better focus on children and families in difficulty.

[Mr. Smith in the chair]

I would also applaud the minister, her government, in fact, for a couple of other things improving the income for low-income families. The child tax benefit is an example; the support for child care at \$25 a day, which we've begun to discuss; and a number of initiatives that indicate that they're looking at a higher priority for vulnerable families and children, who have such a long trajectory of challenges and costs and suffering and death if we don't make it a bigger priority.

I do have some questions around some of the earlier comments you made, and I'll read them into the record so that you can work at them as is possible. I'm interested, for example, in whether there is any number related to how your budget per population of children under the age of 18 compares to other provinces' budgets for child services for children under the age of 18. I'll leave that as it may well not be readily available. I would hope that you could follow up with me at some point. That'll be part of our review, I hope, as the child review carries on.

You mentioned 1,749 full-time equivalents on your staff, moving to 1,811, an increase of 60. Is that a net increase, or does that include numbers who are retiring, leaving? Is this an actual, net increase?

**Ms Larivee:** It is an actual, net increase.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you.

Secondly, the government spent \$22 million less on the Alberta child benefit program last year than the budgeted amount. Why this discrepancy?

**Ms Larivee:** Do you want me to answer as you go?

**Dr. Swann:** No. You could come back as soon as I finish the questions. Thank you.

**Ms Larivee:** Okay.

**Dr. Swann:** I see, with the \$25-a-day child care pilot program, that it's not clear to me how this benefit is tied to need, and if it's not tied to need, why isn't it tied to need? In other words, why is it not in areas where the lowest socioeconomic groups are going to benefit from it?

[Ms Goehring in the chair]

We've talked about the increasing number of First Nations people in care, and I guess one of the key questions we need to answer since it's a significant part of our budget is: what indicators will you use to assess progress on reducing the number of indigenous



people in care? Will one of those indicators be, hopefully with an emphasis on kinship care, not only the number that stays in kinship care but the number that then has to be taken out of kinship care or has recurring difficulties because in some cases the kinship care wasn't the right decision? How will we evaluate that? An important principle, but the reality sometimes doesn't live itself out.

**10:40**

With respect to Albertans' eligibility and benefits – this may not be clear in the first reading of the question. The disability savings plan that young people, children need when they're in chronic care is currently – and I'm thinking of PDD – under family and community services. But it seems inconsistent with your policy, which is to not claw back child benefits when there's other income going to the family. Is that inconsistency something you've talked about, thought about? Let me say it in another way. PDD clients have funding clawed back when they receive an inheritance. In your ministry that isn't the case. You don't claw back income that goes to the family from other sources.

I also wanted to acknowledge that you folks do an important survey almost annually that I'm not sure other ministries do – and that was under human services; I hope you'll continue to do it under Children's Services – a corporate survey that assesses your staff's attitudes, values, confidence in leadership, comments about satisfaction in the work. I think that's a critically important thing and a courageous thing to do in any ministry. It hasn't necessarily served you well politically because it's often not as positive as you'd like it to be, but it's also part of what, I guess, honest governments have to look at, that when staff morale and staff culture are declining, you need to know that, and citizens need to know that. We need to know what the roots of that are and how we're going to improve it. So I applaud the fact that you have consistently over the last at least five or six years, that I've been looking at, had corporate surveys.

I hope those will translate into your own ministry and that you'll get a sense of what's going on there and identify some of the issues that have started to come up in the panel around culture, confidence, leadership, staff relationships, and the ability to shift a culture that historically has been called one of shame and blame in a round-table. That was a term that Manmeet Bhullar raised. I don't know how you turn that around if you don't confront it – I mean, it's hard enough to turn it around anyway – and recognize some of the characteristics of a culture that has too many entrenched interests or a lack of sensitivity or poor communications or simply conflict.

Those are some of my comments around the budget and some of the prime issues of concern around quality and affordability of this ministry. Thank you.

**Ms Larivee:** Thanks. There are a number of questions, so I'll start at the top and work my way down. Certainly, you asked about the increase of 60 FTEs. Those 60 FTEs are very much intended to address workload management issues, to address the caseload growth. Those are net positions. We need to have 60 additional front-line bodies delivering care to Albertans to ensure that Albertans get the care they need but also to make sure that we don't put too much stress on our staff.

In terms of the Alberta child benefit there were only three quarterly payments in 2016-17. In this coming year it will be operational for the entire year in terms of that. It is always interesting forecasting uptake of a program. Certainly, we had support from Treasury Board and Finance as to how many families they expected would fall within that. Again, we'll be forecasting the number of eligible families for the year coming and also providing the full amount. I thank you for your recognition of it. I think that

when we put money in the hands of families, they can provide the kind of support for children, because we shouldn't have children in the child intervention system because of poverty. That's unacceptable to me. We need to make sure that we provide support to families that are struggling to be able to take care of their children.

In terms of child care, while we are demonstrating what universal access to child care is – I have to say that even if you're making above \$50,000 a year, paying \$1,300 for one child per month is an incredible financial burden, and we needed to do something to make child care more affordable for Alberta's everyday families. The subsidy is one thing, but, I mean, clearly above and beyond the subsidy, child care was unaffordable.

Part of choosing the programs that we targeted for the early learning and child care pilots was ensuring that they demonstrated the ability to meet some local needs, that included support for vulnerable families – you'll actually see a number of the sites in areas that are providing additional support to vulnerable families, not just in terms of the affordability but in terms of providing flexible child care, making sure that evening and weekend-type care was available, recognizing the fact that not every family only needs child care from 6 in the morning until 6 at night – but also that they did a lot of work engaging with community organizations to ensure that they had community connections that allowed them to wrap around these families and have a very child-centred and family-centred perspective that would enhance the quality of families.

In terms of providing support to indigenous families and what progress is going to look like, certainly there are a number of measures that we're looking at. The fact that the total number of indigenous children in care is going down is fantastic, and I want to keep on seeing that happen over time. Certainly, the number of families who end up with an outcome in which they have a healthy family in which they are placed is something that I'm looking forward to seeing. The number of families which don't need to come into care because we are providing the kind of early intervention supports is a statistic that I want to be seeing going down as well. And then within that, the number of families – if you'll notice, in our business plan we actually have a performance measure on the number of indigenous children in foster care or kinship care who are placed with indigenous families. We want to see that statistic improving as well and then . . .

**Dr. Swann:** As long as their outcomes are included.

**Ms Larivee:** Yes. And having said that, I mean, in terms of foster care and kinship care we recognize that kinship care provides them with that cultural support and that family support and that familiarity, but there's also a recognition, of course, that the safety of the child and support for the child is a primary indicator, and we'll continue to provide supports to both foster and kinship care to try to get outcomes on that.

We're also looking and ensuring that they have cultural plans in place, that they have the safety reviews. I think that's a part of what you're referring to. Also, the recurrence for those families: I want to see less recurrence for indigenous families and also that they have connections to their community and their culture as well as part of that.

So those are all indicators, of course, subject to the kind of engagement that you will be doing – thank you – along with the rest of the panel with our communities to talk about what the communities want to see and what indicators they would like to see and what progress looks like to our indigenous communities and families as well.

In terms of claw back versus not claw back with that, specifically you're referring to a program within Community and Social Services. That would be something that you could speak to the minister there about. But I do want to say that I'm proud of the support that we're providing to families to make sure that as we provide enhancements, they really are enhancements for families and that they can have as much support as they need in order to improve the outcomes for Alberta's children.

**10:50**

Lastly, engagement. Certainly, it is, one of my primary understandings, as essential to improving the kind of outcomes in Children's Services. Since coming into this ministry, I've made it a key priority of my own to recognize the hard work and dedication of our front-line employees and how important it is and how life changing the work is that they do and to make sure that they know that I value that and that their government values that and that I'm committed to providing the supports that they need to be able to do their job well. Myself and my deputy minister have been committed to continuing to support strategies that were put in place to address that but also to evaluate if there's anything new we can do in terms of moving forward with that.

In terms of the surveys, absolutely we want to know what's happening and whether we're making progress in this area. Certainly, as a front-line worker myself I understand the challenges sometimes that culture can bring to the table and how a culture of shame and blame is not helpful at all. It hurts not only the staff but the people that they're taking care of in the long run. While we do need to continue to have accountability, we're continuing to recognize the professionalism and passion and commitment of the people within the ministry and working hard to engage with them and make them feel a part of this ministry going forward.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

At this point I would like to call the five-minute break. We will be setting the timer for five minutes, and we'll reconvene when the timer goes off.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 10:52 a.m. to 10:58 a.m.]

**The Chair:** I would like to call the meeting back to order.

For the next 20 minutes Mr. Sucha from government caucus and the minister may speak. Mr. Sucha, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister?

**Mr. Sucha:** Yes, please, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Sucha:** All right. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister, for your remarks and to everyone who has contributed to this meeting so far. You know, MLA Drever does send her regrets that she isn't here, but I felt it very important to be part of this conversation because of my opportunity to sit on the ministerial panel that's doing a review of deaths in government care. I stated in one of my member's statements that it was probably one of the most important jobs that I'll ever have as an MLA, and I truly, fundamentally believe that.

I've learned a lot in the last little while and while digging into my own research to try to learn about this before the panel started meeting and even as we've consistently had the discussions. I think, Minister, you outlined as well the historical trauma that's really led to this and the fact that, you know, if you were to go back into colonialism, it's something that we've built up over 150 years as a country and as a nation. We see a lot of challenges in relation to

lack of trust between our indigenous nations and us as a government as well.

The one thing that really always stands out as you start reviewing these things is just the overrepresentation that we see of indigenous children in care. With that being said, I know that in outcome 3 on page 24 of your business plan it speaks to: "greater collaboration between government, communities and Indigenous partners strengthens services and achieves shared social outcomes." Through you, Madam Chair, how does Budget 2017 address the concerns Albertans and stakeholders have towards services being provided to indigenous children?

**Ms Larivee:** Well, thanks for that. Clearly, we all see the overrepresentation of indigenous youth as a tragic reality of our child intervention system today. It is a very important issue for our government and a priority for Children's Services. We are supporting our children and indigenous partners by working with them to improve the way that we help our indigenous children, youth, and their families. That support has led to a 17 per cent reduction in the number of indigenous children in care since 2012. Even though that number is declining, we must continue to do more.

Our recent work includes implementing strength-based approaches such as signs of safety. The focus is on the resources and networks available to families. Every family has something to build upon and has resources and supports. It's important that we capitalize on that and not just leave them out there to flounder but provide the kind of connections and supports that allow them to be successful.

We created a child intervention practice framework that includes respect for indigenous experience as a key principle. We're developing training for staff to create a greater understanding of indigenous culture and historical trauma to better support children and youth and placing greater focus on involving extended family and connecting indigenous families with their respective communities and intake to identify potential kinship caregivers if the child cannot remain at home.

We continue to work with all of our First Nations on the role of the First Nations designate in the hopes of ensuring that all indigenous children are safe and protected. We are very much looking forward to the outcomes and recommendations that will come from the ministerial panel on child intervention. That might give us further insights and suggestions on that issue. Thank you to the member and all those who are part of that panel. That work is tremendous. I'm very thankful for the commitment of everyone in having some positive outcomes come out of that.

**Mr. Sucha:** Thank you for that comment.

You know, Madam Chair, I have to recognize the hard work that's coming from Dr. LaBoucane-Benson, Mr. MacLaurin, and Dr. Choate, who have really contributed a lot to this committee as well.

You spoke specifically in your last comments in relation to safety and safe and protected environments for children. Even in your business plan on page 23 it outlines your commitment to ensuring that children and youth in need of child intervention are supported in order to achieve safety and well-being. I know that your ministry and the government is working really hard to expand these supports for children and youth who are receiving services in Alberta. I see that in key strategy 2.2 on page 24 of the business plan it speaks to: "implement the Prevention and Early Intervention Framework." Minister, can you elaborate on the actions your ministry has taken to address these concerns relating to early support services?

**Ms Larivee:** Thank you. Certainly, you know, we understand that families need the kinds of supports in order to be able to stay at home. A story that I heard recently from staff was of a mom who in previous engagements with the child intervention system was basically told, you know: deal with your addiction, or you can't keep your kids. Our new framework, engaging with that mom, meant connecting her with the kind of support she needed to help manage and deal with her addiction. You know what? She has her newest child in the home with her. She's an excellent mother to that child. In fact, two of her children who were in kinship situations have returned home.

That's the kind of work that we need to do going forward, provide those kinds of wraparound services, those connections to the community that mean that those children get to be with their family of origin, to feel the kind of connection that they feel with those families.

11:05

We're working to refresh the prevention and early intervention framework to include an indigenous lens. That's fantastic. We're also developing processes to monitor, track, and report publicly on provincial implementation of that framework. We'll be focusing on trauma, child development, healing, and resilience, particularly for indigenous peoples and communities.

A parent link centre day of sharing practices to support aboriginal families event was held on September 9 of last year in Edmonton, which was a first-time gathering of all parent link centres to participate in cultural training, to share promising practices, and to discuss approaches to providing services to indigenous families. Additional parent link centre learning events have been scheduled for June 5 and 6 and will include cultural training, the blanket exercise that I referred to earlier, a fantastic way of really feeling with your heart what it was like for indigenous families in this province. We are updating all parent link centre grant agreements to include a requirement that they complete community profiles to ensure they assess and understand the needs of their communities, including those of indigenous children and families.

In 2017 the ministry will highlight statistical data collected on the parent link centre upstart survey. Collecting this data with a specific indigenous lens allows the ministry to see the impact of PLC programming on indigenous families and inform future program policy and direction. I think there is a lot of fantastic work being done in terms of early childhood development with parent link centres and home visitation agencies.

In terms of prevention and early intervention we'll continue to again move forward with the prevention and early intervention framework. An interim report was prepared related to trauma, child development, healing, and resilience, which was a review of the literature with a focus on aboriginal people and communities. The ministry will develop processes to monitor, track, and report publicly on provincial implementation of the refreshed prevention and early intervention framework and ensure alignment of those activities with the grants administered to First Nations.

I think there's a lot of work that we are doing to support early intervention and particularly to ensure that it reflects the indigenous lens, given how much overrepresentation we have.

**Mr. Sucha:** It's very fortunate to hear some of the great works coming out of a lot of these link centres. In my constituency of Calgary-Shaw we actually have Métis Calgary Family Services. Despite the fact that it's a Métis organization, it works a lot with urban aboriginal individuals as well and really creates a great connection with those communities. They run a child care centre out of that facility as well, and they actually are going to be able to

expand affordable spaces because they've been approved for the pilot project for \$25-a-day child care as well.

There's a lot of work that I can see tangibly that your ministry is doing. Through some of the financing that you're doing for \$25-a-day daycare through your budget, that's really sort of providing these benefits to many indigenous individuals, especially a lot of the off-reserve ones, which is a significant amount of our indigenous population here in Alberta as well.

Tying into page 25 of your ministerial business plan, it outlines four risks to achieving the ministry's desired outcomes. The ministry, I'm assuming, clearly recognizes the need to have integrated services that are person centred, as you spoke about earlier. Could you elaborate on what actions your ministry has taken to ensure that programs and services offered by the department follow a child-centred approach?

**Ms Larivee:** The OAG recommended that the department ensure that the care plan for each indigenous child requiring intervention services is adhered to and meets the standards of care the department sets for all children in Alberta and also recommended that the department analyze the results and services to indigenous children and report to the public regularly on its progress in achieving planned results. A review of current standards, reporting, accountabilities, and analysis will be undertaken to strengthen and expand the focus on results for indigenous children, which includes greater accountability for planning activities for all infants, children, youth, and families, with the expectation that services to indigenous children meet the standards of care the department sets for all children in the province, and a plan for the review has been developed.

The '15-16 child intervention standards results have been analyzed to reflect results for indigenous and nonindigenous children and youth, and the '16-17 child intervention standards review checklist for ongoing services has been updated to include practice measurements that target care planning. A review of the current standards has been initiated to better align them with current practice and measurement as well as the First Nations practice standards and Treaty 8 practice standards. The terms of reference for the standards review committee have been drafted, and delivery leadership has been contacted requesting regional participation on the standards review committee. An interjurisdictional scan and literature review of benchmarks and leading practice standards has been initiated and is slated for completion by the end of this month. An indigenous and nonindigenous public reporting will begin in June of this year.

**Mr. Sucha:** Excellent. Thank you.

I'm even going to bounce past a few questions that I had here because I want to sort of tie in a little bit about what you've spoken in relation to standards here. You know, we hear a lot of concerns that come from Albertans and stakeholders that indigenous children in Alberta receive care that is consistently less likely to meet provincial standards than nonindigenous children. Given that page 24 of the ministry business plan notes that "indigenous children are over-represented in all aspects of the child intervention system" and given that key strategy 3.3 highlights a need for collaboration "to support the best outcomes for the health, education and safety of children, youth and families," through the chair, can the minister please explain why this issue exists and what the ministry is doing to address these concerns?

**Ms Larivee:** Well, thank you for that question. The reason for that is complex and varied. The situations regarding indigenous children receiving services are more complex than for nonindigenous

children, specifically in regard to who delivers them, whether it is one of the Children's Services regions or a delegated First Nation authority, or DFNA. Where the child resides, on- or off-reserve, and the involvement of others in delivery, whether the band designates or First Nations are involved, are significant as well. Regardless, there should not be profound differences for Alberta's children given that the legislation and standards apply to all.

Children's Services is focusing on a number of things to ensure provincial standards are met for indigenous children in care. Children's Services is implementing strength-based approaches that align with indigenous thinking and created a child intervention practice framework that includes respect for indigenous experience as a key principle. Signs of safety is an approach to child intervention that uses professional social work concepts and integrates them with the family's expertise and cultural knowledge, encourages a balanced and rigorous exploration of danger or harm as well as indicators of safety, and focuses on risk assessment and safety planning.

We are also developing training for staff that will create greater understanding of indigenous culture and historical trauma. We are reviewing the standards and looking at how we measure outcomes for indigenous children. We have engaged in multiple practice initiatives to support staff to work with indigenous children and families in a different way with a goal of supporting families to keep their children safe at home, and we are creating an evaluation of the provincial implementation of a number of practice strategies and will review results to determine whether these practice shifts have resulted in better outcomes for indigenous children.

**Mr. Sucha:** Excellent. Thank you.

The budget line 2.1 on page 52 of government estimates indicates a budget of \$35.5 million for programming, planning, and delivery, and line 2.2 has allocated over \$493 million for child intervention services. How does this investment support your ministry to ensure indigenous children receive more frequent contact with caseworkers and more care plan reviews?

**Ms Larivee:** Thanks. It's critical that child intervention workers establish a strong connection with the children and families that they support. That is absolutely essential. That relationship is core to positive outcomes for those children. The statutory directory has identified three key areas of practice that are being monitored: face-to-face contact alone with the child, accurate placement information, and accurate legal authority information. To support service delivery areas to achieve these three priority measures, we have developed a real-time reporting system that flags files that have missing or incomplete data, and the results are provided to each region and to the DFNA.

The '16-17 standards review checklist for ongoing services includes practice measurements that target care planning for children, and we're reviewing the standards and looking at how we measure outcomes for indigenous children. We've engaged in multiple practice initiatives to support staff to work with indigenous children and families in a different way with a goal of supporting families to keep their children safe at home. We're completing an evaluation of the provincial implementation of a number of practice strategies and will review results to determine whether these practice shifts have resulted in better outcomes for indigenous children. Throughout all of that we are working collaboratively with indigenous people, including those that are designated by Alberta's bands to meet our requirements for contact and connections for indigenous children, and looking forward to, again, the outcome from the panel of the work and

conversation as to what suggestions the communities have as well.

**11:15**

**Mr. Sucha:** Thank you.

You know, as we kind of cited in relation to the allocation of \$493 million, I know this probably ties into what you have within your business plan, that notes: "Every child deserves to grow up in a home where they [feel] safe and nurtured." What kind of work is required in early intervention in order to see fewer children removed from their homes and taken into care?

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. We know that 83 to 85 per cent of children receiving child intervention services is due to maltreatment, things such as poverty, or family violence. In those situations early intervention and prevention are key. We know that the best way to address the overrepresentation of indigenous children in care is to support their families to keep their children safe at home. The government of Alberta offers a range of early childhood development and prevention programs. Five designated aboriginal parent link centres as well as home visitation programs offered by agencies such as Bent Arrow support indigenous families. However, most supports are offered in urban centres and most often are not available on-reserve or in rural or remote areas.

Children's Services is the lead on two proposals under the UN declaration work to engage with the federal government and indigenous partners on enhancing early intervention and early childhood development and learning supports.

**Mr. Sucha:** Excellent.

Madam Chair, as it was noted on page 21 of the business plan, the Premier created the new Children's Services ministry to have greater "focus on and accountability for protecting children." How is the minister prepared to execute on the plan in order to make a difference?

**Ms Larivee:** As we continue to improve the system, we will ensure that relevant staff have the skills to execute on the plans that are put in place in order to make a difference for our indigenous children. We will look at things like our training and qualifications so that staff have the skills and abilities to meet the competencies of their positions and understand the complexity of child intervention service delivery.

Over the past 10 years child intervention staff have faced numerous alterations to legislation, systems, policies, and procedures. What has sometimes been lacking is a disciplined approach to change management that clearly identifies where the system is going and why. This led the ministry to build project management and knowledge mobilization capacity for the child intervention program. The key components are good planning, process clarity, evaluation, and continuous improvement.

The child intervention division has implemented project management discipline to support planning and implementation for priority projects. This process discipline has allowed us to successfully implement important changes like signs of safety and strength-based practice, recommendations tracking and analysis, and policy-to-practice learning sessions for staff on indigenous connections. Between April 2012 and December 2016 there has been a 16 per cent safe reduction in the number of indigenous children receiving intervention services, a decrease of 1,158 children, which is no small number – I'm proud of that work having been done – and a 17 per cent safe reduction in the number of indigenous children in care.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

For the next 10 minutes I would like to invite Mr. Yao from the Official Opposition and the minister to speak. Mr. Yao, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister?

**Mr. Yao:** Yes, that's fine, please.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you very much.

In line item 3.2 in the estimates you have a capital amount for this year of \$250 K. What is that for exactly?

**Ms Larivee:** Our capital allotment is primarily for the IT supports that we were talking about earlier. There's a need for our child intervention staff to have support. However, there are capital grants of \$250,000 in '17-18 only to conduct a system-wide analysis of the child care system.

**Mr. Yao:** Okay. Let's talk about child care accreditation. Have any of the approved pilot daycare centres been placed at any hospitals or government-owned buildings?

**Ms Larivee:** At this point in time for the early learning and child care centres program the sites were based on a request for proposal that went out and the proposals that came in. Based on the proposals that came in, we picked the sites that fit the criteria most strongly. At this point those sites were not specifically in any of those; however, clearly there is an opportunity as we go forward and branch beyond the 22 pilot sites to talk about what affordable, accessible, quality child care looks like for Alberta families. I expect that as we go forward, some of those will be in those kinds of sites, but, unfortunately, there were not any proposed quality proposals that came forward.

**Mr. Yao:** You can't clarify for us, specifically, any institutions that are targeted with this?

**Ms Larivee:** Again, it was based solely on the proposals that came in, so if there were not any proposals from those kinds of facilities, then we were unable to place them in there. It was not proactive, where we went out and selected sites. It was based on nonprofit agencies choosing to submit a proposal to be an early learning and child care centre. We're proud to support the 22 top proposals that came in across the province.

**Mr. Yao:** Have you given any instruction to these daycare centres to prioritize any particular group of people?

**Ms Larivee:** Certainly, one of the priorities within the early learning and child care centres was sites that served vulnerable populations or in which there needed to be increased access to quality child care for those areas. Each of the sites is responsible for managing their own intake and wait-lists. Again, we're looking forward to seeing the kinds of outcomes that come out of the opportunity to deliver quality child care to these sites going forward.

**Mr. Yao:** All right. Can you elaborate on the system-wide analysis you just talked about?

**Ms Larivee:** Okay. Again, there's a need to ensure that we're making an informed decision as to the upgrades going forward.

Sorry. Just to clarify, you're referring to the \$250,000 for capital grants again, or were you talking about evaluation for the child care centres?

**Mr. Yao:** The \$250,000.

**Ms Larivee:** Okay. The system-wide analysis of the child care system is for the purpose of making recommendations to support the development of the government's mandate to invest in child care, create new spaces, improve affordability, quality, and access. Funding would be used to assess the feasibility of providing different approaches to creating additional child care spaces in the province. Those are planning funds in terms of feasibility and assessment of creating additional child care spaces.

**Mr. Yao:** Will government agencies like AHS or even WCB be eligible for the funds for these daycares? Will they be applying as well?

**Ms Larivee:** At this point there has only been a single intake, so there are the 22 sites that have already been defined in terms of that. As we evaluate and as additional funds become available, we'll decide what the criteria is for sites going forward. The criteria was pretty specific in terms of the proposal, and certainly we would invite any nonprofit early childhood child care provider, if they feel they fit the criteria for any future proposals, to submit an application.

**Mr. Yao:** Okay. Performance measure 1(a) on page 23 of your business plan is: "Percentage of licensed child care programs compliant with the Child Care Licensing Act and Child Care Licensing Regulation." In the last actual you show 70 per cent. Last year the performance measure was for the percentage of licensed daycare programs and contracted family day home agencies that are accredited or participating in accreditation. That was at 96 per cent. Can you explain the difference between these two performance measures and why this change was made?

**Ms Larivee:** Specifically in regard to the percentage of licensed child care programs that are compliant with the act and regulation, again, that's about showing our commitment to safe, high-quality environments for children to provide the foundation for the very best outcomes over the long term. Certainly, if you look at historical trends for the performance measures, there has been a substantial improvement. The actual for '15-16 was 70 per cent; for '16-17 it was 71 per cent. Accreditation, though, is a different measure than specifically licensing. Accreditation is an additional voluntary measure that licensed child care facilities can choose to participate in in order to ensure a quality delivery of services.

11:25

**Mr. Yao:** I'm confused. You say 96 per cent are accredited agencies, and that's fine. They reached a certain level to become accredited. But the other measure is about compliance, so that means that 70 per cent of this 96 per cent is compliant. How can they keep their accreditation? Am I reading that wrong? Could you please explain the difference between those two measures again?

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. I mean, I think there are a variety of measures that would make a specific facility noncompliant, and some are more high risk than others. Some would be low risk type measures, and others would be high risk, but 71 per cent of licensed child care programs, through the assessments through the early childhood development branch, are identified to be fully compliant. Certainly, we continue to work with them in terms of reducing the instances of regulatory noncompliance. Again, we want to ensure a safe, nurturing environment to children and address the Auditor General's observations regarding monitoring and attending.

**Mr. Yao:** All right. The annual report for human services on page 16 says that there are around 110,000 licensed and approved child

care spaces in Alberta and 89,000 children enrolled. Of course, we know that spaces may exist where there are no children, and there may be places where there is a large demand and a shortage of spaces. Can you let us know where these pressure points are?

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. We certainly work really closely with facilities, and we know what the current uptake is with all licensed facilities across the province at any given time. It's exactly as you said. There are some areas where availability exceeds demand and others where there's a huge challenge. Areas with accessibility challenges: Calgary has historically been a substantially challenged area as well as some rural areas. We continue to work with those facilities to enhance. One of the criteria for the proposals that came for the early learning and child care centres was that they create new spaces in areas in which there is a demand as well. That was part of the decision-making.

**Mr. Yao:** On page 21 of the business plan it says, "Women in Alberta continue to have primary responsibility for caring for children and other dependant family members." Do you have statistics on what percentage of Alberta families have women as a primary caregiver versus men or versus a nanny, et cetera?

**Ms Larivee:** I don't have those right underneath my fingertips, but I'll be happy to get those statistics for you.

**Mr. Yao:** If you could table that, that would be terrific.

Page 52, minister's office and corporate affairs, on line item 1.1 under the minister's office: when comparing this line item with that of the former ministry, the minister of human services, your office budget this year is \$100,000 more. As a split ministry – I understand that there are always expenses when starting a new ministry, but can you explain that added expense, please?

**Ms Larivee:** Well, the primary reason for the increase to ministry support services relates to operational funding for the minister's office, the deputy minister's office, of course, and communications. In terms of the minister's office, the \$730,000 increase is to fund full-year operational requirements.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

At this point I would like to invite Mr. Ellis from the third-party opposition and the minister to speak for the next 10 minutes. Mr. Ellis, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister?

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you, Minister. You know, I think that we can agree that anything to do with children is a nonpartisan issue. I think back to my previous career. When a child was at risk, all bets were off the table. We could enter the home in order to save a child's life if the situation deemed it necessary.

Minister, if I could get you to look at outcome 2 on page 23 of your business plan, and I'll just read it here: supporting children and youth in need of intervention in order to achieve safety and well-being. Now, I know that there's been much discussion regarding, let's say, a proposed bill which has been dubbed Serenity's law, which really just ensures that there is a responsibility of citizens and adults to contact the police should a child require intervention. I guess my question is: Minister, will your government be looking to amend the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act in regard to this minor but this critical change?

**Ms Larivee:** Thanks. Certainly, obviously, we all take the safety of Alberta's vulnerable children tremendously seriously and would expect that the adults in this province would intervene when one of those children is identified to be vulnerable or potentially at risk of neglect and abuse, so I certainly look forward to hearing the work that comes out of the panel in terms of what changes may be needed legislatively in order to best enhance the outcomes for the safety of Alberta's children.

**Mr. Ellis:** Yeah. I agree that we would hope and expect adults to do that, but sadly in many, many cases that certainly is not the case. I certainly welcome the panel's recommendations going forward as well.

Minister, if we can just turn back to child care, I've just got a couple of follow-up questions regarding the \$25-a-day daycare. That would be outcome 1, page 23 of the business plan, key strategy 1.1. Maybe you can just help me to understand. How will the \$25 cap work? Is the government subsidizing the parents or the daycares?

**Ms Larivee:** Thanks for that question. The grants are being provided directly to the daycare. Part of the requirement for their proposal to be successful, to be an early learning and child care centre, was that they were able to utilize the grant to ensure that parents only paid \$25 a day. The support is being provided to the early learning and child care centre in part to ensure that they're supported to offer \$25-a-day daycare but also to ensure that they increase accessibility, increase community connection, and deliver the quality child care with a framework to ensure that we have that early childhood development perspective. We're looking forward to seeing the outcomes and impact on the children's well-being in terms of early childhood development in these centres as well.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you.

I'm sorry; maybe this is strictly a yes or no question. Is there data to support where the determination comes up with this \$25? I'm just failing to understand why it's not \$20 or \$30 or \$28. Is there something to support that, or is it just an arbitrary number that fits nicely? I'm just really trying to understand that.

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. Certainly, in terms of the supports that we provide to families, you know, how much support is enough? I mean, I would love to be able to offer free daycare to children, but of course there are fiscal challenges as well. We certainly see it as an incredible support going forward to complement the other actions we're taking to protect and improve services to Albertans. For many of them, you know, this can be half the cost that they were paying before. I'm happy to provide support to families to increase the affordability of child care for them so that, again, they're not faced with not being able to go back to work or else choosing to enter into a private-care arrangement that doesn't take advantage of the licensed child care spaces in the province.

**Mr. Ellis:** Of course, we've seen that there are risks with that as well. I agree.

Minister, if we can look at page 26 of the business plan forecast, it looks like child care expenses are rising from \$287 million in 2015-16 to \$417 million in 2019-20. I guess my question is: what is that plan based on, and does it involve the \$25-a-day child care across the province?

11:35

**Ms Larivee:** Obviously, with our child care program we consider it tremendously important to ensure that Albertans have access to that quality child care. We need to continue to maintain the

licensing and accreditation programs in this province as well as continuing to provide a subsidy. However, we also committed, pending evaluation of the pilots, to expanding access to these programs as finances permit. I'm happily looking forward to being able to continue to enhance access to affordable, quality, accessible child care in this province.

**Mr. Ellis:** Is there a plan to phase out the regular daycare system that we have at this time?

**Ms Larivee:** At this point, again, with the pilot program we're not rebuilding the entire system around it. We'll look forward to seeing the outcomes after a rigorous evaluation of these projects to see what the outcomes are, and following that, we'll decide how to progress from there.

**Mr. Ellis:** Okay. Thank you.

If we can just talk a little bit further about the indigenous collaboration, there are three outcomes listed in the business plan for Children's Services. One of them, of course, highlights the need to improve outcomes for indigenous children. Key strategy 3.1 is to work with indigenous community leaders and partners to develop collaborative strategies to help them. If you could please maybe provide a little more specifics in regard to that, the collaborative strategy.

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. Thanks. Again, coming from Treaty 8 territory and serving a number of indigenous communities, both Métis settlements as well as First Nations, and a number of people who live on neither but still identify as indigenous, you know, I cannot emphasize enough how important it is that we get the relationships right, that we have the kinds of conversations that will allow us to identify what the challenges and barriers are right now and to talk about potential solutions going forward, whether it be in the short term in terms of what service delivery might look like but also long term about how we can reduce the number of children in care. Clearly, it's a complex issue, and it requires a level of community engagement that's going to be extensive.

We're working with leaders to strengthen that relationship and build that trust and have meaningful engagement. We're seeking the direction and input of aboriginal governments and organizations on policy, program, and service development and implementation. We're a partner in the child and family services trilateral engagement partnership, which is made up of representatives from treaties 6, 7, and 8, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, and Health Canada. This forum allows for ongoing discussions of both common and unique issues and opportunities.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you, Minister.

I think I might have time for, just briefly, one more question. Strategy 3.5 relates to Jordan's principle, and maybe you can expand on that. What steps is the government taking towards adopting Jordan's principle?

**Ms Larivee:** Thank you. It was actually quite exciting for me to find out that I was the government lead for Jordan's principle. As a registered nurse for years I had advocated to the federal government to step up and adopt it. Certainly, it is a priority for both myself and our government in terms of aligning with the UN declaration and the TRC calls to action. At this point Children's Services continues to work with other ministries, First Nations leadership, and the government of Canada to ensure that we can take steps forward.

**Mr. Ellis:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

As there is no independent or other party member present, I would now like to invite Ms Jansen from the government caucus and the minister to speak for the next 10 minutes. Are you wanting to combine your time?

**Ms Jansen:** Combined is great. Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Ms Jansen:** Thank you, Minister, for answering so skilfully all of these great questions.

There's an area that I wouldn't mind touching on again because I think it's an important one to go over. It is foster and kinship care. We know that strong foster and kinship caregivers are extremely important. I've met a number of them in the past, and certainly the ones who do their job well are critically important to demonstrate what community really means for children in need. I'm just wondering how the budget ensures that foster and kinship caregivers are supported properly. Can you give us a sense of where in the budget we see the line items that would support that?

**Ms Larivee:** Thank you for that. I cannot say enough about the kind of people who choose to become foster and kinship care providers. Typically, because of the trauma these children go through, they have many difficulties, and the fact that these families open their houses and their hearts to these children is profound. I think they are amazing individuals. I'm very thankful for their willingness to do that, and I'm happy to support them as much as I possibly can.

In terms of line items you'll find it under 2.4. That's foster care support. We maintain funding to support foster and kinship care support. The foster care program provides support to foster and kinship caregivers to ensure that children get their needs met in a home setting, which is so important and so much more normal than a more institutional setting. Alberta has approximately 1,800 foster homes and 1,750 kinship homes. Since last year there has been a 4 per cent increase in the number of children and youth placed in foster and kinship care. Again, the support that they provide to children and youth is critical, and I'm thankful for their commitment to that.

Children's Services has begun to implement the foundations of a caregiver support model to support the achievement of more positive outcomes for children and youth by ensuring that they are nurtured by caregivers who respond to them in a developmentally appropriate way, interpret their behaviour through a trauma-informed lens, and have an appreciation for the impact of grief and loss. I'm proud of the work we're doing to support these wonderful families and look forward to continuing to support them and work with them in terms of determining what more we can do in the future going forward.

**Ms Jansen:** Now, we have seen, sadly, some tragic, rare occurrences where foster or kinship caregivers could be criminally charged with abuse of a child in care. We know that is top of mind, certainly, here in this province right now. Given that the budget for 2017 has allocated about \$177 million for foster care support, can you discuss the screening processes that are in place that ensure that when a child is put into foster or kinship care, they will thrive in that care, with the appropriate supervision to ensure that if they're in a situation that is dangerous, they don't stay in that situation?

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. Clearly, child safety has to be our priority, and it absolutely is. We have stringent policies and practices in place to screen caregivers, and we follow up with regular visits. Applicants have to complete a criminal records check, including a vulnerable

sector search, a child intervention system record check, and they also have to provide three personal references and a medical reference. Even if a pardon was granted for an offence of a violent or sexual nature, the vulnerable sector search results in disclosure of this information. Foster and kinship caregivers and anyone 18 years of age or older in the home have to provide an updated criminal record check every three years. As well, potential caregivers must complete a home study that evaluates how their history, family dynamics, physical environment, and financial status of the family will impact the child's safety and well-being. So we have very stringent processes in place, and we certainly work within those to find safe homes for our vulnerable children to be placed in.

**Ms Jansen:** What's the challenge of finding foster and kinship care homes when we obviously have a situation where that's the best-case scenario? Obviously, not everybody looks at the situation and feels sometimes brave enough to take on a challenge that they may not be completely comfortable with. Do you have a program of recruitment? How do you actually go out and make sure that you have enough people stepping forward who feel comfortable enough to take on that role?

**Ms Larivee:** Thanks for that question. I mean, again, foster families are incredible people that choose to open their home. Obviously, that's a big step that we're asking families to take. As a result of that, like other jurisdictions in Canada, we have challenges recruiting caregivers, especially in terms of caring for children and youth of complex needs and challenging behaviours. Another challenge is that we want to recruit and retain foster homes that reflect the diverse cultures of children in care so that children have those cultural ties, especially with our indigenous children in care. We always need more indigenous caregivers.

11:45

We're working with communications to create a provincial caregiver recruitment and retention strategy. The Child Welfare League of Canada identified four themes that impact foster families. The first is recognition and respect. We help to raise awareness of the dedication of foster parents through National Foster Parent Week and local recognition events. I continue to do everything I can to emphasize to them how wonderful they are.

Systemic factors, including challenging systems to navigate and increasing needs of children in care. Alberta has joint training opportunities for staff and caregivers, supports relationship building and common understanding, and increases awareness of support and services to meet the challenging needs of children in care. Policy changes were made to make it easier for caregivers to access vacation and recreation allowances for children in their care or to obtain approval for travel and supports and services, including financial concerns. The foundations of caregiver support, a communication and engagement strategy for staff and caregivers, is based on three foundational pillars: child development, trauma, and loss and grief. We're providing that.

We work with the Alberta Foster Parent Association to enhance financial supports for caregivers, with steady increases to basic maintenance rates, skill fees, travel and vacation allowances, babysitter rates, and respite. On January 1, 2016, automatic relief or respite available to foster parents and kinship caregivers was increased from one day a month to two days a month. All foster parents and kinship caregivers will be reimbursed for two days a month of relief or respite for each child placed in their home at \$50 a day, with the ability to bank up to six days of relief or respite to be used at one time.

On July 1 of last year the daily rate for relief or respite for each child in their home was increased from \$50 to \$65 per day, and kinship care providers are reimbursed, with receipts, for baby equipment and costs of formula, diapers, and other basic baby expenses through the kinship care support plan. If this causes financial difficulties, the caseworker will arrange to pay for those costs directly, so they don't even have to submit for reimbursement. Foster care and kinship care providers are reimbursed, with receipts, for infant care costs up to \$150 per child per month for formula, diapers, and basic baby care supplies.

Then the last area of concern is training. We provide safe babies training for caregivers who care for infants under 36 months of age. That includes information on caring for infants who have been prenatally exposed to substances and on current safe sleep practices; a children's mental health learning series to help parents, caregivers, and professionals support children with mental health concerns. Training on mental health issues related to psychotropic medications and street drugs is offered through the province for caregivers and staff, and on January 25 of this year a mental wellness for children and youth in care symposium was offered through a grant provided to Align and the AFPA. That was offered to caregivers and staff.

We continue to work with our foster parents to find out what they need and the best supports we can keep in place to enable them to continue to do the amazing work they do of supporting the children who, unfortunately, cannot be at home with their families.

**Ms Jansen:** How much time do I have left here?

**The Chair:** Fifty-eight seconds.

**Ms Jansen:** I wanted to ask a quick question. So many of these kids who go into care – and I've spoken to many care providers – have FASD and similar related issues. Is there a place for the care providers to go to get information on how to deal with some of these very specific areas?

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. We continue to provide training, support, and engagement with those families to meet their needs. Obviously, we need our foster parents to feel that they are competent and able and informed and have the skills and knowledge necessary to provide the support needed by those vulnerable children with complex needs. We'll continue to work with them to make sure they have the access that they need to the kind of supports so that they can feel that they're providing the very best care to the children that they've been entrusted with.

**Ms Jansen:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

For the next 10 minutes I would like to invite Mr. Yao from the Official Opposition and the minister to speak. Did you want to combine your time with the minister?

**Mr. Yao:** Yes, please.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Yao:** In comparing your minister's office, line item 1.1, with that of Community and Social Services, your office spends \$100,000 more, but the overall expenses for the ministry are less. Can you explain why the minister's office for Children's Services is more costly than the minister's office for Community and Social Services, please?



**Ms Larivee:** Thank you. The creation of a new ministry generates initial expenditures to set up ministry infrastructure and in some instances represents a transfer of services from the former ministry of human services, so there are some initial start-up costs that come as a result of starting up a whole new ministry.

**Mr. Yao:** What are the full-time employees for your office?

**Ms Larivee:** The specific FTEs for the minister's office?

**Mr. Yao:** Yes, please.

**Ms Larivee:** It's six.

**Mr. Yao:** How about the deputy minister's office?

**Ms Larivee:** The same.

**Mr. Yao:** The same people?

**Ms Larivee:** No. Six people.

**Mr. Yao:** Six plus six?

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah.

**Mr. Yao:** Okay. For 1.6, communications, you have had a budgeted amount of \$645,000 for the last couple of years. This year's estimate is at nearly \$1.5 million. Can you explain the difference and what the reason is for this increase, please?

**Ms Larivee:** The net \$792,000 increase is primarily to fund the operational requirements of the newly created communications division in Children's Services, offset by small reductions in employer contributions to the management employees pension plan and the transfer of the department's share of the e-Clips news services to Executive Council.

**Mr. Yao:** How many FTEs did you have for communications before, and what is that raised to now as a result of this increase?

**Ms Larivee:** Before is a little bit misleading in the fact that it's a brand new ministry and having to set it up. Certainly, we recognize the importance of having a solid communications division within both ministries. Within Children's Services we have 11 FTEs for communications. From that perspective, we could find out what the previous human services had and get that information for you. We have what we need in the ministry.

**Mr. Yao:** It would be great if you could table that. Thank you very much.

At line item 1.4 you show an increase of more than half a million dollars for strategic services. Can you please explain what the additional funding there is for?

**Ms Larivee:** The net \$550,000 increase includes increases for information and knowledge management, project management, and legal services. Again, that was offset by some small reductions, including a transfer of one legal services staff to Justice and Solicitor General.

**Mr. Yao:** That is your largest line item. Can you provide a more specific breakdown of the services that you're providing?

**Ms Larivee:** Strategic services is comprised of legal services, strategic planning, policy and quality assurance, and strategic knowledge and technology. There was increased demand for information and knowledge management and project management

as well as an increase in legal services to address staffing needs to allow legal services to operate more effectively. The biggest increase, though, is demand for information and knowledge management.

**Mr. Yao:** Can you explain quality assurance? You listed them off as a department.

**Ms Larivee:** Within strategic services, certainly, policy and quality assurance are part of the work that they do. Clearly, in terms of developing policy going forward, we would want a strategic approach to that.

**Mr. Yao:** Quality assurance, I assume, also provides input on, say, the Serenity case, as an example, what issues were dropped there and what was provided or learnings from that.

**Ms Larivee:** Yeah. They provide opportunities for internal audits, looking at continuous improvement over time, and general quality assurance measures that you would expect to happen within a large professional organization.

**Mr. Yao:** All right. Under child intervention, program planning and delivery, 2.1, the line item has received an over \$8.6 million increase on the 2016-17 budget. Can you explain that increase, please?

**Ms Larivee:** In terms of that program planning and delivery, that's an \$8.6 million increase to address various information and technology initiatives, including the creation of a disaster recovery site and the rollout of Windows 10 because we want to stay current.

**Mr. Yao:** You have a lot of IT investment. How many software programs do you have that you guys work with? AHS has over 1,300. What have you got?

11:55

**Ms Larivee:** I do not have that information, specifically, handy. I do know that we continue to work across government to reduce the number of platforms that we utilize as much as possible, to find consistency.

**Mr. Yao:** Can you table the quantity, please?

**Ms Larivee:** I will happily table that for you.

**Mr. Yao:** Line 2.3, supports for permanency: you've decreased that from the 2016-17 forecast. Can you explain the savings?

**Ms Larivee:** Okay. It is a decrease from the forecast, however a \$1.7 million increase compared to last year's budget because we expect increases in caseload.

**Mr. Yao:** All right. Line 2.4, foster care support. This line item has increased \$7 million from 2016-17. Can you explain that increase, please?

**Ms Larivee:** The increase is to address caseload growth, primarily.

**Mr. Yao:** This line item was decreased by \$1 million from the 2016-17 forecast. Can you explain why last year it went over budget?

**Ms Larivee:** Again, unfortunately, due to economic circumstances, it places a lot of stress on families, which means that the generalized caseload for child intervention has increased due to the financial stressors and the potential impact for increased domestic violence, increased poverty, and a number of other issues. Unfortunately, the

child intervention caseload has increased, and so has our need for foster care support. I am proud to be continuing to provide the kind of support that allows us to retain and support foster care families to provide quality care to our children.

**Mr. Yao:** Okay. Line item 4.2, youth in transition: can you please explain what is encompassed within that line item? It's under early intervention services for children and youth. Isn't this more after intervention rather than early intervention?

**Ms Larivee:** There's a recognition that we need to provide support to vulnerable youth in their transition to adulthood. It's important that we provide them support and resources in order to make that transition as successful as possible. Certainly, teenagers or adolescents always have a hard time, you know, transitioning to adulthood, and it's only enhanced when we talk about the complexity of having been a child in care.

Our supports within that include the advancing futures bursary, which is an educational program that supports youth who've been under the care of Children's Services to obtain postsecondary education. It covers their educational costs as well as provides a monthly living allowance. Also, this includes the Alberta mentoring partnership program, which works to increase support for children and youth in care as well as those who may be at risk of coming into care by providing trained adult mentors and funding other community grants to provide supports to vulnerable youth. The role modelling and emotional support that the mentors offer help those young people to develop positive social skills. Both of those are an investment in ensuring that they have positive outcomes for those children transitioning to adulthood.

**Mr. Yao:** A \$1.5 million increase in this budget line: can you explain the increase, where exactly that went to, then, please?

**Ms Larivee:** Okay. That is to support an increased caseload in the advancing futures bursary program.

**Mr. Yao:** What kind of an increase in caseload are you talking about? Have you quantified that?

**Ms Larivee:** Well, it allows more youth who've been in government care to pursue their postsecondary education.

**Mr. Yao:** Have you quantified that? How many? If you could table that, that would be terrific as well.

**Ms Larivee:** Just so you know, in 2015-16, of the 4,900 potential young people who were eligible to receive a bursary, 750 submitted an application. Of those, 575 students received funding and support. Certainly, we want to be able to support these youth, who've had a tremendously difficult life with many challenges, to be successful. We're proud that we're able to support the youth who choose to submit an application going forward.

**Mr. Yao:** What about those 3,000-plus that don't submit an application? Have you followed up with them to see why they wouldn't be able to provide that? Maybe they weren't aware of it; maybe they didn't have the supports. Are you capturing the most vulnerable with this?

**Ms Larivee:** Certainly, there's a recognition that these youth do have a challenging time and that we need to work with them. I'm proud of the work we're doing in supporting them through that transition.

**The Chair:** I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for this item of business has concluded.

This meeting completes the committee's schedule for the consideration of the 2017-2018 main estimates for the ministries within its mandate.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]



