



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
First Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Families and Communities

Ministry of Children's Services  
Consideration of Main Estimates

Thursday, October 31, 2019  
9 a.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 30th Legislature  
First Session**

**Standing Committee on Families and Communities**

Goodridge, Laila, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UCP), Chair  
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP), Deputy Chair  
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP), Acting Chair\*

Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UCP)  
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)  
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)  
Glasgo, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UCP)  
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UCP)  
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UCP)  
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UCP)  
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UCP)  
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)  
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UCP)  
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)  
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UCP)  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)

\* substitution for Laila Goodridge

**Also in Attendance**

Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)

**Support Staff**

Shannon Dean	Clerk
Stephanie LeBlanc	Clerk Assistant and Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig	Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin	Clerk of Committees and Research Services
Sarah Amato	Research Officer
Nancy Robert	Research Officer
Michael Kulicki	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. Rebecca Schulz, Minister



9 a.m.

Thursday, October 31, 2019

[Mr. Ellis in the chair]

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

**The Acting Chair:** All right. Good morning. It is 9 a.m. 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, 2020.

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 at the table. I am Mike Ellis, MLA for Calgary-West, and I am substituting for Ms Goodridge as chair of the committee. To my right, we have the deputy chair.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Yes. I am Lori Sigurdson, and I'm the MLA for Edmonton-Riverview. I actually will be leaving this spot because I'm going to be supporting my colleagues afterwards, but I will certainly be back if needed.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Nathan Neudorf, MLA for Lethbridge-East.

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Jeremy Nixon, MLA, Calgary-Klein.

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

**Mr. Guthrie:** Peter Guthrie, Airdrie-Cochrane.

**Ms Glasgo:** Michaela Glasgo, Brooks-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Walker:** Jordan Walker, Sherwood Park.

**Mr. Long:** Martin Long, West Yellowhead.

**Mr. Rutherford:** Brad Rutherford, Leduc-Beaumont.

**Mr. Amery:** Good morning. Mick Amery, Calgary-Cross.

**Ms Schulz:** I am Rebecca Schulz, Minister of Children's Services, MLA for Calgary-Shaw. Today I have with me Darlene Bouwsema, my deputy minister; Rae-Ann Lajeunesse, who is the assistant deputy minister of child intervention; Mark Hattori, who is the assistant deputy minister of family and community resiliency as well as child care. I add that in because it's not clear in the title. We also have Tiffany Schell, who is our senior financial officer in the Ministry of Children's Services; Gloria Iatridis, who is the assistant deputy minister of our policy, innovation, and indigenous connections division. We also have Zoe Cooper, who is our director of communications.

**Mr. Feehan:** Hi. Richard Feehan, Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Ms Pancholi:** Good morning. Rakhi Pancholi, MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you.

I have some housekeeping notes, so please bear with me. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, and the committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Next, the speaking order and time. Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. Standing Order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking rotation while the speaking time limits are set out in Standing Order 59.02(1). In brief,

the minister or member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of her comments we begin a 60-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus.

The rotation of speaking time will then alternate between the Official Opposition and the government caucus, with individual speaking times being set to five minutes, which when combined with the minister's time, makes it a 10-minute block. Discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not the speaking time is 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 speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or e-mail to the chair or the committee clerk.

A total of three hours has been scheduled to consider the estimates for the Ministry of Children's Services. The scheduled end time of today's meeting is 12 p.m. 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. Is anyone opposed to having the break? Seeing none, we will have the break.

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, have access to a microphone in the gallery area. Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to the three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule and the committee will adjourn. Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run.

Any written materials 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 and any amendments will occur in Committee of Supply on November 19, 2019. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk, and 20 copies of the amendment must be provided at the meeting for committee members and staff.

I now invite the Minister of Children's Services to begin with her opening remarks. Minister, you have 10 minutes. Go ahead.

**Ms Schulz:** Good morning. Thank you, all, for being here today. I'm here today to present Children's Services' 2019-2023 business plan and the 2019-2020 budget estimates. As we've already gone through introductions of senior ministry officials, I will jump right in.

I'll use a few minutes of my time this morning to speak to the Children's Services business plan, which identifies three ministry outcomes and corresponding business objectives for the next four years. It identifies our core business outcome as: first of all, ensuring the safety and well-being of Alberta's children and youth; supporting the well-being and resiliency of children, youth, and families through a continuum of government and community-based prevention and early intervention services and supports; and, finally, promoting the growth and development of children and youth through accessible, affordable, quality child care options. I'm

confident that the 2019 budget for Children's Services supports the desired outcomes and objectives for the ministry.

Our government is committed to making life better for all Albertans. Budget 2019 delivers on our mandate of creating jobs and growing the economy while supporting our most vulnerable citizens and maintaining front-line services. The 2019 Children's Services estimates have increased by \$83.6 million, or 6.3 per cent, overall. This increase will allow us to protect essential programs that support the safety and well-being of the children, youth, and families we serve. Costs associated with delivering these programs and services continue to rise, and the number of children we serve has grown with the population. Those we serve are also coming to us with more complex issues than in the past.

Cost pressures are an ongoing reality for the work of Children's Services. This year those pressures were further compounded by the fact that the previous government did not sufficiently fund last year's pressures. As a result, we began the year with an encumbrance of \$5.7 million, largely in the child intervention division. To address cost pressures and caseload growth, funding has increased for child intervention, child care, and early intervention services.

We are charting a path back to balance through a thorough examination of our finances, including targeted reductions and thoughtful reallocations. We are working to reduce duplications, streamline processes, and do our work more efficiently. We've considered every single dollar we spend and made sure that those dollars are directed to those who need our services the most. By working collaboratively across government and with our partners, I'm confident we'll be able to continue providing children, youth, and families with the supports and services they need.

The Children's Services operating expenses include an increase of \$68.5 million, or 8.5 per cent, to address caseload growth in child intervention. These supports will protect front-line services for children whose well-being and safety are at risk. Our ministry responds to approximately 57,000 calls or reports of child maltreatment, neglect, and/or abuse every year. In 2018 16,123 children were receiving some kind of child intervention service.

In the last year we've seen the number of children in care increase by 4 per cent. Indigenous children continue to be overrepresented in child intervention, at 69 per cent of in-care caseloads despite representing just 10 per cent of the general population in Alberta. These are heartbreaking realities but ones that we have to face head-on. We continue to shift our policies to prioritize keeping kids connected to their culture, their families, and their communities and to address issues in a more proactive way.

But these challenges can't be solved exclusively by government funding. These require strong partnerships with First Nations and Métis communities as well. Government support for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people has shifted significantly over the past six months as well. For example, the federal government committed \$10 million in 2018-19 for early intervention and prevention programming for First Nations, \$11.4 million in 2019-20, and we expect this number to grow by the fourth year to about \$14 million.

Additionally and importantly, the government of Canada's new legislation, Bill C-92, will be enacted in January 2020. This legislation affirms the right for indigenous bodies to take responsibility for delivery of services for indigenous children and families. What this means remains extremely unclear as the federal government has not outlined in any way what implementation will look like or whether there will be funding available. In my short time as minister I've met with representatives from more than a dozen First Nations and Métis organizations. They have shared their concerns that local voices were not heard or incorporated into this bill, but our government will continue to work with First

Nations and Métis partners to advocate to the government of Canada as true partners to support the needs of indigenous children and families.

Although circumstances have changed significantly since the action plan was released, the recommendations of the all-party Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention continue to drive policy and practice within the ministry.

#### 9:10

The operating expenses this year also identify an additional \$15.9 million, or a 3.9 per cent increase, to address caseload growth in child care, and \$8.1 million will be directed to support the growing number of families who need to access the child care subsidy while they work or attend school. Every family is unique. We need to ensure that a variety of child care options are available to meet their needs, and we need to make sure that the lowest income families in our province are supported with subsidies that provide their children with quality programs. We've also invested \$7.8 million to support the growing number of child care programs wishing to access accreditation.

When it comes to the plan for the early learning and child care centres pilot program, I will be clear once again that the terms of the pilot have not changed since this was introduced under the former government. We will review the data and outcomes. I have heard from parents and operators that the program is not working for them. As we wait for the evaluation, I'll certainly be looking toward how we can take the federal dollars, the investment, and tailor it to those who need it most, not those who are simply in the right place at the right time.

We will remain responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars and focus on the needs of parents, with the pillars of affordability, quality, and accessibility guiding our decisions. Children's Services will also be reviewing the Child Care Licensing Act, which will allow us to work towards a transformed model for child care here in Alberta.

To support consistent delivery of early intervention services and supports, the voted operating expense in this area includes an increase of \$751,000, or .7 per cent. We know that working to address issues at home before they become more severe, where safely possible, and allowing children and youth to stay connected in their community leads to better outcomes for children. It also reduces the need for more costly interventions later on. The Well-being and Resiliency framework outlines the ministry's approach to providing prevention and early intervention services to children, youth, and families in our province and will continue to be implemented wherever possible throughout the work of the ministry.

To increase transparency in the way we display our budget, the policy, innovation, and indigenous connections department is identified as its own program in this year's budget. This area plays an ongoing leadership role in identifying social-based challenges and opportunities related to indigenous people and other communities. Strengthening our relationships with the indigenous people of Alberta and continued work towards reconciliation remains a priority for our government and this ministry. Our highest priority will always be to ensure that vulnerable children on- and off-reserve are safe and supported. We will continue to acknowledge and incorporate indigenous ways into the work we do, and whenever possible we'll work to keep First Nations, Métis, and Inuit families together.

In addition to supporting low-income families through subsidized licensed and approved child care, government will be replacing the Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit with a new single benefit, the Alberta child and family benefit.

Consolidating these two programs removes unnecessary administration, saves up to \$400,000 in administrative costs, and will direct more support to lower income families with children. The new program is estimated to deliver approximately \$290 million in benefits to more than 190,000 families on a full-year basis, putting more money in the pockets of those who really need it most. This benefit is expected to be in place by July of 2020 and is a nonvoted expense.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to provide a brief overview of the 2019 Children's Services estimates.

Before I close today, I do want to thank the front-line staff of this ministry, many of whom I've met over the past six months. They come to work every single day, and they deliver the programs, services, and supports that make a real and positive difference in the lives of children, youth, and families across Alberta. Thank you so much for your dedication, thank you for the often difficult work you do, and thank you for making sure that every child matters.

I'm confident that each decision made will result in a more efficient, consistent provincial approach to funding and services that will direct every dollar to where it will have the highest impact. We'll continue to direct our investments to making life better for Albertans by protecting front-line services and targeted supports to help children in need.

I'd also like to thank the committee for your time this morning, and I am very happy to be here to take your questions.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. The time will be set for 20-minute intervals so that members are aware of the time.

Member Pancholi, would you like to go back and forth with the minister?

**Ms Pancholi:** Yes, please, if that works with you, Minister.

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you very much. You may continue.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister. It's a pleasure to be here today to discuss the estimates for the Ministry of Children's Services. I'd like to begin by thanking you for being here, of course, and also thanking the executive staff of the Ministry of Children's Services. Having worked within government myself, I know how budget time is very stressful. It's a lot of work for staff, so I appreciate your being here today. I'd also like to say Happy Halloween to everybody. I know I had two small people that I was getting out the door in various states of costume dress and undress this morning. Let's see how they survive the day. I don't think they really care as long as they get to trick-or-treat. Thank you, all, for being here, and it is a pleasure to ask these questions.

Minister, I think we confirmed that you're all right with sharing time. Also, I do want to begin by just apologizing up front if I do interrupt you during our discussion here today. There are, of course, as you know, very clear time limits around our timing. I'm just trying to get in as many questions as we can, so I may interrupt you at points. I think that many of my questions will be very straightforward. This is really an opportunity, of course, for the opposition as well as all Albertans to get a better understanding of the budget and the numbers, and this is really just, I hope, to be a very straightforward conversation about that information.

I'll begin, if I can, actually, just with a point of clarification. Just looking at the documents that were provided as part of Budget 2019, I note, Minister, that in the estimates, well, actually, the first page of estimates, page 43, the overall 2019-20 estimate is roughly about

\$1.4 billion, but when I look at the fiscal plan for the government, there are several references to different dollar figures. For example, page 13 of the government's fiscal plan refers to \$1.6 billion for the ministry. As well, on page 82 of the fiscal plan it refers to \$1.7 billion for Children's Services. So I'm just wondering if you can clarify the different dollar amounts there.

**Ms Schulz:** Sure. Just a second. We'll get back to you on the details on that.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. Sure. Would you be able to provide that in writing?

**Ms Schulz:** Yeah. Absolutely.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you. Great.

I'd like to then move on to the consolidation of the Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit. As I note on page 147 of the fiscal plan, it does set out, as you mentioned in your opening comments, Minister, that the Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit will be consolidated into an Alberta child and family benefit. I guess I'll just begin by asking – I note that there is a change in the maximum family income amount. It has moved from what it was previously under the two, the benefit and the credit. It was roughly about \$43,295. Any families that were below that amount were eligible for the Alberta child benefit. For the Alberta family employment tax credit it was any family whose family income was below \$43,302.

The information provided in the fiscal plan, page 148, refers to that the annual net income for a family must now be below \$41,000, and that's overall, for both the working and the base components of the Alberta child and family benefit. I'm wondering, Minister, if you can shed some light on how that number was reached, that \$41,000, as the maximum threshold of income.

**Ms Schulz:** First of all, I do want to point out that the Alberta child benefit program itself has not changed. The two programs were in fact consolidated to direct more supports to those families with children who are receiving a low income. Previously the Alberta family employment tax credit provided credits or a tax benefit for families who were making up to \$94,000 a year. Obviously, given the fiscal state of this province, partially left to us by the former government, we had to take a look at where our money was going and felt very strongly that this needs to go to support the lowest income families with children.

Based on a two-child family, Alberta still provides the highest benefits among provinces providing child benefit programs throughout the tax system; 65,000 to 75,000 families will see an increase of their benefits, and these are families who are earning less than around \$25,000 a year. That's an increase of 15 per cent for Alberta families who are most in need under the Alberta child and family benefit. Incentives remain for families to enter the workforce, which is very important. Families with no income will receive an increase of \$15 to \$37 a month.

9:20

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. No. I'm specifically asking about the \$41,000 threshold just to get some background as to how you reached that number. What was the research behind that? Was it done, perhaps, by looking at median family incomes? How was that number reached?

**Ms Schulz:** Treasury Board looked at a number of factors when calculating how the tax credit system works, and partially that was about, really, truly, consolidating two systems, saving up to \$400,000

in administrative costs, taking into account the market-based measure, which also highlights the federal poverty line at around \$39,000 a year. We wanted to make sure that these benefits were targeted to those families. Certainly, in a time like this we felt that extending benefits – and this is one benefit of many that lower income families would receive. As you know, Alberta has had the lowest child poverty rate in Canada for a number of years, long before the former government was in but very much also in part because of the federal universal child benefits that are also in existence.

This still leaves us in a position where we're providing additional supports to the lowest income families in Alberta with children.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister.

Yes, as you noted, we've had a low rate of child poverty in this province for some time. In particular, however, under the former government it was actually cut in half within two years. A huge reason behind that was . . .

**Ms Schulz:** I think, as your colleague also mentioned last night, that was due in part to changes at both the federal . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** There were lots of changes that were made, but particularly, I think, it was the result of a strategic policy decision by the former government to focus on the Alberta child benefit as well as other influences on low-income families such as raising the minimum wage, affordable child care. But I think, you know, that we should take pride in the fact that we do have low child poverty rates. But, really, every province: their goal should be zero per cent child poverty rate. We should not be satisfied until all children are raised out of poverty.

You mentioned that the federal poverty line is \$39,000. I'm just wondering. Why the difference, lowering it from \$43,295 to \$41,000? I agree that we want to be higher than the federal poverty line. Again, we want to encourage more families being raised out of poverty. I'm just, again, wondering if there is a specific rationale for lowering it from \$43,000 to \$41,000?

**Ms Schulz:** Well, also, just to clarify again, 65,000 to 75,000 families will see an increase of the benefit, and those are families who are making less than \$25,000 a year. While the benefit does phase out slightly sooner, people will still receive benefits up to a salary of \$61,000 a year.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister.

I believe that when the budget was introduced, it was your officials who noted that with the changes that are being made, consolidating the Alberta child benefit and the Alberta family employment tax credit would actually result – I hear what you're saying about how the lower income families will get more under the consolidated. However, I do note as well – and these were numbers that came from your officials within the government – that 165,000 Albertan families will now get less than they were getting prior to Budget 2019 and that 55,000 Albertans will no longer be eligible at all for the benefit.

So in a time when we've got a lot of cuts being made to low-income families – I understand the minimum wage is currently under review; we've lowered the youth minimum wage already, and when I say we, I mean that your government has done that; as well, AISH has been deindexed, and you're looking to deindex the personal tax exemptions – I'm just wondering why you would choose as a poverty alleviation measure to actually cut 55,000 families off this benefit?

**Ms Schulz:** Actually, that's just over a hundred thousand families that will in fact receive less benefit, but the families no longer

receiving a benefit will be those families who make in that range of \$61,000 a year to \$94,000 a year as those programs combine.

I also do want to address one of the things that you said about the early learning, the \$25-a-day child care program reducing child poverty. In fact, 1 per cent of Alberta children actually had access to the \$25-a-day pilot program. Of the children who were in that program, that was 1 per cent of the children in this province and parents who actually had access to that program.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister.

Can you clarify with respect to the new Alberta child and family benefit? Under the old system the benefit was based to some degree on the number of children in the family, right?

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely.

**Ms Pancholi:** If there was one child, two children, up to four children. Can you confirm that that is still the criteria by which you'll be basing the . . .

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. Can you provide the details of how that amount will be broken down?

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely. We can send that to you. As you can appreciate, it's quite complex. It's based on, obviously, income, whether or not a family is working, the number of children that they have, and they receive that as a benefit through filing their taxes.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thanks. So that's a commitment that you'll provide that in writing?

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely. Also to note that this does not change their eligibility for any other provincial or federal benefits that they may receive.

**Ms Pancholi:** I appreciate that. Thank you, Minister.

I'd like to move on now to the child intervention portion of the budget. In the estimates, page 45, line 2.2 looks at child intervention services and indicates that the budget for child intervention services is \$573 million. On page 18 of the business plan it indicates – I'll read it out here. It's just about halfway down the page under the heading Initiatives Supporting Key Objectives. It says, "In 2019-20, \$593 million is allocated to children and youth in care." I'm just wondering. There's just a \$20 million difference between what's noted in that line on the business plan versus what's indicated in the estimates. If you could just clarify what that \$20 million is about.

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely. The number on page 18 of the business plan – I see what you're referring to in the first bullet, in the description there. That also includes prevention and early intervention services, which are split into two different line items in our estimates.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. Thank you very much.

Do you know specifically, like, of that \$20 million what is allocated to early intervention?

**Ms Schulz:** Did you want to switch to early intervention and ask specific . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** I'll be going back and forth because they're kind of related, right? It's hard to . . .

**Ms Schulz:** Yeah. Early intervention and prevention services are largely preventative services. That may be children and families

where there may be potential risks, and those could be identified in a number of ways. Certainly, our front-line assessment workers would look at the situation that a child and family are in and determine whether or not a child can safely remain in their home. A lot of those prevention and early intervention services are specific to the needs of a given family. They can vary. They don't look the same. As you can appreciate, every family has unique challenges and unique situations. Part of that is things like home visitation, mentorship, the advancing futures bursary. Those are also included in prevention and early intervention funds.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. I just meant that there is a \$20 million difference there, and I don't know if that was allocated to a specific early intervention program. It's just sort of . . .

**Ms Schulz:** It's not broken out like that in the budget.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. All right. Thank you.

On page 19 of the business plan, under performance indicator 1(c) it talks about the number of children who are receiving intervention services as it relates to children in Alberta overall, so the percentage. I'm curious as to why. I see that there's some historical information provided there from 2014 to 2018. I'm wondering why there are no targets under this performance indicator with respect to what the objectives and goals are of the ministry with respect to the percentage of children receiving child intervention services?

**Ms Schulz:** Ideally, the target would be fewer children coming into care. We know that the number of kids coming into care has stayed relatively consistent over time, but obviously we did see a bump in that in the last year. Part of that was due to population growth. Part of that was due to things like mental health and addictions, the opioid crisis. Ideally, the goal would be to have fewer children coming in care. We also don't control who comes into our care. Children come into contact with the Ministry of Children's Services for a variety of reasons, so that's a really difficult thing to predict.

**Ms Pancholi:** I appreciate that. I mean, I think I agree with you; the goal is fewer. The goal is actually zero, right?

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely.

**Ms Pancholi:** We would like to have no children receiving intervention services. Unfortunately, the reality, as you've indicated, is that that's the case, that there are children who are in need of intervention and care. It is our obligation to provide that support and assistance. You can see there that you've laid out sort of the track record from 2014 to 2018. There are some numbers with which to work, and within the ministry we are able to, I'm sure, to some extent, measure population growth. Of course, it's always going to be a guess. Certainly, again, having worked within government and knowing about how targets are set, you are always making some assumptions and guesses. Do you have a goal and do you have objectives with respect to what that percentage could realistically be given the level of investment and support and the work that's been done to review the child intervention system? Do you have a goal?

**9:30**

**Ms Schulz:** Well, ultimately there are a couple of things at play, and it's not as simple as necessarily setting a number target. We want to see fewer children or no children coming into care. We also recognize that a lot of times the families coming into care of Children's Services: the ministry doesn't control the root causes, but that's why we are all so committed. This is one thing that a lot of our community partners and stakeholders had asked for, that they

would like to see more co-ordination than they had in the past, and certainly that would be amongst the ministries of Children's Services but also Community and Social Services, Mental Health and Addictions, Health, even Justice at times. I think some of the longer term work that we're doing to address some of those root causes will really be transformational as well in terms of the way that we provide supports to vulnerable children and families.

A unique count is also used for this indicator to ensure that a child is counted only once despite having received different types of services throughout the period, so it's not always necessarily the one key indicator of the child intervention work being done by the ministry.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. I think that's a reality that exists across ministries. There are often many factors that are outside of our control. I sat in on the estimates for Education yesterday, and they had many measures about student scores on provincial achievement tests, and we can argue whether or not that's the best way to measure student success, but certainly, again, there are a lot of reasons why students might not do well in a provincial achievement test that are outside of the control of the Ministry of Education, yet they still have targets.

Again, having worked within a ministry and knowing that there are often times where it's very difficult to set targets because we're talking about abstract things, with respect to this we actually have numbers, right? Often the challenge within government is to set targets when we don't have something that can clearly be quantified, but within this I just find it unusual to have a business plan with performance indicators with no targets when we actually are dealing with something that is quantifiable. I acknowledge, again, that there are a lot of factors that go into why a child might require intervention.

**Ms Schulz:** Well, I would also clarify that in the business plan there are a number of targets set out for the ministry, so to say that there are no targets . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** Just on this performance indicator.

**Ms Schulz:** . . . is not necessarily correct. We do set targets and measures.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. I did not say that that was true for all of them. I said it was for this indicator.

**Ms Schulz:** There are indicators that help us look at things in a variety of different ways, and we also know that the goal, ultimately, is safety. When front-line caseworkers go out and respond to a concern of child maltreatment or neglect, there are a number of things that can be done, a number of situations that they are looking at, and that's certainly one of the reasons why we addressed not only the caseload pressures that were not funded in the previous year by the previous government but also accounted for some level of caseload growth, because when our front-line workers are able to address and work directly with families, we know that those families will have better outcomes.

We also know that there might be a better ability for those children to stay in their homes with more consistent supports when our front-line caseworkers have the ability to work with those families. That's what has a real and true impact on the outcomes of children, and not only from the perspective of better outcomes but also it is reduced costs. We know that when a child is able to safely stay in their home, we can provide services at an estimated cost to government of about \$700 a month, and when a child has to come into the care of government, that can go up to almost \$10,000 a

month. Certainly, this isn't about money, but it's about the outcomes of children.

We want to make sure that children and families are supported, and we also recognize that that looks different for every family, so we are committed to working with other ministries. This is happening at the ministry level but certainly also with the ministers of the ministries that I mentioned. We are committed to looking at: what are some of the root causes? How can we do better on prevention by working together across ministries in a way that has not been done before? Also really, truly listening to the feedback of community partners. I mean, they do exceptional work to support families across the province.

**The Acting Chair:** All right. First 20 minutes. Do you want to continue? Thank you very much. Continue.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. I don't disagree with a lot of what you're saying, although I will say again that to measure your success, you should have targets. Again, this is just isolated. My question is specifically to . . .

**Ms Schulz:** Well, we do have targets for our measures, but not necessarily for indicators as the indicators help us to look at things in a slightly different way.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. Well, when we're talking about efficiency and good use of government dollars, a good way to judge that would be to see whether or not the number of children in care receiving child intervention services has gone down. I just think that without targets it will be challenging for you to measure that. But I think that will be your challenge when you have to issue your annual report next year.

On that, you've mentioned a few times that the reality is that there's a growing population, with a lot of complicating factors, particularly when supports and stress on low-income families increase, particularly when perhaps life has become less affordable because school fees have gone up and AISH has been deindexed and personal income tax has been deindexed. As those pressures continue on low-income families, we do know that the caseload, as you've indicated, will likely, unfortunately, go up.

I'm just looking now at page 190 of the fiscal plan. This sets out the FTEs for the ministry. I see that there is no anticipated change in the number of FTEs. Given that you have, you know, acknowledged and we all, I think, will appreciate the unfortunate reality that caseload growth will go up, just how would you plan to manage that caseload growth with no FTE increases?

**Ms Schulz:** Our number of FTEs in Children's Services remains stable. We have more than 2,700 FTEs, total staff count of more than 2,900 as some of those employees may be on different working arrangements, as you can appreciate. Children's Services also has the lowest manager-to-bargaining-unit ratio in all of government at 1 to 14. For front-line child intervention service delivery that ratio is 1 to 20. Children's Services also has 87 regional offices across the province providing supports to children, youth, and families who need them. I also appreciate that sometimes this work is not 9 to 5; in fact, it's 24/7 and sometimes 365 days a year.

In addition to maintaining our current number of FTEs, we have worked to reallocate staff from more support service positions to help with front-line case pressures. We are also continuing – and this is ongoing since April, when following the change in government we have opened up the positions to fill those vacant positions; however, it's sometimes, as you can appreciate, also difficult to find the right people for the right job. It is very challenging work, the work of front-line Children's Services' staff. It is also unique.

We also – and, I mean, I heard this loud and clear this summer. I travelled not only in Calgary, Edmonton, rural, southern Alberta – I spent time with MLA Neudorf – but also up to Grande Prairie, High Prairie and took the time to listen to staff, meet front-line staff, have them explain the types of cases that they were working on and what the work is they do but also get their feedback on what some of the challenges are when it comes to especially recruitment and retention in rural, remote, and northern communities.

We do have also a working group within the ministry, who are currently working to review how we can better do that and come up with a strategy to recruit and retain staff specifically in northern and rural communities, but it's also sometimes having enough qualified candidates applying for those positions as the requirements are quite high. Part of that is also working with postsecondary institutions, and it's sometimes difficult. Even though we have vacant positions, given some of the challenges that there are in staffing and filling those positions, it does take a little bit longer to get people working in those roles.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. Yes. I've heard some concerns with respect to something you mentioned earlier, which is about the idea that some support staff, not necessarily support staff, but people are being moved into front-line positions who may not necessarily be qualified or have the experience to do that kind of work. That's a concern that I've heard when speaking with child care workers over the last few months, that there are staff that are being moved into positions that they're not necessarily qualified for. I appreciate that it may be challenging to fill those positions, and I believe that Children's Services and front-line child intervention workers – it's an area where it is extremely, as you mentioned, high stress.

It's a very high turnover area, and therefore I'm wondering what measures you're taking to proactively address those issues – right? – to actually look for and ensure that there are qualified people who are supported so that they stay in the job because, as you know, a significant part of child intervention work is developing those relationships with the children and families and maintaining that relationship. Therefore, it isn't simply about, you know, filling positions; it's also about actively doing things to encourage staff to stay and to remain in those positions and making sure that they're properly qualified.

**9:40**

You mentioned working with postsecondary institutions, but at the same time – not a matter for this estimates debate today – we see that there have been significant cuts to postsecondary, making it more challenging for individuals to enter postsecondary both because of the increase in tuition and the cuts to the education tax credits. There are so many different ways that postsecondaries are now under attack. So how are you proactively going to ensure that you have the appropriate number and qualified staff for the high-stress and important work of your ministry?

**Ms Schulz:** Well, first of all, I'd like to acknowledge that the premise of your question is absolutely, one hundred per cent, completely false. We have caseworkers in support positions we have used to fill vacancies, but we have to use delegated workers for delegated roles. There are very specific requirements for caseworkers, whether that be experience and education, and certainly the premise of your question, in terms of putting in people who are unqualified for those positions, is completely false.

**Ms Pancholi:** To be clear, Minister, that's what I'm hearing from staff, okay? That's what I'm hearing as feedback from staff.

**Ms Schulz:** I would also like to say that you mentioned caseload growth due to AISH deindexing and other comments, and certainly those are not some of the drivers that we've seen. So I did want to clarify your comments around that.

Our caseload pressures are increasing because of the complexity of the cases that we're seeing. As I mentioned in my earlier comments, a lot of that is around things like mental health, addictions, the opioid crisis. We saw a 36 per cent increase in . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister.

Can you answer my question about what you're doing to proactively ensure that there are qualified and appropriate staff for the high-stress work of your ministry?

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely. We are working. We are filling qualified positions. When we look at our numbers, sometimes it is just getting those people who are qualified to apply for those positions, so ensuring that we are doing some work around recruitment and retention. That is certainly something that had been done in the past that some of our front-line staff had said they would like to see again. As I said, they're working together on a committee to come up with a recruitment and retention strategy. That is one of the things that they identified.

A number of years ago there was some work to potentially recruit some graduates of the social work schools because we do have a number of students graduating from social work programs. Part of it is ensuring that they know that these opportunities exist, and we're doing our work to recruit those staff to apply to positions within Children's Services.

We also have a review of the child intervention workplace, which is currently under way to identify some of those systemic issues that also impact workplace culture. This review is being undertaken in partnership with the AUPE.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister.

If we could move on to looking at line 2.1 of the estimates, which is on page 45. That's program planning and delivery. I do note that we are seeing a reduction there in terms of the budget as compared to both the budget from 2018-19 but also the 2018-19 actuals. I understand from looking at the estimates that program planning and delivery – and this is according to page 44 of the estimates – “sustains non-program supports for regional service delivery.” I'm wondering if you can provide a little bit of clarification as to what this budget line covers in terms of work. Is this related at all to the collaborative service delivery model that I know was being used in some areas quite fluently, in some areas not so much? Is it related to that?

**Ms Schulz:** As you've identified, we have a history of regional service delivery in this province, and some of the challenges with that are inconsistent services for vulnerable children, youth, and families. Budget 2019 does address our fiscal challenges. In this specific budget line we took a critical look to ensure that all possible resources were being directed to front-line service, which resulted in a slight decrease for that specific line item.

**Ms Pancholi:** Can you clarify what that decrease is related to? In what way was it not being done before?

**Ms Schulz:** That's specifically related to some of our corporate service delivery, and it also reflects a move of the salaries for staff who were moved somewhere else within the ministry. It's not related to collaborative service delivery.

**Ms Pancholi:** It's not related. Okay. And you say that this staff – are you saying that this is really a result of just people moving from one area to another area?

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. Can you describe the work that was done by these staff before and now where they're going to be moving to, what kind of work they'll be doing?

**Ms Schulz:** Corporate procurement, finance.

**Ms Pancholi:** Is that not covered under corporate services, which is line 1.4?

**Ms Schulz:** There is some duplication, and that's exactly why those positions have moved.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. So that's not a reduction in any services?

**Ms Schulz:** No.

**Ms Pancholi:** It's simply a transfer. Okay. Thank you very much.

Okay. I'd like to move on to line 5.1 and line 5.2 of the estimates on page 45. Line 5.1 is policy and innovation and line 5.2 is indigenous connections. Again, I looked back at the 2018-19 annual report, which describes the work covered by these areas within the ministry as focusing on

improving outcomes for Indigenous children and families in Alberta through cultural understanding, relationship building and strategic leadership.

. . . integration across programs, particularly of lessons learned and best practices, strengthens ongoing activities, and promotes a culture of innovation.

The division is responsible for promoting Indigenous cultural awareness throughout the ministry by enhancing the understanding of Indigenous people and communities, and working collaboratively with partners on initiatives relevant to children, youth and families.

Both of those areas, again, show a decrease with respect to both comparisons to the 2018-19 budget but also to the actuals. Again, my first question is with respect to policy and innovation, line 5.1. It's going down from \$7.6 million in the actuals to \$6.3 million in the 2019-20 estimates. My question is: with respect to policy and innovation is there work that's no longer being done?

**Ms Schulz:** Well, that's actually a really good question. A lot of these were one-time grants, so the work that's being done by the policy and innovation and indigenous connections area is incredibly important. When I say one-time grants, a lot of this funding was provided by the community capacity-building grants. That was one-time funding to work towards identifying early intervention and prevention supports for First Nations. Now federal funding is available, so the provincial money was used to identify some of the gaps. The federal funding has now kicked in to support prevention and early intervention activities on-reserve, in those places where the capacity-building and the original planning, those one-time grants, are complete. Those grants were not intended to be ongoing.

**Ms Pancholi:** You might not be able to do it now. If you could provide it in writing later, are you able to break down what grants those are, the one-time grants that you're referring to, and how much they amounted to?

**Ms Schulz:** I actually can tell you most of that.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay.

**Ms Schulz:** Examples of some of the one-time grants would be community needs assessment, community engagement on child and family services, development of the cultural understanding tools . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** Sorry. And the amounts if you can.

**Ms Schulz:** Okay. That's a more specific request, but two specific ones that we've reduced due to the completion of the work and the ending of the contracts: there is a \$2 million decrease for child and youth data lab and PolicyWise grants as that work is completed, and our ministry is happy to look at things, contract work for research as needed, but those grants have been completed. Specifically, those would be an additional \$0.38 million decrease for the community capacity-building grants.

**Ms Pancholi:** You say that most of those grants were one-time grants and now we're receiving federal . . .

**Ms Schulz:** They were set up as one-time grants. Absolutely.

**Ms Pancholi:** Can you clarify as to the federal money? Does it equal the same amount as what those grants totalled? Again, if you don't have it with you, if you're able to provide it in writing.

**Ms Schulz:** It's actually more as this year the federal funding was \$10 million. We expect that to grow over the next four years as I identified in my opening remarks.

9:50

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. Thank you. That was with respect to the indigenous connections, 5.2?

**Ms Schulz:** Uh-huh. Also, I should clarify that the ministry has undertaken quite a bit of work, actually, to look at training around culture. That was one of the things that was identified coming out of the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. Also, some of the grant funding went to working with First Nations and Métis communities to actually develop that cultural training. Certainly, the Public Service Commission has the indigenous learning initiative, but the indigenous and cultural training for our staff in the ministry of Children's Services actually goes one step further. When we went to undertake the development of these materials, the ministry worked directly with specific First Nations to make sure that the training was culturally appropriate and engaged First Nations and Métis people in coming up with that training.

To date almost 80 per cent of Children's Services front-line staff have taken that training, the foundational training. Another just about 1,500 staff have also completed training in one of the four-day cultural understanding trainings that happen throughout the ministry. One is based on Cree and the other is based on Blackfoot cultural teachings. We're continuing to strengthen that training throughout the ministry, but obviously the development of those training materials was complete, and that's why some of those funds are no longer necessary.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you. That was one of my questions; it was going to be about how that relates to the action plans that were set out from the ministerial panel. It sounds like that work is – now some of it's going to have to continue to be ongoing, right?

**Ms Schulz:** Yeah. Absolutely.

**Ms Pancholi:** It's not one of those things where you just culturally train everybody and, you know, it's done. It has to be sort of an ongoing work. That work is going to be continuing, so you'll be

continuing with those commitments under the action plan. That's good to hear.

Okay, I'm going to switch a little bit. I know my colleagues might have more questions on these issues when it gets to them, but I'd like to switch if I can to child care. Let's begin with page 92 of the fiscal plan which talks about the review of the Child Care Licensing Act. I understand, of course, that the government has the red tape reduction process in place. Is this review simply as a result of the red tape reduction review? Is this part of the reduction review, or are there additional challenges with respect to the Child Care Licensing Act that have been identified that are leading to this review?

**Ms Schulz:** Partially red tape reduction is part of that. In meeting with a number of child care operators and owners over the past number of months, that's certainly one of the things that came up, but also the regulations are up for review in 2020. It's actually quite a perfect time to take a look to see if we can listen to the feedback of front-line child care workers, child care operators, child care supervisors. They've identified a number of red tape areas where we could reduce red tape already. There will also be further consultation as we look to transform the child care system but also specifically look at the regulations.

Consultation is incredibly important on that front, but we also want to look at what other provinces are doing and really truly take into consideration some of the feedback that I heard over the summer. I know MLA Neudorf could speak to this. When I visited Lethbridge, he had a group of eight or 13, quite a large number of people, engaged in the child care and early learning community in Lethbridge, and certainly that was one table where I heard quite a bit of feedback.

I also recognize that northern Alberta has unique challenges. What's needed in downtown Edmonton or Calgary is sometimes different than what's needed in suburban Calgary or Edmonton. That's why I felt it was important to spend the last six months talking to front-line child care workers and operators to at least get some basic ideas of where we can make improvements, but we're certainly open to feedback and suggestions on that as we move forward.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister.

Given that the review of the Child Care Licensing Act is part of this budget, are you anticipating, then, that you will be bringing forward new legislation as well as regulations within the next session of the Legislature?

**Ms Schulz:** The original timing was a little bit later than that. It was actually scheduled for next fall, so that gives us time to fully consult with child care workers, parents across Alberta, get their feedback, and do a thorough crossjurisdictional scan. That's part of our work moving forward but not necessarily the regulations piece. We're not planning to have that in . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. The second block of 20 minutes has expired. Member Pancholi, do you wish to continue? Final 20. Thank you.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll come back to this one later if I have more time.

Page 72 of the fiscal plan refers to – I'll give you a moment to flip to that – the ELCC, the agreement between the federal government and the province. The federal government, as you very well know, transfers \$45 million per year for the ELCC program.

On page 48 of the estimates, this is forward looking, right? Sorry. No. This is your statement of operations. In terms of revenue it indicates there as actuals that federal transfers, you know, were

roughly about \$73 million, \$74 million in 2018-2019. You anticipate it to be a little bit lower. Would I be correct in saying that this dollar figure for other federal transfers includes that transfer of \$45 million for the ELCC program?

**Ms Schulz:** Yes. In the federal transfers that includes a child special allowance and revenue for early learning and child care. The child special allowance is the tax-free monthly payment to help with the care and education of children who are under the age of 18 who physically reside in Canada. The early learning and child care piece – obviously, as you know, almost two years ago the Canada-Alberta bilateral funding agreement was signed, resulting in those federal transfers to flow. That is also up for renegotiation, and now that the federal election has concluded, we're hoping that those discussions will begin to take place again soon.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister.

That actually leads to my next question. I'm looking now at page 23 of the business plan, which provides sort of the projections for the next few years, the targets at least for the next few years. I note, for example, that under Other Federal Transfers the anticipation at least for your ministry is that those transfers will stay relatively static from the federal government, which means, to my reading, that when drafting this and preparing your estimates, you were counting on the fact that the federal government would continue to transfer.

We know that the current federal-provincial agreement for ELCCs is up at the end of 2021 in terms of the funding, that \$45 million per year, but these projections go forward to the end of 2023. I'm seeing that that amount is not projected to change. It seems to me that your projections were based on the premise that the federal government will continue to transfer money for early learning child care centres.

**Ms Schulz:** Well, as you know, that's why we're here today to talk about this year's estimates. The out-years are clearly a placeholder. We've had no indication from the federal government that that funding will change, but next year I'd be happy to talk to you about what that looks like in the out-years.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you. I just find it interesting because certainly in the most recent federal election we saw that the federal Conservative Party had no plans to transfer any money; they had nothing in their platform with respect to child care. We do know that the current Liberal government, that was re-elected a few weeks ago, did have a commitment to continue providing transfer payments to provinces for an increase in child care spaces and making child care more affordable. I appreciate what you're saying, that we're here today to talk about the 2019 budget, but I find it interesting to note that currently your ministry . . .

**Ms Schulz:** Is there a question here? We don't base the budget on what-ifs.

**Ms Pancholi:** Yeah. The question is: were you counting on the Liberal government winning in order to make your projections for the next four years?

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely not; 71 per cent of Albertans voted for a Conservative government because they know that jobs allow people opportunities to find employment and provide for their families.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. It just seems interesting.

I also note that in the child care projections it's similar. It rarely stays within the same range. Now, I appreciate that the child care line on these projections includes many things, not just access for

ELCCs or affordable child care, but I'm just curious as to – again, there seems to be some commitment at least to maintain some degree of the current child care. Does that mean that there's a projection going forward that you will maintain at least the current support for affordable child care?

**Ms Schulz:** Here's what I can tell you. Under the previous government the pilot, while focusing on a Quebec-style daycare model, which people clearly did not vote for in the Alberta election – I do want to break down some of the numbers: 122 centres out of more than 2,800 centres in this province had access to \$25-a-day child care . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister.

My question for you was whether or not your child care projections going forward on page 23 of your business plan reflect an ongoing commitment to the current state of affairs for child care.

**10:00**

**Ms Schulz:** What I have said publicly a number of times in response to similar questions is that we're going to take a look at child care. We want to make sure. Obviously, we have to be responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars because we were left in a fiscal disaster partially, in fact, by the policies put forward by the previous government. We need to balance our budget. We need to get people back to work . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. I actually note that for the 2020-2021 . . .

**Ms Schulz:** . . . we need to focus on the economy, and we need to focus on quality, accessibility, and affordability for child care in Alberta.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. I note that for 2020-2021 in the targets, which are actually going to come into effect shortly, right? – we're going to see that the 2020-2021 budget will be brought in in just a few months – it actually shows a marked decrease from \$423 million to \$413 million in child care. Do you have a sense yet of why that would be decreasing?

**Ms Schulz:** As I've said, these numbers are placeholders, and that's why we're here today to talk about this year's estimates. If you have other questions relevant to this year, I'd be happy to take them.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. I'm just curious as to why that number – you already seem to be projecting that it will decrease. I'm just wondering if you're privy to information that you'd like to share with us as to why that number will decrease.

**Ms Schulz:** The out-years are placeholder numbers. We are looking at all facets of the child care system as we make decisions going forward. We also saw an increase in the number of families who wanted to access child care subsidies, so we have focused on funding those child care subsidies for low-income Albertans who need help to go back to university, postsecondary education and take part in the workforce. We have also, though, reduced two specific subsidies. One of the them is the kin childcare. That was a subsidy program where parents could pay a family member to take care of their children in their own home. The difficulty with that program is that (a) it had a small number of children and families accessing that program, but it also had no checks and balances. There was no . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. Actually, I do have a question about the child care subsidy if we can get to that.

**Ms Schulz:** Sure.

**Ms Pancholi:** Line 3.1 of the estimates on page 45. I see that – sorry; I'll give you a moment there.

**Ms Schulz:** I think this is what I was answering when you interrupted, but go ahead.

**Ms Pancholi:** I haven't asked my question, so I don't think you know yet. According to page 20 of the business plan \$176 million of the line item there, which is for \$296 million, is for subsidy, right? Would that be correct? So the \$296 million that's set out there, \$176 million of that is for subsidy.

**Ms Schulz:** Let me just double-check. That is correct.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. I'm guessing, then, that the remainder of that \$296 million, which would be roughly about \$120 million, is for oversight of program licensing, inspection, and staff certification. Is that correct?

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. I'm just wondering. In terms of the subsidy, can you just clarify as to whether or not this \$176 million is an increase or decrease from previous years?

**Ms Schulz:** That's an increase.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. Have any changes been made? Are you anticipating any changes to be made with respect to the thresholds for subsidy in terms of the salary amount that a family needs to make before they're eligible? Are there any anticipated changes to that?

**Ms Schulz:** I mean, as we look at the overall child care system, that could be one of the things that we look at, but ultimately what we want to make sure is that parents who are accessing subsidy now – one of those things is also simplifying and streamlining the subsidy process. Some of the feedback we heard is that, actually, in some cases it's a lot of child care workers and child care operators who are helping families through a very complex and onerous process to apply for subsidies. So we wanted to cover the increase in caseload growth for a subsidy, but we're also streamlining the system so that parents will have an easier time applying for and accessing those subsidies. There are no changes in this . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. Thank you. I just wanted to clarify that there are no changes to the threshold for this budget year with respect to subsidies.

**Ms Schulz:** No. Absolutely not.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. Thank you.  
How much time, Chair, do I have left on this?

**The Acting Chair:** You have 10 minutes.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. Maybe I will jump into the advancing futures bursary if I can.

**Ms Schulz:** Sure.

**Ms Pancholi:** Page 21 of the business plan talks about outcome 3 initiatives: \$11 million is allocated to supporting youth transitioning to adulthood through mentoring and advancing futures. I'm just wondering if you can clarify. That \$11 million that

is indicated there on page 21: how much of that is for advancing futures?

**Ms Schulz:** All of it; \$11 million dollars is allocated for advancing futures this year. As we announced yesterday, \$1 million of that is a reallocation because I wanted to increase the amount of money available for children who are transitioning from care into postsecondary and, ultimately, into the workforce.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. Sorry. It's just because on page 21 it refers to \$11 million as supporting advancing futures and mentoring. I know that mentoring is often different, but you're saying that this is all for advancing futures?

**Ms Schulz:** When you talk about advancing futures and mentoring – and this is all under prevention and early intervention – there are a number of different supports that are available to youth that are transitioning out of care. One of those is advancing futures. The advancing futures program is unique in Canada because it is more than just a scholarship program. This program not only provides funding for the basic financial needs of students who are transitioning into postsecondary but also some of those social and emotional supports, and that comes along with mentorship, if you will, as part of advancing futures.

For example, this week I met with a young person who just completed a degree in commerce at the U of A, is now in law school, took advantage of the advancing futures program. Even though he did have some family supports and maybe perhaps more than some other children who are coming out of the child intervention system, he said that it was great to have an advancing futures worker who was there to answer questions about: I'm moving to Edmonton; what area should I live in? Sometimes the supports that are provided – it is social, it is emotional, and it's helping these young people maybe apply for other scholarships. Maybe it's about: how do I rent an apartment? How do I fill out a lease form? That's part of the mentorship that's part of the advancing futures program, and we did increase that by reallocating \$1 million because this program is so incredibly important.

**Ms Pancholi:** I agree with you, Minister, a hundred per cent agree, that the advancing futures bursary is very important. I'm wondering if you can tell me how many applications the advancing futures bursary received this past year.

**Ms Schulz:** Over 980 submitted applications in the last year; 792 students received funding and support, and they were enrolled in 90 institutions and campuses across the province. That was for '18-19. This year we did see an increase. As you know, there was some fearmongering about this program potentially ending, which is obviously not the case as we've reallocated additional funding for this. But we did see an increase of, I think, about a hundred applications. Obviously, these applications are slightly more complex to go through, so there was a slight delay in opening up the next intake for the spring. I also want to point out that one of the incredible things about this program is not only supporting youth who are transitioning out of care, but it is the high completion rate of these programs. I think it's 84 or 85 per cent. I think that largely speaks to the impact of the mentorship component of this specific program.

**Ms Pancholi:** Can you indicate for the advancing futures bursary how that works in term of: does it cover the entire cost of the student's postsecondary or a portion of it?

**Ms Schulz:** All of it. It not only covers the cost of basic education but also additional things like rent, food, other supports that a child might need. That depends on a young person's situation, so it's not always the same amount. On average last year the cost for each award was \$12,625 per year.

**Ms Pancholi:** Given that we're going to see an absolute hike in postsecondary fees given the removal of the tuition freeze as well as – clearly, again, this is not estimates for Advanced Education, but we do know that it's absolutely going to involve tuition hikes for postsecondary institutions across the province. Will the amount of bursary available to youth transitioning out of care into postsecondary increase as well to cover the tuition hikes?

**Ms Schulz:** There are no caps in this program, so we fund the students who apply, and we fund the amount of the costs that they need.

You had asked a little bit about mentoring and advancing futures, so I do want to clarify that in addition to the mentorship that goes along with the advancing futures program, we are also maintaining a mentorship program, and that is for those young people between the ages of 18 and 24, again, providing emotional and social supports. This is \$1.5 million around that, and that helps these young people become resilient, confident adults.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. You've indicated that the advancing futures bursary covers the full cost of tuition as well as other costs associated with a young person's postsecondary education. Given the fact that postsecondary tuition is going to increase, does that mean that it's possible that that \$1 million that's been reallocated to advancing futures is really going to go to eat up the increasing cost of tuition? I see you shaking your head, but I'm wondering: how can you assure that?

*10:10*

**Ms Schulz:** The increased \$1 million is based on the increased number of applications and what we anticipate program participation to be in the out-years.

**Ms Pancholi:** So then do you anticipate, if the number of applications is increasing, which I think is a great thing – that shows that more people are interested. Young people are looking for that support in transitioning into postsecondary. With the number of applications increasing and the cost of postsecondary tuition increasing, doesn't that mean that this budget is going to have to go up even more? Or is that going to mean that you're going to have to not accept or approve as many applications?

**Ms Schulz:** As I said, this program doesn't have any caps. Our budget is an estimate to cover the cost of the increased applications for the program. I also want to point out that not all of the young people who are applying to this program are accessing postsecondary. It's also to cover things like upgrading. As you can appreciate, these young people have been through challenging circumstances, and some of them use this bursary to further upgrade their high school as well.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. Yes, I actually am aware of that although I'd also note that with the flat funding for education, school boards that provide continuing education or postsecondary organizations such as NorQuest College that provide that upgrading are also likely going to have charge more fees for students who are attending upgrading.

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Point of order.

**The Acting Chair:** A point of order has been called.

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Standing Order 23(b). I fail to see how this is relevant to the subject.

**The Acting Chair:** Standing Order 23(b). Okay. You say that it "speaks to matters other than the question under discussion."

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Yeah.

**The Acting Chair:** Or did you said relevance?

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Well, under the subject that we're discussing.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Would you like to speak to this further?

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Sure. Yeah. Again, we're here to talk about the Children's Services budget, and we've wandered into Advanced Education. I fail to see how that's relevant.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay.

**Ms Pancholi:** I'd like to respond if I may.

**The Acting Chair:** Sure. Absolutely.

**Ms Pancholi:** Well, this is a budget line within the Ministry of Children's Services that's directly related to covering postsecondary tuition. Therefore, it's absolutely linked when we're talking about covering postsecondary tuition, how much that budget will cover, and whether or not it will increase the cost of postsecondary. I believe that it's directly related to the issue.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Thank you.

Does anybody else have any further comments?

**Ms Glasgo:** The minister has clearly stated that this does not only just cover postsecondary education; this is specific to Children's Services and covers things like upgrading, which the member also nodded in appreciation of. I think that the member is now grandstanding, and at this point it's time to go back to debate and get back to the matter at hand.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. I'm prepared to rule on this. There's a lot of latitude that has certainly been granted, as in all of the committees over the last several days. We've provided a lot of latitude here. We are here to talk about Children's Services, so I strongly suggest that we talk about the line items, the business plan as it pertains to Children's Services. I certainly appreciate the argument by the Official Opposition that they are trying to draw a link. I certainly appreciate that. I'm going to rule that there is not a point of order here. However, I strongly encourage that we continue to talk about Children's Services, and if we are drawing any sort of link to another department, we may do that. However, I want to make sure that we're talking about the business plan and the line items as they pertain to Children's Services.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Schulz:** I'd also like to point out that I answered the question repeatedly, that the program criteria has not changed. The additional reallocation of \$1 million will cover the amount of increasing applications for this program.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you. Just to clarify, it'll cover the increasing applications, but also if each application costs more, it will also cover that.

**Ms Schulz:** There is enough money, we believe, to cover the amount of applications that we have received in this budget year. It is an incredibly important program, and as I have said a number of times, despite the fearmongering, despite the scare tactics, this program is not going anywhere. It is a hugely important part of transitioning young people from care into postsecondary and the workforce, and we are one hundred per cent committed to that.

Thank you very much for questions.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you. To be clear, I'm also bringing up these questions because they were brought up by individuals who had concerns about the advancing futures bursary, and to refer to that as fearmongering is very disturbing from the Minister of Children's Services.

**Ms Schulz:** Certainly, we've heard those concerns as well, which came from misinformation being spread about the program.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. Moving on, I wanted to talk a little bit about the business plan.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Thank you. The first hour has expired.

We will now go over to the government caucus side for the next 20 minutes. Who will be starting? Member Glasgo will be starting. Go ahead. The floor is yours.

**Ms Glasgo:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We are just off to a great start here. Minister, I'm definitely interested to hear your answers to these questions because just watching you in the House and having the privilege to get to know you for the past few months, I know that you have a real heart for this and that Children's Services is something that you're very passionate about and something that you feel very strongly about. I've noticed that you've talked about transformational change and how it's so important that we have cultural supports for our children and affordable child care.

I know that there has been a lot of talk on both sides of this table, not that anyone is hearing it right now, about affordability of child care, and I know that you're focused and you have a laser focus on making sure that these families have that affordable child care as well as making sure that children and youth are protected and that the growth and development of children is supported. I think it's really great that you are focusing on that, just the amount of care that you are taking and the attention that you're giving to these programs that are under your watch as well as to the families directly. I know that this is a different approach from previous governments because you are making a concerted effort to actually go to where the people are instead of, you know, just having dome disease, sitting in Edmonton and going from there. I think it's really important that you get out into the communities, so I'm very excited to see that as well as excited to invite you down to Medicine Hat soon because I think that'll be really fun.

I'm just going to get started on page 43 of the estimates, Minister, so I'll give you some time to get there. I know you had a really tough budget this year. I know that there are some decisions that had to be made. The previous government, as we have stated ad nauseum, led us to an absolute train wreck for fiscal sustainability, on track for \$100 billion in debt as well as a variety of other problems within the budget, also overstating revenues and everything else like that, understating how bad the deficit really was. I was just wondering if you could elaborate on the challenges that you were left with from the previous government. I know you kind of alluded to them in your remarks to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, but I was wondering if you could elaborate on those further and what made your budget so difficult this year.

**Ms Schulz:** First I would say that any and all budgets are, you know, sometimes difficult, but also they're a good opportunity to look at what's working really well and what are things that we could do differently or, in fact, better, especially when that comes to supporting vulnerable children, youth, and their families. Obviously, on page 43 we see an increase in our estimates not only over the previous year's budget but over the previous year's actual.

One of the things that complicated this budget a little bit was that in the last budget year there was a \$5.7 million encumbrance in child intervention. What that means is that child intervention and front-line services were not adequately funded. It's important to me that those front-line services are funded because strong casework is how we support directly, on the front lines, the children, youth and families in need, as I've said already in the first hour today, providing that fulsome, dedicated support early on and as soon as we can. Our caseworkers within the ministry do incredible work, incredibly difficult and challenging work, obviously, but just incredible work to make sure that the safety and well-being of children, youth, and families are the most important things that we focus on.

The caseload growth was not funded. We started the year with an encumbrance of \$5.7 million. We accounted for that in this year's budget, but then we also wanted to make sure that we were accounting for that increase in caseload. We also know root causes are what sometimes bring children into care. Those are not things that we in the Ministry of Children's Services control, and I've addressed that as well, things like mental health and addictions, other root causes. That's why we are focusing our work as well in terms of prevention and early intervention somewhat.

We're continuing to do the good work based on the Well-being and Resiliency framework, that identifies research and best practices, what we know about brain science and brain development in young children, how we can focus on better outcomes. We're also working with our colleagues in Mental Health and Addictions, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Community and Social Services, the Minister of Justice. We are working together, obviously not quick fixes, but certainly identifying some of the things that we can address in the long term.

**10:20**

Also, there was an increase in child intervention to accommodate the fact that there is a higher number of children in care. That's often a consistent link with the growing population. So typically in Children's Services we see about 1.7 per cent of the child population receiving some kind of services from the child intervention system, so obviously as the population increases, the number of cases increases. Also, as I mentioned before, the complexity of the cases has grown. That is one of the things that I heard over the summer. Certainly, in different areas of the province, depending on a number of different factors and needs or challenges facing a certain community, that doesn't look the same for every family, and it certainly doesn't look the same for every region of the province.

**Ms Glasgo:** I appreciate that, Minister. Thank you for elaborating on that. I know that sometimes in these kind of estimates it's hard to get a good chunk of time to be able to say exactly what you need to say and to also really explain these things. It's not black and white. This is very complicated and convoluted. I know and I respect the fact that your department has made some difficult decisions and that you have as well and that a lot of time goes into making those decisions, so I think it's fair that you get a chance to elaborate on that and get a chance to tell the public exactly what's going on in Children's Services, the good work that our government

is doing and the good work that you're doing, the dedication that you're bringing to the table to make sure that these things happen.

You basically answered the next question that I was going to give you. You were very thorough in your response. Thank you for that. On line item 2 on page 45 of the estimates is where I'm going next, so I'll give you a second to get there as well. Caseworkers in your ministry – we've talked about them, that there's increased caseload pressure and that a lot of this is due to content, and you know that it is a difficult job. I know that in difficult situations this can cause burnout. In fact, I heard this in other committees. Yesterday, in this committee, we talked about this in education as well. Sometimes, you know, it is a burdensome task. These jobs are difficult, but people have to take them on.

I wonder, Minister. I'm sure recruitment can be a challenge for these, especially in rural and remote areas. I think about my own riding of Brooks-Medicine Hat and just how difficult it is, especially in some of the smaller communities like Duchess, Rosemary, even Brooks itself, and to be fair, even Medicine Hat. I can appreciate how hard it might be to get people to come and work in these areas, especially given the higher rate of caseloads coming in. I would just be curious if you could expand on – obviously, this is relating to line item 2 on page 45 of the estimates – how you're supporting staff to ensure that they can continue to provide services for these vulnerable families. What are you doing to address these unique challenges? Also, if you could centre that around rural Alberta, that would be very helpful.

Thank you.

**Ms Schulz:** Well, that's actually a good question. As I've said, I did spend a fair amount of time this summer in rural Alberta, and that was one of the things that I heard, though especially in rural northern Alberta. I have met with some of our front-line staff and management from your area who share a region – I talked a little bit about the regional model – some staff who cover the area from Brooks-Medicine Hat and all the way over to Lethbridge. I talked a little bit about the recruitment and retention. Sometimes what staff have said is that they will go to a rural or remote area or sometimes to northern Alberta until they can get another position. I was lucky enough to meet some of our incredible front-line staff members in northern Alberta who just chose to live in a rural community.

What staff identified is that we do need to take another look at recruitment and retention in rural areas, understanding that there are different and unique challenges. The workload looks slightly different, obviously, as you mentioned, partly due to the geographic location and front-line caseworkers covering a broader geographic location.

I've also made it clear to front-line staff that when the government talks about red tape, if there are things, you know, that we do that make it difficult for them to do their jobs, we want to hear about it. You know, our first priority is the safety and support of children, youth, and families, without question, but it's also supporting our staff to make sure that they have the tools, the resources, and the flexibility that they need to make sure that they can support these vulnerable kids and families. One of the examples was a slight policy item, but I remember hearing this from somebody in our staff in the ministry. They said: you know, previously we had policies, and there's a lot of rigidity, but there also has to be flexibility. For example, when looking over – and we do. We receive Child and Youth Advocate reports. We post any incidents of death or serious incidents regarding children in care. I take those very seriously. Sorry.

**Ms Glasgo:** Take your time, Minister.

**Ms Schulz:** There are times – sorry; I didn't expect that today, pull myself together.

There might be cases where a caseworker meets a family who are providing good-quality care for their kids, but they just need a crib. It's just making sure that our policies are flexible enough. As a mom of two young kids under four these are things that – sorry; did not expect this today.

**The Acting Chair:** Take your time, Minister.

**Ms Glasgo:** Minister, take your time. There's no rush.

**Ms Schulz:** I wasn't even going there with my answer, really, but it just kind of happened.

You know, we need to empower our front-line caseworkers to support families. If they are in a loving, safe home, but the barrier for them is providing a crib for their baby, then buy them a crib. Don't worry about approvals. Buy the baby a crib. Support the family with the things that they need to support young children.

That's also about child intervention supports and training. We do have child intervention practitioner training. It's a huge part of the job. There are cases – and I've heard this from front-line staff. You graduate from university with a social work degree, but can anything really prepare you for some of the situations that you're going to encounter as a front line? Certainly, an assessment worker: I think of the work. I really did spend my summer asking front-line staff: "Walk me through. Walk me through the child intervention system. Explain to me what happens when you get a call and what are some of the challenges that arise."

That speaks to the importance of child intervention training. During the first six months of employment with the ministry it's very specific, targeted training to make sure that our front-line caseworkers and support workers have the ability to anticipate what they might see on the job. That can prevent some of the additional stress and mental health challenges that we see in some of those front-line roles. We're also, as I said, doing a review along with AUPE of some of those unique caseload and workload challenges in the ministry to make sure that we're supporting staff in appropriate ways as best we can.

Another thing also – again, it came out of the child intervention panel work – was the peer support program. This is where our staff has access to a supportive community of people who are doing the exact same work, who have seen the same things. Staff are empowered and encouraged to reach out and support one another. So far we have 30 volunteer peer support workers currently, and we're hoping to increase that as the next training is scheduled next month. That will increase, we're hoping, to approximately a hundred trained volunteers so that staff are better positioned to support each other. We also have Shepell services, obviously. All government workers have access to support services through Shepell as well.

But we know some of the issues that come up with the most prevalence in the feedback that we hear from our front-line staff are things like burnout, compassion fatigue, workload pressures, job-related changes, and sometimes it's direct trauma in the workforce. We talk about trauma-informed care. Sometimes it is current trauma; sometimes it is historical trauma that impacts these families. Those are things that we have to consider when supporting our staff.

**10:30**

**Ms Glasgo:** Thank you, Minister. I mentioned this before when we started: this is a difficult topic. I mean, the last thing we want to see is any Alberta children in horrible situations. I think that your dedication to this file as well as your heart for this really shows,

Minister. I would just like to tell you that I know you have the support of, I believe, everybody in this room to do your job to the best of your abilities and that we all support you and know that this is a hard topic to talk about. I know that nobody in this room would begrudge you for feeling that.

I do want to go back to page 43 of the estimates, though. I'm sorry; Chair, could I get a time check?

**The Acting Chair:** About four minutes and 30 seconds.

**Ms Glasgo:** Thank you very much.

On page 43 of the estimates, Minister, I understand that about 65 per cent of your budget, actually, is in place to meet statutory obligations, and that due to this your ministry is faced with year-over-year caseload pressure. We've talked about this a bit, but I feel like we're really only scratching the surface and you probably have more of a story to tell there. How does this budget address those caseload pressures that are only increasing on you at this point?

**Ms Schulz:** When we talk about the statutory obligations – and I don't like to talk about it like that because each case is a child and a family who are in some need of ministry interventions. I've talked about caseload quite a bit. Obviously, 61.4 per cent of our budget is in place to support child intervention. We've talked about a number of the pieces. There is early intervention and prevention. There is child care, but it is more than 60 per cent of our budget that goes directly toward child intervention specifically.

Our population has grown by 8 per cent since 2014, and that's where we do see, given that there are more than 72,000 more children living in this province, some caseload growth but a consistent percentage of the overall child population in Alberta. It is somewhat hard to quantify some of the impacts of the complexities of cases because obviously that requires additional supports, more wraparound services, and more dedicated work by our front-line caseworkers. Also in the last year we saw the number of children in care increase by 6 per cent while the overall caseload of children receiving services was increased by 4 per cent, so there is a slight difference when we look at the numbers that way.

Does that answer your question?

**Ms Glasgo:** Yeah. It does answer my question. I'm sure a lot of this caseload pressure – I do appreciate that you said these aren't just statutory obligations; these are kids. I think that's something we need to stress in this committee, too. I mean, we talk about a lot of things, and it gets heated. We get emotional. We get caught up in the politics of all this, but at the end of the day these are children.

Speaking to you, I think, for the benefit of all members, I know that your heart is in this and that you are really dedicated to making sure that Alberta has the best standard of care for all children and that especially vulnerable children are taken care of. Minister, I just want to thank you for your time today and thank your department for coming here today and for being so transparent about the numbers in this budget and for your dedication to Alberta's kids.

**Ms Schulz:** Well, thank you. I also have to echo that. I am so incredibly blessed with the support that we receive from the ministry and people who have been with the ministry and in this area for a very long time who've provided not only strong advice but – as a new minister on this file I said to front-line staff: I want to know your job. I want to know, you know: what does this look like each and every day? But I also wanted to walk specifically through the entire system. What are the barriers? What does that look like for the front-line assessor? I felt like without having a good understanding of that – I needed that to make good decisions.

I have to thank the officials who are here with me. I think it was actually a really good process as well to go through every single dollar we spend, every single program we offer, and take a look, right? Is this working the best way that it could, or are we doing it because we've done it for 40 years? Because we've done it for 40 years is not a reason to continue services. Because it's going to have an actual impact on the lives of children, youth, and families: that would be the reason. That's the lens that we used when we targeted more specific funding, especially when it comes to child intervention but also in early intervention and prevention.

**Ms Glasgo:** Thank you very much, Minister.

I'm going to resign my time to the other members.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Go ahead, sir. Mr. Nixon.

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Thank you, Minister, for being here today and for the thoughtfulness you've put into your answers. It's obvious you're knowledgeable on this file and that there's been an incredible amount of work on your end.

**The Acting Chair:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Nixon. Time has expired.

As agreed upon, we're going to take our five-minute break, and then we shall return with the Official Opposition. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 10:35 a.m. to 10:41 a.m.]

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. I see members on the government caucus side, I see the minister, and I see members of the Official Opposition. The five minutes has expired. We will continue, and we will be continuing with Member Pancholi.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister. I'd just like to ask you about I believe it's probably part of line 4.2 in the estimates, which is youth in transition. It's just related to this line item, I believe. Can you clarify: would that line item include the support and financial assistance agreements with youth transitioning out of care?

**Ms Schulz:** Yes.

**Ms Pancholi:** Yes. So I do note that, for example, page 22 of the business plan, indicator 3(b), talks about the "percentage of young adults who transition out of child intervention... and access additional supports through Support and Financial Assistance Agreements." I mean, those are good numbers. We want as many young people in care to, I understand, access those supports. Can you give me an idea of how much of that line 4.2, \$12.3 million is allocated for support and financial assistance agreements? I realize that those agreements are partially financial support but other kinds of support as well.

**Ms Schulz:** Sure. We can get back to you on that specific amount.

Do you mind if I clarify your original question from earlier about the voted versus nonvoted lines in the estimates? This is the one you had asked for clarification on that we said we could provide in writing, but I do just want to put it on the record.

**Ms Pancholi:** Oh, sure.

**Ms Schulz:** The \$1.4 billion is the voted expenses, or estimates. That includes the expenditures in the ministry within our immediate control, and that relates specifically to program delivery. These expenditures can be thought of as cash items or cash out the door. That's everything from salaries and benefits, supplies and services, as well as grants. When we talk about nonvoted, that's things like

accounting adjustments, amortization, the Alberta child benefit for 2019, and the Alberta child and family benefit in the future out-years. Those expenditures are noncash items, so that's why they're in the nonvoted section. The \$1.6 billion in the fiscal under the consolidated 2019 estimate is comprised of voted, nonvoted, and then the consolidated adjustments for payments made to other ministries.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you very much.

**Ms Schulz:** Does that answer?

**Ms Pancholi:** It does. Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that.

**Ms Schulz:** Then to continue on, of that amount the supports and financial assistance agreements is in 2.2.

**Ms Pancholi:** Oh, okay. Is that under child intervention services?

**Ms Schulz:** The 4.2 is not the supports and financial assistance. That's part of advancing futures. But the total for supports and financial assistance agreements is \$67,000. Sorry; \$67 million. New chart here.

**Ms Pancholi:** I always get confused by the drop of the last three numbers as well. It's \$67 million. Okay. Can you identify for me the criteria by which somebody who seeks one of these agreements, how they get approved or how they get allocated?

**Ms Schulz:** Sure. Funding for this area is for young adults, and this is to support their transition out of the child intervention system and into adulthood. This is to support them in fully reaching their independence, and obviously that differs depending on a child's needs. The support is partially financial, and that's things like food, clothing, household needs, personal needs, utilities, transportation, and shelter, but it also includes community supports along with the assistance and counsel of a specific identified caseworker. They are, in fact, unique to the individual recipient who would be accessing those supports. The average monthly cost is just over \$1,200 a month. But, again, when we talk a lot about the transition from regional service delivery, there were a huge number of differences in that specific program from region to region, which is one of the things that we're looking at as we move forward in the review of that program.

**Ms Pancholi:** Do you know roughly how many youth are under these agreements? I appreciate that they vary by individual circumstance.

**Ms Schulz:** That's about 500 young people across the province, and that's per year.

**Ms Pancholi:** That's per year? Are they yearly agreements?

**Ms Schulz:** One second. Sorry. I think I've got the wrong number in front of me. Let me clarify that. Here it is: as of June 2019 there were 2,200 young adults with a support and financial assistance agreement. That was a 6 per cent increase over the previous year.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. Currently my understanding is that the criteria in order to be eligible for one of these agreements for young adults would be that they have to be between the ages of 18 and 24. Is that correct?

**Ms Schulz:** That is currently the case. We are reviewing that program. I also want to point out that before entering into a supports and financial assistance agreement, there are two considerations to

make. One is that these children need to be in care at the time that they are 18. But it is also their choice. Not all children and youth who are transitioning out of care necessarily choose that type of agreement, but certainly it is there.

**Ms Pancholi:** Can we go back? You said that it's under review. What's under review?

**Ms Schulz:** We are. One of the things that we're reviewing in this program – and this is in careful consideration of the data – is that when we look at the consideration for young people, it is certainly their choice to enter into a support and financial assistance agreement. We saw quite a sharp decline of uptake in the program at the age of 22, so we are reducing the age of eligibility from 24 to 22. However, there is still access to things like mentorship. As you've seen, we've maintained \$1.5 million in mentorship as well as advancing futures, which will continue on until the age of 24.

**Ms Pancholi:** Sorry. You said that it was under review, but you've already made the decision that you're decreasing the age of accessibility to 22?

**Ms Schulz:** That decision is one thing that we're looking at, but there are also a number of factors. As I've already mentioned, one of those factors is that there is a sharp decline after a young person turns 22 years old. A lot of that sometimes is that these children in some cases have been – I know that you would know this given your background in social work – involved in or in contact with the system for a very long time. Sometimes by the age of 22 we do see a number of these young people no longer interested in accessing that program.

What we did, maintaining that our number one goal is the smooth transition of young people from care into adulthood and understanding that that looks different for different individuals, is that we looked at that number within the age range of 22 to 24 who are still remaining within the system. There were a large number of young people who were or could be eligible for things such as PDD, AISH, or income support. This gives us an ability – certainly, I've been working with the Minister of Community and Social Services, and our ministries have been working at that as well – to make sure that when we are looking at providing services to people, we are providing them with the services. That's not just funding; it's also casework support that is best aligned with their unique needs.

**Ms Pancholi:** Just for confirmation, though, the eligibility age has been changed from 24 to 22?

**Ms Schulz:** It will be reduced from 24 to 22 as of April in the next fiscal year. This is also, again, with the lens of transitioning young people out of care and into adulthood, also, though, making sure that we are building on natural supports that currently exist in a young person's life as well.

**10:50**

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister.

Can you tell me: of the 2,200 individuals, young people, who entered into one of these agreements as of June 2019, how many of those individuals would fall within the 22 to 24 age range?

**Ms Schulz:** This is where the 500 number that I had stated earlier – sorry. That will be the number of young people that are impacted. We've been working very closely with the Ministry of Community and Social Services as a large number of those young people transitioning out will be transitioned on to programs that are better placed to meet their needs.

**Ms Pancholi:** So 500 out of 2,200?

**Ms Schulz:** Again, our goal is always to transition young people into adulthood sooner rather than later, identifying those natural supports, not necessarily waiting till the last minute. It's more about ensuring that we have a seamless transition into adulthood and ensuring, really, that there is equity and that the funding matches the specific needs of the individual.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister.

You had indicated that one of the reasons for dropping this is because you were seeing a decline in the number of individuals, but 500 out of 2,200 is almost a quarter. I know it's not quite, but it's almost a quarter. That doesn't sound like a small amount to me.

**The Acting Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much. Time has expired.

We concluded on the government caucus side with Mr. Nixon. Do you wish to go back and forth with the minister?

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Yes, please.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you very much. Go ahead.

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Perfect. Thank you.

Again, thank you, Minister, for being here and for your dedication to this file and your knowledge on this file. One of the reasons that I ran – and I might get a little emotional, too. Just hearing you talk about . . .

**An Hon. Member:** Kleenex.

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Yeah. We'll get some Kleenexes over here.

Just hearing you talk about our kids and your passion for them and for families, I'm happy that you're on this file, and you bring heart and passion to it. One of the reasons that I ran was to bring a voice from the front line, and what I'm hearing today is that they have a voice. They have a voice in this government, in this ministry because you've taken the time to spend time with our front-line public servants, our civil society partners, and our youth. It's so important that they have a voice, so thank you for taking that time.

I know that I got the chance to tour with you to a number of agencies, and I'm truly inspired by that. I think that this budget is a true reflection of that in regard to you coming and listening. You know, supports for families, more consideration for working across departments and understanding the importance of that, and seamless transitions to adulthood are just all things that are a reflection of that. I can tell you, in talking to my former colleagues, they've all been very impressed, and they haven't seen this type of attention in a long time. So just that importance of working with them and our civil society partners.

I've just got a couple of questions. On page 92 of the fiscal plan the ministry's operating budget is \$1.6 billion, which is an increase of \$94 million compared to 2018-2019. You know, one of the things that I remember you saying, as we were touring, was that we're the last house with the lights on, and we need to make sure that we keep those lights on. I appreciate seeing that increase of \$94 million so that we can always have those lights on for kids that need that.

The expenditure is expected to grow by 15 per cent by 2022-2023 compared to 2018-2019, which is amazing. This government's budget projected a 2.3 per cent reduction across the board, so we're seeing this 15 per cent increase in spite of that, which, again, I think, shows the heart of this government and you, Minister, in regard to our dedication to vulnerable people in our community. But I'm wondering if you can please speak to the reasoning behind the

decision to increase this budget line when we're looking at decreases in other areas.

**Ms Schulz:** Well, certainly, you know, one of the things that I learned quite quickly after being put in this position as Minister of Children's Services – and this was from our Premier but also from our colleagues, who fought so very hard for change in the child intervention system, including the chair as well as a number of our other colleagues, who very soon after took the time to come and just share their feedback and explain that there is a very real focus and a very real commitment to making sure that young people in this province are safe and supported. I mean, you've heard me say this when we're working with our community partners. I am happy to have advice and ideas and input and looking at different ways where we can support vulnerable children, youth, and families better. That includes, obviously, current research; we've talked a lot about the Well-being and Resiliency framework.

But, for me, the support of our colleagues and our government is consistent. We saw it, obviously, when our colleagues were in opposition, and certainly their commitment to the all-party panel on child intervention reinforced that commitment to supporting young children in need. For me, I think that through the budget process it does clearly give us an opportunity to, as I said, look at each and every single program, every single dollar that we've been investing, making sure that they are having the biggest impact possible, making sure that there are checks and balances. We were asked by the people of this province to be fiscally responsible but also, really, to rely on the expertise of our front-line staff and our community partners. Certainly, you know, that was evident in the last place we toured together – I think it was Hull Services – in just seeing the relationships. Relationships are hugely important, especially when we're working with vulnerable children, youth, and families, and also the relationship of front-line workers within our ministry and the community partners who serve vulnerable families in this province.

For me, it makes sense that we increased funding, especially when we're looking at child intervention, front-line services. We've got to make sure the front-line caseworkers have the supports that they need, because we also want them to make sure that they have the time that they need to support children, youth, and families, to make those very important front-line decisions, following our policy and practice, especially as it has shifted so much given the work of the all-party panel on child intervention.

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Awesome. Thank you very much.

**Ms Schulz:** And thanks for joining me this summer.

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Yes. I was happy to do that. It's inspiring when we have an opportunity to visit our partners in this work and just see their heart and their passion. I don't think it should ever be understated, the importance of that partnership and those relationships, so thank you.

Line item 2, page 45 of the estimates: Minister, child advocacy centres provide an essential service and have been calling for additional funding support for quite some time. Where is funding for these organizations allocated in your budget?

**Ms Schulz:** That is under line 2.2. Current funding in this year by Children's Services specifically is \$1.7 million, but there's also \$4.1 million to fund child advocacy centres, that come through the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Justice as well. Over the past six and a half months now I have had the opportunity to tour the child advocacy centres both in Edmonton and Calgary – the Zebra

centre and the Calgary Child Advocacy Centre – as well as meet with folks from the Red Deer child advocacy centre.

The work that they do is incredible. When we think of the incredible trauma and the experiences that these young children go through, whether it is a situation of abuse or sexual assault, by having these children walk into a centre that is warm, that is designed to be calming and welcoming, where there are toys and books, where there is a space for a family to be there – and I think about the alternative of kids going to an emergency room and then going down to the police station to give their statement instead – in being able to do this in one specific place where they feel safe, I mean, obviously, there are a couple of benefits from that.

When we look at the services provided, it's quite a range. There is education and awareness on signs of abuse, and that's important for community members. But also schools and child advocacy centres do work with school divisions as they've identified that sometimes it's teachers who identify some of those early signs that a child may be in a situation of distress or at risk of abuse. As I said, the forensic interviews are done right on-site, the specialized medical treatment that these kids receive, trauma and mental health services, victim support and advocacy, and court preparation.

**11:00**

The two major child advocacy centres had recently just shown me that their ability to now have kids appear in court or testify in court right from the child advocacy centre makes a huge difference. There are seven sites across the province at various stages, I would say.

But one of the things that they told me loud and clear is that Alberta is a leader not just in Canada but in North America in terms of child advocacy centres. When I looked at why and also in speaking with some of our counterparts in other provinces, it was really because – this is a beautiful example, and you, coming from a community agency, may appreciate this – it wasn't government telling communities what to do; it was communities coming together, whether that was police, mental health services, health supports, AHS, to say: you know, we have a need here, and we can support these vulnerable children better.

That's why they do look a little bit different in different regions across the province. There are certainly some similarities, I would say, when you're looking at Calgary and Edmonton. Things look slightly different in Grande Prairie, for example. There was some funding provided for other areas.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Minister. Time has expired.

We'll now go back to the Official Opposition with Member Sigurdson.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Well, thank you very much. I'm grateful to be here today to talk about this very important ministry. I think we all know that, you know, making sure children are safe and well cared for in our province is really so important. I guess, what I know – myself I was a front-line child welfare worker, so I know the fundamental importance of relationships. Certainly, in social work we know that.

I guess I'm talking about 2.2 in the government estimates, just talking about staffing. Staffing is so fundamental, and certainly there are chronic issues that predate this government, predate our government, predate other governments, but we have significant issues in this area. You've alluded to some of them already. You've spoken to some of them.

Of course, we're dealing with families that have many, many challenges, many barriers. Poverty is correlated with families regarding issues around neglect. We know that the major caseload focus is about neglect and supporting parents to overcome

challenge. A lot of times it's single-parent moms, you know. There are also gender barriers. We know that women make much less than men in our society. We know that things like decreasing poverty, like our government did, increasing the minimum wage – we know that over 60 per cent of minimum wage earners are women. I mean, there are so many things that feed into why families struggle and why families are stressed and perhaps make some poor decisions about how children are cared for.

Certainly, the staff must be highly qualified, professional, supported, trained to be able to support these, yet there seems to be a fair bit of chaos in the staff in the child intervention system. Please, I'm not saying this to disregard any of the very amazing work of the front line, you know, the people I worked with all those years ago, and I certainly am very close with many colleagues who still work in the ministry. I mean, my heart goes out to them, and I have great gratitude for the tremendous work they do.

But a lot of times it's in spite of the system rather than because of the system, and that concerns me. You know, I guess, as the minister in this area you've inherited a lot of challenges, and I'm sure you've heard it loud and clear because you did travel and you talked to people in the front lines. I know that one of the major issues is that there are a high number of people off on stress leave, on sick leave, and that creates trouble, because what happens with those caseloads, what happens with those families, what happens with those vulnerable children when that worker isn't there again? What does happen to them, Minister?

**Ms Schulz:** Well, I really do appreciate your question, and I appreciate it coming from somebody like you, who has experience on the front line. I did take the time to hear from front-line staff. I also understand – I mean, there has been a significant amount of transformational change within the ministry over the past number of years and, I would say, necessary change, policy and practice that were changing as part of what was heard through the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention.

We also recognize that, you know, we have positions that are open that are taking time to fill. Part of that is, as I spoke to a little bit earlier, making sure that the training – the first six months, the training that I had just spoken about are so vitally important to preparing front-line workers, who may be coming from a different area or coming straight from postsecondary, to ensuring that they're prepared for the challenging front-line work in this ministry.

Also, coming up with that recruitment and retention strategy within the ministry: I think the benefit of that is that that work is being done by our front-line management and staff, people who know full well what it looks like to transition from postsecondary into some of these very unique positions and challenging positions. I'm really relying on the information that they bring forward in terms of how we can better recruit and retain because right now we do have open positions.

We are filling those positions, but sometimes it's just difficult to get them filled because, as I said before, these have very specific needs, and that's both in terms of the educational requirements and the experience requirements that are needed to enter these roles. Sometimes it is a bit of a challenge.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay. Thanks, Minister. Certainly, I know that when people are off on sick leave or stress leave, then the people that are left in that unit carry those files, so that adds to their caseload.

I've heard, certainly in the Edmonton area, that caseloads – experienced workers are carrying as many as 29 files, 29 families. That's extraordinary. I mean, I think the case file range should be between about 12 and 19, but people are carrying much more. What

happens then? People aren't being supported. Balls get dropped. This isn't a game; this is a serious thing when children's lives aren't being supported. That's what happens. I know that. I've heard, too, that undelegated workers are carrying files. I've heard that they're carrying 17 cases, and this is – you know, reports from the front line have told me directly.

I wonder if you could tell us, Minister, just – I know staff retention is low. What is it? What's the number? Like, how long are most staff retained? After they're hired, how long do they stay in the ministry working?

**Ms Schulz:** I mean, I should say that I went to the graduations for the children in care, and when I went to the one in Calgary, the elder, who has been working with Children's Services for a long time, said, "You're the first minister who's ever come to this event," which kind of broke my heart, because for me it's an opportunity to see some of the successes.

**Ms Sigurdson:** So how many are retained after they are hired?

**Ms Schulz:** Well, I mean, I've also met staff at these events that have been working with the ministry for 30 years.

**Ms Sigurdson:** No, no. There must be a stat. You must have a stat about staff retention. I know that when I worked there, it was two years. Even though you put in all those resources, AUPE has – it's two years. That means huge transitions in staffing, which means poor service. That's how it is, so that has got to be the focus.

**Ms Schulz:** Yeah. Absolutely.

**Ms Sigurdson:** So why don't people stay? Why don't people stay? Huge stress, of course, multiproblem families, not a lot of support.

Another question I have for the minister is just: what are the credentials of the caseworkers generally?

**Ms Schulz:** First, I want to take it a step back because I did respond. That may have been when you had all stepped out. There was a question about some of the stressors that are faced by some of our front-line caseworkers and the breakdown of – there is data, certainly, on what the feedback is on what some of the biggest stressors are.

But the answer isn't just one thing, so that's why we are looking at some centralized function to reduce caseloads. One of the things that we trialled this summer is, in areas where there was an increased pressure, bringing teams from one area of the province to come to another. I know I heard from staff in one area that received one of those teams and the support, and it was received very well, the additional supports.

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay. So you have some plans on dealing with the stressors.

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely. That was a bit of a trial, but then there's also the workforce review . . .

**Ms Sigurdson:** Okay. I hear you, Minister.

**Ms Schulz:** . . . that's being done with AUPE.

**Ms Sigurdson:** I'd like to move on to something else now.

**Ms Schulz:** Sure. Absolutely.

*11:10*

**Ms Sigurdson:** I want you to tell me – you know, someone who's working in sort of a casework position: what are the credentials of that worker?

**Ms Schulz:** There's a variety of backgrounds. People most often think of somebody with a social work degree, whether that's a bachelor or a master's of social work, but it is social work, education, health. We can get you all . . .

**Ms Sigurdson:** What percentage would have a social work background, would be registered social workers?

**Ms Schulz:** We can absolutely get you that percentage.

**Ms Sigurdson:** I'd like that in writing.

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely. We can definitely do that. It's also a combination, as you would appreciate, for many government positions and especially front-line positions. It's often both considerations, experience as well as educational background.

To respond to your previous question, the turnover in the ministry is 7 per cent.

**Ms Sigurdson:** On an annual basis, 7 per cent. Okay.

Well, you know, one of the things that, certainly when I worked there, we knew – and I'm still asking for the updated – is that 40 per cent of the staff actually were registered social workers; 60 per cent were not. So the vast majority were not, which I could never understand. I still don't understand that today. Like, you can't get through the door of a school without a BEd, a bachelor of education. Teachers need that fundamental. This work is so much more, I think, complex. You're going into very risky situations oftentimes. You're working with all sorts of issues, with people from different backgrounds, sometimes newcomers to Canada, and you have much less support. Yet it's like . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Member. I'm sorry. Time has expired.

We're going to go on to the government caucus. We concluded with MLA Nixon. Are we going to continue?

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Yup. Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you very much, sir.

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** It's been a couple of years since I was at the shelter, but I do remember that we worked really closely with caseworkers with Children's Services and the youth that we were serving. We had a number of PGO, TGO family enhancement kids living in our shelter. I remember caseloads at that time were chaos. They were very large, and when you have one caseworker working with a large number of high-risk street kids, it's difficult to get the traction that you need in that. I guess, for clarification, are we funding growth in regard to caseloads so we can try and keep up and keep those numbers manageable?

**Ms Schulz:** Well, as I said before, that comes back to the fact that under the former government, who spent a lot of time focusing on child intervention yet didn't fund front-line caseload pressures – we did begin the year with a \$5.7 million encumbrance. I mean, that speaks to things like recruitment and staffing. The former government had not funded this, not adequately. I mean, that's part of it as well.

Now that we've been reallocating positions from more corporate services or support areas to the front line where possible and also making sure that we have a plan to recruit and retain staff – but it goes much bigger than that. Obviously, it's the review of caseload pressures. We want to take a look at the recruitment and retention strategy because it's one thing to have positions and it's another thing to make sure that we are attracting qualified people to work

in those positions. You're right. When it comes to caseload, high turnover is a disruption, and the goal is to not have a disruption in care, especially when they're supporting vulnerable children, youth, and families. I think you've already spoken to the fact that relationships are so incredibly important, especially in these situations. That is part of our increased dollar amount for child intervention.

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Awesome. In regard to dealing with the chaos in the staff, we're going to do what the previous government didn't do, make sure that we're funding growth so that we can keep caseloads manageable so that we're not burning out our front-line employees. And we're providing additional supports, is what I'm hearing, in regard to making sure their care is a priority.

**Ms Schulz:** Well, it's a \$68.5 million increase in child intervention alone.

Also, speaking to what I just alluded to was the trial this summer of – sometimes in different communities, especially in southern Alberta, we saw an increased caseload pressure, so the ministry sent a team of supports and other front-line staff to support current staff. This was something that we were trying to address caseload pressure, support current staff, essentially provide some backup for them so that they could continue to do the really great, important work that they were doing to support very vulnerable children, youth, and families but also, you know, have support on the staffing side. Feedback from that was very well received. We do still have some work to do, and that's why I am relying on ministry front-line staff as well as managers of front-line staff to come up with some ideas on how we can recruit and retain.

I am really proud that our budget in this year protects front-line staff and addresses our fiscal challenge as well as services for those most vulnerable in our province; \$267.8 million supports staffing within child intervention overall, and that is just over or around 2,600 employees in 87 regions across the province.

There is no staffing freeze. I had been asked that question as well. There is no staffing freeze; there is not a staffing decrease. We are currently hiring to fill our vacant positions, but as I've articulated already a couple of times in the last few minutes, that is challenging because it's also challenging work.

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Yeah. I appreciate that, in recognition that past decisions have made it even more challenging. I appreciate your advocacy for front-line staff and your dedication to making it better.

One of the other things that actually just started to rise up as an issue when I was managing the shelters was opioids on the street. At the time, of course, crystal meth was probably the major drug of choice for the young people that I served, but we started to see that rise. I'm just wondering if you've seen that impact your ministry, and if so, how are you working toward addressing that in this budget?

**Ms Schulz:** One of the things – and I know I said it a little earlier on – one of the issues when we're looking at our caseload growth is around the complexity of the cases that are coming forward. Part of that is absolutely, in fact, the increase in cases that also cite mental health and addictions impacts. However, we talked about the opioid crisis earlier this year. When we looked at the numbers, we did actually see, when looking at the cases, that there was a 36 per cent increase in the cases that actually cite crystal meth as one of the factors as well. Those are some of the things that we're working with the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions on.

Certainly, I know that MLA Neudorf and I spent some time talking about this, the Lethbridge area specifically. Part of this is

about prevention and early intervention. We're going to continue to invest funds in that work. Then I believe September 11 was the announcement by the Associate Minister of Mental Health. I know we're not here to talk about their budget, but certainly an increase in treatment beds for people with addictions will have an impact as well.

We also have been working with AHS, and this has come forward through some of the recommendations previous from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. I take those recommendations incredibly seriously and have met with the Child and Youth Advocate a number of times over the last couple of months. We've also seen a slight increase of children in care due to children who are born basically with an addiction to drugs and increased use by parents. That's one of the things that we've been working with AHS on to address, to ensure that those systems are working together to identify and, you know, ideally, prevent some of those issues from happening. There are things happening at the community level as well by some of our community organizations to support some of that work. But certainly it has increased caseload as well as complexity, and they are definitely very real issues.

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Awesome. Thank you very much for your answers and, again, for your dedication to this. I'm here to help in any way I can.

**Ms Schulz:** Well, I should also say that this was something that I had heard from our front-line staff and specifically from front-line staff who are working in a facility with slightly older young people, so traditionally from the age of about 14 to 18, but they're seeing younger children come into this specific facility. The training has continued to evolve and, as well, safety measures have continued to evolve to address some of those more complex cases and make sure that our staff are safe and that they are equipped with the right training to make sure that they can be prepared for those types of situations.

11:20

**Mr. Jeremy Nixon:** Perfect.

I'd like to pass my time on.

**The Acting Chair:** MLA Walker, go ahead, sir.

**Mr. Walker:** Thank you so much, Chair. Thank you, Minister, for being here and for your colleagues in the ministry to be here as well as your staff. This is such an important file, and your advocacy and the care you show and the concern are clear, and frankly today it's palpable. I just want to say, too, that before I got elected decisively on April 16, I was a civil servant in the government of Alberta, and I, in fact, worked with many people who had worked in your ministry. They tell me how happy they are to see a minister so engaged in their file and such a powerful advocate for this very important portfolio.

I also really enjoyed moderating the education panel with you and the Minister of Education as well as the Minister of Indigenous Relations. What really struck me was hearing through that panel, Minister, how in the past with government ministries, especially when it came to vulnerable Albertans and children, there was too much of a silo effect going on. I'm just so excited to learn about how your ministry and the two aforementioned ministries are now planning to work together to develop strong connections, collaboration, and synergies.

With that said, I'm going to move into my question. Line 2, page 45, sort of ties into, actually, the education panel that we so much enjoyed, Minister, a few weeks ago.

**The Acting Chair:** The member will have to hold that question and wait for the next round. We'll get back to you.

We'll go back to the Official Opposition. Member Sigurdson is who we left off with, but we're going to Member Pancholi. All right. Thank you very much.

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, I just wanted to take you back to line 4.2 of the estimates on page 45 with respect to youth in transition, which you indicated deals primarily with the advancing futures bursary. I just wanted to clarify. I'm sorry; you may have actually given this number before, but I can't seem to find it right now. How many young people – was it 900? Sorry; I'm looking for the number – are currently receiving the advancing futures bursary?

**Ms Schulz:** Just wait one second here. That's 785 young people. I also have that the number of applicants was I think just over 900.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. You said that roughly 755 are currently receiving it? Okay.

Minister, currently that bursary is available to young people between the ages of 18 to 24 years old. Are those age eligibility requirements changing?

**Ms Schulz:** No.

**Ms Pancholi:** Okay. Thank you.

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely.

**Ms Pancholi:** It's still 18 to 24, and that's not intended to change.

**Ms Schulz:** Yeah. On your question before about the supports and financial assistance agreements, while the age for that specific program is reducing to 22, we will be working with other ministries to make sure that those young people have a seamless transition. But specifically for the \$1.5 million in the mentorship program as well as advancing futures, those programs will continue to be available for children up until the age of 24. Part of that, in my conversation with the Child and Youth Advocate, is that one of the most important things for these young people isn't always the physical bucket of funding . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you, Minister. Sorry. We're running a little short on time, so I do want to get to my next question really quickly.

Are there any other, I guess, grants, bursary programs, any other programs where the age eligibility requirements are changing?

**Ms Schulz:** No, not in this . . .

**Ms Pancholi:** Thank you.

I will cede my time now to my colleague Mr. Feehan.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you very much, Minister. I really appreciate the opportunity to chat with you today. Obviously, you know, this is an area of concern for me, with a 33-year-plus career in this area. I appreciate that you bring your heart to this work as well because I'm somebody who does that, too, and I appreciate that sometimes it catches up on us. I think that's excellent.

I have a couple of different areas I want to go into. Obviously, my role as indigenous critic: I will speak a bit about that. You've provoked me a little here in some of your answers, in a good way, and I just want to ask a little bit about that.

Just as background, I think you may know that I've been involved in the Alberta incidence study on child abuse and neglect, of which you are now a signatory. One of the things that has been repeatedly

pointed out in that study over the last number of years is that it is not abuse but, rather, neglect that brings children to the attention of the department and, of course, brings children into care. You spoke about that. In fact, this was the moment at which you, quite appropriately, became emotional, and I celebrate that. I do. You spoke to the idea: "If it's just an issue where somebody doesn't have a crib, why are we intervening? Why don't we provide them a crib?" Obviously, I one hundred per cent agree with that. But I'm finding it difficult to see in this budget anywhere where the provision of that kind of practical, material support has been increased under your budget. I'm wondering if you can tell me if it has.

**Ms Schulz:** Yeah. Actually, that's included in the caseload growth numbers.

I also just want to clarify two things. One of the things, as I said to the critic for Children's Services and especially given your long background in this area, is that if there are ever suggestions when it comes to process or policy, I would be happy to hear your ideas and thoughts.

**Mr. Feehan:** Well, it does come down to this very point, that the issue we primarily have is an issue of neglect, and it's going to become important when I talk about the issue of indigenous relations as well. I mean, you sort of mentioned: just buy the crib; don't worry about the budget. But I'm sure you know that an actual worker would be disciplined for doing that very thing.

**Ms Schulz:** No, actually. No, not at all. That's some of the work . . .

**Mr. Feehan:** Well, I won't argue that point because it's not part of our budget.

**Ms Schulz:** But I do want to clarify that that's an important point. Coming from the work of the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, the practice framework has changed significantly in terms of how our ministry works with families from an area of the strengths of those families. That is accounted for in caseload growth, and that was one of the things that management looked at: what are some patterns we're seeing, and how can we encourage our front-line staff?

**Mr. Feehan:** Is there a specific allocation of dollars per worker or per family that would allow those kinds of things to happen?

**Ms Schulz:** Well, it would certainly depend. That's part of the overall funding in child intervention. But also, when we're talking about potential examples of where a child might be at risk because of neglect, we want to focus as well on early intervention and prevention services as that is often the solution to some of these situations.

**Mr. Feehan:** With regard to that, I just wonder if that means that you will be doing more prevention work within the department or if that is being contracted out to community agencies.

**Ms Schulz:** Well, as you likely know, that's definitely a mix. Our caseworkers work very closely with the children, youth, and families who may be at risk and, obviously, help them.

**Mr. Feehan:** Would we anticipate an increase in the number of community agencies or the amount of money available to community agencies to participate in prevention services?

**Ms Schulz:** Well, we have a number of agencies across the province. Right now, currently, in prevention and intervention we have quite the patchwork of programming and contracts and grants.

**Mr. Feehan:** That's right. That's why I'm just asking the budget question, because I know there are a lot of them. Is there an increase?

**Ms Schulz:** I can get you the exact number of the increase. I think I said it before.

**Mr. Feehan:** You can provide that to me afterwards.

**Ms Schulz:** Sorry; \$750,000 a year. I did provide that.

**Mr. Feehan:** Is that an increase, though?

**Ms Schulz:** It is an increase.

**Mr. Feehan:** Okay.

**Ms Schulz:** That's the increase of \$750,000 per year . . .

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you. Sorry. I really am stuck for time.

**Ms Schulz:** I just want to make sure that we're on the same page.

**Mr. Feehan:** But your answers are appropriate.

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Feehan:** I'm just interested in the number of indigenous-focused agencies that would be recipients of that. I'd be happy to receive in writing about any increases in the number of indigenous-focused agencies or, of course, the amount of dollars allocated. You can provide that in writing. That's fine. It's a budget number I'm interested in.

I'm also interested in the fact that indigenous children, of course, are highly overrepresented in terms of children in care, something we're all quite aware of. I'm wondering. Besides the training that is being done under the response to the Miyo report and other investigations that have been done in the past, we know that some cultural training is appropriate and good, but we also know it doesn't necessarily reduce the number of children in care. We know that the ministry over the last number of years has been working to reduce the number of children coming into care, and it has resulted in a decrease in the number of children in care but has not closed the gap in the overrepresentation of indigenous people.

I notice there is no goal under your performance indicators. It does talk about the number of children receiving services but not about the difference between children receiving services and children coming into care. I have a number of questions around that. One is: are there some specific actions being taken to reduce the number of children coming into care as opposed to just receiving services overall?

**11:30**

**Ms Schulz:** Part of that, as you may know, is really basing our prevention and early intervention programming to reflect the Well-being and Resiliency framework that was put in place. Also, that promotes an understanding of how trauma, both current but also historical trauma, has a very real impact on young people and families.

**Mr. Feehan:** Do you have a specific goal, then, on reducing the number of children actually entering care?

**Ms Schulz:** Well, as I said before – and I think I said it in the first hour – ultimately, the goal is that no children are coming into care, and that's why we're . . .

**Mr. Feehan:** But no goal in your business plan.

**Ms Schulz:** . . . targeting the work that we do and the funding that we provide, the work both within the ministry but also with our contracted agencies. This was something that was requested from some of the agencies, who have already begun to incorporate the Well-being and Resiliency framework into the work that they do. It does outline consistent approaches to prevention. It also supports staff, indigenous communities – and that includes delegated First Nations agency staff as well – to provide a very consistent government-wide and community partner wide approach to how we . . .

**Mr. Feehan:** I appreciate the answers – and I just stayed quiet for a moment because I wanted to hear it – and I think it's quite appropriate, but I just don't see a goal that says that you're going to actually work to measure and reduce either the number of children coming into care or a goal that says that you're going to measure and reduce the gap between the percentage of indigenous children who are seen by Children's Services and who end up in care, which is higher, and the percentage of children who are nonindigenous seen by social services and that come into care. I guess I'd just like to see some kind of a goal.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Member. I appreciate it. Time has expired.

We will go back to MLA Walker to continue with questions.

**Mr. Walker:** Thank you so much, Chair. Through the chair, Minister, I'm just going to go straight to my question – we were cut off by the buzzer last time – line item 2, page 45 of the estimates. Vulnerable Albertans frequently utilize supports from multiple ministries, which can create barriers. How are you working with your ministerial colleagues in addictions and mental health, Community and Social Services, Justice, Indigenous Relations, et cetera, to break down barriers and ensure that government services are proactive and not reactive? This is line item 2, page 45.

Thanks so much.

**Ms Schulz:** Speaking specifically about child intervention, that's a good question, and I want to go back to your opening remarks. I also worked as a public servant for a number of years and value the work that our public servants do, especially in Children's Services when providing services to some of the most vulnerable Albertans. The panel that you moderated with myself, the Minister of Education, and the Minister of Indigenous Relations: certainly, following that feedback, the stakeholders in the public schools association felt like this approach was somewhat new, although I wasn't working in government for the last couple of years, so I can't speak to that, but I am proud of the fact that we were really, truly there as a team to listen to the feedback.

Certainly, the same vulnerable children that are in the child intervention system are going to school, and we know that 69 per cent of the children in care are indigenous. Sometimes, we know, they have complexities and unique needs, whether that be a developmental disability, a cognitive disability, a physical disability, or a unique health concern or need. As well, your question more specifically referenced mental health and addictions. The increase in mental health and addictions treatment spaces as well as the fact that we have an associate minister dedicated to mental health and addictions shows our government's commitment to taking action in this area. We are working with other ministries to identify some of the places where we can provide better wraparound services, based not on our government ministry structure but on the unique needs of vulnerable kids and families.

We're also working with other ministries – Justice and the Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women – to

address human trafficking. That was part of our campaign commitment, so work is beginning on that front as well. I had the opportunity to meet with Paul Brandt, who is spearheading Not In My City in Calgary, but it's also expanding to Edmonton. There is a very real connection with human trafficking and the vulnerable populations that we serve in my ministry as well, so this is also work that I am incredibly dedicated to.

When we talk about children with disabilities, this didn't just come up when I was speaking with our front-line caseworkers and staff; it actually also came up in some of our child care centres. For me, it was understanding – you know, through the \$25-a-day pilot there was one child care centre in particular who had been very well known in the community to support children with additional disabilities. What happened, they said, was that, unfortunately, because of demand and because it wasn't based on need or income or anything like that, their facility, which typically had wait-lists, no longer had the ability to take on new young people in that group of children and families who needed those additional supports, whether that be daycare or respite care. That's one of the things that I've been working through with my colleague the Minister of Community and Social Services, that there's PDD funding, that there's FSCD funding. What does that overlap look like, and how can we do a better job?

It also comes back to the complexity. As a government we make it so incredibly difficult sometimes for vulnerable populations to access funding and services that best meet the needs of their family. You know, if you want to talk about red tape in the social services ministry, in prevention and early intervention, under some of our contracts and grants we found out that some of the money was going towards things like community newsletters and navigators for our system. If our system requires navigators, I don't think that the issue is that families don't know how to access the system; the issue is the system and that we're making it too complex, so complex, in fact, that vulnerable children and families aren't able to easily access the services they need. I've talked about that in terms of redesigning the subsidy application form. I think that there are things that we can do when it comes to funding specific to children with disabilities, and that's whether these children are on-reserve or off.

Also, working with the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, as I've said before, the addictions spaces will have a huge impact in our province because, obviously, we recognize that children are being born to parents who are struggling with addictions. Accessing treatment space will have an impact on some of the families that we serve. Also, though, we recognize that sometimes within the ministries of Justice and Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Health, mostly through AHS, these are the same children, the same young people. If we are seeing these children and serving these children from a number of different perspectives, we have to do a better job of looking at the services that they provide and bringing them together.

**The Acting Chair:** Minister, I hate to cut you off, but no member is allowed to speak for longer than five minutes.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** So we will go to Mr. Walker.  
Thank you.

**Mr. Walker:** That happened to me before, too. It's all good, Minister.

Thank you so much for your thoroughness, your thoughtfulness, and your candour here today and, again, for your great advocacy with this very important file. Thank you, Minister.

I had a second question, but it's already been covered, so I will, Chair, cede my time to Member Yao.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you.

Member Yao, go ahead, please.

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you very much. Minister Schulz, I just want to thank you and your team for all of your hard work and dedication. Your ministry manages our most vulnerable, and that is children. What I was especially encouraged about earlier on, when you inherited this file, is your knowledge about Fort McMurray, my community, and the issues that surround us. Previously that was quite rare to see. Fort McMurray often gets ignored or neglected in regard to the services that we require despite our financial contributions to our nation. Again, it really encouraged me when you expressed that knowledge.

**11:40**

You know, you're evaluating a three-year pilot of early learning and child care centres, and you're doing a very rigorous review. Obviously, you're doing a rigorous review of everything, a system-wide review of all of the aspects of your ministry, and I want to thank you for doing that. Also, your comment about targeting the most vulnerable is greatly, greatly appreciated. We do recognize that we have a limited amount of money, but we do want to help those that need those supports. Certainly, when we look at things like subsidized daycare, in my community it certainly didn't target the people that truly needed it. I can speak about some people whose household income is over \$200,000, and they were beneficiaries of this subsidized daycare. As much as they appreciated that, they wanted me to pass on to the previous government that, you know, their votes can't be bought. I told them that I don't know how to express that to anyone. Anyway, again, targeting the most vulnerable is greatly appreciated.

If we could look at page 92 of your fiscal plan, where you mention the three-year early learning and child care centres pilot and the rigorous review you're completing, can you tell us a little bit about the results of the first-year evaluation and if you've completed a second-year evaluation from that and just what we learned? What feedback did you get from Alberta families? Can you explain some of that, please?

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely. I've said this a number of times before, that the terms of the pilot haven't changed. It was set up as a three-year pilot, and over the past number of months I've met with centres who purposely didn't take part in the pilot because they were nervous about the disruption in service given the three-year timeline but also with some that clearly articulated the benefits but also some of the gaps of the pilot and where it was working or where it wasn't.

Unfortunately, there are a couple of things about Alberta, as is the case in a lot of areas, that are unique. Coming forward with, you know, a Quebec-style approach to daycare was an interesting choice given that it addressed one specific issue. But what we know is that for parents and many other provinces across the country, when accessing the federal funding, there are a number of different things that we look at. One of those things is quality.

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Member Yao.

We concluded in the Official Opposition with Member Feehan. Would you like to continue, sir?

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you. Thank you, Minister. I appreciate an opportunity to continue this important discussion. I'd like to delve a little bit further into the issue of indigenous children in care. I've

already spoken to the fact that there is no goal around reducing the children in care. One of the things that I do also notice is that you have a performance indicator that asks the question about indigenous children in foster care and kinship care who are placed with indigenous families, but I notice again, though, that no goal or target is associated with reducing that.

I can see also that there has been some improvement, but it's sort of an area that is somewhat neglected, I guess, and reaching the point of only 45 per cent of children being in an indigenous care setting. I'm just wondering if in this particular budget you have a goal of what percentage of indigenous children will be in indigenous care and if there are any dollars that are particularly attached to that goal.

**Ms Schulz:** There are a couple of things that I want to clarify. One is that we set targets for our measures, not for our indicators. While the goal is always no children in care, I do want to point out that there was no target to reduce the number of children in care under the previous government, your government, for the exact same safety reasons. Otherwise, a policy statement can reduce children in care to zero without consideration of safety and deference to the experience of our front-line staff. So I do want to be clear that that's very consistent for all the reasons that you as a member of the former government but also as a social worker would likely know.

**Mr. Feehan:** Well, one I don't agree with, by the way, but I appreciate your point.

Just with regard to the issue, then, of indigenous children in foster and kinship care, can you tell me if there is any kind of specific program or budget designed to increase the number of indigenous placements for indigenous children?

**Ms Schulz:** That actually is an exceptional question. We do have an increase of \$20 million to support foster and kinship care, and this is the first time that kinship care specifically is included in that title. I've also met with the Alberta Foster and Kinship Association to address some of those issues. Also, when meeting with a number of First Nations and Métis communities over the summer, these are some of the things that we discussed. When we look at our performance indicator 1(d), the percentage of indigenous children placed with indigenous families has actually steadily increased, a 6 per cent increase from 2014-15, which was 39 per cent. Then, also, in 2018-19 that was 45 per cent. We see that those numbers are incredibly positive, but there are also a number of factors that helped to address kinship care. Part of that is really about building strong connections within First Nations and Métis communities. They've identified that sometimes finding those family supports to increase kinship care is difficult, right? In foster care those caregivers sign up, they know they may have a child for a short period of time or a longer period of time, but kinship care providers are in a unique situation, where they may not have anticipated providing care to those children.

**Mr. Feehan:** Thank you, Minister. I agree that there is some minor improvement; 6 per cent, I'll recognize, is an improvement, and I'm glad to see that.

I guess I'm just wondering about the objective to move farther along and about sort of the monies that are being put to that. One of the points that has been articulated many times in the past is that when children come into care, if they arrive and go to foster care, there are a significant number of resources available to foster parents, payments that are provided to them, but in the past kinship care has not received those same kinds of payments. I suspect you may be working on improving that, and I just want to give you a chance to brag a bit about it. Tell me if there will be more.

**Ms Schulz:** Thank you. As you know, that was part of the work and the recommendations that came forward from the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. One of those things was to look at a made-in-Alberta kinship care program. We are still determining what that will look like. The outreach is going well with the foster and kinship care providers to gather their feedback. We know it's incredibly important that we make sure that the programs we provide and the services we provide reflect their very real needs. We also need to know that reuniting children with their parents where it's safely possible is ultimately the best outcome. We also know that the Alberta Foster and Kinship Association has been working hard to provide supports to foster and kinship caregivers. They also continue to receive financial . . .

**Mr. Feehan:** Let me just ask a specific question within that.

**Ms Schulz:** Sure. Sorry.

**Mr. Feehan:** I accept your statement as it is. Then is there a specific line item that would indicate to me that the amount of dollars available to indigenous kinship family systems for caring for children is increasing this year?

**Ms Schulz:** That's embedded throughout the line items. There's a \$20 million increase to foster and kin care.

**Mr. Feehan:** Right. That's why I'm just asking about the specifics.

**Ms Schulz:** Indigenous considerations are built in throughout all of the line items in the ministry's budget. First of all, foster and kinship caregivers will continue to receive consistent amounts in terms of finances, but we also know that . . .

**Mr. Feehan:** Kinship and foster care will receive the same number of dollars?

**Ms Schulz:** That they were currently receiving.

**Mr. Feehan:** Ah, but not consistent with each other.

**Ms Schulz:** As I said, the review, which was started under the previous government, is currently under way, so we're continuing to look at that and consult with our stakeholders. Fifty-eight million dollars goes to support kinship care placements specifically, but we also know that sometimes it's not just the financial piece. We've also provided increased training because sometimes, as I've mentioned before, these children have complex needs as well.

**Mr. Feehan:** Very appropriate, yeah. The actual kinship rates that will be received on a monthly basis: will they be the same between kinship and foster care in future?

**Ms Schulz:** As you well know, they will remain consistent to where they were last year, but we are currently reviewing, as was begun under the former government, the kinship care program.

**Mr. Feehan:** So that's just something we need to wait to find out about at this time. It's still a work-in-progress.

**Ms Schulz:** It's absolutely still a work-in-progress.

**Mr. Feehan:** I appreciate that. My questions aren't necessarily to trap you. I want to know where we're going in the future here.

**Ms Schulz:** Absolutely. You've got to appreciate as well that, you know, we've had some of these conversations. I have had this conversation with the foster and kinship caregivers' association but

also in my meetings with First Nations and Métis communities. While it does come up, there are also so many things changing in the landscape, as you can appreciate, under Bill C-92 and what that looks like, not just from a specific kinship care position but also as it relates to prevention and early intervention and potential large changes to child intervention services.

**Mr. Feehan:** There have been some very successful programs. I'll just highlight, for one second, Saddle Lake, where they have over the last number of years been able to return a number of children to Saddle Lake in care. I'm just wondering whether or not there's been an evaluation of the government's relationship and support with the Saddle Lake program and whether or not we can anticipate that to be expanded to other nations.

11:50

**Ms Schulz:** Actually, that's a good point you've brought up as well, because one of the First Nations that I met with this summer, Alexander, also has a unique program, that has been working very well over the last number of years, to increase kinship care placements where possible to address some of those early risk indicators. We did start having some discussions around C-92 and what that would look like, but they were very clear that partnerships had been working very well with the provincial government to change those numbers. Another is with Siksika and the work that they're doing within Siksika Family Services.

You're very right that there are a number of First Nations across the province that are doing exceptional work. I mean, every First Nation has a different number of kids in care, different community struggles, different approaches. The nations are very unique. I also recognize that they've expressed that they want us to recognize that they are unique and have very real differences.

**Mr. Feehan:** That speaks to my point. Is there a goal to ensure that the number of children returning to in-reserve communities or to at least indigenous families is increasing, and are there resources that are attached to it? It's really the whole direction. I gather from some of your answers that some of that is still in discussion about how that will be happening or whether or not those kinds of programs will be expanded throughout the province.

**Ms Schulz:** Yeah, and it is. It's embedded in all of our line items. Certainly, the good work that's been taking place with specific First Nations as well as the Métis community: we're going to continue to build on the successes. Also, when we're specifically speaking about Saddle Lake, that is a DFNA, and that is a trilateral relationship with the First Nation, the provincial government, and the federal government. Absolutely, we will continue to have those discussions.

**Mr. Feehan:** Do you have plans to increase the number of trilateral relationships on other reserves beyond that one? Is that part of the ongoing intent?

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Member. Time has expired.

We will now go to the government caucus side. My understanding is that Mr. Neudorf wants to speak.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, if you'd like to finish that last question for the opposition.

**Ms Schulz:** I would, actually. Part of that, just to clarify, will be part of our discussions with Bill C-92. What we did receive from the federal government in my discussion with them is that while

there was really no clear path to implementation or any clear commitment to funding, what it allows is for unique trilateral agreements to be addressed with each individual First Nation and Métis community. In that spirit, we'll continue to work with First Nations and Métis partners as well.

Thank you. That was a very good question.

Thank you for allowing me to respond.

**Mr. Neudorf:** You're welcome. Thank you, Minister. Thank you for all the questions today.

With a little bit of time left, Minister, page 132 of the capital plan. I'd like to ask the minister: are there any large-scale capital infrastructure projects that the government will be funding that relate to your core mandate?

**Ms Schulz:** Yes. In the capital plan, while there is \$84,000 for small tenant improvements, there is also \$30.4 million set aside for the Yellowhead Youth Centre project. This is something that I am so incredibly proud of. This is a home for our most vulnerable young people. In meeting with ministry staff, it was made very clear that not only is this a priority; it is something that ministry staff have been asking for since 2012. There are 12 buildings on the site in Edmonton; four of them will be renovated, and eight of them will be replaced. Actually, part of that project was in jeopardy with the expansion of the Yellowhead Trail, and this will allow us to do additional design work to ensure that we can in fact maintain that number of beds in that project. Construction will start once the design phase has been completed, but that is, I believe, 50 beds. By allowing us to review the design, we hope to not lose any of those beds. We won't lose those beds that were at risk with the other infrastructure project on the Yellowhead Trail.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Fantastic. I really appreciate that. Thank you very much, Minister.

I also just want to take this opportunity: you mentioned a couple of times your trip to Lethbridge. I know that the child care providers there very much appreciated the face-to-face time with you, that they were able to have their voices heard. In fact, one of them sent me a question when she heard that this estimates committee was meeting today. Their question to you would be: science shows the experiences and environment a child has during the first five years of development have lifelong impact on everything from physical and mental health to success in school, success in the workplace as well as relationships; how will the Ministry of Children's Services be investing into early childhood development across the province? If you could speak to that.

**Ms Schulz:** There are a couple of ways. That is a good question. Part of that is, as I've mentioned before, embedding the Well-being and Resiliency framework into, especially, our prevention and early intervention services. This framework is based on best practices but also on brain science, and that's where that tells us about the importance of people, called serve and return, those healthy relationships and how the experiences that a child has in their first five or six years of life actually have the ability to not just change their outcomes but actually the physical composition of their brain, of their developing mind. That's hugely important. We're going to make sure that that is built into our prevention and early intervention services.

Also, it's making sure that – I mean, we know research shows that more vulnerable populations will benefit disproportionately from things like quality child care, so it goes back to need. Right now our licensed and accredited child care centres are at about 80 per cent capacity, so we understand that parents are still choosing different forms of child care for their children. What we need to

make sure is that the parents who need access to supports – and that’s why we’ve also increased the amount, \$8.1 million, for subsidy in licensed child care centres. It’s incredibly important that low-income families have access to quality child care. When we talk about accessibility, that could be, as I said before, for children with various needs and in various areas of the province, so certainly that’s part of child care subsidy and affordability as well.

**Mr. Neudorf:** Fantastic. Thank you very much.

I know there are just a couple of minutes left, but we’ve talked a lot, with a lot of questions from a number of different areas covering a whole range of topics. In light of the larger budget, where we had to have seen some reductions and held the line on spending, this portfolio has pretty much been steady or seen an increase across every sector to address the most vulnerable.

Just wondering if you had a few closing remarks about that and the success that I’ve seen in your efforts to really make sure the money gets to those who need it the most and protecting our province’s most vulnerable. If you just would comment on that.

**Ms Schulz:** Sure. As I said in my opening remarks, this year’s budget delivers on our government’s mandate – specifically, creating jobs, growing the economy – but it also protects front-line services and supports those who are most vulnerable in our province. We are on a chart back to balance, and that is through targeted reductions and thoughtful reallocations. I think some of the

things that we’ve discussed today really address some of the work that the ministry has undertaken to question things and to make sure that we’re not doing things because we’ve always done them. We’re doing things to address best practices, changes in brain science research, and making sure that as much support as possible is going to support the front line, whether that be by supporting our front-line caseworkers or ensuring that our prevention and early intervention programs are targeted to support those who need it most.

Funding has increased for child intervention, child care as well as the Alberta child benefit. Those families who were receiving the Alberta child benefit will not see a change, but it’s also about targeting the funding that government provides really, truly to those who need it most. Every dollar we save by reducing duplication, streamlining processes . . .

**The Acting Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister. Time has expired. With as wonderful a discussion as we had this morning, I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that time allotted for this item of business has concluded. I’d like to remind committee members that they are scheduled to meet on Tuesday, November 5, 2019, at 9 a.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Health.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned. Have a great day.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]





