



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, March 10, 2021
7 p.m.

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Second Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participants

Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General

Hon. Kaycee Madu, QC, Minister

Dennis Cooley, Associate Deputy Minister, Solicitor General

Mary MacDonald, Assistant Deputy Minister, Resolution and Court Administration Services

David Peace, Assistant Deputy Minister, Justice Services

Bill Sweeney, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Security

Brad Wells, Executive Director and Senior Financial Officer, Financial and Business Services

7 p.m.

Wednesday, March 10, 2021

[Ms Goodridge in the chair]

**Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Good evening, everybody. I would like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone here tonight. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022.

I would ask that we go around the room and have members introduce themselves for the record. My name is Laila Goodridge. I am the MLA for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche and the chair of this committee. I will be starting to my right.

Mr. Smith: Good evening, everybody. My name is Mark Smith, and I'm the MLA for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Ms Lovely: Jackie Lovely, MLA for Camrose constituency.

Mr. Guthrie: Peter Guthrie, MLA for Airdrie-Cochrane.

Ms Ganley: Kathleen Ganley, MLA, Calgary-Mountain View.

Mr. Sabir: Irfan Sabir, MLA for Calgary-McCall.

Ms Robert: Good evening. Nancy Robert, clerk of *Journals* and substituting for the committee clerk tonight.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to members participating virtually. When I call your name, please introduce yourselves for the record. Shannon Phillips.

Ms Phillips: Shannon Phillips, MLA for Lethbridge-West.

The Chair: Mickey Amery.

Mr. Amery: Good evening. Mickey Amery, MLA, Calgary-Cross.

The Chair: Richard Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Good evening. Richard Gotfried, MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek.

The Chair: Michaela Glasgo.

Ms Glasgo: Michaela Glasgo, Brooks-Medicine Hat.

The Chair: Brad Rutherford.

Mr. Rutherford: Good evening. Brad Rutherford, MLA, Leduc-Beaumont.

The Chair: Thank you.

Due to the current landscape we are in, all ministry staff and the minister will be participating in the estimates debate virtually. Minister, I would ask that you please introduce yourself and would ask that if any one of your officials is called upon to respond to a question, they introduce themselves before speaking.

I would like to note for the record the following substitutions: Ms Phillips as deputy chair for MLA Lori Sigurdson and Mr. Guthrie for Mr. Neudorf.

Minister, would you like to introduce yourself as well as your officials that are present with you.

Mr. Madu: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm Kaycee Madu, MLA for Edmonton-South West and Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. I do have my officials in the room, but I think I would like to do that in the course of my opening remarks if that works for you.

The Chair: It's up to you.

Before we begin, I would like to note that in accordance with the recommendations from the chief medical officer of health attendees at today's meeting are advised to leave the appropriate distance between themselves and other meeting participants.

In addition, as indicated in the February 25, 2021, memo from the hon. Speaker Cooper, I would remind everyone of committee room protocols in line with health guidelines, which require members to wear masks in the committee rooms and while seated except when speaking, at which time they may choose not to wear a face covering.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Those participating virtually are asked to turn on their camera while speaking and to please mute their microphone when not speaking. To be placed on the speakers list, virtual participants should e-mail or send a message in the group chat to the committee clerk, and members in the room are asked to please wave or otherwise signal their intention to the chair. I would ask that everyone please set all of their cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of this meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. A total of three hours have been scheduled for consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General. Standing Order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking order rotation and speaking times. In brief, the minister or a member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of his comments a 60-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition begins, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for independent members, if any, and then a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus. Individuals may only speak for up to 10 minutes at a time, but time may be combined between the member and the minister. The rotation of speaking time will then follow the same rotation of the Official Opposition, independent members, and then government caucus, with individual speaking times set to five minutes for both the member and the minister. These times may be combined, making it a 10-minute block. One final note. Please remember that at all times all discussion should flow through the chair regardless of whether or not speaking times are combined. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send an e-mail or a message to the committee clerk about the process.

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 a break? Wonderful. We will work with the other group to have a break near the midpoint.

Ministry officials, at the direction of the minister, may address the committee. Ministry officials are asked to please introduce themselves for the record prior to commenting. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit, appropriately distanced, 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; however, the speaking block time and the overall three-hour meeting clock will continue to run.

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

The vote on the estimates and any amendments will occur in Committee of Supply on March 17, 2021. 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 as a courtesy an electronic version of the signed original should be provided to the committee clerk to be distributed to all committee members.

I will now invite the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to begin with his opening remarks. Minister, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good evening, everyone, and thank you for being here this evening. As you know, today I will be presenting the Justice and Solicitor General 2021-2024 business plan and the 2021-2022 estimates.

First, I would like to introduce officials attending with me: my Deputy Minister of Justice, Frank Bosscha; associate deputy minister, Solicitor General, Dennis Cooley; acting assistant deputy minister, corporate services, Fiona Lavoy.

Also with me today are Kim Goddard, assistant deputy minister, Alberta Crown prosecution service; Kim Sanderson, assistant deputy minister, correctional services; David Peace, assistant deputy minister, justice services; Lisa Tchir, assistant deputy minister, legal services; Bill Sweeney, senior assistant deputy minister, public security; Mary MacDonald, assistant deputy minister, resolution and court administration services; and Brad Wells, senior financial officer.

As we continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic challenges it presents, our government is focused on what matters most, protecting lives and livelihoods. For the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, that means we need to continue to make sure Alberta's families and communities are safe and secure.

I do want to thank my department for pivoting quickly in the face of this pandemic. COVID-19 presented significant challenges to our justice system, but it also presented an opportunity to deploy our modernization program, that utilizes technology to accelerate Albertans' access to our justice system. With our partners in the justice system we are moving forward with modern, technology-driven solutions to the challenges facing our courts. This budget continues to focus on the core priorities of the courts through these changes.

We are investing in law enforcement, integrating services, and adopting new approaches to consistent challenges to provide the province with better outcomes and results. We are doing this because despite calls, including those from the opposition, to weaken law enforcement, we have heard from Albertans and, particularly, minority communities that strengthening enforcement is needed now more than ever, and we cannot allow philosophical issues to compromise efforts to protect Albertans and keep all of our communities safe.

In this budget we remain focused on fulfilling the promises that a record number of Albertans entrusted us with, including rural communities. Their concerns went unaddressed for far too long. This year the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General's consolidated budget is \$1.35 billion. Simply put, with Budget 2021 our ministry is providing much-needed savings to taxpayers while

delivering common-sense reforms to the justice system that would make it work better for Albertans.

7:10

Alberta's justice system must work for Albertans, especially when it comes to enforcement coverage and response times. All Albertans deserve access to timely and responsive police services no matter where they live. I see no reason why someone living in a rural community must wait significantly longer for police than someone living in Calgary, Edmonton, or Lethbridge. That's why I'm intending on increasing enforcement funding across the board. Funding for organized and serious crime, including the Alberta law enforcement response teams, is increasing to \$43.7 million. Total funding for the Alberta RCMP is increasing, and we are looking forward to the rapid response initiative coming into place this year, demonstrating our firm and continuing commitment to fighting rural crime.

Provincial funding to municipalities for policing is holding steady. Of this budget the chief of the Edmonton Police Service, Dale McFee, noted as follows:

Police agencies across the province are evolving in ways well beyond their traditional roles and we are pleased that the provincial government is maintaining its support as we continue to make advancements. Policing has become increasingly complex and, in a time of economic downturn where demands on our frontlines are rising, it is critical to ensure that the men and women who serve their communities have support and proper resources. We appreciate that the provincial government recognizes the importance of their investment in policing and law enforcement.

In total, we have committed more than half a billion dollars to policing and enforcement activities this year. This is because we recognize the essential role law enforcement officers play in protecting our communities. We remain united in this purpose. In times such as this we cannot afford to play politics with law enforcement. Albertans do not accept the rhetoric of ill-informed calls to defund the police, and as Justice minister I will not give any legitimacy to that kind of partisan activism. We now know that governments that flirted with the idea of defunding the police saw a spike in crime, disproportionately affecting minority communities. Budget 2021 is based on facts and evidence, not hashtags and fashionable trends in politics.

Common sense is also guiding Justice and Solicitor General staffing to find savings in our corrections system. In our efforts to focus on the core services Albertans rely on, we are reviewing and determining the most suitable delivery of correctional services while reducing costs as inmate populations decline. That means increasing the use of technology to streamline administration and supervision to create efficiencies; internalizing some services that were once contracted out at an additional expense such as youth community corrections in Calgary and, instead, relying on our own qualified staff of the provincial government; finding and eliminating duplication wherever possible; taking strategic approaches to managing and filling vacancies; participating in group purchase initiatives and sharing contracts with other government branches to reduce costs; and analyzing the use of overtime within our correctional centres. Through these common-sense efficiencies the corrections department will find \$24 million in much-needed savings, bringing its total budget to \$263.2 million this year.

Within our court system we are focusing on core services and changing the way we do business to save taxpayer dollars as well. In our courts we strive to resolve matters in a timely manner. Pressures remain, but we won't wait for better fiscal times.

We are already pressing forward in several associated areas to find efficiencies. We have been working with Alberta's judiciary to modernize court services and operations, work that was sped up by the need to address the new pressures created by the COVID-19 pandemic, including court closures and social distancing requirements. Thankfully, staff and our partners were able to speed up this process and expand the use of remote court hearings earlier than expected, freeing up invaluable court space and time.

The fast and safe and fair SafeRoads Alberta system represents a significant modernization effort, and I must thank both the Minister of Transportation and his officials for their collaboration on this important reform. With SafeRoads the penalties for impaired driving are tougher while allowing us to prioritize serious matters and make better use of existing court resources. In this way we continue to strive to keep our streets safe while enhancing access to justice by prioritizing essential matters before the courts.

We are also using technology and process changes to make similar improvements in other areas of the justice system. Services around traffic ticket adjournment filings and virtual court are getting more user friendly and efficient thanks to the increased use of technology and process updates. The savings from practical changes like this start to add up quickly when we look at the big picture, so we will be continuing down this road in 2021. I am excited to discuss more about the justice digital initiative and some . . .

The Chair: Minister, I'll let you finish your sentence.

Mr. Madu: Madam Chair, I yield back to you.

The Chair: Wonderful.

With that, we will now move to the Official Opposition. Mr. Sabir?

Mr. Sabir: Yes.

The Chair: All right. Mr. Sabir will be opening up the first 20-minute block. For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. The timer will be set for 20-minute intervals so that you are aware of time.

Member, are you interested in sharing time or doing block time?

Mr. Sabir: Yes, if that is what the minister agrees to.

Mr. Madu: Yes, I am comfortable with that, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Fantastic. Then the first block is yours, Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister. I do have some brief opening remarks. It's my pleasure to be here to discuss the Justice and Solicitor General budget. Thank you to the minister and all your staff for being here to discuss this budget.

The work of the Justice department has always been of critical importance. The functioning of our society and democracy depends on the rule of law and a fair, impartial, and efficient justice system. In recent times it has become more important than ever before to have an efficient justice system that is responsive to the needs of diverse communities in Alberta. The murder of George Floyd; the Black Lives Matter movement protests that followed; then the arrest of Chief Allan Adam, the chief of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation; overrepresentation of indigenous and black people in the justice system; and the recent attacks on black, Muslim, hijab-wearing women have all led to renewed calls for addressing systemic racism issues and concerns raised by black, indigenous, and persons of colour communities respecting their interaction with the justice system.

I recognize, Minister, that we may disagree on many policy issues, but we all share a common belief that all Albertans should be able to feel safe in their homes and communities. We also agree that all Albertans should be governed by the rule of law and must have an equal access to justice. Through this exchange today my hope is to have an honest and respectful conversation that will help Albertans understand your budget, your vision, and the work you are doing to advance our interests and address challenges facing us as Albertans.

I understand that you may not have all the information that I may seek, so if you provide an undertaking to provide an answer later, I will expect that any such undertaking will be dealt with prior to the vote of the budget in the Legislature. I will try my best to keep my questions brief, and I hope that you would do the same.

7:20

With that, I will get into the first question. I think that by the end of your remarks you were getting into digital justice. You referenced the fiscal plan a number of times, for example on page 120, about the digitalization of courts and the justice system, those changes being responsible for the majority of the reductions in your budget this year. My understanding is that this initiative started several years ago and that criminal e-filing was well under way in 2018. Minister, the question I have is that this year you attribute \$65 million – that's the total reduction in the Justice budget – to newly found savings to this initiative. Can you or your officials walk us through what those savings are that you identified this year, which were not planned in last year's budget? As I said, it's my understanding that this initiative started before you, and I just want to know how the savings or the expected savings have developed since 2018. Like, what was forecasted at the time versus what was saved in later years, including this year?

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Member Sabir, for your question. Budget 2021 provides savings to taxpayers while delivering common-sense reform to the justice system. We are protecting the programs and services that Albertans rely on to keep them safe. While the previous government neglected the justice system, we are taking transformative steps to modernize it for today's Albertans; hence, the effort with respect to digital justice.

Other initiatives include reforming Alberta's Police Act, banning the practice of carding and regulating street checks, fighting rural crime, and reducing response times for Albertans in distress through rapid response, appointing the Alberta Parole Board, updating laws to protect citizens and the economy from emerging criminal trends. But specifically to your question, through modernization and efficiencies Alberta's government is saving taxpayers' dollars while protecting citizens.

Key to Albertans' safety is policing, which is why we are maintaining or increasing enforcement for them in several areas. We will continue to focus on better use of technology and updating processes to modernize services. For example, we are working with the judiciary to modernize court services and operations, some of which were already demonstrated and spelled out by our collective effort to address the pandemic, as you rightly noted, such as expanding the use of remote court hearings. We are continuing to support changes to impaired driving enforcement and consequences, which are designed to keep our streets safer and not tie up police, prosecutors, and judges in courtrooms. Under the simple, fast SafeRoads Alberta system penalties for impaired driving got tougher while we prioritize matters and help our police and courts focus on the most serious matters facing Albertans.

Finally, I would say this, Member Sabir. We are also using technology and process changes to make the justice system more user friendly and efficient such as in the areas of traffic tickets, adjournments, filings, and virtual courts.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Minister. Well, that doesn't help me understand where we found \$65 million in reductions.

The Chair: Mr. Sabir, I'll just remind you that all the questions must go through the chair.

Mr. Sabir: You asked me to speak, and I started.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Sabir: You recognized me, and then I started.

The Chair: I understand, but your question has to go through the chair and not directly to the minister.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. Through you, Chair, that answer didn't help me understand how \$65 million were saved in the Justice budget, but I will move on to the estimates. I will come back to this digitalization later.

With respect to line item 3.1, through the chair, Minister, we now have seen a reduction of \$16.5 million over two years. My understanding is that these reductions result from the reduction of full-time employees in lawyers inside the department and outsourcing more legal work. In 2019 the government plan that was publicly shared was to reduce it by 90. The question I have is: how many have been reduced to date, and how many do you intend to reduce in this budget since there are reductions of \$16.5 million in two years?

The Chair: To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Chair, for that question. Since the 2019-2020 fiscal year the legal services division has been advancing a strategy which combines manpower reductions with service innovation and a focus on providing those services of greatest value to our clients. We work with our clients to assess the nature of the services they require and ensure the work requires the specialized skills, knowledge, or experience of a lawyer. If the request does not require specialized legal skills or is of low priority or risk, we will assist our client in developing capacity to manage the matter through activities such as developing templates, tipsheets, flow charts, and other resources.

But let me also say this. As part of that, the legal services division needs to ensure we are focusing our legal resources and specialized legal skills on those matters that require a lawyer. The legal services division uses internal processes to rigorously monitor an ongoing service request and assign resources to items of high priority to our clients.

Specific to your question, as well, this was done through a combination of issuing work notices to staff and attrition. All of the bargaining unit positions identified in 2020-2021 were lost through attrition. You know, the last working notice issue will be complete in December 2021.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Through you, Madam Chair, will there be any reductions in the number of lawyers in your department by the end of this year?

The Chair: Minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Chair. For 2021-2022 the lawyers that will be affected at the management level are 10, zero for opted-out, and the bargaining unit will be two, for a total for 2020-21 of 54 and for 2021-2022, 12.

The Chair: Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just for my understanding, it's stated in your explanatory note for this line item that your department provides legal services to other ministries under this line item. Would these reductions – it's significant, \$16.5 million. Are other departments now outsourcing more legal work more often, and how is that handled? Are you still responsible for providing legal services to other departments?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sabir. I'll just remind you again to make sure you're directing your questions through the chair.

Minister Madu.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. The department still provides legal services to other departments. There are circumstances in which we would utilize outside counsel. When the legal services division lacks capacity or subject matter expertise, we retain external counsel in the marketplace, with the cost paid by the client department. We are able to retain counsel at rates set out in the government of Alberta tariff. That has not increased since 2009. When that is not possible, we negotiate the best rate possible. Tariff rates have to be approved by both senior Justice and Solicitor General officials and the client ministry. The top-end government of Alberta tariff set in 2009 is \$250 per hour.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

7:30

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
To Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. Do you have some crossgovernment dollar figures on how much was spent on external legal opinion, and did that amount differ from previous years? Where do those expenses show up, like, in each department's budget or within the Justice budget?

The Chair: Thank you.
To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Well, data for the current fiscal year is not yet available, but I can confirm the following. The amount of money spent on outside counsel for the last two complete fiscal years is as follows: 2018-2019, roughly \$21 million; 2019-2020, \$26 million.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
We're having some technical challenges.
Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. Minister, is there a list of firms that have work outsourced to them, and is there anywhere that we can know which firm is acting on what file? Have you had to make any policy changes such as the amount that can be billed, sole-sourcing, those kinds of rules?

The Chair: Thank you.
To Minister Madu.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. As we can see from the tariff that was set up in 2009, that has not changed. The lawyers that my ministry retains come from a wide variety of backgrounds, I think, and it depends on the nature of the legal work and the expertise that is being looked for. Those are matters that are reported with the Auditor General, and they can easily be found.

Let me also say this, that we do as much legal work as we can using our highly efficient and economical in-house counsel in the legal services division. When we do have to use outside counsel – let me be clear again – we endeavour to retain counsel at rates set out in the government of Alberta tariff, and as I said before, that hasn't changed since 2009. Again, you can find all of this information on the government's open source website for sole-source contracts. All of that is readily available, Member Sabir.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Sabir, I'd just remind you that your questions must be directed through the chair. One of the better ways of doing that is to not ask the question directly to the minister but asking it through the chair.

Mr. Sabir: Madam Chair, every time I've been directing it through you. I don't know what else you want me to do to make sure. At the end of the day every question is going to the minister, like I said, through you to the minister. So you want me to repeat that every time?

The Chair: I would, yes. I would like you to be directing your questions through the chair.

Mr. Sabir: While we are on this category, line item 3.3, law reform, this year will only be a fifth of what it was last year. The question, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister: can you walk us through what kind of projects will not proceed because of that reduction? Can you provide us a list? Will there be fewer employees because of this reduction?

The Chair: Thank you.
Minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Obviously, you know, there are going to be some changes, and this is not new to Justice and Solicitor General. At Justice we have approximately 6,777 employees. As a consequence of Budget 2021-2022 and based on the direction from Treasury Board and Finance, you are going to see, at the most, 71 or 77 staff being impacted, but I am confident that many of these positions, as I said before, are going to be through attrition and the working notices that were issued in 2019-2020.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: I have some questions now relating to the business plan. On page 71 it states:

Justice and Solicitor General helps ensure that all Albertans can live in safe and resilient communities while having access to a fair and innovative justice system. It ensures that the rule of law is upheld and government undertakings are administered according to law.

Through you to the minister, I know this is on the minds of many Albertans: six black, Muslim, hijab-wearing women were attacked

in the last little while here in Edmonton, and pretty much every weekend a bunch of racists carrying tiki torches are flouting Alberta's lawful public health restrictions here in Edmonton and in Calgary. I just want to ask some questions on behalf of those who are victims of all this, and I am hoping to see where it's reflected in your business plan. For example, the key objectives in outcome 1 and outcome 3 talk about many important issues but speak little to these issues. Can you tell us how this important work fits into your business plan this year, and could you assure Albertans that this work will be a priority?

The Chair: Thank you.
To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, we condemn acts of racism and discrimination and hate crimes against minority communities. I am sure the member would agree that any time someone out there is victimized on the basis of who they are or what they look like or the colour of their skin, as a society we can all agree that we should never tolerate those types of behaviours, and we should all rise to condemn . . .

The Chair: Minister, I'll let you continue. That was just the first of our 20-minute blocks.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We can all agree to condemn those types of actions and do everything we can to ensure that we root out those who seek to do our citizens harm on the basis of what they look like.

Societal expectations with respect to proactive policing of hate and bias-motivated crimes and crime extremism are growing. No question about that. We are considering the establishment of a Justice and Solicitor General based hate crimes task force to enhance intelligence, training, specialized investigative support, and interagency co-ordination to reduce and respond to hate and bias-motivated crimes and incidents throughout Alberta. I am confident that we will have more to say on this particular issue in the weeks and months to come.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
To Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Through you, Madam Chair, just a clarification question. Minister, you have mentioned the words "minority communities" a few times now. Just to be on the same page and to help understand your answer better, can you explain: what do you mean when you use "minority communities"?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sabir.
To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Well, by "minority communities" I am referring to individuals who come from minority communities: black, indigenous, other persons of colour, LGBTQ-plus members of our society, all of those people who have been on the margins of our society, who due to either their religion or the colour of their skin or their sexual orientation have been victimized. I think that they will come under the umbrella of folks from minority communities.

7:40

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
To Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Through you, Chair, given that it's top of mind for many Albertans, under line item 8.2 we see that there is no contribution to the assistance to the human rights education and

multiculturalism fund, same as last year, and on the website of the Alberta Human Rights Commission it appears that the fund and its programming are discontinued. Through you, Chair, Minister, can you explain if that work is done in a different way and if there is anything else that changed? I'm not able to find the support for these initiatives in your budget.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sabir. Again, just a reminder to direct your questions through the chair, not directly to the minister.

Minister, for a response.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Alberta Human Rights Commission and the work that they do is actually important in making sure that we treat all of our citizens fairly and that there is a mechanism for citizens to seek remedy when their human rights are being violated. That work is important to me as the Minister of Justice, and I have been working closely with the leaders of the Alberta Human Rights Commission to make sure that they understand that that is important work.

That said, the assistance to the human rights education and multiculturalism fund provided financial resources for programs and services that promote diversity and equality, prevent discrimination and racism, and build welcoming communities and workplaces. The goal of this program was to support the full civic participation of all Albertans in the social, cultural, political, and economic life of the province without encountering discrimination because of their race, religion, beliefs, colour, gender, disability, age, ancestry, sexual orientation, or other characteristics protected under the Alberta Human Rights Commission.

The human rights education and multiculturalism fund was funded by the department of the Alberta lottery fund in 2019-2020. It was identified to be dissolved once the \$30 million surplus in the fund was exhausted. The fund no longer receives revenue from the department of the lottery fund. That said, the work of human rights education continues with the Human Rights Commission.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

To Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Through you, Madam Chair, I think it's widely believed that education is one of the best ways to address racism. As you indicated, there is dollar zero allocated to address racism and systemic racism issues. The question I have is: are there any funds for those kinds of initiatives anywhere in your ministry's budget? Through you, Chair, can you, Minister, help me understand where I can find support for those initiatives around racism and systemic racism?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sabir.

To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. We do have budgetary allocations for the Alberta Human Rights Commission that help them do the important work of meeting their mandate, the mandate of the commission, and that includes, you know, making sure that complaints of discrimination and racism to the commission are heard. Part of that mandate also continues to be education and dealing with racism wherever it occurs.

My department, the Department of Justice, also has a wide variety of programs and services aimed at dealing with racism and discrimination. We also provide funds to municipal police services, all kinds of grants, that help them also deal with issues like that. That is also why in Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, there was a provision for new funds that will go to community

services and agencies that are focused on community work and providing equal opportunities and tackling crimes before they occur or helping us root out the root causes of crime. Overall, communities and agencies out there can make application to the department through the establishment of that particular fund for all kinds of community efforts that include fighting racism and discrimination in our communities.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

To Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again in the business plan, page 71. "The ministry continues to work to ensure matters progress through the justice system . . . within the time frames established by the Supreme Court of Canada in the R v Jordan decision." Through you, Madam Chair, I have a question for the minister. Can you please speak about the status of delays relating to the Jordan decision, if any, in criminal courts?

The Chair: Thank you.

To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. As a consequence of the Jordan decision, there is a requirement to ensure that matters impacted by the Jordan decision are heard within the period of 18 months. We are working with our partners in the judiciary to make sure that matters are heard within the time frames required by the Jordan decision.

You know, that said, 306 Jordan applications have been filed in Alberta courts between October 25, 2016, and December 31, 2020. Nine pending, 94 dismissed by the court, 36 granted to be appealed by the Crown, 56 abandoned by the defence, 45 proactively stayed by the Crown on the basis that they wouldn't survive the Jordan application, 66 resolved: all related to Jordan applications. Over that time period more than 407,000 cases entered the system, which means that about .008 per cent of matters have resulted in a successful Jordan application.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

To Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. There used to be a performance indicator on Jordan applications. I don't see it in the business plan anymore. But through you, Madam Chair, the question I have for the minister is: did the minister perform any analysis on how the number might develop going forward?

The Chair: Thank you.

To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, the court and my department are tracking those applications to make sure that, you know, they are within the time frame allowed by the court. We are keeping a close eye on that. We are working with all kinds of partners within the justice system, including Legal Aid, you know, to make sure that cases that are coming before the court that may have impacted the Jordan decision have been resolved on time. But we do not know what the impact on that application will be as a consequence of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

To Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you, we are seeing line items 2.4 and 2.5. Those are funds for Provincial Court and Alberta Court of Queen's Bench. We are seeing reductions for both. So the simple question I have, through you, Madam Chair, for the minister is: have you done any analysis on how these reductions will play out, and will it impact court backlogs?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sabir.
To Minister Madu.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, we have worked closely with the leaders of the judiciary to make sure that the budget that we put forward for the court is something that they are able to manage. We have tried so hard to minimize to ensure that the budget would not impact front-line justice services. I mean, I am confident that the work we continue to do with the court continues to focus on better use of technology and auditing processes to modernize services. For example, we are working with the judiciary to modernize court services and operations, some of which was already demonstrated and sped up by our collective efforts to address the pandemic such as expanding the use of remote court appearances.

We are continuing to support changes to impaired driving enforcement and consequences, which are designed to keep our streets safer and not tie our police and prosecutors and judges up in courtrooms.

7:50

At the end of the day, you know, I am confident that the court budgets have been put forward in a way that ensures that they continue to deliver the services that Albertans expect without any significant impact on their ability to deliver for Albertans.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
To Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Page 73, outcome 1: "the ministry is committed to ensuring all Albertans feel safe, secure, and protected in their communities no matter where they live within the province." Through you, Madam Chair, the question for the minister. Minister, the budget lists three key objectives, which include a feasibility study for a provincial police force – includes a provincial police force among other things. The question I have or what I really want to understand is how these objectives help a black, Muslim, hijab-wearing woman getting attacked in Edmonton or someone getting surveilled unlawfully by the police to feel safe and secure in their homes and communities.

The Chair: Thank you.
To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. The ministry is working with policing partners and stakeholders to ensure that all Albertans feel safe and secure and protected in their communities, and that includes folks from minority communities. Government efforts in this regard include commitment of up to \$10 million each fiscal year to improve law enforcement's rural crime response capability by increasing RCMP resources and creating the rural Alberta provincial integrated defence response, which will allow provincial peace officers to better respond and assist the RCMP and other police services in rural Alberta. We are committing up to \$43.7 million to deal with and investigate child pornography, gun violence, drug trafficking, stalking, and domestic violence, primarily through the Alberta law enforcement response team.

We continue to work with partners and use evidence-based principles to assess the risk of those involved with community

corrections through sustainment of effective processes in community policing. I am confident, you know, that the budget that we have put forward will ensure that we keep all of our communities and people safe. There are all kinds of initiatives on that municipal policing, crime prevention and restorative justice unit. All of that particular work is undergoing. As Justice minister I am committed to making sure that all Albertans, regardless of where they live in this province, feel safe in their homes and in their communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
To Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. Through you to the minister, page 71 of the business plan says, "the ministry supports, educates and trains police commissions and policing committees," and on page 72 it's stated that "the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General continues to review programs to ensure . . . efficient and client-focused services." I recognize that it's a pretty important function, through the chair to you, Minister, given the concerns about systemic racism and unlawful surveillance by the police. Can you confirm if you're reviewing police education and training? Basically, I just want – if you could confirm it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sabir. Again, a reminder to try and direct questions.
To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Let me be clear that as Justice minister I would, you know, do everything within my power to ensure that everyone feels safe in our province. I have also said that the law enforcement community has got my full support. That said, I also said that we would hold them to account when they abuse the extraordinary power that they exercise and wield on Albertans. That includes making sure that we review the Police Act. In fact, that is why we have embarked on the largest review of the Police Act since 1988. We have brought together a wide range of Albertans from all walks of life to provide us with their views, their expectations on what a modern Police Act would look like.

We've heard issues around the complaint resolution process. We've heard complaints around the interaction between law enforcement and citizens, and we've heard that racism and discrimination are real. I am committed to making sure that we resolve all of this. That is why, Member Sabir, I was proud in 2020 to have banned the practice of carding, something that minority communities have been calling for for years, for decades, and finally this government was able to bring to an end a practice that unfairly discriminated against minority communities.

That is also why in Bill 38, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2020, we amended the Police Act to include for the first time in our police history, you know, First Nations policing and commission. That is why I also have appointed a cultural person with a background in criminology and sociology to help the department in the review of the Police Act.

I want to make sure that our Police Act reflects today's Alberta, that the justice system reflects today's Alberta, that everyone who calls this province home can feel safe and respected in this province. Unless we do that, it will be difficult for folks to be able to have faith and trust in law enforcement. We can't afford to compromise that.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

To Mr. Sabir. Just to let you know, we're just at the end of our 20-minute block, the second of three.

Mr. Sabir: Through you, Madam Chair, just a point of clarification for the minister. I have read the paper that was released about carding and street checks, and I have read it a few times. What it says is that carding was and continues to remain illegal, and police authorities are directed to make policies and procedures with respect to street checks. I represent a constituency which has people of colour communities and for those who just look like me, the question, through you, for the minister, to help me understand in the simplest terms, is: what is different after your policy for a person like me when they go out?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sabir.
To Minister Madu.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Let me, through you, assure the member that the practice of carding, which is a practice that allows the police to arbitrarily stop people on the street on the basis of what they look like, has come to an end in Alberta. We ended that in November 2020. There is a distinction in practice and in law between street checks and carding. We also embarked on the reform of police checks. Law enforcement, and I'm sure that Mr. Sabir will agree with me, must continue to have the ability to gather intelligence to help us disrupt violent crimes, to keep our people safe in our communities. To do that, there has to be a legal means by which police are able to have interactions with members of the community. That is why we reformed the street checks, and I committed to bringing forward legislation that would put parameters around when law enforcement can use the practice of street checks.

To be clear, and to all folks from minority communities who are watching tonight, who are listening, there are distinctions between carding and street checks. What I have heard, long before I got elected, from my own community, you know, is that they were concerned with carding. They were not concerned about the potential for law enforcement to have legal interactions with them. It is law enforcement, those officers who embarked on a practice whereby without any lawful purpose they had stopped them on the street simply because of what they look like or the colour of their skin. I mean, those are the issues. We have ended that and put a requirement on the use of street checks.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

8:00

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
To Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. Through you, Chair, I think that what I'm hearing from the community is more of the same, but I will leave that for another day and move on to page 73, outcome 2, a fair and effective justice system. Key objectives talk about red tape, recall legislation, and the UCP Fair Deal Panel. Under key objective 1.3, the feasibility of a provincial police force, in the quantitative portion of the Fair Deal Panel report, page 65, only 35 per cent of Albertans thought that it would be helpful. A couple of short questions. I know that many Albertans are interested in seeing that report, and it's due on April 30. Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister: will that report be made public? I would appreciate if you can keep your answer brief.

The Chair: Thank you.
To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. The member is correct that we are expecting the provincial police transition study report by April. I am not, you know, going to delve into a report here that, I

mean, I don't have. I have not received the report yet, but I think, suffice to say, that Albertans will be informed of that particular report. I think it's important that we hear from Albertans who want the presence of law enforcement in their communities. That was an important commitment recommendation coming out of the Fair Deal Panel.

The former Justice minister embarked on a tour of rural Alberta, where there were hundreds and hundreds of fellow citizens who trooped out, you know, to tell him how important it is for them to be able to feel the presence of law enforcement. At the end of the day, the whole essence of the provincial police transition study is focused on community policing. I want to make sure that it doesn't matter where you live in our province; you are going to feel and see the presence of law enforcement in your communities. Let me also be clear that this is a matter of the safety of our people and of our communities, and I am not going to allow petty politics or the views of those who've got, you know, municipal police services – while we will take into consideration the views of all Albertans, I also want to make sure that we do the right thing in making sure that we protect all Albertans.

You know, Madam Chair, in Edmonton you could call 911, and within a matter of minutes you get the police at your beck and call. You could do the same thing in Calgary, Lethbridge, Camrose, and Medicine Hat. But if you live in rural Alberta, sometimes it takes two hours. The idea that we would not do everything we can to fix that – a phone call to the police oftentimes can be a matter of life and death. Rural crimes have gone up. The complaints about rural crime have gone up. It is important that government, regardless of the views of some, does the right thing. Safety is a concern to all Albertans. At the end of the day, I am going to take into consideration the views of those who are most impacted by this particular issue in making recommendations to the government.

At this point in time I am looking forward to the report, and at the appropriate time I think that we will share the report with Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
To Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. I hope that report gets shared sooner rather than later.

Page 74, outcome 3, key objective 3.1 talks about the new model of victim service delivery. I understand that the government is setting up a panel to make recommendations on this, and, Madam Chair, my colleagues and I are hearing from constituents, from victims of crime about the delays and them getting denied services. The question I have for the minister, through you, is: how long will victims of crime have to wait before they can see a new model? I just need some specific timelines.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sabir.
To Minister Madu.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Victims deserve to have the help that they need when they need it, and we are working to make sure this continues to happen in Alberta. We heard first-hand that changes were needed because the previous financial benefit program could take too long to access and didn't always provide enough urgent assistance for those coping with trauma. This is why we worked with stakeholders to make more timely support available to victims. We have also engaged with stakeholders, including victims and victim-serving organizations, to help us develop a new victims assistance program as part of a new approach

to support victims of crime in Alberta, which we will be launching this year. As part of this particular work we will also be looking at how to potentially direct more funding to assist victims.

Let me also say this, Madam Chair, that I think that it is important, when we're talking about victims of crime, that we also talk about the root causes of crime, the reason why there are victims in the first place. I don't want us to lose sight that there is no greater responsibility of any government than to keep their people safe, and if there is any investment that we can make in respect of public safety initiatives to prevent fellow Albertans from being victims of crime, I think that is the right thing to do. Oftentimes I know that we tend to focus on money, and there are problems that money is going to solve for us. Those of our citizens who have fallen victim to crime need the care that they deserve. They need, you know, the assistance to overcome the trauma and to overcome the difficulties that they are going through because of folks who have committed crimes against them. But I am also heavily invested in making sure that we do everything we can to see if we can prevent those crimes before they occur.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
To Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you. Just a follow-up question: is there a timeline for this new model? When can victims of crime expect it to be in place?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sabir.
To Minister Madu.

Mr. Madu: Madam Chair, I am going to defer that question to my associate deputy minister responsible for Solicitor General to address the question.

Go ahead. Please introduce yourself.

Mr. Cooley: Dennis Cooley, associate deputy minister, Justice and Solicitor General. That work that the minister is referring to, the victims services review, is ongoing now. We hope to have the work completed over the course of the spring and into the summer and then bring that forward for cabinet decision-making following the completion.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.
To Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Estimates, line item 2.2, resolution services: how many employees are there under line item 2, through you to the minister?

The Chair: Thank you.
Minister Madu.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am going to defer that question to my assistant deputy minister responsible for resolution and court services, Mary MacDonald.

Mary, please introduce yourself.

8:10

Ms MacDonald: Yes. Good evening, Madam Chair. Mary MacDonald, assistant deputy minister, resolution and court administration services. To answer the question, in terms of the number of staff in resolution services, it's based on about 90 staff there, depending on the number of vacancies at any given time.

The Chair: Wonderful. Thank you.
Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just to follow up, there is more than \$2 million cut in line 2.1. Will there be any reduction in that staff?

The Chair: Mr. Madu.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, we are working with the judiciary to modernize court services and operations, some of which was already demonstrated and spread out by our collective effort in response to the pandemic. As I said before, there is going to be a total of 71 or 77 staff that have been put forward by the department. That number will cut across the various divisions within Justice and Solicitor General.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line 2.2, resolution services: they're cut from \$11.9 million to \$4.9 million. Can the minister or staff, through you, Madam Chair, walk us through what services will look different? Will there be any change in services? Will all services be the same?

The Chair: Thank you.
To Minister Madu.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. The court continues to focus on better use of technology and auditing processes to modernize services. As I said in my opening remarks, front-line services will not be impacted. We are working with the judiciary to modernize court services and operations, some of which was already demonstrated and spread out by our collective effort to address the pandemic. You know, we are continuing to support changes to impaired driving enforcement and consequences, which is designed to keep our streets safe. At the end of the day, I am confident that while we are going to see a reduction in the number of staff, mostly through attrition and working notices that were given in 2019-2020, the services that the division provides or the court provide will not be impacted. Albertans will continue to have the same level of services that they have become used to from the court.

The Chair: Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm glad to hear that no service will be impacted in line 2.2. Through you, Madam Chair, yesterday the Child and Youth Advocate, Del Graff, issued a statement of concern, and it was mostly about the impact of conflict in custody disputes on kids. He's calling on the government of Alberta, with the leadership of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General and support from child-serving ministries, to make sure that formal and informal supports are readily available to families in high-conflict custody disputes. At the same time, we are seeing a reduction of \$7 million in court resolution services when the Child and Youth Advocate is asking for more. Again through you, Madam Chair: Minister, can you assure Albertans that those services that are recommended by the Child and Youth Advocate will be available to the families if they wish to seek those services?

The Chair: Thank you.
To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair and also to the member, and thank you for that question. As I said before, the budget that we

have put forward is a budget that pays very close attention to making sure that we preserve the same level of service, if not more, that Albertans have come to rely on. We are making transformational changes to make our system and our courts more efficient, and that is a good thing. If we achieve savings, which is the goal here, that also is a good thing. As I said before, it is an important opportunity to make investments, you know, to provide efficient services and to make sure that there are no reductions in the level of services. It is not all the time that that means that a reduction in the budget necessarily means that there is going to be a reduction in the quality or level of service. As we have shown in Justice, we are taking advantage of innovation in technology and science to deliver more efficient services.

That said, we take the concerns of the Child and Youth Advocate very seriously, and I thank him for highlighting the needs of families involved in high-conflict separation. My department, you know, will fully review the statement of concern. As you know, Madam Chair and Member, this was released yesterday. We are now going to study that particular report to make sure that we better understand what is needed to be done, but I can assure the member that my department is committed to making changes where required to ensure that families are protected and families and children who are going through high-conflict matters in our court system are provided the support that they need. So we will connect with that particular office to better understand what is required. If we need to work with several ministries like Children's Services, Community and Social Services to ensure that we put forward solutions to this particular problem, you can rest assured that that we will do.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a clarification question for the minister. The line 2.2 reduction is a fair bit. On a \$12 million budget, it's a \$7 million reduction. Minister, through you, Madam Chair, is there any initiative that we would categorize as digitalization or modernization that you can attribute these reductions to?

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Madu, you have 32 seconds to respond.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Resolution services budget changes reflect efficiencies to be achieved through automation and digitization, realignment of resources to core front-line services and government's labour mandate. I am confident that resolution services . . . [Mr. Madu's speaking time expired] Thank you.

The Chair: Minister, you can finish your sentence very briefly.

Mr. Madu: Sure. Madam Chair, I am confident that the budget that we have put forward for resolution court services would allow them, you know, to meet the demands of their division, the demands of the ministry's goal whilst at the same time taking advantage of innovations in technology and modern ways of doing things in the 21st century.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

With that, we conclude the first portion of questions, and we move on to government caucus for 20 minutes of questions from members. I believe we are going to Mr. Amery.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you to the minister and to his officials for coming here this evening and allowing us to review these estimates for those in attendance and watching. I was particularly happy that the minister took the opportunity to address the committee about the steps that were taken in his short tenure as Justice minister, including his responses to the racially motivated attack, which I have a personal connection to and was something that the minister and I have discussed extensively.

Working on the issues of carding was very important, and banning carding and initiating the comprehensive review of the Police Act was incredibly important and a timely move by this Justice minister. The review of the Police Act is very important, in my view, because it is an act that has not been reviewed in any great detail or scope for decades. I'm confident that this review is absolutely essential, Madam Chair, to ensuring that it meets the needs of a very different society today than the one that it was originally drafted for. When we look at the Police Act and we note that it hasn't been really looked at in decades and we note that the changes in society have become, you know, so different from what we experienced when the Police Act was originally enacted, I think that it's an important move and an essential one at that.

8:20

It's also particularly encouraging, Madam Chair – I want to highlight this because the minister and I have had a significant amount of conversations around this. It's important and encouraging to have a Justice minister who fully and wholly understands the struggles of our marginalized and our racialized communities. I would urge the minister to continue to take a hardline position against all of the hate-motivated attacks against those individuals in our population that are particularly at risk. I say that because I represent an incredibly diverse community, and I hear the struggles and the challenges of racialized groups on a daily basis.

To the minister. The basis of an effective democratic society, in my view and in my past experience as a lawyer and in my practice, has been the effectiveness of our legal system. Law and order is, in my mind, a basic and fundamental component of a well-functioning society. In fact, I think we as Canadians are incredibly fortunate because we do have a society that is the envy of the entire world, and I think law and order forms a very essential component when it comes to that.

With that said, though, Minister, I had the opportunity to review the materials, and one of the first things that I wanted to bring to the minister's attention, Madam Chair, is found in the estimates on page 155. Now, it's my understanding that under line item 3.3, which is referred to as law reform in the estimates, the Alberta Law Reform Institute receives an annual grant from this government to review legislation, to provide advice, to ensure that the laws remain up to date. I did not know that, and I'll be frank. I think that though the institute is well known and well regarded within the legal community, their relationship with the government to Albertans may not be well understood. To the minister: how long has the Alberta Law Reform Institute received this grant for? What is the volume or the production of research and recommendations that this government receives on an annual basis? What does the ministry use the information for, with specific reference to what types of benefits are being received from this institute's research?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Amery.

Minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. MLA Amery, let me thank you first for your work in making sure that we get the Police Act reviewed. Right; I have had multiple conversations with you, and you know that we are committed in making sure that we have a 21st-century Police Act that reflects today's Alberta. I know I have often said that the promise of our province, again, is that we are a people that come from a different multicultural, multiracial, broad professional background and that the promise of our province is that when you come here to this province, you will achieve your full potential regardless of who you are. We are committed to building a society that reflects that, that allows people to reach their full potential. So thank you for your help in that particular work.

The Alberta Law Reform Institute is an important institute that was established in 1967 through an agreement between the government of Alberta through my office, the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, the University of Alberta, and the Law Society of Alberta. It is a tripartite agreement that has been renewed every five years since that time. The latest agreement was put in place in 2017, whereby money has been provided annually. This has ranged from \$200,000 to \$500,000 in grant money per year from Justice and Solicitor General.

In terms of some of the work that the Alberta Law Reform Institute has done, in 2019-2020, for example, 45 references to the Alberta Law Reform Institute were in court decisions, journal articles, and blogs. Some of the projects that they have undertaken include adverse possession, standing in the place of a parent, police record checks, regulating legal services, the Dower Act, the Personal Property Security Act, informal public appeals, the Family Property Act. Alberta's new Family Property Act came into force January 1, 2020.

The institute has got a broad mandate to make sure that they are constantly looking at our laws to make sure that they are up to date, and where they find that there is a need for reviews or amendments or updating of pieces of legislation, they make those recommendations to my department. So far I am thankful for the work that the institute does on behalf of our legal community and Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Amery.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

To Mr. Amery.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for that response. The minister went into a detailed discussion earlier this evening with respect to questions from Member Sabir in relation to the Jordan decision. Some stats were provided earlier this evening which were staggering, in my view. Certainly, for those who don't know, the Jordan decision set timelines for a province or a prosecutor to try a case for an accused in order that an accused does not experience unnecessary delay with respect to charges alleged against that individual.

Having said that, the minister earlier mentioned that there were some 300-plus challenges under the Jordan rule, and nine of those are currently ongoing, with the majority of them, or a large number of them, thankfully, being dismissed. Having said that, one of the concerns is that this Jordan rule has placed a significant weight on our Crown prosecutors in that they are forced to move a case as quickly as possible in order that a Jordan challenge does not arise and ultimately the risk that an accused individual be set free on what I would characterize, in many cases, as a technicality.

Having said that, I note, Minister, that on page 155 of the estimates and, in particular, line item 4 the Alberta Crown prosecution service has received a decrease in funding. Now, as I've

alluded to and is no secret to any member of this committee, in my previous life I was a lawyer, and I worked very closely with many Crown prosecutors. I understand that the role is incredibly thankless and involves a lot of hours and very little support. One of the concerns that I have is that there is a decrease in funding when all of the Crown prosecutors I've been able to speak to have been looking forward to some help from within this ministry in order to continue the great work that they're doing. Can you, Minister, explain the decrease in funding and whether this has stemmed from any savings in other areas? Is there any justification for this that you can elaborate on?

Secondly, another question for you. One of the primary complaints of our Crown prosecutors is that the staffing issues within their offices make their jobs very difficult, meaning that without adequate staffing, as you know, it's very difficult to get things done because support staff are such an essential part of a Crown prosecutor's job. Can you elaborate a little bit, please, for this committee and for those watching, on the staffing levels at the Crown prosecutors office and perhaps explain to all of us, myself included, what some of the underlying issues or challenges are your department is facing with respect to retention and recruitment of Crown prosecutors or capable Crown prosecutors?

Thank you.

8:30

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Amery. I would just remind you to make sure that you are directing your questions through the chair and not directly to the minister.

Mr. Amery: Thank you.

The Chair: Minister Madu, for you to respond.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, MLA Amery, for your question. Obviously, the Crown prosecution service does important work on behalf of our province. You know, I think we wouldn't have an effective justice system without the work that that particular office does. That said, there has been pressure with staffing at the Crown prosecution office, and I as Justice minister am working with my department and doing everything we can to make sure that we relieve the pressure on that department.

Work continues to fill existing Crown prosecutor vacancies. We have ongoing job competitions, and we are increasing the size of our articling program to ultimately grow the ranks of the Crown prosecution service. Hiring more Crown prosecutors is essential to addressing increasing caseloads and ensuring that viable criminal cases can proceed. Work continues to address concerns that have led to issues with recruitment and retention of prosecutors. Our government also increased the number of articling students in Justice and Solicitor General to help recruit lawyers to ultimately work as Crown prosecutors. That number increases to 20 in 2021.

Let me also say this, Madam Chair. As of the end of February 2021 the total number of occupied trial Crown prosecutor positions in the province is 329, and the number of vacant positions is 31. This is an improvement in occupied positions over 2019-2020, when we had 308 occupied positions. As I said before, work continues to fill existing Crown prosecutor vacancies. As you know, this government committed to hiring 50 additional Crown prosecutors, and we are on track to fulfilling that mandate.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

And to Mr. Amery.

Mr. Amery: Thank you once again, Madam Chair and to the minister for that response. Through you once again to the minister, I've had the opportunity to look through the estimate documents. We've talked a little bit about the Police Act review, and this is really an important thing for me and for, I think, many Albertans. I don't see a specific line item here with respect to the Police Act review. This is one of the objectives identified on page 73 of the business plan.

In addition to pointing out what line item this might fall under within the estimates, through you, Madam Chair, could the minister please walk us through the process of this review and explain what some of the costs are likely to be and some of the costs that have been incurred so far? Are there any estimates of the costs to implement any likely recommendations? Has that been contemplated by these figures that you have provided before us, and does it contemplate for things like we see in other jurisdictions, for example, the use of body cams, which might provide us with additional insight on police encounters, or, you know, things like additional training for police officers, de-escalation training and the like? Does the minister have a specific area that he might point us to on how the Police Act review will be funded and/or recommendations implemented?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.
And to the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, MLA Amery, again, I mean, for that question. The Police Act review is a significant undertaking that will shape the relationship between police and our citizens for decades to come. The outcome of this review will be the first major update of this legislation since it was introduced in 1988. We need an effective complaint process that offers citizens a fast, effective, and independent process to bring forward concerns about police misconduct. We need a modern governance framework that provides communities with input into establishing police priorities and ensures effective oversight of how police undertake their duties. We need to improve the experience of indigenous peoples with law enforcement and strengthen the relationship between indigenous communities and the police. We need to improve the public trust in police through collaboration between police, government, and community groups to codetermine solutions to issues.

Between mid-March and April of 2021 we will be meeting with stakeholders that represent Alberta's diverse communities to ensure that changes proposed will be responsive to the concerns they raise. These meetings will all be done virtually to minimize cost. As I said, in order to make sure that we have capacity within as well as outside, that is why I appointed a special adviser on the Police Act review, to help the work of the department, to make sure that we have taken into consideration the broad voices and views of the members of our community.

You know, the costs associated with the Police Act review engagement to date have been absorbed within our program. Once the review is complete, I will be able to comment on the cost of different policy items that cabinet considers, but that said, I think that part of the provincial police transition study, part of the work that they are doing is to also advise, provide recommendations on what it would mean to have a 21st-century police service that is focused on community policing. Many of the items you touched on, MLA Amery, will be the subject matter of review and will be contained in the report that I expect from the police transition study.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Just before we go on to the next set – I do note that there are a few minutes left – it's starting to get exceptionally hot in this room, so if anyone wants to take their coats off, please do so. If anyone needs fresh water, we will be going to a break after the next round of questions from the opposition.

I see Mr. Rutherford.

Mr. Rutherford: Chair, just a time check.

The Chair: A minute, 35 seconds.

Mr. Rutherford: Okay. Well, thank you, Minister, for being with us today and for your staff as well. I'll ask this question rather quickly. Hopefully, we can get through it. In estimates, page 155 under line item 3, there is a reference to a \$7.5 million reduction associated with the service delivery charge for civil law. That would be line item 3.1, I believe. Can you please explain what the change is and how it is generating that reduction?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rutherford. Just a reminder to have the questions be directed through the chair.

To Minister Madu for a response.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, MLA Rutherford, for your question. Since 2019-2020 fiscal year the legal services division has been advancing a strategy which combines manpower reductions with service innovation and a focus on providing those services of greatest value to our clients. We work with our clients to assess the nature of the services they require and ensure the work requires the specialized skills, knowledge, or experience of a lawyer. If their request does not require specialized legal skill or is of low priority or risk, we will assist our client in developing a capacity to manage the matter through activities such as developing templates, tipsheets, flow charts, and other resources. The legal services division uses internal processes to rigorously monitor new and ongoing service requests and assign resources to items of high priority to our clients. We communicate with our clients to understand their needs and priorities. We are working with our clients to establish the best practices on when and how to utilize legal services.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

That concludes the government members' first block of questions. Now we move to five-minute blocks of questions from the Official Opposition, followed by five minutes of response from the minister. As mentioned, 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. Please remember that discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless as to whether or not speaking time is combined. Ms Ganley.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair and through you to the minister. I'd like to thank both him and his staff for being here this evening. If it's agreeable to the minister, I would like to combine the time.

Mr. Madu: That's okay with me, Madam Chair.

8:40

Ms Ganley: Fantastic. Thank you very much. I'm going to – sorry. Through the chair to you, Minister, I'm going to begin my questioning with respect to revenue. I am now on page 161 of the main estimates. Under revenue I have a couple of questions. The first relates to the line which is entitled fines and penalties. It was a

\$198 million actual in '19-20. In 2020-2021 – whoa, say that five times fast – it was projected to be \$267 million but only came out to \$239 million and is now projected in estimate of '21-22 to be \$262 million, roughly. I'm omitting the hundreds of thousands there.

Now, my understanding is that the jump which was projected initially in budget to occur occurs as a result of the province taking a greater share of those fine revenues, so a larger percentage, and that the drop occurs as a result of sort of a lower number of tickets having been issued because, basically, of the pandemic and that you're expecting it to recover almost to prepandemic levels in '21-22. Could you maybe confirm whether those assumptions are correct or let me know sort of why we see that drop and then that increase again?

The Chair: Thank you.
To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am going to defer that question to the senior financial officer of my department, Brad. Brad, please go to the podium and introduce yourself.

Mr. Wells: Good evening. Brad Wells, senior financial officer. Yes, your assumption is correct. The drop in the fines and penalties revenue from '20-21 to '21-22 is reflective of what we're seeing in the current environment. Fine penalties are down, and the assumption is that's related to COVID and the reduced traffic. We do anticipate that rebounding once the pandemic is over, and that's why we see the rebound of the estimated revenues in '22-23, '23-24.

The Chair: Thank you.
Ms Ganley.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. Through you, Madam Chair, thank you, Mr. Wells. The other question I had with respect to revenue – again, I'm on page 161. I'm looking at other revenue. Other revenue is at \$22 million in '19-20, was budgeted to \$42 million in '20/'21, and is now estimated at \$51 million in '21-22. Now, it's my recollection, from my conversations with the minister's predecessor last year, that at least part of that increase was due to – so the way the current rural crime strategy works is that money is taken in from municipalities. It comes in under this other revenue and then goes out through the PPSA. It is my understanding, from my conversations with the minister's predecessor, that the anticipation was that about 15 million additional dollars would come in in '19-20, \$30 million in '20/'21 – sorry. Sorry; the additional \$15 million was for '20-21, and then it would be up to \$30 million this year.

What I'm trying to get about in a slightly roundabout way here is: is there roughly that expected \$30 million coming in from the small urbans and rural municipalities, and is that coming in under that line, other revenue?

The Chair: Thank you.
To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. What I can tell MLA Ganley is this. The 2021-2022 estimate is \$51.5 million. That is an \$8.8 million, or 21 per cent, increase to the 2020-2021 budget. All of that will be broken down as follows: \$8.8 million net increase comprised of an 11.2 per cent increase for police funding model due to the agreement we reached to increase cost recovery charges from 10 per cent to 15 per cent in front-line policing needs for municipalities; a \$1.4 million increase projected in other

miscellaneous revenues, primarily for unclaimed amounts, court trust funds, the maintenance enforcement program, the PPSA, Edmonton Airport Authority recoveries, and the sheriffs' civil enforcement offset. Now, there will be an offset by a \$2.6 million decrease due to one-time funding provided in 2020-2021 for replacement of a legacy accounting system transferred from the OPGT common fund to the general revenue fund, and a \$1.2 million decrease to reflect the reduced bill for future amounts.

The 2021-2022 estimate is again \$51.8 million, an \$8.7 million, or a 20 per cent, increase over the 2020-2021 forecast, and that will be as follows. For this year, 2021-2022, the cost recovery will be 15 per cent, and we can anticipate collecting \$33.7 million in revenue. This will fund 97 new positions in the RCMP detachments and specialized crime unit reductions. In 2022-2023 the cost recovery will be 20 per cent and 30 per cent thereafter.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
To Ms Ganley.

Ms Ganley: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair, and, through you to the minister, thank you for that. I did have another question, sort of also located kind of on this page and on others. Again, I'm on 161. I'm just looking at – oh, you know what? I'll ask that on another page.

I'm turning now to page 155 of the main estimates, and I'm looking to line 6.5. That's contract policing and oversight. It is my understanding that that line represents the PPSA, so that's what the province is paying, or now the province with municipal flow-through funding is paying, to the RCMP for the contract policing for the small – under 5,000 – and the rurals. I see that there is an increase in that line of roughly just a little less than \$10 million. Is that correct?

The Chair: The minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. In a nutshell, that would be correct, MLA Ganley.

The Chair: Thank you.
To Ms Ganley.

Ms Ganley: Yes. Thank you very much. I have a few other questions. One relates specifically to – and my apologies. I did want to stay on page 161, so I'll turn back there, to the victims of crime and public safety fund. We can see it was roughly \$43 million in '19-20, with up to \$60 million budgeted for this year, which has passed, and \$62 million in estimates for the upcoming year. My conversations with the minister's predecessor indicated that out of that victims of crime and public safety fund, so relative to when the mandate was expanded last year, there was \$10 million that was going to ALERT, \$4 million that was going to the drug treatment court, \$5 million that was going to prosecution services, and \$6.6 million that was going to the sheriffs for RAPID force. I'm just wondering whether those numbers are projected to be the same for '21-22.

The Chair: Thank you.
We have nine seconds, Minister.

Mr. Madu: Here's what I would say: for '21-22 the drug treatment court would have – I believe that would be \$3 million, but . . .

The Chair: Minister, perhaps we can get to this after the break at our next rotation.

With that, the time is 8:50, so I will ask that we all return at 8:56 promptly.

[The committee adjourned from 8:50 p.m. to 8:56 p.m.]

The Chair: All right. Fantastic. We are at 8:56, so we are returning from our break.

With that, we go to the United Conservative caucus, and I believe we have Ms Lovely. Oh, sorry. Do we have Mr. Rutherford? Was I mistaken?

Mr. Rutherford: Yeah. I just have one question, Chair, if I could.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Chair. I see that on page 155 of the estimates, line item 5.4, public guardian and trustee services has taken a decrease in its budget. Minister, can you explain what this line item is and the rationale behind the decrease? Also, it is my understanding that under this line item there is a potential replacement of the legacy trust accounting system. I was wondering if you could detail any challenges in setting up this new system. Is the system fully implemented, and what is the impact of this system on service delivery as well?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, MLA Rutherford, for that question. The decrease from the 2020-2021 budget is largely due to funding of \$2.6 million that was provided in last year's budget for the replacement of the legacy trust accounting system. That project is still under way. But you will see in budget 2021-2022 that the amount of \$4.5 million is allotted from capital. Look at that in line 5.4 under Capital Investment Vote by Program. Your question is answered in that there have been challenges with this project due to a myriad of factors, including unsuccessful vendor submissions and insufficient appreciation of available industry solutions.

At the core of this previous unsuccessful attempt was the fact that the OPGT was attempting to project money through transformation solely within OPGT. In contrast, the OPGT IS, which is the information system project, now has a robust governance structure with seven committee members from two divisions in Justice and Solicitor General, two parts of Service Alberta, and informed by legal procurement and IT experts. The OPGT is now on a solid pathway to project completion, a pathway that lies within the office of the Auditor General IT project health check guidelines.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

To Ms Lovely.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Through you to the minister, before the COVID-19 pandemic we hosted a very well-attended town hall right in Camrose, where the discussion focused on rural crime. Members of the community brought forward concerns around repeat offenders and emphasized that it was generally the same individuals committing crime on a regular basis. Key objective 1.1 on page 73 of your business plan states that you will "continue to work with policing partners and municipal leaders to address drivers of crime, such as establishing crime reduction units in rural Alberta." Outcome 3 on page 74 of that same document is ensuring that "Albertans are supported in their interactions with the justice system." Madam Chair, through you to the minister: can you

please outline how these objectives in your business plan addressed the concerns of my constituents and will help protect our communities from repeat offenders?

The Chair: Thank you.

To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair, for your question. The ministry is working with policing partners and stakeholders to ensure that all Albertans feel safe, secure, and protected in their communities. Government efforts include a commitment of up to \$10 million each fiscal year to improve law enforcement's rural crime response capability by increasing RCMP resources and creating the rural Alberta provincial integrated defence response, which will allow the provincial peace officers to better respond and assist RCMP and other police services in rural Alberta – that will include Camrose, MLA Lovely – and a commitment of up to \$3.7 million to deal with and investigate child pornography, gun violence, drug trafficking, stalking, and domestic violence primarily through the Alberta law enforcement response team. We will continue to work with our partners and use evidence-based principles to assess the risk of those involved with community corrections through sustainment of effective practices in community policing.

Let me also say this, MLA Lovely. You raise a very important point, which is the persistent issue of rural crime in our province. As you know, this government has made a historical commitment in working with our municipal partners to make sure that we have boots on the ground and that rural Albertans get the services that they need, that will decrease the gap in response time. I believe that every Albertan, regardless of where they live, should be able to call the police and the police go to respond within reason. All of that particular work is under way, and I am confident that we would eventually tackle successfully this perennial and persistent issue of rural crime.

Thank you, MLA Lovely.

The Chair: Thank you.

To MLA Lovely.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister. Madam Chair, through you to the minister, at this same town hall some of my constituents expressed concern regarding communication between Camrose city police and the RCMP. On page 73 of the business plan, under key objective 1.3, reviewing the delivery of policing services, are you planning on looking at the co-ordination and communication of the RCMP with local police forces? If so, what steps is your ministry planning to take to help improve communication between the two? If I might add, under the same objective, will part of your review on the feasibility of the provincial police service consider how many former RCMP and city policing jurisdictions interact? If so, if we do proceed with a provincial police service, do you have any indication whether jurisdictions like the Camrose city police force and the former RCMP will be amalgamated?

The Chair: Thank you.

To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair and to MLA Lovely for that question. At the end of the day I think it's important that we focus our concept of policing on community policing. That is what it comes down to. I want to make sure that we have a provincial police service that is responsive to the needs on the ground, the realities that our fellow citizens get to encounter on a daily basis. While I

can't speak to the outcome of that particular study by the consultant that we have hired, I am looking forward to that particular report. The issues that you raised are the issues that we have tasked the consultant, you know, to look at in terms of how a potential police service is going to be put in place.

I have said that at the end of the day it comes down to community policing. We have to make sure that our citizens who live in any part of our province get to feel the benefit and the presence of law enforcement. I am really looking forward to what model the consultant is going to come forward with. Obviously, I have enormous respect for the RCMP, and they are a great Canadian institution, but this is not about the RCMP. It's not about that institution; it's about the safety of our people. The study will take a look at all kinds of models out there, and while I can, you know, second guess what they will come back with, I am looking forward to that particular report.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

9:05

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

To Ms Lovely.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister. Madam Chair, through you to the minister, I just want to mention that that particular meeting, we filled the ballroom. It was standing room only, and people drove for an hour to get there, some of them. It was very well attended, and I'm hoping that once things settle down a bit with COVID and we're able to gather again, Minister, you'll be able to join me in Camrose, and we can do part two of that session. I think the community would be really thrilled to have you there.

That leads me to my question. Members of my community have advised that individuals who commit a crime because there are not enough judges and the legal process times out – outcome 2, identified on page 73, is ensuring that Alberta's justice system is fair and effective. What is being done under this outcome to ensure that due process is being followed and that justice is being served with a reasonable time frame?

The Chair: Thank you.

To the minister, you have 17 seconds for a reply.

Mr. Madu: Good question. You know, Madam Chair and MLA Lovely, I would have loved to have all the time in the world to respond to that particular question. Let me say this. We are doing everything we can within our power to make sure that we ensure that justice is done when we see crimes being committed against our people and against our communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

With that, we move on to the next block and Ms Ganley.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Through you to the minister, I'll just reframe my questions from the last time to be slightly more succinct. I trust you'll remember the page references. Basically, what I'm asking about is with respect to the victims of crime fund. This is for the estimates under consideration here, '21-22. How much of that victims of crime fund do you expect to go to ALERT? How much do you expect to go to RAPID? How much do you expect to go to the Crown prosecution service?

Thank you.

The Chair: To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, MLA Ganley, for your question. We have all kinds of initiatives under the public safety division. For drug treatment court for 2021-2022 it will be \$3 million. For ALERT it will be \$15 million. For RAPID response, which is the sheriffs' branch, it will be \$10 million. For the Crown prosecution service it will be \$10 million for 2021-2022.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Ganley.

Ms Ganley: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you to the minister, thank you for that response.

Now turning once again to the main estimates, I'm just treading back here to contract policing and oversight, on line 6.5. In your response to a previous question about other revenue you had indicated that 15 per cent, or roughly \$33.7 million, would be coming in from municipalities directed towards policing. What I'm seeing is that for that same time period, the change from the actual in '19-20 to the estimate in '21-22, there is a change of roughly 23 and a half million dollars increase. My question is just: why is there \$33.5 million coming in from municipalities but only 23 and a half million dollars additional going to the RCMP to pay for police?

Thanks.

The Chair: To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, the budget changes for 2021-2022 are as follows: a \$9.4 million increase due to an \$11 million increase for the police funding model; \$3.6 million for reallocation of the BCA contract from element 6.1, program support, to element 6.5, contract policing and policing oversight; and a \$0.1 million increase for Edmonton airport policing services. Now, again, the change from Budget 2019-2020 actuals: a \$23.4 million net increase due to a \$26.6 million increase for the police funding model and \$3.6 million for the reallocation. All of this should be offset by a decrease of \$5.8 million for the provincial police operating and maintenance adjustments and \$1 million for the biology casework analysis.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

And to Ms Ganley.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. Sorry. I don't have quite as much information here. Would you mind running over just that last set of numbers again, when you broke down the \$23.4 million? I'll just let you read it again.

Thank you.

Mr. Madu: Madam Chair, I am going to ask Brad Wells of my department to run through those numbers.

Mr. Wells: Good evening. Brad Wells, senior finance officer. Just to go over the numbers on the police funding model, for '20-21 the net revenue generated from the model was anticipated to be \$15.4 million, and that's increasing to \$26.6 million in 2021-22. The jump from \$15 million to \$26 million is approximately \$11.2 million, which the minister spoke to. Also included in the change from the \$279 million to the \$289 million from budget '20-21 to '21-22 is \$3.6 million for the biological case analysis agreement and \$100,000 for the Edmonton airport policing services. That's offset by decreases of \$4.5 million for provincial police operating and maintenance adjustments and also a decrease from past years for the biological case analysis agreement of \$1 million. There's a net

change there of \$9.4 million even though the police funding model portion equates to \$11.2 million.

The Chair: Thank you.
And to Ms Ganley.

Ms Ganley: Yes. Thank you very much. That was helpful.
Sorry. My apologies for sort of jumping around a little bit here. And my apologies, Madam Chair; I did let a “you” slip through in there. That was my fault.

With respect to the victims of crime fund the previous minister had indicated that he expected to save about \$7 million from the victims’ financial benefits last year. Do you anticipate saving \$7 million again this year, or has that number grown?

The Chair: Thank you.
And to the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am going to defer that question to the senior ADM for my department, Bill Sweeney.
Bill, please.

Mr. Sweeney: Senior Assistant Deputy Minister Bill Sweeney from the public security division. The answer to that question is very difficult to provide at this stage. As the minister said earlier, we are reviewing the financial benefits program. There’s an interim program in place. Recommendations will go to the minister for consideration later this year. Once those recommendations are assessed, we’d be in a better position to make a determination on the actual cost for next year.

The Chair: Thank you.
To Ms Ganley.

9:15

Ms Ganley: Thank you. Through you, Madam Chair, thank you very much, Mr. Sweeney.

One of the additional questions that I had. Now, with respect to, again, the estimates – I’m on page 155 – I’m looking under item 4 in total, which is the Crown prosecution service. It’s gone down somewhat, so about \$2 million last year and another just over \$2 million this year. Now, obviously, that’s somewhat off-set by the fact that you’ve gone from \$5 million coming from the victims of crime fund to \$10 million coming from the victims of crime fund.

Initial projections on that promise of 50 prosecutors – this was from Budget ’19-20 – were \$105 million in ’19-20, \$109 million in 2020-21, and then \$114 million this year. It looks like you’re managing to achieve a little bit of savings relative to what would have been projected to have the number of prosecutors in place that you need to get the 50 by the end of the term. I think that 50 is probably about right. We added 70, I think, over the course of four years, so I think that seems like a very reasonable number to me. You said that you’re still planning to hire those 50 additional prosecutors. I’m just wondering how you’re expecting to save those extra couple of million dollars, whether there’ll be expected changes to compensation . . . [Ms Ganley’s speaking time expired] Never mind.

The Chair: We can get to that at the next block.
With that, we move back to the government caucus and, I believe, Ms Glasgo. You’re muted.

Ms Glasgo: Yes, I am. Technology is not my thing.
Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister, for your time today and also for being willing to share time with us so that we can get some answers for our constituents.

As you know, Minister, I have recently chaired the Alberta Firearms Advisory Committee, and this was in conjunction with several members from the firearms community, including some amazing people from across the province and your own department. I have to say that any time I can, I’m going to give props to Peter and the incredible team at Justice and Solicitor General for the work that they’ve done to support me and Albertans in making sure that we’re listening to Albertans on the issues that affect them most, especially the issues of firearms.

We suggested to the Ministry of Justice – we sent a formal recommendation – that a chief firearms officer should be appointed in the province of Alberta, and I know that the Ministry of Justice has taken to setting up an office for the chief provincial firearms officer. Can you highlight how Budget 2021-2022 protects public safety while respecting law-abiding gun owners and what line item the new chief provincial firearms officer will fall under?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Glasgo.
Now to the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Ms Glasgo, for that question, but also let me thank you for your important work in chairing that important committee, that has made our work in making sure that we appoint the chief provincial firearms officer possible. Through you, please extend my thanks to members of your committee for their good work.

You are correct. Alberta will appoint a chief provincial firearms officer this spring to help stand up for the province’s law-abiding firearms owners. A provincially appointed chief firearms officer is a Fair Deal Panel recommendation that will better reflect Albertans’ priorities and be more closely aligned with the province’s law-abiding firearms culture. The chief provincial firearms officer will collaborate with partners to help keep our communities safe and put criminals where they belong, behind bars. The new officer’s work will also help free up the courts to deal with more serious matters.

The chief provincial firearms officer is not included in Budget 2021 but will be part of the Q1 update. The CPFO will take over from the federal government in August 2021. Let me also say that the chief firearms officer’s budget will be all under line item 6.4, law enforcement standards and audits.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.
To Ms Glasgo.

Ms Glasgo: Thank you very much, Minister. That’s great for clarification’s sake.

I’m going to switch veins a little bit but still talking about protecting citizens. In one case, we’re talking about law-abiding firearms owners, but in this vein I want to touch on some of the most vulnerable in our society, those who are victims and survivors of human trafficking.

We know that this is a disgusting and dehumanizing crime that violates a person’s most basic human rights and dignity. It’s predatory, it’s malicious, and it has absolutely no place in Alberta. Often victims of this crime are members of very vulnerable communities, and we also must give support to survivors. I was pleased to hear that the Human Trafficking Task Force was hearing from stakeholders and strategizing how to eliminate human trafficking in our province. This also is a crime, we know, that particularly impacts indigenous women and girls in the province and in the country as well. This aligns with key objective 1.2 on page 73

of your business plan, to “collaborate with partners to protect vulnerable Albertans, including those at risk of human trafficking.”

Through you, Madam Chair, I’m just wondering if the minister could please provide an update on the key objective and point out what line item the Human Trafficking Task Force falls under and maybe provide an update to Albertans about what exactly is going on with that.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Glasgo.
To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair and again Ms Glasgo for that question. We established an Alberta Human Trafficking Task Force with a mandate to provide recommendations to help government implement the nine-point action plan. The task force is expected to submit their recommendations to government in the spring. To date the task force has heard from over 70 individuals who are representative of people with lived experience and experts in combatting human trafficking. The task force recognizes that any recommendations to government must be informed by those with lived experience.

We established an internal government working group, led by Justice and Solicitor General and with representation from nine ministries, to support the task force and be in a position to analyze the task force recommendations when received and to action recommendations subsequently approved by cabinet. While the task force is active, my department continues to be the key liaison and secretariat to the task force for all needs and requests for information and administrative functions. A fourth 2021 cabinet date is being considered to review and decide on which task force recommendations to approve. The Human Trafficking Task Force falls under line item 6.1, program supports.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
To Ms Glasgo.

Ms Glasgo: May I please get a time check, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Three minutes, 42 seconds.

Ms Glasgo: Okay. Great.

Minister, there seems to be a narrative, that I think is perpetuated on, you know, horrible places such as Twitter, that you are defunding police departments. We know that the only people who want to defund the police are the left-wing activists who are sitting on Twitter, but for some reason your ministry is accused of this often. Yet I see on page 155, under line item 6.7, that policing assistance to municipalities is being held steady. That’s a great thing as many in rural communities, we know, of course, are faced with higher rates of crime. We know that these violent crimes have gone up, and it’s quite concerning.

Through you, Madam Chair, I was wondering if the minister would be able to talk a little bit more in depth about this line item and how this money is being used. If the minister could also explain why the decision was made to increase funding and what concrete deliverables Albertans can expect to see for their investments.

The Chair: Thank you.
To the minister.

9:25

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. A good question again from Ms Glasgo. Let me be clear: we are increasing the total enforcement funding this year. You know, to be clear, in Budget 2021 we have

increased that funding to \$549.5 million. That is more than half a billion dollars in law enforcement. Compare that, again, to Budget 2020, \$543.2 million. This has been an increase from Budget 2020 because we believe that now is not the time to begin to play politics with the law enforcement budget. There can never be a good time, in fact, to do that because, as I’ve always said, the men and women who wear the uniform are doing important work to keep us safe at home and our communities safe. In fact, when many of us are fast asleep at night, those men and women patrol our streets to ensure that we get to enjoy the peace and quiet we’ve been accustomed to as a province.

In 2020-2021, Madam Chair, we provided \$89.8 million in combined policing grants to municipalities with more than 5,000 population, who are responsible for providing their own policing services. Again, we have not removed a penny from the funding that we provide to municipalities to help them provide police services to the various municipalities. There are two sets of grants that we provide to municipalities: the municipal police assistance grant to 54 municipalities and the police officer grant to 50 municipalities. All of that funding has been maintained at their level.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
Ms Glasgo.

Ms Glasgo: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister, for that response. I just wanted to say that I’m eternally grateful to all of the men and women in uniform in Brooks-Medicine Hat and in Alberta in general. I’ve spent a lot of time with the Redcliff RCMP as well as the Brooks RCMP and Medicine Hat Police Service talking about issues such as mental health, rural crime, and such, and I know that they are all very dedicated individuals who are there to support constituents when they need them most. I just wanted to take time. While many of us are thinking that this is a late night, they’re working even later.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Glasgo.

With that, we go back to the Official Opposition. Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you to the minister, page 160, victims of crime and public safety fund at \$62.8 million. A simple question, through you to the minister, is: how much of that \$62.8 million goes to victims of crime benefits specifically?

The Chair: Thank you.
To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Madam Chair, I am going to let Brad Wells of my department speak to that matter.

Mr. Wells: Good evening. Brad Wells, senior finance officer. For ’21-22 in the estimates for financial benefits, specifically in the victims of crime and public safety initiative fund, there’s just over \$5 million.

The Chair: Thank you.
Back to Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. I will move on to the estimates, page 155, line 4, Alberta Crown prosecution service. In the business plan there is, Minister, that you’ll be hiring 50 new prosecutors: 20 this year, 20 next, and 10 after. Through you, Madam Chair, 50 Crown prosecutors were announced in 2019 as well. I just wanted the minister to confirm if they are the same Crown prosecutors or if those are new ones.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sabir.
Minister Madu.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, we made a commitment to hire 50 new prosecutors, and we are on track to fulfilling that. In fact, we plan to hire 20 new trial Crown prosecutors for the 2021-2022 year. The total number of occupied trial Crown prosecutor positions as of February 28, 2021, in the province is 329, and the number of vacant positions is 31. This is an improvement in occupied positions over 2019-2020, when we had 308 occupied positions.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Through you, Madam Chair: what's the cost of hiring 20 prosecutors?

The Chair: Thank you.
To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Sorry, Madam Chair. If I can get Mr. Sabir to repeat that question, please.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. What's the cost of hiring 20 prosecutors?

Mr. Madu: Madam Chair, I am going to let Brad from my department deal with that particular question.

Mr. Wells: Good evening. Brad Wells, senior finance officer. For costing purposes we use an average of about \$200,000 per Crown prosecutor, so if you're talking 20 Crown prosecutors, then you're around \$4 million.

The Chair: Thank you.
Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair and to the minister. That Crown prosecution service budget line is cut by \$3 million. To the minister, through you: how are we going to fund this 4 million and a bit dollars line item? It will be \$4.2 million, I think.

The Chair: Thank you.
Minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Alberta Crown prosecution service's budget is \$98.6 million, or 8 per cent of the department's total operating budget of \$1.3 billion – sorry, \$1.2756 billion. The budget provides for \$92.6 million, or 94 per cent, of the operating budget for salaries; \$6 million, or 6 per cent, of the operating budget is for supplies and services; and the rest, 773 full-time equivalencies.

From 2020-2021 the budget and forecast is as follows: a \$2.8 million net decrease, which is comprised of a \$2.7 million reduction to manpower from ministry internal reallocations and due to restructuring of the appeals and regulatory prosecutions branch; \$2.5 million in reduction to manpower for the government's labour mandate adjustment, and this is also off-set by a \$2 million increase to support the Alberta rural crime strategy; and \$0.4 million, or \$400,000, to increase the supply and services for hardware and equipment requirements to support the 20 new Crown prosecutor positions for 2021-2022.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just to clarify, Minister, these numbers are under line item 4?

Mr. Madu: Correct. But let me just say this, Madam Chair. This does not include the \$10 million for additional Crown prosecutors from the victims of crime and public safety fund, which represents a \$5 million increase from the budget of 2020-2021.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, through you, Madam Chair. Just to confirm what I heard, that Crown prosecutors – the money for that will come from the victims of crime fund. Is that correct?

Mr. Madu: That would be correct, Chair.

Mr. Sabir: Let's move to justice services. Through you, Madam Chair, there is an overall \$8 million reduction here, and these are all important supports; for instance, item 5.2 is maintenance support. I understand that COVID has caused many concerns, financial hardships. Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister: can the minister provide the caseload numbers for maintenance enforcement and whether they have gone up or down?

The Chair: Thank you.
To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am going to defer that question to the ADM who is responsible for that particular area, David Peace.

Mr. Peace: Good evening. David Peace, assistant deputy minister, justice services division. The caseload in family support order services, which runs the maintenance enforcement program, has not changed significantly since last year. It runs close to 50,000 case files, and there are two parties in each one of those case files, so about 100,000 clients.

9:35

What the maintenance enforcement program has been doing over the last two years and will continue going forward is transitioning to a case management service delivery model, which allows much more holistic handling of the cases, understanding from a case officer to the clients the exact nature of what they're going through – COVID restrictions, for example – and what that does to their income levels and allows them to manage those caseloads more effectively, which results in better quality service.

The Chair: Thank you.
Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Moving on to item 5.4, public guardian and trustee. I do know constituents who utilize these services, and I'm surprised to see a cut in this category. I would've expected that with the potential client base growing, the need for services would increase. Through you to the minister: again, what's the forecasted caseload for this public guardian and trustee office?

Mr. Madu: Again, Chair, I'm going to defer that question to David Peace of my department.

Mr. Peace: Again, Madam Chair, it's David Peace, assistant deputy minister, justice services division. For the public guardian and trustee for the represented adults or the people that have a public guardian, the caseloads for OPGT are 2,590; on the trustee side it's

4,210; and clients that have both a public trustee and a public guardian it is 1,665.

The cuts that you see in that line item, as the minister mentioned in his earlier remarks, reflected change in the funding for the information management system transformation project that's under way. The year just ending, that was operating money that was being spent. Next year it's showing up as capital money due to the nature of the expenses that we're forecasting in the phase of the project renewal. We're not actually changing the front-line service delivery.

The Chair: Perfect. That was right within the buzzer.

With that, we move back to the government caucus. Mr. Guthrie.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Chair. I'm not going to waste any time here. Like a jackrabbit, I'm just going to hop to it. Through the chair to the minister, in the estimates on page 55, under the line item 6.9, sheriffs branch, there is a decrease showing from last year's budget. I think it's from around \$91.8 million to \$85.1 million. Now, as you know, the safer communities and neighbourhoods, or the SCAN unit, is out of the sheriffs department, which is funded through the sheriffs branch. It helps to keep communities safe while dealing with properties that are being used illegally. Through the chair, Minister, I was wondering how, if at all, this decrease in the budget would affect funding to SCAN.

The Chair: Thank you.

To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to MLA Guthrie for that question. In December 2007 the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act was established in response to this legislation in early 2008. The sheriffs branch established SCAN investigative units in Edmonton and Calgary.

Currently there are 10 investigator positions in the north and 10 investigator positions in the south. Although both Calgary and Edmonton SCAN units currently have 10 investigator positions, each unit is carrying one vacancy. The Edmonton SCAN unit investigates complaints from north of Red Deer while the Calgary office investigates complaints in the southern part of the province, including Red Deer.

The goal of this SCAN unit is to improve community safety by targeting and, if necessary, shutting down residential and commercial buildings regularly used for illegal activities. This includes activities such as producing, selling, or using illegal drugs; prostitution; substance abuse or the unlawful use and consumption of alcohol; gang activity; organized crime; and exploitation of children.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Minister. Through the chair, further to the same item, Minister: could you address how SCAN has been operating over the last year and, in particular, whether their operations have been impeded by the pandemic, and has this led to a backlog, anything that might have to be dealt with in this upcoming fiscal year?

The Chair: Minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Throughout the COVID period of this period SCAN has seen an increase in investigations. This is likely because people are working from home and are more exposed to the activities occurring in and around their communities

throughout the day. COVID has not impacted how investigations are conducted or concluded. SCAN continues to strive for success and serve Alberta community members, who are empowered to take their communities back and restore them to peaceful, enjoyable, and safe communities. Living near a property with constant drug activities is disruptive and traumatizing to the hard-working citizens throughout our province. This government will continue to work with SCAN and policing agencies to ensure that Albertans enjoy safe and secure communities. That programming is in place to best meet the challenges that lie ahead.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Minister. Through the chair, Minister, on the same page, estimates page 155, this time, though, on item 2.1, under program support, I notice there's a decrease from last year's budget, going from \$16 million to just under \$14 million. Can you explain the rationale behind this decrease, and, in particular, did merchant fees for electronic payments play any kind of role in that change?

The Chair: Thank you.

To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Program support service includes the back office and strategic management services to our courts, Alberta's three courts, court technology services, and Alberta Review Board. The budget decrease of \$2 million reflects my department's effort to realign resources to core front-line services and our government's labour mandate. This means greater efficiencies in our operations without changes to our front-line services. It's important that I emphasize that these are as a consequence of us, you know, looking for efficiencies. This will not affect front-line services that Albertans rely on.

Merchant fees, charges we receive when Albertans make court fee and fine payments electronically: the total is approximately \$30 million annually. The budget for merchant fees has not been altered, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Guthrie, for that question.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Minister.

Chair, I'd like to cede the remainder of my time to MLA Amery.

The Chair: All right.

MLA Amery.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you once again to the minister for his hard work this evening. Minister, the provincial courts have essentially modified, as have all courts in our province, their systems to deal with a post-COVID reality, and a lot of that includes things like online appearances and attendances. Almost all adjournments are taking place online and, quite frankly, from what I'm told by my colleagues, a lot of the processes are taking place virtually. That means, essentially, less traffic in court, and, in my view, potentially fewer resources are being utilized with respect to in-person appearances. What you see now are members of the legal team – lawyers and self-reps are appearing online, oftentimes from places like their home, their offices, even places like, you know, the Devonian gardens, essentially, which is a very, very nice place located right next to the courthouse and, as you probably know, a beautiful place for foliage and growth there.

I'm looking forward to seeing, you know, continued appearances in this manner, and I'm looking forward to seeing what you have to say about one particular area on page 155 of the estimates in line item 2.2, resolution services, and 2.4, the Provincial Court of

Alberta. It seems to have taken substantial reductions from almost \$7 billion and \$8 billion, respectively, I should say. It seems to me that line item 2.2 may actually relate to key objective 3.2 and digital transformation. To the minister: would the minister please be able to explain the rationale behind these reductions and whether they are related, in fact, to these virtual appearances and a greater dependency on virtual attendance?

9:45

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Amery.
Now to the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. MLA Amery, you are correct; line 2.2 is related to key objective 3.2 and digital transformation. Resolution services' budget changes reflect efficiencies to be achieved through automation and digitization, a realignment of resources to cull front-line services and government labour mandates.

Resolution services administers programs that help members of the public to resolve their legal matters; for instance, delivering information services and court forms assistance to the public related to their legal issues and concerns and alternative dispute resolution services such as mediations. The department is currently assessing which initiatives to proceed with in order to meet the Budget 2021 target. Any changes to services will focus on supporting the justice system's core components and modernizing the services to make them more user friendly and efficient through automation and digitization. The reduction to provincial court administration will be absorbed mainly through attrition. The resolution and court administration services has an attrition rate of just under 20 per cent. Our cuts will focus on maintaining essential front-line positions and investing in technology to make processes more efficient.

Let me also add this, Madam Chair. If we have learned anything from this pandemic, it is that it is important that we seize this moment in order to innovate on how Albertans are able to access the courts. We learned that it is not, in all cases, that lawyers or self-representing litigants need to go into the courthouse physically. Those are some of the things that we have learned, that we have tried to implement in Budget 2021-2022. As someone . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
With that, on to Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you, a quick clarification question about the office of the public guardian and trustee: is there any funding for office of the Public Trustee to help with dependent adults who don't qualify or don't have a public trustee? They would come through PDD and AISH. It's just a clarification. Where is funding for those Albertans?

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Madu: Madam Chair, once again I'm going to have the ADM responsible for that particular area, Dave Peace, to deal with that question.

Mr. Peace: David Peace, assistant deputy minister, justice services division. Madam Chair, could I just get the question repeated for me, please?

The Chair: Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Sure. Is there any funding for the office of the Public Trustee to help with dependent adults who do not qualify or don't have a public trustee? They're Albertans who would come from PDD and AISH.

Mr. Peace: In this budget document there's no specific project that's oriented towards that. However, the public guardian and trustee, Community and Social Services, Children's Services all work together as a holistic approach towards clients, especially when there are complexities to those clients. If there was somebody that needed a trustee or a guardian that couldn't rely on family members or friends to do that, then that's when the public guardian and trustee would step in.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you and through you, Madam Chair. There's also, Minister, a clarification question. I was earlier listening to the Executive Council estimates. The Premier said that money for the referendums will be given to municipalities, and it's in the Justice department, like, for instance, for equalization. I wasn't able to find the line item where that money is, so through you, Madam Chair, if the minister could please help us figure out where that money is.

The Chair: To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Obviously, the government made a commitment to hold a referendum on equalization and made a commitment to hold that later this year. What that means is that the government is going to fund the costs of holding the referendum. The primary responsibility for conducting the referendum lies with Municipal Affairs. While I can't speak on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I can assure the member that my department and all of government works closely with the Minister of Municipal Affairs to make sure that the budgetary needs of holding the referendum are going to be there when we need them.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Sabir: Again through you, Madam Chair, on line item 6 in the estimates, public security, there is approximately a 10-year cut over two years, and the budget is going down for organized and serious crime, ASIRT, for instance. The question I have is: what does the ASIRT caseload look like? Has it increased? The related question is – recently the executive director of ASIRT, Susan Hughson, warned that ASIRT is at a breaking point, and I quote: was taxed to the max and beyond capacity. She said that ASIRT either needs more resources or the minister would need to reconsider ASIRT's mandate. Through you, the question I have is: we see a slight reduction, so can the minister confirm if he is reconsidering ASIRT's mandate?

The Chair: Thank you.
To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Before I hand over this question back to the senior assistant deputy minister responsible for public security to be dealt with, let me say that we have put forward a budget that provides record funding to law enforcement, more than half a billion dollars, and I am confident that all of the agencies that work under the public security division will have the budget that they need to meet their mandate and deliver for Albertans.

With that, Madam Chair, I would like the senior assistant deputy minister for public security to address the member's specific question.

Mr. Sweeney: It's Bill Sweeney, senior assistant deputy minister for the public security division. The budget appropriation reflects the current mandate for ASIRT. The minister gave us explicit direction in the course of the Police Act review to explore whether the mandate is the right mandate and to bring forward recommendations, and those recommendations would have budget

implications. It's too premature for us to speculate on what that might be and the public policy issues for the minister to consider.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Sabir: Through you, Madam Chair, with respect to correction services the budget is cut by almost \$25 million. It's forecasted at \$286 million for 2020-21, and '21-22 is \$261 million. We have seen outbreaks in all correction centres. Employees have been asked to come to work even if they tested positive. How will this reduction impact our correctional services? Also, through you, if I can get the caseload numbers and how many people were moved out of the prison because of COVID-19. I'm just looking for two numbers, through you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Madu: Madam Chair, let me make one correction because I wouldn't want – what the member said: that is incorrect about my department. Requiring folks that work in our correctional facilities who have tested positive to come to work: that particular statement is false. There is no iota of truth in that.

9:55

That said, Madam Chair, we are focusing on the core services within the provincial correctional system to keep Albertans safe while working to reduce the budget. We are determining the most suitable delivery of correctional services to eliminate duplication and to identify where changes could be made.

Let me answer with respect to the member's specific question that when a centre experienced an outbreak, the following measures were instituted: testing of all correctional centres by Alberta Health Services staff, which is voluntary; twice daily symptoms screening of inmates by staff; screening of staff before each shift; enhanced cleaning and disinfection; enhanced personal protective equipment for staff and inmates; and continued health teaching and mental health supports for both inmates and staff. All non-urgent inmate movement was temporarily suspended within the entire centre and in and out of the affected unit.

In terms of the number that the member is looking for, I believe it's 1,349.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Sabir: Also, the last question: there was a \$20 million reduction over two years in the sheriffs branch, which was supposed to do more work in the provincial integrated defence force, and also there is a reduction in – the youth offender community correction centre program in Calgary was cut, which lost 27 employees. Through you, if the minister would like to comment on those two.

The Chair: Minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair, for that question. As part of an internal reorganization the commercial vehicle enforcement

branch joined the Alberta sheriffs in April 2020, followed by the fish and wildlife branch in October 2020. The integration of this enforcement area into one service will result in a co-ordinated command dispatch, records management, and a force multiplier for office assistants, saving taxpayers more money while creating stronger links in the safety-related services we provide to Albertans.

With respect to, you know, the young offender centre in Calgary, what we did there was to reassign the management of that particular work from the city of Calgary to the provincial government.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

With that, we move on to the government and Mr. Amery.

Mr. Amery: Thank you once again, Madam Chair. I just want to quickly continue my questioning about the digital transformation. Would the minister please walk us through what this digital transformation means for our Alberta law libraries and whether such transformation will ultimately mean that users will be able to access these resources virtually from attractions like I had referenced earlier, Devonian gardens, and other areas with beautiful scenery and hopefully a rhododendron exhibit, if it ever becomes available here, and other attractions while maintaining social distancing?

The Chair: Thank you.

To the minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. I can see that you guys are having fun down there.

Thank you, MLA Amery, for that question. I am going to turn that question over to the assistant deputy minister responsible for that particular area, Mary MacDonald.

Ms MacDonald: Mary MacDonald, assistant deputy minister for resolution and court administration services. The Alberta law libraries are funded through kind of a joint venture between the government of Alberta, the Law Society of Alberta, and the Alberta Law Foundation, and in doing so, they provide services to Albertans throughout the province. As the digitization of the courts and government in general occurs more and more, it allows more and more of those services to be centralized. Yet, as we all know, to be able to use technology . . .

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for the consideration of the ministry's estimates has now concluded.

I would like to remind committee members that we're scheduled to meet next tomorrow, March 11, 2021, at 9 a.m. to consider the estimates of Children's Services.

Thank you, everyone.

[The committee adjourned at 10 p.m.]

