



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General
Consideration of Main Estimates

Thursday, March 17, 2022
9 a.m.

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Third 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. Tyler Shandro, QC, Minister

Frank Bosscha, QC, Deputy Minister

Dennis Cooley, Associate Deputy Minister, Solicitor General

Marlin Degrand, Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Security

Kim Goddard, Assistant Deputy Minister, Alberta Crown Prosecution Service

Fiona Lavoy, Assistant Deputy Minister, Correctional Services

Brad Smith, Assistant Deputy Minister and Senior Financial Officer, Financial Services

Barb Turner, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Court and Justice Services

9 a.m.

Thursday, March 17, 2022

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

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

The Chair: I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials who are joining you at the table.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you. First of all, Tyler Shandro, the MLA for Calgary-Acadia and the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. With us today we have the deputy minister for the ministry, Frank Bosscha, QC. We also have Dennis Cooley, the associate deputy minister of Solicitor General. We have Brad Smith, the assistant deputy minister of financial services and senior financial officer. Also with us today are Kim Goddard, the assistant deputy minister for the Alberta Crown prosecution service; Fiona Lavoy, the assistant deputy minister for correctional services; Barb Martini, who's the acting assistant deputy minister for SSI, strategic support and integrated initiatives; Lisa Tchir, who is the assistant deputy minister for legal services; Marlin Degrand, who is the assistant deputy minister for public security; Barb Turner, acting assistant deputy minister for court and justice services; Brad Wells, the executive director for financial services. That's everyone, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

My name is Jackie Lovely, and I'm the MLA for Camrose and the chair of the committee. We'll begin, starting to my right, with introductions.

Mrs. Frey: Good morning. Michaela Frey, Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Reid: Good morning. Roger Reid, MLA for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Smith: Good morning. Mark Smith, Drayton Valley-Devon.

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

Mr. Walker: Good morning. Jordan Walker, Sherwood Park.

The Chair: And across the table, Mr. Sabir.

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

Mr. Shepherd: David Shepherd, MLA for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Deol: Jasvir Deol, MLA for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Barnes: Drew Barnes, MLA, Cypress-Medicine Hat.

The Chair: Now we go to those participating remotely.
Mr. Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Yes. Grant Hunter, Taber-Warner.

The Chair: And I see we have a guest.

Mrs. Aheer: Good morning. MLA Leela Sharon Aheer, Chestermere-Strathmore.

The Chair: Welcome, everyone.

I'd like to note the following substitutions for the record: Mr. Shepherd is substituting as deputy chair for Ms Sigurdson, and Mr. Walker is substituting for Mr. Amery. Thank you very much, everyone.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*. Committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and visual stream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Members participating remotely are encouraged to have your camera on while speaking and your microphone muted when not speaking.

Remote participants who wish to be placed on the speakers list are asked to e-mail or send a message in the group chat to the committee clerk, and members in the room are asked to please signal to the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. A total of three hours have been scheduled for consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General. Standing Order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking rotation and speaking times.

In brief, the minister will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of the minister's comments a 60-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition begins, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for independent members 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. After this, the rotation of speaking time will then follow the same rotation of the Official Opposition, independent members, and the government caucus. The member and the minister may speak once for a maximum of five minutes, or these times may be combined, making it a 10-minute block. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send an e-mail or 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. Does anyone oppose having a break? Okay.

Ministry officials may be present and at the direction of the minister may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery area and are asked to please introduce themselves for the record prior to commenting.

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

If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and the committee will adjourn.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and individual speaking times will be paused; however, the speaking block time and the 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 estimates and any amendments will occur in Committee of Supply on March 21, 2022. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which time they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be

deposited with the committee clerk with 20 hard copies. An electronic version of the signed original should be provided to the committee clerk for distribution to the committee members.

Finally, the committee should have the opportunity to hear both questions and answers without interruption during estimates debates. Debate flows through the chair at all times, including instances when speaking time is shared. I'm going to emphasize that, please, everyone: debate flows through the chair.

I would like to now invite the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to begin his opening remarks.

Minister, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'll begin by just acknowledging that we continue as a government to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. As well, that includes the economic challenges that came with it. Our government continues to be focused on what matters most: lives and livelihoods. What that means for the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General is that we need to continue to make sure that families and communities in Alberta are safe and secure and to continue focusing on access to justice for Albertans.

Now, COVID presented significant challenges to the justice system, but it also presented an opportunity to help modernize programs that are using technology to speed up the access that Albertans need to the justice system. In particular, we're moving towards modern digital solutions to better serve Albertans. This budget continues to focus on the core priorities of Albertans and our justice system partners through these changes. We're investing in courts, in law enforcement, and in corrections to integrate services, adopt new approaches to persistent challenges. Ultimately, this will provide the province with better outcomes and results. We are doing all of this because we have heard from Albertans, including those in at-risk communities, that enhancing access to justice is needed now more than ever to protect Albertans and to keep all of our communities safe.

Now, as I alluded to earlier, in this budget we remain focused on improving core services for Albertans and addressing concerns within the justice system. This year the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General's consolidated budget is \$1.48 billion.

Looking at the public safety side of the department, all Albertans deserve access to timely and responsive police services no matter where they live here in Alberta. I see no reason why someone who is living in a rural community has to wait significantly longer for police than someone who's living in Calgary or Edmonton. That's why we're maintaining or increasing enforcement funding across the board.

Funding for organized and serious crime: this includes the ALERT teams. The Alberta law enforcement response teams – as I said, it's better known as ALERT – is increasing to \$50.4 million. The total funding for Alberta RCMP is increasing so that more officers can be hired through the police funding model and to address the RCMP's collective bargaining pay raise. Provincial funding to municipalities for policing is holding steady. In total, we are committing more than \$600 million to policing and enforcement activities this year. This is because we recognize the essential role that law enforcement officers play in protecting our communities. We remain united in this purpose.

Moving on to corrections funding and cost pressures there, in our efforts to focus on core services, we're also exploring efficiencies and the delivery of correctional services to reduce costs. What this means is, first, increasing the use of technology to streamline administration and supervision to create efficiencies there; second, internalizing some services that were once contracted out at a higher

cost – an example would be the youth community corrections in Calgary; third, finding and eliminating duplication wherever it's possible; fourth, managing and filling vacancies strategically; next, reducing costs through group purchasing and sharing contracts with other government branches; and last, analyzing the use of our resources and overtime within our correctional centres.

9:10

Next, moving on to the court system funding, we're focusing on core services and changing the way that we do business. We know that Alberta's courts strive to resolve matters in a timely way. My department has been working with Alberta's judiciary to modernize court services and operations, work that was sped up by the need to address pressures that were created by the pandemic, including court closures and physical distancing requirements. Now, thankfully, staff and our partners were able to expand the use of remote court hearings faster than expected, and this freed up invaluable court space and time.

Through the Justice digital initiative we're also using technology and process changes to make similar improvements in other areas of the justice system. Services for traffic tickets, adjournments, filings, case management, and virtual courts are getting more user friendly and efficient, and this is thanks to the increased use of technology and process updates. The value benefits from practical changes like this start to add up quickly when we look at the big picture, so we'll be continuing down this road in 2022 as well. I'm excited to discuss more about the Justice digital initiative and some of the other exciting next steps in our modernization efforts in the months to come, such as new digital tools for our courtroom clerks, for them to be able to boost productivity, for them to be able to create efficiencies for both pre and post courtroom operations as well as during hearings. My officials will be prepared to go into more details in our discussion today.

In conclusion, as you see, we're leaving no option unexplored as we work to provide Albertans with an efficient and effective justice system. This budget also prioritizes delivering better value in services for taxpayer dollars. Throughout all this work we remain laser focused on protecting lives and livelihoods. The results speak for themselves. Albertans will have a justice system that is more modern and more user friendly. They'll also have correctional facilities properly staffed. They will see more enforcement officers in uniform protecting their families and their communities. In short, they will have a system built for the times that we live in and optimized to make the best use of precious public resources. Budget '22 reflects this government's commitment to keeping Albertans safe and secure wherever they call home in our province.

Madam Chair, that's it for my comments. I'm pleased to take questions from the committee. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

We will have our break after our independent member finishes up his questions with the minister. I hear there'll be fresh coffee for us then. With that, we'll move over now for the next 60 minutes to the members of the Official Opposition and the minister.

Hon. members, you will be able to see the timer for the speaking block just on either of these big screens here.

Members, would you like to combine your time with the minister?

Mr. Sabir: It's up to the minister.

Mr. Shandro: Probably block time would be the easiest for today.

The Chair: Block time? Okay. If that's your preference, all right. Please proceed.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. It's a pleasure to be here to discuss Justice and Solicitor General estimates. Thank you, Minister, for being here today and thank you to all your staff for being here and available to answer these questions and for the work you do year-round to keep Albertans safe.

I do have a fair bit of questions, so I will get right into it. My first set of questions relates to the ministry's business plan. On page 75 of the business plan 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 where the rule of law is upheld and government undertakings are administered according to law.

Minister, as of late we have been hearing about attacks on racialized women, in particular Black, Muslim, hijab-wearing women across this province. In Beltline Calgary there are daily protests against the public health restrictions, which some will argue have already been lifted. Then the Alberta Coutts border crossing remained blocked illegally for 22 days. The question I have is: what do you have to say to those who are just being attacked for who they are and to those who are feeling less safe because of these attacks? What do you have to say to the residents of Calgary's Beltline who are inconvenienced by the anti public health restrictions, those fringe groups? What do you have to say to those who lost millions and were unable to get to funerals of their loved ones and had to miss important appointments because of the 22-day-long unlawful and illegal blockade? I guess what I'm asking here is: are you satisfied with the state of the rule of law, and if not, what do you intend to do differently to uphold the rule of law and fulfill government's responsibility to uphold the rule of law?

The second question relates to page 75 of the business plan. It says that "the ministry's programs and services help ensure Albertans' security and access to justice through efficient functioning of courts, correction, and law enforcement." However, there are currently more than 3,000 cases in Provincial Court alone at risk of being tossed out over unreasonable delay. These are cases beyond the 18-month threshold as of December 31, 2021. That's according to the Alberta Crown Attorneys' Association. I have a few questions relating to this. In your opening remarks, Minister, you talked about access to justice. A week ago you told the mayor of Edson that we don't have any Jordan situations right now, so the first question I will ask: do you think these numbers are correct, what the Alberta Crown Attorneys' Association is saying, that there are 3,000 cases in Provincial Court alone?

The second question. It's a deeply concerning situation, and I want to ask what message you have for all those who were wronged by criminal acts and are not seeing their perpetrators get punishment. They're not seeing the justice system work for them. Why is that, that they didn't get access to justice, that they didn't have their day in court? What message do you have for these victims of crime?

Another question. I would like to ask you about the status of Jordan delays overall and to share what you intend to do to address the situation.

Another question. The legal aid budget is also cut by \$300,000 this year, line item 5.5. How does that help to ensure Albertans' access to justice, and how many cases are there beyond the 18-month threshold as of today? I'm not talking about Jordan applications being made to the court; I'm talking about the actual number of cases that are beyond the 18-month threshold.

Then I also want to know: how many cases are there beyond the 30-month threshold as of today? Again, I'm not talking about the Jordan applications being made – that information is available on the courts' website – just the number of cases that are beyond the 30-month threshold as of today.

Through the chair, I also want to talk about the AG's, Auditor General's, recommendation, page 227 of the fiscal plan. The Auditor General's recommendation's heading is Continue Cause Analysis of Cases Delayed Due to Jordan Applications. The Auditor General recommends that the department

continue its cause analysis of cases, which have been judicially stayed or pre-emptively stayed by Alberta Crown Prosecution Service because of Jordan applications to identify contributing shortcomings in practices, or behaviour it can control and correct.

The department has accepted this recommendation, and I think it's important that we have that information, that we know the cause of these delays. The question I have is: where is that work at? It's already March 2022. Will you be sharing that analysis publicly, and if not, why not?

Back to the business plan, page 75: "The ministry supports victim services providers that help victims of crime, including those affected by domestic violence, hate-motivated crimes and human trafficking." Second paragraph, towards the bottom. The question I have is that your government made cuts to the victims of crime fund. My colleagues and I have been hearing from organizations and victims for the last two years now that the new program is still not in place and the changes that were made by your government are not acceptable. So why is your government taking those essential and needed supports from those victims of crime?

9:20

Page 76 of the business plan: "The ministry is examining the current victim service delivery model to ensure services are consistent and accessible and provide the appropriate support to victims of crime." Again, what's the status? How much longer will victims have to wait?

Page 79 of the business plan expense statement shows that victims of crime and public safety will see a reduction from \$69 million to \$62 million. Why is that? Can you explain that reduction? The other question I have is: how much money from the victims of crime fund will go to fund other services this year?

Back to page 75 of the business plan, through you, Chair. The ministry provides critical services. Those services are listed there. Then the government's fiscal plan, page 135, says that the increase in operating expense of \$99 million "is mainly due to RCMP collective agreement costs and increased costs for Alberta Sheriffs [and] Correctional Services." The question I have is that this budget has not added any new money for programs and services, which were deeply impacted by the cuts in the previous year. Last year alone this ministry was cut by \$65 million. Considering Jordan delays and law and order pressures, can you assure Albertans that despite these massive cuts in the last few years the ministry programs and services will not be impacted by these cuts and that in the given budget the ministry will be able to deliver on its mandate?

Also, another related question is: from this increase of \$99 million, what amount exactly is going to cover the costs of collective agreements? What amount will go towards other programs and services?

Page 75 of the business plan. The ministry is committed to reducing rural crimes. The violent rural crime stats on page 77 show that there is an upward trend. Why is it going up despite the UCP rhetoric and efforts? Are there new and dedicated funds to tackle it? Another related question is: where do Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge stand on the crime severity index, and what will you do to reduce that?

I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you so much, hon. member.

We'll turn the time now over to the minister for his response.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair and, through you, to the member, for the questions. I hope that I wrote down the questions exhaustively and have an opportunity to answer them. If not, then please do remind me if there was anything that I missed.

First, I'll begin with the questions related to hate crimes because I think that was the first question. It was raised as an issue. Most of the questions were related to the Beltline protests. I'll maybe begin by speaking a little bit about hate crimes or hate-motivated crimes because they fall broadly into two different categories. There are the traditional crimes, like mischief to property, that include a hate element, and these are offences that are charged and prosecuted according to the relevant Criminal Code section. The hate element of the crime is only taken into consideration at the time of sentencing. There is also the second category of hate propaganda, or also known as hate speech, and these offences are charged and prosecuted under sections 318 and 319, I think, of the Criminal Code.

The newly created hate crimes co-ordination unit is falling under the intelligence bureau within the public security division. The added cost in establishing this unit, the HCCU, is estimated to be about \$600,000 annually. Now, the HCCU is mandated to deliver services which would reduce, respond to, and promote recovery from a hate-themed occurrence throughout Alberta. The members of the unit will provide situational awareness and advice to officials and JSG as well as the AACP, the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, on hate-motivated incidents and develop interagency intelligence and criminal analysis to support those investigations and prevention programming as well, because it's not just about enforcement, but it's also about prevention. So they'll be collaborating with the minister-appointed community liaisons on hate crimes and diverse community and stakeholder organizations such as the Alberta Hate Crimes Committee, the AHCC, to support an environment that actively addresses issues of bias as well as prejudice and hate.

Amid the rising concerns, Madam Chair, about hate-motivated violence, which the member correctly points out, and vandalism across the province, the Alberta security infrastructure program officially launched this fall. Not-for-profit organizations can now apply for grants to assist in applying security in and around their premises, and the HCCU is supporting the administration of the ASIP grants.

So I'd say that in general related to hate crimes as well as just to point out that we are taking a holistic approach to fighting hate crime in the province and working to support the vulnerable and bring justice to those who would prey on these vulnerable populations in our province.

The member then spoke about the Beltline protests and concerns that folks have related to those protests. I would say, first of all, as I said in the House earlier this week, that when it comes to decisions related to police operations, municipal police services like the one in Calgary, as a former member of the Calgary Police Commission, they are accountable to the Calgary Police Commission. I know that I was asked in the House about some of the members of council in Calgary who have raised concerns publicly about that, and I think at least one of them is a member of the Calgary Police Commission.

There's an opportunity for us because we do have these municipal police services under the Police Act. If they fall under the Police Act here in Alberta, there are opportunities for us to have civilian-led oversight of police performance, civilian-led governance regarding policies for our police services, like the one in Calgary. And there are opportunities, then, for us as citizens.

Like the member, Madam Chair, I live in Calgary, so there's an opportunity for me, for him, for others in the Beltline who would have concerns about protests, about not feeling safe to be able to

speak to and advocate with the Calgary Police Commission or through their council members, because the Calgary Police Commission is accountable to the Calgary city council, to be able to speak to them about their concerns and make sure that those concerns are then being addressed through the governance and oversight that the Calgary Police Commission has over the Calgary Police Service.

That's the structure that we have for the governance and oversight, that we as civilians have over policing operations for those police services that fall under the Police Act. That's the structure that we have as citizens to have that accountability for police operations. We do not as politicians direct law enforcement operations. We don't, and I think I've heard, not from the member but from some of his colleagues in the House, calls for there to have been political intervention regarding police operations. I think we have to be prudent. I think we have to be deferential to law enforcement.

We want to make sure that all those folks – the member, Madam Chair, had raised tangentially the issue at the Coutts border crossing. I'd say this, that we want to make sure that those law enforcement officers who are involved in a situation like the Coutts border crossing are coming home to their families safe every night. That means that the work that our law enforcement is doing – I think we have to give deference to that, making sure that it's done in a safe way that deals with those who are going to be breaking the law. People have the right to protest in this province, and we respect that, but it has to be done in a lawful way.

There was unlawful activity that occurred at the Coutts border crossing. Thank you to the law enforcement officers that addressed it. I can understand the frustration that Albertans might have had if they didn't think that it was happening fast enough, but we also have to make sure that we give deference, that we act prudently and support those law enforcement agencies, because it's a multiagency response, making sure that those officers are coming home safe to their families every night, where they're not being pushed politically into a situation where their lives may have been at risk.

9:30

I think after that question, we then had questions related to Jordan. I guess I'd first point out that we have to remember that as we see cases that might be over a certain period of time waiting for the disposition of whatever the situation might be for the accused, Jordan does separate between what is and isn't within the control of the Crown. We were asked about a certain number of cases that might be over the 30-month limit. Before I defer to an official to be able to answer that question, I think we have to make sure that we are also distinguishing, though, between those that are and are not within the control of the Crown. The court has in a number of circumstances made a determination that – and, second, I would point out that it's also a difference between the applications and the situations where the court has agreed with the applicant regarding the Jordan application.

I'd also say that I think in that question, Madam Chair, the member is correct in saying – because I think the underlying concern is that Albertans deserve a justice system which protects them. It protects their loved ones, protects their property. We need to be committed to providing the tools and the resources that are necessary to ensure that the criminal justice system here in Alberta operates in a timely and effective way, so government is spending \$10 million to hire 50 new prosecutors and support staff to increase the proper functioning of the criminal justice system here in the province. Since budget year 2020-21 there have been 40 new prosecutors hired, and we are working to hire the remaining 10, and support staff is under way.

This increase will also ensure that rural Albertans are better served by the justice system by prioritizing placing the new students in locations – sorry. I’m jumping over this point, that we increased the number of articling students from eight to 20 to help recruit lawyers to ultimately work as Crown prosecutors and making sure that they’re not just working in Edmonton and Calgary. And all of our stakeholders in law enforcement, the judiciary, duty counsel, Crown prosecutors continue to work together to identify further improvements to help decrease delay.

Some of the recent changes include using the remote court processes to help address the backlogs and shorten wait times: remotely hearing thousands of dockets, hearings, trials, sentencings, and other situations; encouraging Albertans to deal with their traffic tickets online; starting e-mail filing as well of certain documents and working on a more permanent e-filing solution for the province; moving jury selection and jury trials to off-site facilities that are better able . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: We are going to turn the time back over to the Official Opposition. Please proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. There were quite a few questions, Minister, that I didn’t hear any answers to.

Anyway, moving on to page 75 of the business plan. It talks about “hate crimes unit” and “introduction of specialized training for key justice system officials.” The question I have: can you share more about the training, who developed it, how it was developed, and what percentage of Justice staff has already been trained in it?

Page 76 of the business plan talks about the “new and innovative approaches to policing,” and on page 77 outcome 1 talks about collaboration with policing partners and a review of police services. There was a resolution passed at the Alberta Municipalities convention a week ago, I believe March 9, and a position paper was also issued outlining their official position, dated March 9, essentially saying that municipalities across Alberta do not support the idea of provincial policing. Then on March 15, two days ago, the Rural Municipalities of Alberta voted 67 per cent in favour of reinforcing their support for the RCMP and calling on the government to not pursue a provincial police force. And the PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP’s report, Alberta Provincial Police Force Transition Study, clearly identifies additional costs of \$200 million per year in federal funding lost and then \$366 million in transitional costs alone. That’s on top of what the UCP has already downloaded onto municipalities through their new provincial policing model, to the tune of \$286 million. Further, the report by the Fair Deal Panel indicated that this was unpopular with Albertans. So a simple question, Minister: why is this government still insisting on moving ahead with the idea of a provincial police force, and what will it take for the government to listen and to abandon this idea? Do these resolutions from municipal partners mean anything this government?

Back to page 76 of the business plan. It talks about reviewing the programs and services that this department delivers. The question I have is: what programs specifically are under review at this point, and will the public have any opportunity for input in those reviews? Also, will any information from those reviews be made public?

Also, while talking about reviews – and I understand that reviewing programs is important – we have heard from many about concerns around systemic racism and instances where public trust and confidence in our police services is undermined. Are you reviewing any programs like, for instance, police education and

training? Do you have any steps in mind that you will take to ensure that Albertans have trust and confidence in their law enforcement?

Page 77 talks about outcome 2, implementing the Fair Deal Panel recommendation to make the Alberta justice system fair and effective. The question I have is that Alberta’s antiracism council made 11 recommendations for the justice system on January 10, 2021, and the government has yet to even say whether they accept those recommendations or not. The first question I have is whether you accept those recommendations. Do you plan to implement, for instance, race-based data collection or stipulate in the Police Act that law enforcement officers will take ongoing antiracism training? Those recommendations: there are 11 of them. The first question is whether you accept them, and the second is whether you will enact any of that, in particular the collection of race-based data.

A question around outcome 2, page 77. It talks about the Recall Act. The question I have is: why has the government not proclaimed the regulations yet? What’s the delay?

On page 78 performance measure 2(a) talks about lead time to trial for serious and violent matters, and it shows that it has increased during COVID and, might I suggest, due to the cuts over the last three years. The question I have is: what specific steps do you intend to take to bring that lead time down, and are there new investments in your budget that will help us achieve that goal?

Performance indicator 2(b) shows that Indigenous Albertans are overrepresented in correctional centres. In the last two years that situation has even gotten worse. Again, the question is: what specific steps do you intend to take to bring down the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in our justice system?

9:40

With respect to statement of revenue, page 79, it’s projecting premiums, fees, and licences revenue to go up from \$25 million to \$33 million in 2022-2023. The question I have is: what fees or premiums should Albertans expect to increase this year, and can you please provide a breakdown for us on where those increases are coming from?

Statement of revenue, page 79, is projecting other revenues to go up from \$52 million to \$64 million this year. Can you explain where those other revenues are coming from?

Under capital investment, page 79 of the business plan, Alberta Crown prosecution services is seeing an increase. I would like to know what projects are considered there in that increase.

Page 77 of the business plan, outcome 2: a fair and effective justice system. Again, key objectives there talk about recall legislation, UCP’s Fair Deal Panel. I would suggest that none of those reflect issues facing Albertans, in particular Black, Indigenous, and person of colour communities, who have issues around systemic racism, issues around overrepresentation of Indigenous and Black people in the justice system. So help me understand how the things you have listed there help us address these concerns.

Page 78, outcome 3: introduce a new model of victim service delivery. It’s exactly the same as last year. As I said earlier, my colleagues and I are hearing about victims getting refused for services. Can you commit to a timeline as to when we can expect a new model will be in place, when the new program will be in place, and how long do victims have to wait?

A few questions relating to fiscal plan 2022-25. It doesn’t mention even the word “racism.” Why is that? Don’t you see that as an issue?

Page 133 of the fiscal plan talks about a human trafficking working group led by Justice and Solicitor General. Can you tell us: what’s the progress there, and will there be some report that will be shared publicly?

Page 135 of the fiscal plan. I asked this already. There was a \$99 million increase mainly for collective agreements, so I wanted to know how much exactly is going to those agreements and how much is going to services.

And then there is . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much, hon. member.

Now we return over to the minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair, and through you to the member, thank you for these questions. They're incredibly thoughtful and substantive questions, so I really appreciate being able to speak about all these things.

I'll maybe just begin with – maybe one thing that I didn't get to in the last block was related to the victims of crime fund. It is not actually being cut. The victims of crime fund is not being cut. The scope of the fund actually was expanded so that there are more opportunities for us to use the victims of crime fund for public safety initiatives as well. Just to make sure that was clarified.

Related to legal aid, because that was asked in the last block, we do remain committed to helping those in Alberta who are vulnerable to be able to access justice services that they need by continuing to provide steady funding to legal aid in Budget '22, and while we are maintaining funding at the same level as last year, this represents an almost 70 per cent increase in legal aid funding that has occurred since 2014. With the pressures of the pandemic easing in 2022, we will reassess the funding for Legal Aid Alberta as needed as more court locations open up again.

Next I'll move on to the question related to the Indigenous justice program. This module-based training is being developed in collaboration with Native Counselling Services of Alberta. I think that was the question the member had. It will be available to Alberta's justice system professionals. Alberta received about \$230,000 from Justice Canada to develop this training. In addition, all government employees will be taking unconscious bias training over the coming year as well.

Next I think the member was asking about the work that's been done to investigate whether there could or should be an Alberta provincial police service. First of all, I just want to say, because I think the member – I wrote down this quote: why is this government still insisting on proceeding with this? I just want to clarify that that's not the case at all, Madam Chair. There has been no decision regarding an Alberta provincial police. We are still engaging with Albertans through the work that is happening after and as a result of the PWC report. I've heard loud and clear from municipal leaders that they had concerns about the scope of the engagement. I've committed to them in being able to sit down with them and hear their concerns about whether or why an Alberta provincial police should be the case.

Whether or not we have an Alberta provincial police service, I think it's time that we have to acknowledge some of the ways in which the MPSAs, the municipal police service agreements, that 47 of our municipalities have with the federal government to provide police services through the RCMP, with the RCMP being the vendor providing contract policing, and the way that we through our PPSA, the provincial police service agreement, engage and contract out with the federal government to have the RCMP providing provincial police have a number of concerns. Whether or not we have an Alberta provincial police service, we have to acknowledge the ways in which policing right now is not serving, in particular, rural Albertans very well.

One of the concerns that I have is that we don't have local police commissions throughout the province for all of these municipalities and to have an opportunity for policies to be set by local commissions

rather than national policies across the country, to have local evaluation of police performance, that we need to move forward in allowing civilian-led selection of detachment commanders. We have to move forward in allowing or improving recruitment throughout the province to focus on those who value rural life and desire to live and work in rural Alberta, to reduce the frequency of transitions that we see throughout the province, to reduce the limited duration postings, to stop the transfer promotions so that people don't have to transfer out of the community just to be able to progress in their career.

We have to improve training in the province so that we have training in Alberta, not just elsewhere in the country, that we can have training that focuses on community policing, that we have training that focuses on specific Alberta Indigenous communities, that we have improved information sharing so that PROS is integrated with every police service, and that we have an integrated approach to data sharing to end the duplication, that we can see an opportunity for us to speed up forensics instead of having triaging that's on a national basis, that we could actually have provincially tiered forensics in the province, and that we can also move forward in improving dispatch by expanding the RTOC to work with all municipalities and First Nations. We don't see that right now. Whether or not we have an APP, we have to be able to resolve these issues. We need to work with our municipal leaders to understand that those are our concerns, that these are issues, and that we can all work together to address them.

The member then, I think, asked about systemic racism, Madam Chair, and concerns. I would say that we do have an opportunity through the work that's been done so far on the Police Act review. I think that there are opportunities in that review for us to be able to improve the complaints process at least for those police services that fall under the Police Act. Right now, as a former member of a police commission, the complaints process for a complainant – complaints can take many, many years to resolve, which is frustrating for a lot of complainants. I think there are ways in which we can take the feedback we've received from communities throughout the province to improve the Police Act so that it's more responsive and, in particular, to those who have concerns about systemic racism.

9:50

The Recall Act was a concern that was also raised by the member. That did receive royal assent in June of '21. It has not yet, as the member pointed out, Madam Chair, been proclaimed. That proclamation is a key platform commitment. Right now, before we do proclaim the act, there is a need first for us to develop the regulation that's required to support the act before it does come into force. Work is still under way in developing that regulation so that it can be proclaimed. I'm hoping that this work can be completed fairly soon so that the act can come into force, be proclaimed, as soon as that – well, actually, I think, in consultation with the Chief Electoral Officer as well. We understand there is a period of time that the Chief Electoral Officer would then need to stand up processes and policies and guides to support the recall process. I understand there might be a couple of weeks for his office to be able to do that, but soon after the regulations are developed and completed and then that period of time for Mr. Resler's office to finish that work to develop those processes, then it would be able to come into force at that time.

We were asked about fees and premiums. I can say, Madam Chair, that there is going to be no increase in any fees, in any premiums. Any increase that's reflected in the budget is an increase in volume but not in any of the fees and not in any of the premiums.

The \$4.6 million increase for the victims of crime and public safety surcharges is due to a 5 per cent hike in the provincial victims of crime and public safety fine surcharge to support the public safety initiatives, a \$2.5 million increase for late penalties, and a \$2.1 million increase for ticket processing due to increased provincial fine retention. But no increases in any of these fines, fees, or premiums, Madam Chair.

I would say as well that the antiracism council – I think we were asked about that and the recommendations that we received. I can say that we have been focusing on our own hate crimes initiatives. The recommendations from that council are now continuing to still be analyzed, but right now we are focusing on our own hate crimes initiatives at this time, Madam Chair.

I believe I may be fairly close to time, so I'm happy to go back to my colleagues for further questions.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Back to the hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Well, thank you. I will just follow up on a couple of questions. On page 79 the statement of revenues is clearly projecting that revenues from fines are going up, so there will be some new fees, new fines, and that's the reason that they're going up.

With respect to the question around the antiracism council's recommendations, they're all really good. The question I specifically asked was about the collection of race-based data, and the reason I asked that is that it's important for many reasons. We do know that the Black, Indigenous, and persons of colour communities are overrepresented in our justice system, and having that data is important to ensure a fair and efficient justice system.

Anyway, I will move on to page 135 of the fiscal plan. There is a funding increase of \$5 million for the Alberta security infrastructure program to address hate- and bias-motivated incidents, which is really good. I recognize that this funding is important. But my concern is that the attacks I talked about on individual Albertans, in particular hijab-wearing Muslim Albertans, occurred on the streets, at the bus stations, in parking lots. Is there any money that will be earmarked to address those attacks specifically? In order to address those, I would suggest that it's important that the ministry analyze these recommendations from Alberta's antiracism council and clear their position, whether they are accepting those recommendations, and set out some time frame to address and implement those recommendations.

Page 214 of the fiscal plan, schedule 24, expense by object, provides a breakdown of the ministry's expenses. I was looking at this: salaries and wages, \$756 million; supplies and services, \$459 million; grants to other, \$253 million. The total doesn't add up to \$1,481 million. It adds up to \$1,480 million. There is a little bit of a discrepancy there, but I wanted to ask about a detailed breakdown of the grants, that \$253 million number.

Then I have a question around the Auditor General's recommendation. It's on page 227 of the fiscal plan, and I think that it relates to line item 4.1 as well. The Auditor General is recommending that the department resume its bail results analysis and evaluate and report on the effectiveness of implemented solutions.

We recommend that the Department of Justice and Solicitor General:

- resume its detailed results analysis of the various steps in the bail hearing process
- evaluate and report on the effectiveness of the solution it implements to improve identified problems in the bail hearing process.

The department accepted this recommendation, but they said that they intend to continue providing this analysis as long as resources allow. The question that I have is: will there be resources? Have you budgeted for this? It's important that we take these recommendations seriously. The bail process itself: it's important – people's liberties are at stake – that we have that in place. I hope that there are resources and that you can address this question.

The second recommendation relates to the triage process protocol, its tracking and reporting requirements. The recommendation is to "ensure that tracking and reporting requirements of triage protocol are followed by all Crown prosecution service offices." The department said that they will conduct a review and implement it by March 2022. The question I have is: is it done? Has it been implemented, and will that be made public? If somebody wants to see it, can you share where they can find that information?

Page 231 of the fiscal plan talks about the victims of crime and safety fund. There is a recommendation that is repeated by the Auditor General, so clearly it was not implemented. They're recommending again to "develop and approve a business plan with measurable desired results for the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Fund" and "publicly report the results of this business plan." The question I have is: why was there a delay, why was it not implemented, and why does the Auditor General have to say the same thing over and over?

10:00

I have asked about the victims of crime fund as well. The question I have is: will the minister be able to share a timeline when that recommendation will be fully implemented?

Okay. Page 212 of this year's fiscal plan lists full-time equivalents at 6,592 for '21-22 and 6,605 for '22-23. However, in last year's fiscal plan, page 182, Justice and Solicitor General had 6,670 full-time equivalents in the previous year and 6,599 full-time equivalents in 2021-2022. So there is a reduction of 71 employees in the last year or so. This year's number somehow shows that 13 people are added, but clearly there was a reduction of employees from 2021 to this budget, 71 employees. I would like to know: what positions were cut over the last one year or so?

Then I have a couple of questions with respect to JSG, Justice and Solicitor General, entity financial information 2022-23. On page 80, transfers from Canada, a \$10 million increase is projected. If you can provide a bit of detail for that.

Again, the fines and penalties revenue forecast is \$231 million. It's estimated to be \$271 million. Again, there are some fines, some penalties that are increased. What are those new fines and penalties?

On the same page, page 80, under expense, the victims of crime and public safety fund: the estimate is \$62 million, the same as last year. Again, I need a breakdown: what amount of that fund is going directly to support the victims of crime, not the public safety initiatives?

With respect to the strategic plan, page 11, they're dedicating up to \$49 million in 2022 through a number of initiatives. I just wanted to ask: is that a highlight or new funding?

The Chair: Thank you so much, hon. member.

Now we'll turn the time back over to the minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair and, through you, to the member. I think the first question was, again, a question about the fine revenue. I would say that we have seen over the last couple of years, perhaps because of the pandemic, fine revenue going down. We're expecting a bump – we're budgeting for a bump – and the reason for that is just that we expect the volume to go up from what

we've seen, that it's come down, over the last couple of years, during the pandemic.

The next question is about race-based data. For this, I'd ask for Assistant Deputy Minister Cooley to come and speak about the work that's under way with the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police and StatsCan.

Mr. Cooley: Thank you, Minister. I think it's fair to say that police services in Alberta understand the importance of collecting race-based data. It's been discussed at the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police meetings, and they acknowledge the work that's being done. Right now the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and Statistics Canada are working on a national data collection framework, so we've deferred our work to allow CACP and StatsCan to do their work so that we get a national picture and we're comparable with other jurisdictions.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you.

Madam Chair, I think the next was related to the Alberta security infrastructure program and questions related to what else might be done for Albertans, the point being that some of the crimes against a vulnerable Albertan might not necessarily be in a facility like a place of worship or a community centre, et cetera, but it might be on the street. I think that is the point that the member made.

First, before I speak specifically to that, further about the ASIP program. We have seen hate-motivated crimes when it comes to synagogues, cemeteries, community centres, and schools related to the Islamic faith and then firebombings, including the Vietnamese church in Calgary recently. I'm really pleased to support the continued work and, actually, more than doubling the fund so that we can increase the opportunities for these vulnerable populations to support and protect these facilities related to that population.

For somebody who is a vulnerable person and not at one of these facilities, I would point to the work that the hate crimes liaisons are doing now, the answers I gave previously related to hate crimes, and what we are doing with the hate crime co-ordination unit and the liaisons to be able to address the ways in which we as a province can support the work and co-ordinate the work throughout the province and try to help police services throughout the province address these concerns so that everybody in the province, no matter who they are, where they are, where they came from, where they were born, the colour of their skin, feels safe in their community.

Mr. B. Smith: Good morning. Brad Smith, assistant deputy minister, financial services. Through the chair, there was a question related to the breakdown by object of expenditures in the fiscal plan. I believe the reference was to page 214. Of the \$1.481 billion, \$756 million of that is salary, wages, and benefits, so it reflects a heavy front-line-operating ministry; \$451 million of total operational expense is budgeted for supplies and services, and that includes \$343 million for the provincial police services agreement. There's \$253 million, or 17 per cent of the total, related to grants, which includes \$89 million for police assistance grants to municipalities, \$94 million for legal aid. There's \$6 million budgeted for amortization of capital assets and \$6 million in an Other category, which is, effectively, a writedown of assets.

Thank you.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Assistant Deputy Minister Smith.

Next was a question related to a recommendation from the Auditor General. This relates to, I think the member had said, Madam Chair, line 4.1. The recommendation was for us to continue to resume that work, and will there continue to be resources, and do we take the recommendation seriously?

For that answer, I will defer this to the deputy minister.

Mr. Bosscha: Thank you, Minister. Good morning, and thank you for the question. Frank Bosscha, Deputy Minister, Justice and Solicitor General. We do very much take the recommendation seriously, and we have devoted resources to this. The reason for the inclusion of: while resources are available. It was included because it does involve front-line prosecutors to make sure that we're getting the right information. There are concerns at times that we have to prioritize what's going on in court versus where we're trying to get the metrics. We do take it seriously. We fully expect that with the hiring of the additional prosecutors over the last couple of years, we'll be able to maintain collecting that data and having it available.

In terms of the report, we fully expect that this review that we're doing will be completed by the end of this month. Once we've had a chance to review it, we will look at the implementation to continue to improve on these services. Whether it will be made public or not will be something we'll have to consider given the nature of prosecutions and their operations. There are a lot of restrictions that we have to be mindful of before we make things public.

Thank you for the question.

10:10

Mr. Shandro: Thank you.

Then, Madam Chair, next was a question about the business plan for the victims of crime fund, which was a recommendation as well, and I can advise that, yes, we do accept the recommendation. It's just a matter of timing related to the development of this business plan.

For that, it is right to impose on Assistant Deputy Minister Cooley. Thanks.

Mr. Cooley: As the minister indicated, Madam Chair, the department certainly accepts the recommendation, but the issue now is that we're right in the middle of redeveloping the victims of crime package, so as we've talked to the Auditor's office, we've let them know that we accept the recommendation. Once we get the new victims of crime package together, we will then be in a better position to establish the business plan. So that should be coming within the next several months.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you.

Then, Madam Chair, I think the next question was related to the number of FTEs in this budget.

Deputy Minister, I will again defer to you for this answer.

Mr. Bosscha: Thank you, Minister, Madam Chair. The department has gone through a number of adjustments over the last few years with respect to living within its budget, so the reductions that we have seen reflect those reductions in staff that were based on decisions made in the 2019-20, '21 budgets as we went through to basically reduce the number of staff we had in certain areas. People may recall that we had a reduction in our civil law teams, and that reflects that a lot of those 71 would have come from that. There were some other positions that were abolished in courts and in a couple of the other departments that represent the 71.

The increase of 13 that we have this year is primarily comprised of the transfer into our department of positions from other departments, and the increase also represents a few positions that have been created to reflect the new programs that we are offering under the department.

Thank you.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you.

Madam Chair, we may not have too much time for the next question, but it was details regarding the transfers from the government of Canada.

Deputy Minister, if I can again . . .

Mr. Bosscha: I'll actually ask Brad.

Mr. Shandro: Assistant Deputy Minister Smith.

Mr. B. Smith: Thank you. To the chair: there was a question from the member on the transfers from the government of Canada. Yes, there's a \$9.3 million increase, and that's comprised of \$5.4 million from the federal government contribution for legal aid, a \$2 million increase for the federal initiatives on guns and gangs due to the integrated opioid enforcement tactics requirement and crime prevention grants, and a \$1.6 million increase for the corrections exchange of services agreement.

The Chair: Thank you so much to the minister and his team.

We'll now turn the time back over to our independent member. Is that right? Yes. Please proceed.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister, to you and your entire staff, for all the work you do for Alberta and, of course, for your time here today. I greatly appreciate it. Would you like to go back and forth, or would you like me to do 10 minutes of block time?

Mr. Shandro: If block time is okay with you, that would be great. Thank you.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Sure. It is. I have eight or nine things that I'd like to mention, so I'll do my best to get them in in the 10 minutes. I appreciated your remarks at the start. You talked a lot about access to justice for Albertans, you talked about timely access to justice, and then you had some words around accountability for the people providing the access to justice and the protection of Albertans, so let me start there.

Rural crime significantly spiked up in the last little while, possibly due to the pandemic, possibly due to the bad economy. I heard some things: first of all, in rural Alberta the lack of police services. Sometimes in two counties, you know, 300 miles by 300 miles, there might only be one or two policemen and -women working that night on duty. Of course, if you have to drive 200 miles in between calls, the timeliness of that is not there, and of course we all know that an important incident or call can eat up several hours and hours of time and paperwork. So are there enough resources to protect rural Albertans?

I guess the next thing I've heard – where in your budget, where in your focus and your business plan are you putting time on overcoming the regionalization issues? Of course, you know, if a crime happens in a city and the person runs into a county, you have a situation where you're dealing with two different police forces, a municipal one and an RCMP one. How does the change-off happen from that? How does that work? Is that a huge problem? To be frank, Minister, it's one of the reasons a lot of people want an Alberta police force researched.

Then the other two things I hear that maybe hurt me the most: I've heard the situations where our Crown prosecutors have tens and tens of files and are very, very busy, and I've heard about some property crimes, shoplifting in particular, where the store owner will phone the police, and no one will come because the Crown prosecutor won't end up handling the situation and there's nothing that can happen to the perpetrator anyway. Then when I hear, Minister, that it's quite often the same small, small percentage of people committing the crimes, I wonder – you know, of course, the main concern is to help these people get back to being a full, contributing member of society, and I appreciate that might be part of your budget. But do you have some focus on these consistent

people that are making crimes in a small-property way, and what can we do about that to really protect Albertans?

Secondly, the Alberta police force. I clearly know that when I talk to Albertans, you know, everyday Albertans out there that need to work hard and create income and create wealth and protect their families, although they greatly appreciate the work that individual RCMP officers do and what the RCMP officers do for us, they are interested in greater protection. They are interested in gaining some level of autonomy from Ottawa, and they believe that an Alberta police force can do both, make them safer and make Alberta stronger.

I don't know if it's under your jurisdiction or not, but we now have appointed our own Chief Firearms Officer. I see no reason why the gun owners of Alberta who take out gun ownership registration shouldn't elect that person. We believe in accountability, as you mentioned. So is it on your radar at all to come up with a system to elect our Chief Firearms Officer?

Speaking of photoradar, I'm disappointed that your government's announcement and a bill, I think it even was a few months ago, just seemed to reflect and further talk about what the previous government had done. I, like the previous opposition speaker before me, see that you've increased the revenue from fines and penalties, you know, \$50 million in two successive years, so you're expecting quite an increase in that. You know, photoradar: yeah, a person is breaking a traffic violation, and we need to ensure that safety happens, but I sometimes wonder if these fines and penalties are really appropriate and fair. I wonder if we've ever looked at putting photoradar just in school zones and playground zones, to make it – our children, of course, are precious – where the heightened awareness of that would do the most good.

Back to my first, access to justice. You mentioned, Minister, I think it was 50 more Crown prosecutors and \$10 million more. When I look at the Alberta Crown prosecution service expense item, it stays static for the next three years. So can you please pinpoint me to where that taxpayer contribution is going to come from?

The victims' assistance model. I really just want to give a shout-out here. I see your key objective 3.1: introduce a new model of victim service delivery. Great. From a personal standpoint, I had a break and enter 10 years ago, and it hit me harder than I'd expected. The next day a complete volunteer from victims' assistance called me, and it was really good. Then I started to talk to some of my friends who were involved in victims' assistance as volunteers. God bless them for all the work they do, especially when it's a crime of personal injury or mental health. Just do what you can with victims' assistance. As far as I'm concerned, that program should be enhanced all we can. It's good.

10:20

Minister, if you could, government of Alberta lawsuits. We've seen the Premier sued by NGOs over some environmental remarks; we've seen some other lawsuits, you know, against the government of Alberta. Is that in your budget anywhere? What do we spend per year on those kinds of things, and what is our process for picking a legal firm to represent us? How do we do that?

Analyzing use of resources. I'm glad to see you have that in your business plan a couple of times. It's important to get value. One of the things that I've heard about – and I'm just going to quickly tell you, and maybe you can help. I've heard that sometimes between 30 and 40 per cent of court cases when they go to court – and that will be with the policeman there on duty, being paid for being there but, of course, not out in the streets on the front lines, where they could potentially do the most good. Thirty to 40 per cent of the time the Crown prosecutor or the defence attorney or the person being

charged will stay the proceedings, and these trials will be stayed and stayed and stayed. Of course, our hard-working police officers will be in there and end up just having to turn around. If that's accurate, is there anything we can do to make it so that the taxpayer can get more value and still provide those services?

I want to touch on drug trafficking just because it's so pertinent. I heard Mr. Smith talk about some of it, and I was grateful for that. You know, Cypress-Medicine Hat, more and more we hear about the drugs being involved in our community, the untimely deaths, the small, well, not even small, the property crimes that come with that. I'd really like to hear about your focus to help people get out of that trap of a life.

Before me, the NDP opposition mentioned the Recall Act. I just want to say that it does surprise me that we're at 200 or more days since we passed that in the Legislature, and we still don't have the regulations. I get it that sometimes you proclaim a law or you have royal assent, after we pass it in the Legislature, before the regulations come, but I would contend that it's a bit sloppy. It's not as good as it could be. The 87 of us had to vote on that law and had to debate that law without the regulations, and here we are all these 200-plus days later and still no regulations. I would just think that possibly some money in your budget could go to making sure that we have that in front of us more often.

The last thing I'll mention, traffic tickets. I've heard about some truck drivers who get their second traffic ticket even though it's maybe in the wrong area. It hurts their company's insurance; it hurts their job chances.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Over to the minister for his response.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair and, through you, to the member. First, I'll talk about rural crime. Our commitment to protecting lives and livelihoods is a part of making sure that we're maintaining or increasing police support, grant funding for municipalities, more funding for ALERT, and I'll talk about that more in a little bit and perhaps even impose on Assistant Deputy Minister Degrand on that as well, just to give him a heads-up that I'll be doing that. Funding for our RCMP is increasing, as is funding for the RAPID response initiative, which I'll talk a little bit more about as well. Overall, we do continue to provide more than a half-billion dollars for policing annually.

Specifically, when it comes to rural crime, yes, you're right that rural Alberta has been dealing with high crime rates, especially involving property offences like you had yourself. I'm sorry to hear that you were a victim of that offence. Folks are frustrated with the long response times, in particular if it's in an isolated area in the province, so the province is standing up for rural Alberta by taking action to reduce the response times with, as I mentioned, the RAPID response program, and the point of this is to deter crime with new – as well, the work that was done under Minister Schweitzer to pass new legislation, which was regulating the scrap metal dealers and recyclers. We've also taken steps to reinforce property rights by strengthening trespassing laws, with tougher penalties for trespassers.

Using the RCMP crime gauge, a comparison of rural crime stats from January to December of 2019 to the same period in '21 shows a continued downward trend with an overall drop of 14 per cent in property crimes, including theft of motor vehicles, B and Es, thefts over and thefts under \$5,000. Persons crimes, however, have not seen the same drop although the total persons crimes showed no change between 2020 and 2021. I'd also say that the RCMP provincial detachments report that in '21, compared to '19, there have been over 1,200 fewer motor vehicle thefts, over 2,700 fewer

B and E incidents, and 3,800 fewer thefts under \$5,000, which is good news for us to hear.

Anyways, I'm happy to take further questions on rural crime. I think that has highlighted some of the work that we have been doing to – and I'd say that the RAPID response is also meant to alleviate some of the pressures that RCMP officers have by allowing the sheriffs and fish and wildlife officers to be able to help take some of the burden off their work, allowing RCMP officers to focus on serious incidents and to help with response times as well.

A good question about regionalization issues. A fantastic question, Madam Chair and, through you, to the member. The member is absolutely right. Crime doesn't respect a municipal boundary, and if you look at the province before 2006, we had really big concerns when it came to a lack of a regionalized approach to prevention and response to crimes in the province. One of the reasons why, under I think it was the Solicitor General at the time – it was Harvey Cenaiko – was the development of the ALERT program. And through ALERT we then had the opportunity to start addressing crime in a regionalized way.

Now, it's true that we have an opportunity, if we did have a provincial police force, in expanding the work that ALERT does on a province-wide scale. We could expand the scale of ALERT and the amazing work that that team does. Maybe to provide a little bit further information about ALERT, I'll impose on Assistant Deputy Minister Degrand to talk a little bit more about how ALERT is looking at prevention and response to crime in a regionalized way.

Mr. Degrand: Thank you, Minister and Madam Chair. I'm Marlin Degrand. I'm the assistant deputy minister for the public security division. To speak to the minister's questions and point, ALERT has seen an increase in funding and a commitment to double its resources over the course of five years. We're in the middle of that process right now. As a consequence of that, ALERT has been engaged in dealing with the development of units across a broader stretch of Alberta. We have increased the rural footprint for ALERT to include areas like Lloydminster as well as expanded it to include things such as human trafficking initiatives, property crimes teams, scrap metal initiatives, and, of course, organized and serious crime.

ALERT is the conduit for joint forces operations in the province. Specific examples of recent success have been, actually, in the Medicine Hat area with the joint forces initiative between the Medicine Hat Police service and the RCMP, that is conducted there under the banner of ALERT. That has been highly effective in addressing some of the property crime issues that they've been facing in that area, with some very recent and notable successes.

ALERT is also the conduit for intelligence sharing in the province. The Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta is constituted under ALERT and is a conduit for all intel sharing across every one of the police services – the seven independent municipals, three First Nation services, and the RCMP – here in the province.

10:30

We also, in addition to that, have their involvement in the integrated offender management initiative, which is a broader initiative that's undertaken by every major police service in the province and works closely with the Crown in identifying prolific offenders and high-priority, especially property, offenders, identifying them, working on means to either egress them from a lifestyle of crime or to address their criminality in the most aggressive way possible through the court systems. ALERT actually is a managing part of that initiative as are, of course, the major services.

Finally, ALERT's expansion is allotted to involve every police service in the province, with the exception of Lakeshore police

service, in directly having membership within the ALERT forces, and every police service, including Lakeshore police service, is a part of the managing board of directors for ALERT.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you.

Now, Madam Chair, I complimented the member's question regarding regionalization issues. I'm not going to do the same for his question about photoradar. That's not a JSG issue. I invite the member to be asking that of Transportation. That is a traffic safety issue, and that is properly addressed by my colleagues in Transportation.

I would point out, though, that when I was a member of the Calgary Police Commission, the Calgary Police Service did come to the commission, and there was a focus on, before there was photoradar in the city, that there was evidence that there was a concern regarding an intersection that might have a high fatality rate and proof that when photoradar was implemented at an intersection, it actually reduced fatalities in that intersection. An example might be Bow Trail heading east, where a lot of people are rushed going into the downtown area. At 33rd there was often a lot of folks going through those red lights, not even a stale yellow but a red, red, red light, and a lot of head-on collisions in that intersection. Then the photoradar did show that it did reduce fatalities in that intersection.

Regarding the question of the Chief Firearms Officer I want to, first of all, just use it as an opportunity to highlight the stellar appointment. The recruitment didn't happen under me; this happened before I was the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. But just to talk a little bit about the Chief Firearms Officer's career before coming into the CFO role, she was a member of the Alberta Firearms Advisory Committee, the director of the Canadian Shooting Sports Association. As well, she was the secretary of Alberta Arms and Cartridge Collectors Association, the president of Military Collectors' Club of Canada, and an associate professor of business at the U of C. As well, although I haven't seen it, not yet, although I would be interested to see it, I think she has the largest collection of Japanese military firearms in the country. So somebody who comes to the role with a huge amount of experience and someone who will be able to advocate well for all Albertans in this role.

There was a question about the Recall Act. I think there was a question maybe advocating for us to have a debate on the regulations. I hope I misunderstood, that it's not the case. But the regulations will now be addressing, for example, expense limits, contribution limits, and all those operational details that were enabled in the act, which the member knows because it was debated by all 87 members, for us to then be able to now take those operational issues and address them in the regs, which will be, as I said previously to other colleagues . . . [A timer sounded]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

We'll head to our coffee break now for five minutes.

[The committee adjourned from 10:34 a.m. to 10:41 a.m.]

The Chair: We'll now move over to the government caucus for 20 minutes of questions from the members.

Would you like to combine your time with the minister?

Mr. Gotfried: If he's amenable to that.

Mr. Shandro: Sure.

Mr. Gotfried: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister and to your staff here today. It's a great opportunity for us to have a conversation with you and your team. I know it's been a very difficult couple of years during times of COVID pandemic, with lots of challenges in the communities that we serve, and also with respect to the nonviolent and expected protests that sometimes accompany this. I know it's been a challenging time.

Minister, I know that justice system capacity, which includes policing, judiciary court, and corrective systems and everything else that's overseen by your ministry, is very fundamental to the functioning of society and the protection of Albertans and, of course, under the purview of our government here in Alberta, as in most other subnational jurisdictions, a very, very important element of a just society. However, in Budget 2022 I see that there's an inclusion of a \$129 million increase to the Justice and Solicitor General budgets. While I'm sure this is extremely warranted and I know that there has been a lot of diligence and work put into it, I'm still interested as to how these dollars will be allocated and benefit Albertans and our justice system. I'd be very appreciative if the minister could explain to us why we are seeing this substantial increase and how this can be justified to all Albertans.

The Chair: All right. You're going back and forth, then, for this segment?

Mr. Shandro: Yes, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Please proceed, Minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair and through you to the member for the question. The question was about the \$129 million increase in the budget. The increases in the budget – I guess I could explain it this way – will help to keep Albertans safe and to increase access to justice in a number of ways. Some of these ways would include bolstering law enforcement. For example, we heard Assistant Deputy Minister Degrand talk about ALERT. Another example would be the Alberta sheriffs improving police accountability. We are increasing our funding for ASIRT, which is the Alberta Serious Incident Response Team, the significant increase in funding for ASIRT for them to continue to be supported in the work that they do and to improve the accountability of police services in the province.

Continuing to modernize all three levels of court that we have here in the province, so not just the Provincial Court and the Court of Queen's Bench, which see a lot of volume throughout the province, but also the Court of Appeal. We're also going to see increased funding for our correctional facilities. As well, the office of the Chief Medical Examiner and the office's staff. There's going to be an increase in the number of staff in that office. Then more than doubling the grants, as we talked about in the questions from other colleagues, for the protection of community facilities for those who are at risk of hateful vandalism or violence.

There is also going to be steady funding to help keep Albertans safe and to continue to support access to justice across the province by maintaining policing grants; for example, the municipal policing assistance grants as well as the police officer grants. Maintaining funding as well for our prosecution service: there's a slight increase there for them as well. Then Budget '22 reflects through this \$129 million increase that I was asked about, Madam Chair, the government's commitment to keeping Albertans safe and secure wherever they call home in the province.

Thank you to the member for the question.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Back over to the hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Great. Thank you, Minister, through the chair for that. Thank you. I think you've touched on some items here that I'll probably try and get a little bit more granular on as we go forward again, Madam Chair.

Minister, I can see on page 155 of the estimates documents under line item 7.2 that the Alberta Serious Incident Response Team, or ASIRT, as you referenced, will receive a 35 per cent increase in budget. As far as I'm aware, certainly, we hear of ASIRT when there are any particular incidents involving them, that they investigate incidents involving police and oversee any serious allegations involving police conduct. You know, obviously, this work is important and shows your ministry's commitment to outcome 1 on page 77 of the business plan, which is, first and foremost, to keep Albertans safe. We know that our trust and, I guess, oversight of the policing system is certainly of great relevance and importance and, I think, a priority for Albertans, but maybe you can expand a little bit on some of the reasons for this increase in marked funding and possibly just touch on how this budget allocation will improve safety and accountability in our province.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Member.
Minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair. The point of the increase is to increase the investigative capacity for ASIRT and really just to bring that capacity in line with the organizational needs that they've expressed to us. That will help to address the operational pressures of the unit and the existing backlog of work at ASIRT that they've advised us of.

As well, the ministry recently went through a reorganization, and as a result of that reorganization several of the units within the law enforcement and oversight branch were moved to a newly created branch, the provincial security and intelligence office. That resulted in the splitting of the budget line between branches, but in reality there was – yeah. Anyways, really, the increase for ASIRT was to deal with increasing their capacity.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.
Hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Great. Thank you again to the minister, through the chair.

Minister, I'm looking over the main budget documents here and noting a significant increase in line 8 on page 156. You again reference the overall corrections budget, and I see that it has increased by over \$22 million this year, a jump of about 7 per cent, so greater than inflation and probably population growth. Now, I know the line items in this category are very important to the operation of evolving the corrections system and improving it for Albertans and, obviously, to get people through that system and back into mainstream society, but I'm hoping you could break down some of the numbers we're seeing here to clarify how this will make a difference for us. Can the minister, again through the chair, please explain how this funding will be allocated and how it will benefit Albertans both inside and outside of the system?

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair. The increase in the division's budget is related to a number of key areas. Folks who are housed in custody in the province have increased to pre-pandemic levels. What that means is that folks that are supervised in the community and in custody in line with public safety measures and supervision, which Albertans should and do expect – on any given day there are about 3,000 folks in custody in our 10 correctional facilities and about 15,000 folks who are supervised in the

community. There are various levels and differentiation of conditional release. Most of them, I assume, are on stat release for those 15,000. So that's about a \$10 million increase to budget for that reason.

Savings related to the labour mandate savings were not realized, and this funding has been reinstated in the '22-23 budget. So that's about a \$7 million increase to budget.

Money, as well, was transferred from Advanced Education to support inmate education and rehabilitative programs. This is not an increase in overall funding, but it is an increase to the correctional services division as this funding was previously part of the Advanced Ed budget – it's a just over \$5 million increase to budget from Advanced Ed – and then we as a province continue to operate the lowest per diem for custody costs in the country and have about 300 more people on average per day than we did last year.

10:50

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you again to the minister, through the chair. I'm really glad to hear some of the advanced ed opportunities there as well.

Just continuing with this line of questioning. On line 8.4, correctional programs and services specifically, we're seeing about a \$5 million increase in this line item alone. Of course, we're looking for measurable outcomes. What are some of the measurable outcomes that we as Albertans should see from this particular budget increase and what your objectives are and, again, those measurable outcomes that you hope to achieve from that increase?

The Chair: Thank you so much, Member.
Minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair and through you to the member, for the questions. That is the Advanced Ed portion. Measurable outcomes: I mean, what I would say is that as a former member of the national parole board we want to make sure that when folks are returning to the community, whether on conditional release or when they're at warrant expiry, they have some opportunity to get programming in an institution to help with them understanding their triggers, for example, or just help them better with rehabilitative services so that when they do return to the community, they're less likely to reoffend, they have a release plan that's going to help make sure that they're successful, or if they're at warrant expiry, they're successfully back, integrated into the community, and going to be successful and not reoffend.

The measurable outcomes would be looking at the ways in which we are continuing to support offenders who are in our institutions, making sure they're getting those supports, they have successful release plans, they're not reoffending when they're on either a stat release or after a warrant expiry.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
Member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you. Maybe just a quick follow-up on that. Would the rate of recidivism be one of your outcome measures on that specifically?

Mr. Shandro: Well, maybe I'll impose on Assistant Deputy Minister Cooley to answer that question.

Mr. Cooley: Thank you. Yes. Certainly, rate of reoffending is an indicator. Successful completion of programs are indicators of our interim measures, I would suggest, of that. The amount of program that an individual takes is typically related to a successful outcome. Those are the types of initiatives we're tracking.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you for that clarification.

Again through the chair, Minister, the Alberta security infrastructure program funding was increased from \$1 million to \$5 million in this year's budget on page 135 of the fiscal plan. From what I can see, this program works to facilitate infrastructure improvements – very important, I think, probably, with some aging infrastructure – that might diminish the risk of hate- or bias-motivated crime in communities. I know you referenced that in some of your earlier responses. Can you explain to us the reasoning behind this and how this will increase the support and the safety of Albertans at risk of hate crimes and, obviously, many of those in our ethnic and religious communities?

The Chair: Thank you, Member.
Minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair and through you to the member. The increase in the funding was really just a response to the significantly high demand from vulnerable Albertans who are at risk of being targeted by hate- or bias-motivated crime. Because of that high demand – that was the reason for more than doubling the program, because we had seen so many applicants.

The second question, I think, was: how is that going to support folks who are at risk of a hate crime? It would support those folks who are at risk of a hate crime by supporting the funding to support security infrastructure needs, people who either worship at or work at, you know, even if it's a community centre or a school. Folks who are attending these facilities when they are serving a vulnerable community deserve to be feeling safe.

As the member mentioned, Madam Chair, some of the crimes that we've seen throughout the last few years, the rash of violence against, you know, last summer, certain places of worship, including the Vietnamese church, where we announced last Sunday the increase in the funding – they've done a lot of work to rehabilitate that church. But seeing the photos and seeing how badly the crime made that entire population feel insecure – folks who are at risk of that hate crime: it's just making them feel secure again in their community. These are really important facilities that people need to be able to feel safe in.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
Member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think that that's an admirable approach to this. I'm glad to see that funding as an Albertan of Jewish heritage. We see an increase in anti-Semitism, and certainly with what's happened around the globe, I think we have to be very cognizant of that. I do hope you're working with the Minister of Culture and status of women as well so that we can go and maybe improve how we're moving forward with educating people and creating a more just and welcoming society. So thank you for that.

Minister, through the chair again, I see on page 155 of the estimates document under line 5.3 that Budget 2022 includes a significant increase in the budget of the Chief Medical Examiner's office – again, you mentioned that a little earlier – close to \$4 million, to be more precise. I understand that this office's primary function is to investigate unexplained deaths in Alberta and even maintains a centre in forensic pathology and toxicology, which, of course, is an advancing science and a more precise one certainly in the last 10 or 20 years. Can you please elaborate on what benefits this increase in budget for the Chief Medical Examiner will bring to that office and to Albertans in terms of us, I guess, overseeing and providing greater insights into the forensic world?

The Chair: Thank you, Member.
Minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair. First, the suggestion that when it comes to the ASIP grants, we should be working more closely with the Minister of Culture and status of women: that's fantastic advice. The Associate Minister of Status of Women, in particular, has been very helpful in helping us reach out to communities, helping us with town halls, and engaging with folks, making sure that they're aware of those grants. My former colleague in Labour and Immigration, the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism, obviously, because he was also there for us with the announcement on Sunday, has a strong passion as well and has been helping us reach out to many different vulnerable communities to make sure that they're aware of the program and those opportunities.

The OCME, office of the Chief Medical Examiner. Good question, Madam Chair, through you to the member. The office of the Chief Medical Examiner is committed to providing high-quality and timely service for the deceased in their care, to help grieving families find closure during a traumatic time in the lives of those folks. Budget '22: that investment will help the OCME to meet the demands of modern forensics, quite frankly, and to better serve current and future generations of Albertans. Budget '22 also provides \$40 million in capital funding over four years to help construct a new Calgary facility for the OCME.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
Member, do you have more questions?

Mr. Gotfried: Yes, I do. Thank you.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes. Thank you to the minister again. Of course, we're all experts on forensics by just watching late-night TV. We can find all that out these days. Thank you for your comments on that, and I hope that we can reach those high marks in that area.

Minister, I'm going shift my questions a little bit over to the courts, again a big issue, an emerging issue and concern, I think, across this province in terms of dealing with that and advancing and evolving the system. Budget 2022 includes significant increases in funding to the three levels of courts in our province, and specifically on line 2 of estimates documents it outlines that the Provincial Court, Alberta Court of Queen's Bench, and the Alberta Court of Appeal are receiving funding increases of \$7 million, \$5 million, and a half a million dollars respectively. So some good numbers, I guess, in terms of that. But I think we want to hear about some qualitative things, so could you maybe elaborate a little bit more on how this funding will improve Albertans' access to justice and help to fulfill our commitment to end the court backlogs, which we hear about quite consistently?

The Chair: Thank you, Member.
Minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, the whole point is to reflect our commitment to improving access to justice, to make sure that our court system is equipped to meet the needs of Albertans, and we are seeing increased funding for all three levels of courts in the province: the Provincial Court, also the Court of Queen's Bench, also the Court of Appeal. The increased funding is going to be used in a few ways. First, to modernize court services

because we are seeing the justice system return to prepandemic levels and to a prepandemic normal. So we want to make sure that we are increasing funding to modernize those court services and make sure that we're dealing with the volume. Then the capital funding will also be used to help in those efforts by expanding videoconferencing capacity in our courtrooms as we've seen the pandemic really push the court system into an accelerated way of modernizing their approach to access to the courtrooms.

11:00

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.
Member.

Mr. Gotfried: Great. Thank you, Minister, and thank you for those increases.

Again through the chair, Minister, I've been combing through the estimates documents because I don't have to spend too much time combing through my hair, and it appears to me, based on line 5.5 on page 155, that this year's budget shows no increases in funding for Legal Aid Alberta. Now, I'm sure that I'm not the only one who finds this decision interesting and perhaps concerning. Even if the line numbers for 2022-2023 are in line with previous budgets, it seems to me that there may be, you know, in our government an opportunity to do more for low-income Albertans in terms of access to legal services.

The Chair: And that's our time.

It's now going to move over to the Official Opposition. Please proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do want to start by noting that it's ironic that the Minister of Justice has taken a completely different approach with questions from the government than questions from the opposition. But that's fine; be that as it may.

The first question is related to 2.1, which also includes money for business and technology supports. My question is: what is your ministry doing to make sure that online resources are available in one place such as the Alberta Courts website log-in information for Webex for all regions? That's important because there are many who are self-represented, and there are many who may not have access to technology and all those things. What are we doing to make sure that we have the supports in place to help those Albertans navigate and obtain the correct information?

A second question is with respect to line 2.2, that includes maintenance enforcement, child support. What's the workload for maintenance enforcement? What's the workload for child support? Has the workload per person increased within those departments, and if so, how are you addressing that?

With respect to lines 2.3, 2.4, and 2.5, all three courts, a question I have is: do you have the full complement of judges in all courts, and how many vacancies are there in each court?

Also, I'm hearing from many in my riding and the communities I represent, and I have talked to some in the legal community as well, that courts are not providing interpreters for family and civil matters, which impacts their access to justice, which impacts access to justice for marginalized communities. They rely on volunteers who are not trained to interpret legal proceedings, which complicates issues further, and it takes more court time as well. Is there any money in this budget to provide interpretation services for civil and family matters? I do understand that there's a language helpline that exists, but that doesn't help. Are there any plans to add those services to ensure access to justice for those who may have language barriers or who are marginalized?

With respect to 2.3 I'm pretty sure that you have heard about the public outcry against the changes that were made to the traffic ticket court: the new fees that were added to fight tickets, the seven-day deadline, and how these actions violate the principles of justice and access to justice. So my question is: do you still plan to move ahead with all those changes?

Also, I'm hearing that the justice of the peace counter remains closed and has not reopened after COVID. Will that open again?

Another thing is that, like – you will agree with me that courts are supposed to be impartial and accessible to all Albertans. Digitalizing the court process is good, but it is also creating barriers and encouraging systemic barriers for those who don't have access to technology, who don't have access to Internet. What steps specifically will the department take to make sure that those who don't have access to technology, who are not well versed in using that technology have access to justice?

There is some increase in ALRI, which is good. There's no question there.

The Chair: Thank you so much, hon. member.
We'll turn the time over to the minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair, and through you to the member: again thank you for these questions, I think really thoughtful questions, for all of these. So thank you.

First, I'll start with the question related to business and technology supports. In particular, there was a concern for those who are self-represented who may not have – I hope I'm accurately describing the question. The concern was about self-represented litigants who wouldn't have access to online resources. That was the concern, right? I hope that I got that right. Perhaps if I could impose on the deputy minister for that answer.

Thank you.

Mr. Bosscha: All right. Thank you, Minister, Madam Chair, to the member. The issue of technology and the changes that we're making to the courts and using, you know, basically something that's not available to all people is a real concern. We've had conversations with a number of stakeholders. The term that they use is technology poverty. We're very much aware that as we build these changes into our court systems, there has to be a mechanism or resources available to those people that would not otherwise be able to access the courts. It's very much something that we're alive to. While right now we are very much focused on the core change to the court systems to make use of digitalization, we are also looking at the same time at how do we increase those resources, whether it's through legal aid or through other providers, to make sure that they have access. Also, we've had conversations with our libraries that support the courts. They're a conduit that may very well be available where services can be provided. So we are looking at how to make sure that as we advance and modernize the courts, we are not leaving people behind, especially those that are very much in need of the supports that government can provide.

Thank you.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you.

I'm going to jump around a little bit with these questions, Madam Chair. I really appreciate the question regarding interpretation services. It was specifically about family and civil matters. I can say that there is an increase in funding from Canada for this. It's a matter that's under consideration, and we are looking at further ways in which we might be able to expand access to interpretation services. Fantastic question. I really appreciated that one, and it is something that we're going to continue to look at.

For the justice transformation initiative I would say, first of all, that there have been no decisions made, that there were proposals that were developed internally, but there have been no decisions made. The question was whether or not we were going to continue to proceed with those internal proposals. I would say that – I mean, that is a transportation issue. I'd defer that answer to the Minister of Transportation for that question.

Regarding the vacancies we do have vacancies in both Provincial Court and Court of Queen's Bench. The specific numbers: Deputy Minister, do you mind me imposing on you for that answer?

Mr. Bosscha: Certainly, Minister.

Our understanding is that at the Provincial Court level there are six to eight. It depends on how you count the vacancies. We have a number of judges that are part-time. Right now we have actively six to eight positions that would be considered vacant.

In the QB level we actually look to the federal government to add four additional positions for the QB, so we are looking to the federal government to appoint two new justices in Grande Prairie and two more justices in Red Deer. I believe there are a couple of vacancies that have occurred within the QB.

The Court of Appeal has a number of vacancies. I'd have to get back to you with those numbers. But there is one current vacant position that has never been filled by the federal government, that the minister is actively seeking to have the federal government appoint. A number of years ago there was a position created, but the federal government has never staffed that one. We'll get back to you with the actual vacancy numbers.

Thank you.

11:10

Mr. Shandro: Thank you.

Then the last question that I think hasn't been addressed was regarding maintenance enforcement and child support and the workload and if it's increasing and to what extent we're addressing those increases. Do you mind me imposing on you again, Deputy Minister?

Mr. Bosscha: Actually, Minister, if I may, I would ask Assistant Deputy Minister Barb Martini to speak to that one.

The Chair: Seventeen seconds left.

Mr. Bosscha: My apologies; Barb Turner.

Ms Turner: Barb Turner. Hi. I don't know the exact volumes, but I do know that they've gone to a case management system where each worker does a cradle-to-grave approach to the files. My understanding is that it's working very well.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Member.

Now we'll go to the independent member for his questions.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Thank you very much. Back and forth or block time?

Mr. Shandro: Block time is okay. Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: Block time. Yeah. Okay. No problem.

Okay. Thank you very much, Minister, for being here today, and thank you to the minister's staff and department for being here, too. I appreciate your attendance, and I look forward to just some friendly questions and answers here. I'll start on page 79 of the business plan under revenue. I'm just wondering: what are the various revenue streams that contribute to fines and penalties, and

why is it projected to increase in estimate '22-23 versus previous actual and forecast?

Again on page 79 under revenue: what is included in other revenue, and why does it increase dramatically for estimate '22-23 versus the actual from previous years?

Next question. On page 79 of the business plan, expense, under public security: I'm presuming that's where the RCMP funding comes from, and I guess I'm just kind of curious here. The RCMP versus provincial police force discussion, I guess, is a bit controversial. When I talk to people, a lot of people I talk to are interested in the provincial police, but when I talk to municipalities, they seem to be very much in favour of sticking with the RCMP. So there's that kind of back and forth there, and I think a lot of the discussion relates around – I think the average person is considering that going with the provincial police may help kind of, you know, develop a bit of a break from Ottawa to Alberta, so I think they would like to see a little bit of a distancing there.

But when I look at the Province of Alberta's Provincial Police Service Agreement, dated April 1, 2012, which I believe is the most current one, and in particular 6.1 and 6.4, 6.1 says that "the Provincial Minister will set the objectives, priorities and goals of the Provincial Police Service," which is the RCMP, and then article 6.4 says that "nothing in this Agreement will be interpreted as limiting in any way the jurisdiction of Alberta in respect of the administration of justice and law enforcement in the Province." So I guess my question is: how much control do you as the Justice minister have in how the RCMP goes about doing their job as far as objectives, priorities, and goals and that jurisdiction of provincial basis?

My final question. A lot of the concerns I hear within communities, especially when it comes to rural crime, are the catch and – they call it catch-and-release, where people are caught and tend to reoffend many times before, you know, something actually happens with them. That's a great concern, and I'm just wondering what your department and what you are doing to alleviate those concerns.

I'll leave my questions there, and you can have the rest of the time to answer. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much, hon. member.

Over to the minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair. First, regarding the increases in fine revenue, as stated previously, these are increases in volume. We saw over the last couple of years decreases in volume, so we did see decreases in fine revenue. We're now expecting there to be a return to prepandemic levels of volume, so that's why there's that bump there. For the breakdown regarding other revenue, I'm going to impose on Assistant Deputy Minister Smith to answer that one.

Mr. B. Smith: Thank you, Minister, through the chair. The elements in that line for fines and penalties: there's ticket processing, there are five provincial fine retentions, there's traffic sheriffs, there are federal surcharges, and then there's the safe roads initiative and a very small amount in other revenue. By and large those are the major elements: ticket processing, fine retention, traffic sheriffs, and federal surcharges.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you.

Next there were questions about the RCMP and questions related to the work investigating whether or not to proceed with an Alberta provincial police and if there was, what would that model look like? There was the PWC report, which was investigating various options that might be included. Another is an engagement process to get

feedback from Albertans on that issue and that report. I had answered these questions previously from Member Barnes. I refer the member perhaps to those answers, but maybe to supplement what I had said previously – actually, because I didn't answer this question, the member asked specifically: what control do I as Justice minister have? I can set the priorities on behalf of government to work with the RCMP and establish priorities for them, but at that point then all of the operations are left to the RCMP. There isn't civilian oversight over anything further than that other than perhaps removing the division commander.

There isn't a lot of civilian oversight right now that's provided in either the PPSA, the provincial police service agreement, or the MPSAs, the municipal police service agreements, which is one of the reasons why in my answer to Member Barnes I highlighted that right now the framework that we have with the RCMP as a vendor for both the provincial police and the municipal police services for various communities is that we don't have civilian-led oversight for the recruitment of a detachment commander. We don't have civilian-led oversight of complaints or even just establishing at a more local level the priorities of a community and oversight of performance in that community. So there are a number of concerns, I believe, whether it's a provincial police or otherwise. I think we have some very big concerns with the PPSA and the MPSAs. There are 47 of the MPSAs throughout the province. We have to work with the federal government to address these.

When I work with municipal leaders who have concerns – and I'd also say this, too. I hear as well, Madam Chair, through you to the member, that we have municipal leaders, we have folks in rural Alberta who really strongly support our RCMP officers, and I agree with them. This isn't an attack on our RCMP. This isn't a criticism of our RCMP. I think all Albertans really appreciate and thank all of our sworn members in our rural communities for doing all the work that they do to keep our communities safe. It's a matter of us working with them, working with the federal government, working with the municipal leaders to address these nine really big gaps, that I highlighted in my answer to Member Barnes, to be able to figure out whatever the solution is going to be. We do need to figure out how to provide better civilian-led oversight of policing throughout rural Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to yield the remaining time.

The Chair: All right. With that, we will go over to the Official Opposition. Please proceed, Member.

Oh, sorry. I thought we finished with you. I'm so sorry. My deepest apologies. We go back to the government side. We're going to Member Walker.

Mr. Walker: Thank you so much, Chair. Colleagues, Minister, through the chair, great to see you here as well as your colleagues. This has been a wonderful discussion. I've learned a lot, some really good dialogue on lots of important topics. I would also just say that now some of my questions, Minister, will cover courts, which are critically important in the application of justice for Albertans as is the actual physical infrastructure. At some point we really look forward to having you out for a tour of the Sherwood Park courthouse. I'd appreciate that. That will be great. It's a very important piece of infrastructure in my riding.

11:20

I also want to say as well that this Alberta security infrastructure enhancement grant more than doubling is a wonderful announcement. It's going over so well, especially, as MLA Gotfried had pointed out, with minority communities, vulnerable communities, and I'm just over the moon about that. So thank you

for that amazing support for Albertans, particularly in our religious communities, our multicultural communities. That's just absolutely amazing.

Minister, do you want to do block time or back and forth?

Mr. Shandro: I'm happy either way.

Mr. Walker: Okay. Great. On page 161 of the estimates documents it shows in your ministry statement of operations that there is a decrease in expenditure for the victims of crime and public safety fund. I can see that the estimated expenditure for this year is back in line with our 2021-2022 budget. Given that this is such an important initiative, I find it rather curious that we're seeing an 11 per cent cut in here rather than an increase. Minister, why was there no population- and inflation-based increase to funding in this year?

As well, Minister, our government made a commitment to Albertans to reduce the court backlog. I'm curious. I'm sure that I'm not the only member here who is happy to see that key objective 3.2 on page 78 of the business plan is committed to improving Albertans' access to services and reducing red tape. With that in mind, it's interesting that this year's budget shows that funding for Crown prosecution services is lower than in the 2020 fiscal year. Will our government be able to fulfill this commitment to reducing the court backlog and red tape while also minimizing the burden on taxpayers?

In 2019 our government assured Albertans that we would hire 50 new Crown prosecutors to help reduce the backlog in our courts. Now, page 78 of the business plan reiterates the same commitment. Your ministry's initiative supporting its key objectives from outcome 2 indicates that your ministry has already hired 40 of these additional prosecutors. Furthermore, I see in the same supporting initiative that your ministry also accepted 20 new articling students. Can you elaborate on how these additional Crown prosecutors, Minister, will help reduce our court backlog? As well, why is it important for your ministry to train articling students?

Then just finally here, Minister, on the theme of courts our courts are still using many outdated processes and technology. This obviously slows down processing times and adds unnecessary obstacles for your ministry's services. I see that objective 3.2 on page 78 of the business plan shows a commitment to implementing digital transformation so that Albertans can have better access to services and our system is more sustainable. Can you explain, Minister, how Budget 2022 will support the transition to a more digitized and efficient court system? I think I'll just bulk those questions as they're all themed around courts, I'd say, through the chair, Minister, if you'd like to answer.

The Chair: Thank you so much, hon. member.

We'll turn the time over to the minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair and through you to the member. The first question regarding the victims of crime and public safety initiative fund. Thank you for the question because I don't think I – I think I was asked about this as well by Member Barnes and didn't get a chance to answer it. It begins with the MLA-led review of victims' services in Alberta that was chaired by members Pitt and Neudorf. We are now in the process of completing our review of that report and the recommendations that came out of that review that was led by those two members.

The focus of that report was on how victims' services are delivered in the province and the types of supports and services that are provided to someone who is a victim of crime. We expect to have our review of that report completed early in this fiscal year, and as such the funding levels were maintained at the '21-22 budgeted amounts. Once we're done our review and subsequent

decisions are made after a review of that report, we'll then be arranging any new budget requirements to support any of the approved changes to the victims' services funding, including assistance to victims' organizations and victims of crime. So it does begin with us finishing a review of that report and then taking any decisions at that point.

For the court backlog question: the total funding for the Alberta Crown prosecution service is slightly higher in Budget '22, over \$108.7 million versus Budget '21, which was, I think, just \$200,000 less, \$108.5 million. That includes funding for new Crown prosecutors paid through the victims of crime and public safety initiatives fund.

You had a question regarding 50 new Crown prosecutors to help reduce the backlog in the courts. For that question: the government made good on its commitment to add these 50 new Crown prosecutor positions by this fiscal year. As of February of '22 there are more than 47 more trial prosecutors working within the Crown prosecution service than in 2019, and work is actively under way to fill the remaining three new positions. Hiring more Crown prosecutors is essential to addressing the increased caseloads and ensuring that viable criminal cases can proceed. We're continuing to fill existing Crown prosecutor vacancies. We have ongoing job competitions, and we increased the size – you mentioned the articling program – to ultimately grow the ranks of the Crown prosecution service. With the lifting of the salary freeze it's anticipated that recruitment and retention challenges will decrease.

In September of '21, last year, the overall vacancy rate for trial prosecutors was over 10 per cent, and then in February of last month it had fallen to 6.8 per cent. On top of that, the Crown prosecution service has also undertaken early reclassification of legal officers to further bolster retention efforts. That reclassification helps to ensure that legal officers are receiving compensation which is in line with their assessed legal experience, and that compensation then aligns with the complexity and the volume of their caseloads. Early reclassification is a key component of our retention strategy and will be required to continue with dedicated funding support. The proposed budget and '22 targets: they don't include an immediate ask for the ACPS. This need will be reassessed in the future as recruitment to both the new positions and existing vacancies is completed and vacancy rates continue to decline.

The member, Madam Chair, asked about the articling students. Training those articling students will allow government to bring in new talented lawyers early in their career and enable them to gain that experience to promote a career within the Crown prosecution service.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Walker: Thank you so much.

The Chair: We have eight seconds left, so we're going to turn it over now to the Official Opposition for their next round of questions. Thank you so much.

Mr. Sabir, I understand you're going next.

Mr. Sabir: Yeah. Thank you. I have a question about line item 4. What's the total number of Crown prosecutors working for prosecution services, and what's the vacancy of, in the new terminology, trial prosecutor, including those?

Legal aid offices, in particular in Calgary, are closed for in-person appointments. When will that resume?

On 7.3, provincial security intelligence: what kind of information gathering are they responsible for?

On line item 7.4 there is law enforcement oversight. The budget is down from \$11 million to \$9.8 million. Why is there a reduction,

and does this include the Law Enforcement Review Board? I would assume that their workload has gone up.

11:30

With respect to police oversight, Minister, you had made some comments, so my question is: are you intending to have provincial, broader civilian oversight?

With respect to 7.7 it's flat at \$89 million, so there is no increase for inflation and population growth for municipalities' police services.

With respect to correctional services hearings were done through CCTV camera during COVID. Will in-person hearings resume any time soon?

One last question; 8.5, which includes police training. The question I have is with respect to that training. Will that include antiracism and antibias training? Who prepared that? Who's delivering that? Those kinds of questions.

One last question I have is with respect to Alberta human rights. That's a new line item. Can you provide the breakdown of these funds?

Madam Chair, will I be able to cede my time to my colleague?

The Chair: Sure. And who's going to proceed, then?

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Member. Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you, my question to the minister. I'll try to be quick given the time limit. Minister, I will go a little bit back, but I hope it will become clear why. I understand that some of this precedes you, but hopefully your officials can provide some additional details.

In your estimates, line item 6, Alberta human rights, it describes its mandate: "fosters equality and reduces discrimination by eliminating barriers to full participation in the cultural, social, economic, and political life of the province for all Albertans." In 2021 the government ended the assistance to the human rights education and multiculturalism fund line item, which was \$1.735 million in 2018 to 2019, then reduced to a half million in the budget for 2019 to 2020. Given that this was done a while ago, I was wondering if the ministry has done any analysis on the outcomes of the fund ending. Has it affected any outcomes for human rights? I noticed that there was a slight increase to item 6. Were any of the functions amalgamated into this one line item? Could the minister elaborate on these questions, please?

I have another one. I have some questions related to the recommendations of the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council. My colleague has touched on that somewhat, but I was hoping that you could break out precisely where the funding is in your estimates to support recommendations that are specific to the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General. One of them was "advancing human dignity in education." It is mostly focused on public education, but given that we just talked about human rights education, I was hoping you could also shed some light on if there is work being done under line item 6 of the estimates to support recommendations such as this.

I've raised a number of questions. Like, multiculturalism got a big hit in this budget. It would really be helpful for me, any information regarding these questions that I can have from the ministry.

The Chair: Thank you so much, hon. member.

Now over to the minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair and through you to the members for their questions. First, I had the first question, the total number of Crowns working in the province right now. I'll ask Assistant Deputy Minister Goddard to assist with that answer.

Ms Goddard: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Kim Goddard, assistant deputy minister for the Alberta Crown prosecution service. I can advise that the total number of legal officers working for us is 453; 383 of them are trial prosecutors. The difference between those numbers is that the trial prosecutor numbers don't include people working the bail office, appeals, or policy and project counsel.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

An Hon. Member: Vacancies?

Ms Goddard: In terms of vacancies it's 6.8 per cent vacancy for trial prosecutors, 9.2 per cent vacancy for all legal officers. That's largely in part due to some additional positions added to the Crown bail office within the past couple of months.

Thank you.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair. The next question, I think, was about the provincial security intelligence office at line 7.3, and for that I'm going to ask Assistant Deputy Minister Degrand to come again to speak to that line item.

Mr. Degrand: Thank you, Madam Chair. Marlin Degrand, the assistant deputy minister, public security division. The provincial security and intelligence office consists of three discrete units and a relationship to a fourth. The first is the provincial security office, which used to be referred to as the departmental security office. They're responsible for providing advice and assistance across government in relation to the security of government of Alberta employees and government of Alberta properties. The provincial intelligence office is another discrete unit, which provides advice and assessment around ongoing threats that may be posed to Albertans, the government of Alberta, or Alberta interests. It provides security advice as well as a security assessment process. Finally, we have the Integrated Threat and Risk Assessment Centre, which is a domestic violence threat assessment unit, which works closely with police and victims of domestic violence to conduct security risk assessments and assist in the development of security plans for victims of domestic violence. Finally, that unit has a relationship of support and an operational relationship with the chief firearms office.

Thank you.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you.

I think, Madam Chair, we were then asked about line 7.4. This is the law enforcement oversight part of the budget. The change of funding for the law enforcement oversight branch reflects a structural change that split the branch into two departments, the LEO and the provincial security and intelligence office branch. No funding was lost there.

As I alluded to in an answer I provided to colleagues opposite, it's a big branch. There are quite a few program areas under the LEO branch. This includes everything from, you know, being responsible for Amber Alerts, high-risk offenders, Clare's law notifications. It also administers the Civil Forfeiture Act, that allows government to pursue forfeiture of proceeds of crime and property used to carry out crime. The integrated community safety as well: that promotes a consistent approach to addressing prolific offenders using formalized processes and the creation of collaborative teams. Security services and investigations, the body armour control program area, peace officer program, policing standards and audits: it's a big program. There's no funding lost. It was really the splitting of the division into two different divisions there.

Next I think it was a question regarding corrections services. No? Sorry. Line item 6 for human rights. I'll speak generally, and maybe you can supplement the answer. What the budget is providing for, because I think it was a breakdown that was requested, and what's estimated in '22-23 was \$6.913 million. What this provides for: 55 per cent of it, or \$3.8 million, is for salaries, wages, and employee benefits; \$3.1 million, or 45 per cent of the operating budget, is for supplies and services. We have 54 FTEs there in that line item.

Anything else, Deputy Minister, to . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

We'll turn back to the government side. Hon. Member Frey.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, through the chair to your staff I want to say thank you to all department staff, political staff who are here today. Often the work of staff who are largely unseen but do an incredible amount of work is underappreciated by the public, and I just wanted to say thank you very much to the ADMs, DMs, and all those who are present today to answer our questions and be accountable.

11:40

Minister, as you know, I was the chair of the Alberta Firearms Advisory Council, and we were part of assembling that group. I see Marlin in the audience today. Thank you very much, Mr. Degrand, for all the work that you did as well.

Minister, under key objective 2.3 in the business plan your ministry is noted as advancing the Fair Deal Panel's recommendations. For firearms owners in the province getting the office of the Chief Firearms Officer set up was very important. You touched on the accomplishments of Ms Bryant, who I agree is exceptionally qualified. If anyone has met her, she is pretty awesome. As far as talking to her for five minutes, you'll learn more about firearms and firearms policy than you could from reading, I think, a dozen books. She's just a wealth of information. Minister, I was curious if you could comment on the status of the office of the provincial Chief Firearms Officer. What is happening there? What can Albertans expect? If we're sharing time, I'll guess I'll turn it over to you.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you. I'll impose on Assistant Deputy Minister Degrand for that answer. Thank you.

Mr. Degrand: Thank you, Minister, Madam Chair. Yes. The status of the chief firearms office is that they've undertaken to hire and have completed hiring of all of the staff now to take over the operations of the chief firearms program here in the province of Alberta from the federal government. They are currently dealing with a large backlog of files that were handed over to them as they came onboard, and the office is actually quite operational and engaged in their duties.

Thank you.

Mrs. Frey: May I go, Madam Chair? Okay.

Thank you. Thank you for the update on that.

I want to change course here to the opioid epidemic and the justice system's role in that. Under objective 1.1 it states that you will "continue to work with policing partners and municipal leaders to address drivers of crime, including focused work on rural crime," which is obviously very important in my constituency, "drug trafficking and proceeds of crime." I know that we had a lot of money for drug treatment courts as well as had worked very hard to ensure that we are getting harmful drugs off the streets. I think it was also Mr. Degrand that noted about ASIRT and the work that they've done in the south. I think there was one of the largest drug

busts in history, which is exactly what we need to get these off the street.

Minister, as you know, the opioid epidemic has not spared Alberta, and drug addiction has been exacerbated by the social isolation of cyclical lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the start of the pandemic it was necessary, of course, to encourage and require physical distancing, but the mental health toll of isolationist policies is often ignored. Minister, can you elaborate on whether or not Alberta has seen an increased crime rate associated with increased drug usage in the past two years and what we are doing about it?

The Chair: Thank you so much, Member.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair and through you to the member. It's always difficult to specifically attribute the drivers of crime and, particularly, violent crime. During the last five years the province has experienced significant impacts as a result of the global recession and the collapse of the energy sector in the province beginning in 2014-2015. Further, we have seen an increase in the prevalence of methamphetamine-fuelled crime across the province. That's both in rural areas as well as within our urban centres. Many of the police services have indicated that they have seen significant violent and property crime that's associated with that disturbing trend. It's for that reason that we have increased funding to ALERT with one of the specific focuses of that new investment being on addressing organized crime and drug trafficking, specifically in both fentanyl and methamphetamine, which law enforcement, as I said, have reported as an increasingly dangerous component of the crime and violence that they're facing in our communities in the province.

Regarding the opioid epidemic and the ways in which the pandemic has made that more difficult, increasingly in recent years our police services have noted an increase in the prevalence of crime that's associated with the opioid crisis. Competition between those who deal in these harmful substances and the violent and criminal behaviours associated with the drugs have been noted as a significant driver of social disorder, a significant driver of crime and harm in our communities, again, one of the reasons why we increased funding to ALERT to be able to address drug trafficking, organized crime, specifically for those drivers.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you very much, Minister, for that response. You talked about social disorder, which I think is something that's really interesting to focus on because rural crime is obviously an enormous problem. I mean, in my constituency alone there are people who wait up to an hour or two hours for police to respond. That's no fault of the police; it's a systemic issue. With response times in rural Alberta that are such that farmers, ranchers, homesteaders – these people don't live in the urban luxury of having police respond in five minutes, so it's often up to them to take care of themselves, their family, and their property, and it can get very worrisome for those who are out in maybe more remote areas who don't have access to the police being five minutes away. I know that our government undertook rigorous rural crime tours in previous years, mostly pre-pandemic, to hear directly what rural Albertans want from their law enforcement. Under the same objective, Minister, what has your department implemented or is planning to implement to reduce rural crime?

The Chair: Thank you so much, hon. member.
Minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Chair. First, the introduction of the police funding model allowed government to reinvest in the growth of the provincial police service to levels that were not seen in decades, and this is allowing the RCMP to have the resources then to develop a robust response to rural crime in the province, develop initiatives to free up police time and to target prolific offenders and criminal groups while also enhancing services to those who are victimized by crime. Beyond that, government has invested, as I said, in the growth of ALERT, expanding its further reach into rural Alberta, helping target those who are preying on Albertans.

We've also launched the RAPID response initiative, the RAPID response program. What this did is that it was used to leverage 400 of our sheriffs to augment and support the RCMP provincial policing complement, to reduce the response times to crisis events, and to free up valuable police resources in rural Alberta – for example, by reducing the amount of police resources that are required for traffic matters – to be able to more fully focus RCMP time on rural crime efforts.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.
Member.

Mrs. Frey: Yes. On a different vein, as you know, I represent the city of Brooks, which is the City of 100 Hellos, which means that we have a lot of diversity and many minority groups who are calling Brooks their home. I'm very proud of the work that Newell safe communities has done through the RCMP to kind of bridge the gaps between those who maybe don't feel as comfortable with police, those who are worried about bias and systemic issues. I'm curious. Minister, I'm sure you know that this is a very difficult subject. One plainly does not trust an institution because of historical wrongdoings, yet something like hate-motivated crime is perpetrated against those who are most likely to have that difficult relationship with police in the beginning. For a problem that relies on collaboration between sides, Minister, I'm wondering how you plan on working towards a positive objective of healing some of the division that exists in our communities with law enforcement included.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.
Minister.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, for the question. I did talk a little bit about some of the work that we are doing when it comes to hate-motivated crimes and crimes that are committed against vulnerable Albertans.

Perhaps to further complement those answers, though, maybe I'll impose again either on Associate Deputy Minister Cooley or assistant minister – is that right? Thank you.

Mr. Cooley: Certainly, the human trafficking and the work that's been done to prevent that are top of mind for the ministry. The Alberta Human Trafficking Task Force engaged with individuals . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister and his team.

We'll turn the time over now to the Official Opposition.

11:50

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. My first question relates to line item 6. Before that, we used to have 8.2, assistance to human rights education and multiculturalism fund. The last budget reduced that fund to zero, and there were no grants in that. So is it still the case that the budget for any assistance to human rights education

and multiculturalism fund is still zero and there are no grants available?

The second question again relates to victims of crime, page 161. I asked before, didn't get the answer, so will ask again: how much of this money is going directly to support victims? The second thing is that now the program allows only 45 days to apply for the support, and it's extremely problematic in the cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse, where it typically takes much longer to report and then to apply for this fund. There are even no more benefits if a child is witnessing a crime. Do you intend to stick with these criteria, or do you want to make changes to this?

A few questions relating to corrections and people who are held in custody. I have heard from community groups and advocates that there are many who are in our prisons, remand centres that may face mental health issues, and typically the staff there may not necessarily be trained to deal with those mental health issues. Are there any plans or is there any budget there to support those initiatives, in particular people who are facing mental health issues?

With respect to 5.4, public guardian and trustee, in the last budget we heard that there was some funding for computer system upgrades, a cloud system, so I would like to know the status of those changes. Also, I want to know what the caseload is like and the staffing situation. How many vacancies are there in that particular program?

With respect to prosecutions – that's under 4.1 – in particular when young people are going through the court processes, is there a legal requirement to have a duty counsel or counsel present when those matters are dealt with?

There was another question I skipped over. With respect to the digitalization initiative I asked this again, and the question was answered by the deputy minister, but I didn't hear any specific initiatives that will be undertaken by the ministry or any specific supports that are out there that I can refer people to. If they don't have access to the Internet, if they don't have access to computers, if they don't have access to a cellphone, then how can they do that?

The last question. With respect to traffic court changes there are no longer in-person dispute mechanisms available, so changes are already under way. Can you comment on that as well?

The Chair: That concludes your time, hon. member.

We'll now turn over the last section of speaking time for this estimates section to the minister, and that'll wrap us up.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you. Maybe I'll start with the question the member, unfortunately, had to repeat because I didn't get a chance in a previous block to answer this. It was a question about the victims of crime fund and the percentage – well, it's the victims of crime and public safety initiatives fund. The total amount is \$62.887 million for that fund, and \$38 million goes specifically to public safety initiatives, so that would be 60 per cent. The remainder would go to victims of crime from that fund.

Oh, there was a question about what used to be line 8.2 from a few budgets ago and then how that relates to line item 6. Maybe I'll ask the deputy minister to speak to that, that change. I understand that those folks had moved over to the Human Rights Commission, but perhaps, Deputy Minister, if you could clarify.

Mr. Bosscha: Thank you, Minister. Madam Chair, the multiculturalism fund was basically decommissioned a couple of years ago, and at this time there's been no indication that it will be reactivated. In terms of the staff that were managing that fund, all

of them were moved into sort of the Human Rights Commission proper to take on other functions there. I think there was also a question earlier on from the member with respect to: would there be a study or has there been any work done with respect to the impact of not having that fund anymore? I can advise that, no, no studies have been done.

Thank you.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Deputy Minister.

The next question was mental health supports for those in institutions. Perhaps if I could impose on Assistant Deputy Minister Lavoy to come up to speak to that question.

Ms Lavoy: Hello. Fiona Lavoy, assistant deputy minister for the correctional services division. Madam Chair, with respect to the question of mental health supports for individuals that are in custody, I can certainly advise that there are a number of different mechanisms that are employed to ensure the health and safety of individuals that we have. That's including supervision as well as interventions and counselling and programs. We do work in partnership with Alberta Health Services for a number of those interventions, including medical expertise, social worker support as well as psychology, psychiatry as well as nursing staff members that help support that. That's everything, through our admission process to make sure that individuals are not at risk of self-harm, throughout the continuum of mental health supports.

Thank you.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you.

The next question, I think, Madam Chair, was related to the office of the public guardian and trustee, and I think the member was talking about the fact that since 2007 the office had spent quite a bit of money in well over a decade modernizing its systems. There were project failures back in 2007, I believe, but despite those setbacks the – and I think the vendor community was not exactly compliant with their bids, or vendors were disinterested. But the Public Trustee has retained a total of \$5.3 million that is still producing value to the current project. The acronym is OPGTIS, and that project started in 2016. It may eventually merge into the new and modern guardian and trustee management systems. The Public Trustee information system is in its first phases. It had been awarded to BDO Canada. The replacement of PTIS will go live in November of this year, '22.

The next question is about bail, I think, line 4.1, and the requirement for duty counsel to attend. Deputy Minister, if I could impose on you for that question. I have to admit I may have not written down the question accurately. Did you catch that question?

Mr. Bosscha: Unfortunately, I did not, Minister, but I think I'll ask ADM Goddard to speak to that one.

Mr. Shandro: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: I apologize, ADM. We're not going to get to your answer.

I must advise the committee that the time allotted for consideration of the ministry's estimates has concluded. This concludes the consideration of the 2022-2023 main estimates by the Standing Committee on Families and Communities.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]

