



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Second Session

Standing Committee
on
Legislative Offices

Tuesday, January 11, 2022
1 p.m.

Transcript No. 30-2-8

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Second Session**

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC), Chair
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair

Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)*
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)**
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)

* substitution for Mark Smith

** substitution for Rod Loyola

Also in Attendance

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)

Legislative Officers

Jill Clayton	Information and Privacy Commissioner
Del Graff	Child and Youth Advocate
Glen Resler	Chief Electoral Officer, Election Commissioner
Marianne Ryan	Ombudsman, Public Interest Commissioner
Marguerite Trussler, QC	Ethics Commissioner
W. Doug Wylie	Auditor General

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Participant

Terri Pelton	Executive Director, Child and Youth Advocacy
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Support Staff

Shannon Dean, QC	Clerk
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin	Clerk Assistant and Director of House Services
Nancy Robert	Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Committees
Sarah Amato	Research Officer
Melanie Niemi-Bohun	Research Officer
Warren Huffman	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Janet Laurie	Supervisor of Corporate Communications
Jeanette Dotimas	Communications Consultant
Michael Nguyen	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schwegel	Director of Parliamentary Programs
Amanda LeBlanc	Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

1:00 p.m.

Tuesday, January 11, 2022

[Mr. Rutherford in the chair]

The Chair: Good afternoon, everybody. I'd like to call the meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Brad Rutherford, MLA for Leduc-Beaumont and chair of the committee. I'd ask that members and those joining us at the table introduce themselves for the record, and then I will call on those joining us remotely. I'll begin to my right.

Mr. Milliken: MLA Nicholas Milliken, Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Long: MLA Martin Long, West Yellowhead.

Mr. Amery: MLA Amery, Calgary-Cross.

Ms Sweet: MLA Heather Sweet, Edmonton-Manning.

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

Dr. Massolin: Good afternoon. Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and director of House services.

Ms Cherkewich: Good afternoon. Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk.

Ms Rempel: Good afternoon. Jody Rempel, committee clerk.

The Chair: Thank you.

Going online, we'll start with Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: MLA Glenn van Dijken, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Allard: MLA Tracy Allard, Grande Prairie.

Member Ceci: Joe Ceci, Calgary-Buffalo.

Ms Rosin: Miranda Rosin, MLA for Banff-Kananaskis.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just to note a few substitutions: Ms Pancholi for Member Loyola, Mr. Amery for Mr. Smith.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Pursuant to the direction of the hon. Speaker Cooper I would remind everyone of the updated committee room protocols, which require that outside of the individuals with an exemption, those attending a committee meeting in person must wear a mask at all times unless they are speaking. In addition, attendees are reminded to leave an appropriate distance between themselves and other meeting participants. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, so during the meeting members do not need to operate them. The committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

We just have one guest who has joined us. Do we need to have her introduce herself?

Ms Rempel: Yes.

The Chair: Mrs. Aheer, could you introduce yourself, please?

Okay. We will work on that.

The draft agenda was distributed to all committee members. Does anyone have an issue or want to raise any changes to propose?

If not, can I get a motion to approve today's meeting agenda? Thank you. Mr. Milliken has moved that the January 11, 2022, meeting agenda of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices be approved as circulated. All those in favour in the room, please say aye. Anyone in the room opposed, please say no. Moving online, all those in favour, please say aye. Anyone online opposed, please say no. Thank you. That motion has been carried.

Adoption of the meeting minutes. Are there any errors or omissions to note?

If not, would a member move to approve the minutes as distributed? Mr. Long has moved that the minutes of the December 3, 2021, meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices be approved as distributed. All those in favour in the room, please say aye. Anyone in the room who is opposed, please say no. And moving online, all those in favour, please say aye. Anyone online who is opposed, please say no. Thank you. That motion has been carried.

Moving on to agenda item 4, review of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate annual report 2020-21. We have the review of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate annual report 2020-21. Our mandate for the review of this report is outlined in Government Motion 105, which was agreed to on November 24 and requires us to report back to the Assembly by February 22, 2022. This is the third time that the committee has been tasked with this annual responsibility. Does anybody have any questions as to Government Motion 105 that we can answer before we proceed moving forward?

Okay. Hearing none – I will always give a bit of an awkward pause there just for anybody online to ask, if you're wondering why I'm waiting just an extra few seconds.

Now we can move on to item (b), presentation from the Child and Youth Advocate. Mr. Del Graff and his colleagues have joined us today and are prepared to provide us with a briefing of about 30 minutes on their annual report. Then I will open up the floor to questions from committee members.

Mr. Graff, when you are ready, please proceed with your presentation, sir.

Mr. Graff: Good afternoon, Chairperson Rutherford and committee members.

I don't see the PowerPoint slides up. I wonder if Jody or someone could put slide 2 up for us, please.

The Chair: We are just going to work on that. Hopefully, you should be seeing it now.

Mr. Graff: We don't see it.

The Chair: We'll just give that a moment to try to correct it.

Mr. Graff: Okay. There we are.

The Chair: Okay. Please proceed. Thank you.

Mr. Graff: Thank you. Well, good afternoon, Chairperson Rutherford and committee members. It's nice to see all of you again, even though we're virtually connected. With me today is Terri Pelton, our executive director of child and youth advocacy.

Mr. Chair, our work extends throughout the province. We respectfully acknowledge that Alberta is the traditional and ancestral territory of many Indigenous peoples of treaties 6, 7, and 8, the Métis settlements and the six regions of the Métis Nation of Alberta. It's important to acknowledge the territory we are in and to remind us all of the disproportionate number of Indigenous young people who are in the child intervention and youth justice systems.

Next slide, please. Today we will provide an overview of our 2020-2021 annual report. This review expands on our December 3 presentation to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices and addresses four areas: advocacy in changing times, highlights of the past year, reporting to Albertans, and looking ahead.

I'll now turn it over to Terri. Next slide, please.

Ms Pelton: Thank you, Del. Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members. When young people contact our office, they're looking for support with issues that matter deeply to them. They may feel that their voices aren't being heard by adults or that their viewpoints aren't considered when decisions are made about them. The advocacy work of our office is multifaceted. It involves helping young people learn about their rights, navigate complex systems, and have their interests represented in legal processes.

This was a challenging year for the young people we serve. The pandemic intensified many of the issues and concerns they faced and required us to pivot our advocacy efforts. Our staff had to adjust quickly to work remotely and embrace new technology so that we could continue to provide quality advocacy services safely and effectively even when we couldn't be together physically. While relationship building is best done face to face, our staff worked tirelessly to build and nurture relationships with young people virtually. The three main issues we assisted young people with were placement, maintaining connections, and case planning.

Next slide, please. Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, we continued to stand up for young people and to elevate their rights and interests to decision-makers. We even found new ways to support them and to connect with young people and those who support them. Our annual efforts around National Child Day were reimaged. We worked with community partners to create new virtual events, promotional videos, and engaging social media and blog content to celebrate and promote children's rights.

One of our most popular in-person learning activities is our advocacy 101 workshop. The training helps stakeholders learn about our office, the rights of young people, and how to advocate on their behalf and support them. During the early months of the pandemic we shifted to a virtual method of delivery and were pleasantly surprised by the positive response. Due to high demand we more than doubled the number of advocacy 101 workshops and now have a wait-list.

Consider these numbers. From April 1, 2020, to March 31, 2021, we received almost 4,100 intakes, with just over 2,700 young people receiving advocacy services. Over 3,200 young people were appointed lawyers for child intervention matters. The circumstances of 132 young people who had been seriously injured or passed away were reviewed, and our actual spending in both operating and capital expenditure categories was \$13.9 million, which was 6 per cent below the approved amounts.

1:10

We also worked on a statement of concern related to high-conflict custody disputes, revitalizing our youth council, facilitating increased meetings through a virtual platform – the council met with the Minister of Children's Services about the impacts of lowering the age for support and financial assistance agreements – and, finally, completing the preliminary requirements for a new advocacy information system to replace our aging system, that we've been working with since 2005.

I'll now talk about our public reports to Albertans. Next slide, please. There are a number of ways we report to Albertans. These include our annual report, investigative reviews, special reports, and statements of concern. This committee is already quite familiar with our annual report. It summarizes our major activities over the

reporting period and highlights our priorities for the year ahead. Our financial statements and performance measures are included in the annual report, fulfilling the financial reporting responsibility of the Child and Youth Advocate. There's also a legislative requirement for us to present the report to this committee, which is why we're here today.

We conduct two types of investigative reviews into the serious injury or death of a young person, and both result in a public report that includes findings, observations, and recommendations. The ministry or child-serving agency identified in our recommendations must respond within 75 days. During this reporting period we released two mandatory review reports, which together examined the circumstances of 23 young people who passed away. We made six new recommendations, to the Ministry of Children's Services about file transfers and the need for whole-family residential treatment; to the Ministry of Community and Social Services about collaborative practice and a review of the family support for children with disabilities policy; to the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General about no-contact orders; and to the ministries of Health and Children's Services recommending a forum related to the provincial youth suicide prevention strategy.

All of our investigative reviews, both systemic and mandatory, focus on engaging with the people who knew the young person best. Elders and community members provide valuable insight by elevating the voices of young people within the context of families and communities.

We also have the authority to release a special report if there are systemic issues affecting a number of children and youth. We identify these through a number of sources, but primarily we learn about them through knowledge sharing across our office. We didn't release a special report in 2020-21; however, significant work was done on two reports. *Renewed Focus: A Follow-up Report on Youth Opioid Use in Alberta* was released this past June, and *Strengthening Foundations*, a systemic investigative review, was released this past September.

Finally, in March 2021 we issued our first statement of concern, which is one way we can bring public attention to matters that don't fall within our mandate but negatively impact young people. We have observed a concerning trend about the well-being of children whose families are involved in high-conflict custody disputes. Over five years we had received over 1,000 intake calls and been notified of four young people who had passed away while their families were struggling with this issue. We identified conflict as potentially the most harmful factor for children whose parents have separated. It's critical that families receive appropriate and timely supports to resolve their conflicts before they reach a crisis. The Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General has accepted the intent of the statement of concern, and we continue to look forward to hearing what actions they are taking.

I'll now turn it over to Del. Next slide, please.

Mr. Graff: Thank you, Terri. As we look ahead to the upcoming year, there are four areas we want to focus on to improve services for young people.

Next slide, please. Thirty-one years ago, in its first annual report the children's advocate identified the issue of the disproportionate number of Indigenous young people in the child welfare system. More than a generation later this overrepresentation is worse now than it was then. The root causes as to why Indigenous young people continue to be overrepresented in our child welfare and youth justice systems must be addressed. It won't be easy. The federal legislation, *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families*, is a significant step forward. It provides a framework for Indigenous peoples to develop their own

child and family services, which is a good thing for children and families.

At the OCYA we have been learning about the legislation and identifying resources to help us understand some of the changes to child intervention. We are continuing to learn and are reaching out to Indigenous leadership to discuss what this could mean for them and for us. We believe in the inherent right of Indigenous peoples to raise their own children. We also believe Indigenous peoples have the right to provide the care, supports, and services their children need.

This legislation will affect our future work and relationships with Indigenous communities. It means we will need to shift our strategic priorities to ensure more consistency with the young people we serve, the majority of whom are Indigenous, and if we want the very best outcomes for Indigenous young people, we need to do all we can to support them as they move along this path.

Next slide, please. The Child and Youth Advocate Act was last amended in 2018. Over the past several years of working under these legislative changes, we've identified a number of ways our act could be further strengthened to benefit young people, the overall work of our office, and child-serving ministries. Three key areas for consideration are age provisions, strengthening recommendations' responses, and additional opportunities and challenges.

With respect to age provisions under our current act a child is defined as under the age of 18 or under 22 if they have a support and financial assistance agreement. The age provision and definitions of children and youth are not aligned with youth justice or child intervention, which results in times when we cannot advocate for young people receiving designated services. For example, a young person who is over 18 may be serving their sentence at a young offender centre but unable to receive individual advocacy services because of their age, and young adults over 18 cannot have a lawyer appointed for a child intervention matter. Aligning ages to be consistent with related legislation would allow us to address the needs of all young people within our mandate.

The second area we'd like to propose a change to is related to strengthening responses to our recommendations. Currently our legislation requires a ministry to publicly respond within 75 days of receipt of a recommendation. It is the only requirement for government related to our recommendations. In 2017 the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention and the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices called for implementation of practices that would ensure accountability from both the OCYA and government departments. We believe these calls for government accountability require a response much greater than what is currently reflected. Therefore, we're proposing that this annual review process focus on both our office's contributions and recommendations made and on what the relevant ministries have done to address those recommendations. This committee and all Albertans deserve to know what actions are taken and what outcomes are achieved in our collective efforts to improve the circumstances of young people.

The third area of proposed change relates to the last amendments to the Child and Youth Advocate Act. At that time the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention looked closely at child death reviews and determined that the OCYA should be the primary body to review deaths of children and young adults involved with Children's Services. The panel made seven recommendations which amended our legislation to include mandatory investigative reviews. It was a positive and significant development for our office and for the province.

Concurrently there was a legislated review of our act being completed by the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices. Sixty-six written submissions and 28 oral submissions were reviewed, and the standing committee made nine resolutions. None were included

in the amendments to the act in 2018. We believe all nine resolutions are still relevant to our work and are important to our ability to represent the rights, interests, and viewpoints of young people.

1:20

I will now talk briefly about some challenges with systemic and mandatory reviews. The first is that our act has two different ways to define young people for systemic or mandatory reviews. Systemic reviews are considered for young people receiving a designated service when they're seriously injured or pass away or within two years of receiving that service. Mandatory reviews are required for young people identified as a child in need of intervention at the time of their passing or within two years. This complicates the review process, and we believe a clear definition of young people for reviews should be considered.

In addition, the purpose of mandatory reviews is not defined in our act. We know, from our experience, that families and others close to young people frequently ask about our purpose when doing reviews. Given no legislative guidance for mandatory reviews, we identified the purpose of improving the lives of young people by reviewing their circumstances for systemic issues, services and supports, and/or public assurance. We're recommending the purpose of mandatory child death reviews be clearly identified in the Child and Youth Advocate Act.

Also, because of the volume of reviews and the requirement that we report to the Speaker every six months, we publicly release mandatory reviews twice each year. The act currently requires that mandatory reviews must be completed and publicly available within one year. The timelines for public release are problematic, particularly when considering the grief and loss for families. We're recommending that the timelines be extended for public release to within 18 months of notification. This is distinct from the completion of the review, which could remain within that 12-month period.

Lastly, there is no provision for further reviews of the Child and Youth Advocate Act. The act still refers to the original date of 2016 for review. The standing committee identified that the act should be reviewed every five years. We think this is critical, particularly given the nature of the last review and the impact of the ministerial panel on the resolutions brought forward by the standing committee.

Next slide, please. This past year didn't come without challenges for the young people we serve nor for our staff. However, we are proud of how we navigated the public health restrictions as we continued to stand up for young people. Moving forward, we must strengthen our focus on ending the overrepresentation of Indigenous young people in the child welfare and youth justice systems and work towards true reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. As well, I urge you to act on strengthening accountability measures for government when we make recommendations. Finally, I would advocate for a review of the Child and Youth Advocate Act, with consideration for the areas that we have raised in this presentation.

Chairperson Rutherford and committee members, I've had the privilege to serve as Alberta's Child and Youth Advocate for almost 11 years and to be the first with the mandate of an independent office of the Legislative Assembly. It has been an incredible experience and the most rewarding and meaningful work of my public service career.

We'd now be happy to answer your questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Graff, for that presentation.

Now we'll turn to committee members. Ms Pancholi, I see you're flagging me down for the first question. Please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ms Pelton and Mr. Graff, for joining us today. Before we begin, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, Mr. Graff, for your service as the Child and Youth Advocate. I know you have been a tireless champion for the children that you serve. We have all benefited from your commitment and advocacy, and I just would like to express my thanks on behalf of myself and my caucus members and, I'm sure, the other committee members as well.

I'd like to begin my questions by asking – I do have quite a few, I'm warning, Chair, right now. I will begin with something referenced both in your presentation as well as in the annual report. You mention on page 11 of the annual report that one of the major pieces of work that you undertook in your office in the 2020-21 fiscal year although the report was not finished until later in 2021 – during that fiscal year you undertook work on youth opioid use in Alberta, and that led to the follow-up report later that year.

Page 18 really sums up the urgency of this issue quite well. It talks about: "Since the release of [your 2018 report] Into Focus, young people continue to die by opioid poisoning at alarming rates." Your review, as noted on page 47 of the annual report, mentioned the previous recommendations made by your office regarding opioid-related deaths and the urgency of implementing these recommendations, and a number of reviews, of course, have noted substance abuse as being a factor. As we are in the middle of a record year for deaths amongst our most vulnerable youth, what do you see as the risks of failing to act quickly on this youth opioid file?

Mr. Graff: I don't know how to respond to that other than to say that the risks are greater tragedies for young people as a result of opioid use. I am very concerned about it. One of the reasons we did the Renewed Focus report was because we were concerned about the lack of a comprehensive approach to our earlier report, that was released in 2018, and along with that concern of insufficient response we have had significant additional deaths and tragedies for young people as a result of opioid poisonings. When we looked at the issue again and we went to communities and we spoke with many people, we were seeing that we don't just hold that concern ourselves; it's a concern that's reflected in every group that we spoke with.

Perhaps, Terri, you'd like to expand on that. You were involved in the development of the report, so you can perhaps make a comment.

Ms Pelton: I don't have much to add other than that I think the risk is that we are going to continue to see young people dying. We want to see that change, and we believe that the comprehensive strategy is what it will take to move it along.

Ms Pancholi: A follow-up?

The Chair: Yeah. For a follow-up, please go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. I appreciate that very much. I know that your office has called for a youth opioid strategy from the government. Can you indicate what response you have seen from the government in terms of developing that youth opioid strategy? What progress has been made, has it even been fully accepted, and what would you see as progress? What, in your eyes, would mean that this government was actually taking action to develop that strategy?

Mr. Graff: I'll answer the second part first, and then we'll try to find some information about the first part of your question. What we'd like to see is a strategy that is across a continuum, similar to

the recommendations that we had made in our first report on opioid poisonings of young people, and that strategy being implemented across our province, with a full continuum of services that are reflected both at the preventative and at the intervention ends of those continuums and, in fact, at the harm reduction end.

This is a crisis that is so significant that the principles that we try to employ to intervene, I think, are critical. That means that the life and safety of young people has to be first. It has to be before other considerations. From my point of view, it's just, really, an urgent matter, and it's one that has been urgent for some time.

I'm also very concerned that while today we might be talking about fentanyl and carfentanil as being major contributions to these tragedies, there are other drugs that are in play that are not related, that do not have an opioid base, and in fact can be as lethal if not more lethal. That's something that we all need to be concerned about. To not take action sooner is a real problem. In our refocus what we are really hoping for is a co-ordinated, comprehensive approach through a plan.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just before we get to Mr. Amery, Mr. Shepherd, if you'd like to introduce yourself, please, for the record.

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

The Chair: Thank you.

One more time we'll try to get Mrs. Aheer to introduce herself, please.

Mrs. Aheer: Hello. Leela Aheer, Chestermere-Strathmore.

The Chair: Thank you so much for that.

Over to Mr. Amery for a question and a follow-up.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Chair. I understand that you will not be renewing your contract, so before I begin, I too want to take this opportunity to thank you for the work that you have done as the Child and Youth Advocate on behalf of my colleagues and, I'm sure, all of the committee members as well.

I'm looking at your annual report, and I see on page 24 the intake services highlights here. Your annual report says that your office received referrals from 4,092 young people, some of whom have benefited from legal representations for children and youth, which is down 20 per cent from the 2019-2020 intakes. Similarly, intakes received by child intervention were down 27 per cent as well.

1:30

I'm going to ask both of my questions at once because I think they might be related to one another. Is there any indication that you can provide this committee as to what could be behind these decreases in 2020-2021 as compared to 2019-2020? And, secondly, in the referrals that you did receive, what sort of information can you provide to this committee about the impact of the pandemic and the complexity of cases and how it impacted the number of intakes that you received this past year?

Thank you.

Mr. Graff: Thank you. Certainly, I will start a response and ask Terri to follow up with some additional information. We noted that there was a reduction as well, and one of the things that is a consideration in those reductions is the number of court matters that are being moved forward and the number of children who are in care. We know that both of those were also reduced during that time period, so it would stand to reason that the request for our services would reduce in those two program areas.

That being said, one of the things that the pandemic has brought with it was the need for a significant increase in our ability to respond to calls from young people, from those who care about young people who are struggling with a range of issues. Some of those issues could be related to advocacy services or to the designated services of our office, some of them were not, so we would often act as a clearing house in terms of making referrals to other community agencies for supports for young people.

Terri, did you want to respond with some additional information?

Ms Pelton: Sure. I can add a little bit of information. Related to the complexity of the intakes, I think we've seen a significant increase in how complex children and families are responding to the pandemic and the impact that has on them. Historically we wouldn't have had intakes about whether or not children should be in person in school or whether or not they can have a visit with family. Children's Services has been quite responsive with keeping children connected, but there are still times when foster families may not be comfortable or group homes have an outbreak or somebody who's tested positive and then that impacts young people's ability to connect with others. We really did see an increase in the number of young people just feeling isolated, that the home-schooling maybe was not what worked best for them. For some, it works really great, and for others, it doesn't work great at all.

It's been a really hard year, I think, for our intake team because of the breadth and depth of the calls they're getting and the crisis that not just young people are feeling. We're getting a number of calls from individuals who don't fall within our mandate, and we're doing our very best to connect them with the right service.

Mr. Graff: The only other thing that I would add to that is that the calls that we received ended up being at a volume where we had to allocate additional resources to be able to manage them. They were a significant number for a good period of time.

The Chair: Thank you.

I understand there's not a follow-up for this.

Ms Pancholi, go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. Mr. Graff, I want to follow up a little bit on my last question and as well something that was raised in your presentation about greater accountability, I think, before this committee, this committee acting on behalf of the Assembly and Albertans, really, from government ministries in response to the recommendations that you've made in your report. Specifically, you know, with respect to the youth opioid strategy you've made that call. You mentioned it came in 2018 and again in your follow-up report last year, and we've very clearly outlined – and I think Albertans recognize the risks – the significant impacts if action is not taken in a co-ordinated way. I'd like to ask you a little bit about: what do you feel is required for accountability on that recommendation? Have you had any response from the Ministry of Health and the Associate Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions around the development of a youth opioid strategy? What accountability should this committee expect from that ministry in response to your recommendation for a youth opioid strategy?

Mr. Graff: Yeah. Well, I can tell you that we have had some responses to some of the recommendations, and if we thought they were sufficient, we would not have completed a Renewed Focus report. We didn't believe that they were sufficient. For example, one of the things that we asked for as a recommendation in our Into Focus report was a review of the drug use legislation – I'll just find the recommendation right now – and that recommendation, that review of that piece of legislation was completed. It was thorough.

There is still some action to do, but we noted significant progress in relation to it.

We made a recommendation as well that substance use education should be part of the school curriculum on an ongoing basis and that it should be embedded in the school curriculum so that every young person had an age-appropriate exposure to substance use prevention education, and we've not seen sufficient action in that regard.

Each of our recommendations: we have a process where we ask for updates from the ministries. Most often they provide them, and when they do, we assess that information against what we had expected for our recommendation, and then we publicly post it on our website. So all of those responses would be reflected in terms of our assessment regarding the recommendations that we've made. Those are two examples of different ways that we've seen our recommendations responded to.

The co-ordinated strategy: we've not seen a strategy come forward, and for us, that is perhaps the most concerning because it tells us that the other activities, then, aren't moving forward in a co-ordinated fashion.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you.

The Chair: A follow-up?

Ms Pancholi: Yeah. As a follow-up – and I think it's a related issue. Also, one of your recommendations that's part of this annual report is around a forum to highlight the actions around the youth suicide strategy, or prevention plan, I should say. Again, you know, we've seen some really jarring numbers in terms of deaths of children and young people in care. A record number of those deaths are still pending in terms of the cause of those deaths. I don't want to presume what any of those may be. We know that there's a lot that we don't know right now, but we have seen a lot of young people and children in care die. I guess I'm questioning with respect to the youth suicide prevention plan and your recommendation to the ministries of Health and Children's Services to conduct a forum on that: what has happened in that respect, from your perspective, about actually having that forum? What has the response been, and why is that still sort of an outstanding recommendation?

Mr. Graff: My understanding is that the response was a statement from the press secretary, who said that once the pandemic had passed, they would consider the forum moving forward.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Graff: If I could just expand a bit on that.

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Graff: That is really the only response that I recall receiving.

I mean, you need to know that when we're talking about wanting recommendations to be strengthened, it's circumstances like this that are really reflective of that request. You know, when I look back at the different reports that we've done in recent times, we start with the Into Focus report; we move to an additional report on calls to action regarding A Critical Time, which is really about supporting young people in transition; we move from there to the Into Focus report, which calls for a renewed effort with respect to opioid poisoning; we move from there to Strengthening Foundations, which looks at the assessment, information sharing, and collaboration for young people.

1:40

We have pushed forward a significant number of reports that we think have good, solid recommendations for advancing how young

people are served in this province, and what we would really like to see is a process where those groups that we make recommendations to come to a table to tell us what they're doing or not doing with respect to actioning those recommendations. I don't have any qualms if people disagree with our recommendations in terms of the way to get there. They may say: that's a really good kind of goal to have, but we're going to do it this way instead of that way. That's just fine with me, but either to not have any response or to have responses that are repetitious in terms of sending us the same response time after time or having responses like "We'll have a forum when the pandemic is over" tells me that there needs to be a greater accountability for the actions of government in relation to them.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to Mr. Milliken.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Graff and Ms Pelton, for the amazing work that you do, obviously. Having read the report, having read last year's report, having, obviously, listened to the presentation, complex issues are definitely what you're dealing with, so I commend you for all the work that you do. I also want to say thank you to all the members so far who have asked questions. Both of you have, actually, if anything, asked questions that I wanted to ask, too, so I want to thank you for that as well.

I guess what I'll do is just – I'm not sure if this is maybe just my confusion from reading the report. I'm going to repeat it a bit verbatim here. I want to build off a little bit what Member Pancholi has been asking questions about with regard to the youth opioid strategy. On page 58 you mention the year ahead, and you talk about:

Place renewed attention on the opioid crisis. While it may have been compounded by the impacts of the pandemic, the drug epidemic is serious and threatens the health and lives of young people in our province. Through a special report, we will bring renewed attention to the opioid crisis and the critical need for meaningful action.

You mentioned that there was the 2018 report and then the one from the middle of last year. Is this referring to a report that you intend to bring forward, and if so, when would we expect that? I know that this government has placed a significant amount of emphasis on ensuring that the opioid crisis that we are facing is dealt with in a compassionate and effective way. I guess just looking at that.

Mr. Graff: Certainly, I can clarify those comments. You're referring to the annual report, correct?

Mr. Milliken: Yes, on page 58.

Mr. Graff: Yes. What we are referring to is the Renewed Focus report, which was released in June 2021. The annual report goes to the end of March 2021, so when we are talking about anticipating another report, it would be this Renewed Focus report that we were referring to.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you very much. I was just wondering if there was another one coming, but thank you for that.

No follow-up.

The Chair: No follow-up. Thank you.

Ms Sweet, do you have a question?

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Graff, for being here. It's great to see you as well, Terri. I want to focus if we could a little bit on C-92 and the work that's going to be done with

First Nations communities as we transition under the new principles that have been introduced by the federal government. Recognizing, of course, that my background is working with First Nations communities with Children's Services, I know the complexity of how these changes and these principles are going to need to be implemented on a First Nations community base by base. I'm curious, from your perspective, about the role that the Child and Youth Advocate is going to be able to play through the transition and if there are going to be considerations that need to be made around how we support the Child and Youth Advocate in continuing to have a voice as we see the changes being implemented or if you've had any conversations with partners around sort of the future of your role in this new world.

Mr. Graff: I can tell you that we reached out some time ago to Indigenous leaders across the province with a letter inviting that kind of a dialogue, and because of the pandemic, we've only had a limited opportunity to do that. But, certainly, there's significant interest on the part of Indigenous leaders in having that dialogue with us. How it changes our organization is something, I think, that has yet to be determined. The recognition that there will need to be significant changes in terms of how child welfare services are provided for Indigenous young people and their families and who provides those services is a substantial question, and it's one that the Indigenous people need to be at the helm of working through. We have said that we believe strongly in the inherent right of Indigenous people to raise their children and that Indigenous people are in the best position to provide for the care, support, and services that they need.

We will want to do our very best to support Indigenous groups as they move forward with child intervention because that's our best way of advocating for young people. The more that we can do to support Indigenous people to be able to provide their own child intervention services to their own children in an effective way – that includes the voices of young people being considered; that includes the rights under the UNCRC and the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples – the more we're advocating for young people. That's our walking-in kind of perspective, and it's one that has so far been received well by those that we've conversed with, and we're hopeful that it will help us to evolve the way that we need to evolve to be supportive to young people in this process.

Terri, did you have any further comment? Okay.

Ms Sweet: Can I just . . .

The Chair: Yep, for a follow-up. Go ahead.

Ms Sweet: I appreciate that. I mean, I am a strong believer that children being with their communities should be the ultimate goal of Children's Services and obviously have a strong belief that the more that Indigenous communities can take on the role and make sure that children are with their families is the priority that should be placed, for sure. I'm curious if you're hearing anything from our Indigenous partners around the ability to implement the changes that are being negotiated with the federal government, if there is resistance around looking at the changes within Children's Services, and how the direction from the federal government may be impacting the current services that are being provided within Children's Services and resistance around a willingness to look at how these changes will be implemented.

Mr. Graff: I'm certainly aware of challenges that are present for Indigenous people as they seek to move forward. Some of those challenges are about unknowns, where there really isn't the existing information to enable them to move forward in terms of their next

steps, and recognizing that Indigenous groups are at different places in terms of those steps. I don't know whether I would call it resistance or not, but I do note that there is a need for the federal government, for Indigenous governments, and for provincial governments to all be at a table where there is a comprehensive kind of approach that's being applied. I'm not sure if there's resistance to that or what, but I am aware that it's not happening at the levels that perhaps some Indigenous groups in particular would like.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Graff. I'll continue along a similar line of questioning, actually, because I'm sort of curious how this is going to work. I'm glad that there is attention finally, too. Actually, you had me on the edge of my seat when you just flat out stated the inherent right of Indigenous people with raising their own children. Parts of our history that we cannot erase around birth alerts still linger in Indigenous communities, and we have to make strides to be better. As I say, we can't erase the history, but we have to be better. I'm glad that you have discussed this at length today. Reading the report and seeing the disproportionate number of Indigenous children and youth being represented in child welfare and youth justice systems: it's still cringeworthy.

I know that you've discussed how you've been consulting with and working with Indigenous leaders and communities. Just for curiosity, one question I have is: what proportion of the OCYA, like, the office itself, is actually Indigenous? Obviously, Indigenous leadership in our offices is vital to make sure that representation is being done adequately. Actually, if we can just start there, and then I just have a follow-up question.

1:50

Mr. Graff: Sure. We don't keep track of the number of Indigenous people who are in our employ, but I can tell you that in each of our program areas we have Indigenous people who are employees. They're certainly a minority in terms of the rest of the staff. We have a diverse staff that includes Indigenous and people from other groups as well, but I don't have a specific number for you. They are not the majority of our staff even though, as I noted earlier, the majority of young people that we provide a service directly to are Indigenous. It does reflect in large part the overrepresentation of Indigenous young people in the system.

Mr. Long: Thank you for that.

As your time is limited as you're not renewing your contract, I just have a question, curiosity, with your expertise in your position, what it will look like. You know, I see the budget for the OCYA is about \$14 million. How do we plan a path forward to develop an Indigenous group that takes care of the Indigenous component in the child welfare system? Like, do you see it being an umbrella sort of system or a different arm altogether? I believe it's about 60 per cent of children and youth both in the welfare system and in the justice system are Indigenous. Would that mean that there'd be a transferring of 60 per cent of that budget to Indigenous community-led organizations on child welfare? Or what do you envision for that?

Mr. Graff: Part of the federal legislation is the beginnings of a mapping out of how that should look. At the end of the day, however it looks in terms of whatever structures are in place, be they parallel structures, et cetera, what is, I think, the hope of that legislation is that Indigenous people will have the capacity – the governance, the resources, the expertise, the depth of culture reflected in their communities and reflected in their schools and reflected in their, you know, daycare programming, all of that – to

give the full range of care to their children so that those children grow up without the identity issues that children have currently when they're placed in care for most of their young lives and those kinds of things. That structure can look a whole bunch of different ways, but at the end of it, in my view, success is really when young people feel like they know who they are, they know where they're from, they're proud of their heritage, and they're able to negotiate life effectively.

Can I go back to the overrepresentation question? I think it's a critically important one, and it's one that, for me, matters over time. When I spoke earlier about the first advocate's report speaking to the overrepresentation, that was in 1989-1990, during that fiscal year. At that time the percentage of young people who were involved with the child welfare services of the day was 32 per cent. Currently the percentage of young people who are involved with the child welfare services is 64 per cent. At that time, in 1989, the percentage of Indigenous young people who were in government care was 40 per cent. Currently they're 71 per cent. When I say that it's worse now than it was then, that's significantly what "worse" means. I just think that we have got to find the ways to reverse that in a safe, healthy way, with Indigenous people governing themselves.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Pancholi.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Graff, I think you spoke very compellingly about, you know, the lack, sort of, of response or accountability once you've made recommendations to ministries and how sort of you get maybe repeated the same key messages or maybe very little messaging whatsoever in terms of the response to the recommendations. You also mentioned in your presentation how there was an intention, it seemed, from the work done by the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention as well as previous versions of this Legislative Offices Committee that there be some accountability at this committee by ministries and how they're responding to your recommendations. I'm wondering if you could provide: from your perspective, what would that look like? What would that accountability, what would that process look like to fulfill that intention and the need for accountability for ministries as to how they're implementing recommendations?

Mr. Graff: Sure. I can tell you that when the legislation was amended to include this meeting as a follow-up from our regular standing committee meetings, we were a bit confused about what the purpose was, because from our perspective we were reviewing our annual report at that standing committee meeting along with the other legislative offices, and then to have a second review: we weren't quite sure what that meant. That led us to think: well, what should it mean? My point of view, and I own this, is that I'm absolutely fine with the secondary review of our annual report and of questions that come from that that are – you know, we don't have the time to address them in the earlier meeting: coming forward and being able to explain what we do, why we've done it, what it means, why it's important, all of those things.

But also something that is really important to me is that those entities that we've made recommendations to, I think, should be able to come to this very same table and say: "And here's what we've done about the advocate's recommendations that were made in his annual report. Here are the actions we've taken." They may say, "We've taken different actions, but we have achieved the same outcomes." They may say, "We can't do this because." For me, less relevant than what they say is the fact that they're at a table to provide some level of accountability for the actions that they take or not take, and from my point of view that's part of what could be

on the agenda for this meeting that would make it more meaningful than just merely reviewing our annual report with you folks again. It would be an addition to what we're doing now.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Graff. I note that at previous – this is the third time that this committee has reviewed your annual report. Repeatedly, I think we have, at least from the opposition side, asked for that accountability at the same committee table – you know, I note that in your annual report this year you have recommendations specifically for Children's Services, Community and Social Services, Justice and Solicitor General, and Alberta Health – to bring forward representatives to speak to how they implemented the recommendations outlined in your annual report. Are you suggesting and would you support, then, the idea that this committee at this time, the Legislative Offices Committee, would also hear from those specific ministries at this table to answer questions about how they've implemented the recommendations you've made?

Mr. Graff: Yes. That's, in fact, what one of the resolutions put forward by the standing committee following the review of our legislation suggested. It really does make sense in terms of: how would there be a full circle in terms of the recommendations developed, made, completed, acted upon, and we'd know that it's been achieved? Really, that was one of the resolutions from the standing committee. When we refer to the nine that were made, it was certainly one of them. I'm just looking for which one it was.

The Chair: Thank you.
We'll go to Mr. Milliken.

Mr. Milliken: Sure. Just shifting gears a little bit, on page 55 it states that

as the OCYA shifted to virtual delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic . . .

And I get that this question could also probably have been asked during the budgetary review aspect of it, but I think it still overlaps quite importantly here as well.

. . . maintaining the quality of services remained a priority.

The quality assurance team co-ordinates formal quality assurance activities. Given the challenges presented by restrictions imposed due to COVID, were you able to maintain what you would consider to be sufficient or adequate services, or structurally were there issues that maybe, perhaps, came about from COVID restrictions that made it insurmountable for certain services?

2:00

Mr. Graff: I can tell you that mostly we are very pleased with what we were able to provide for services, and I say "mostly" because there are some young people for whom face-to-face meetings are just absolutely essential to their sense of connection and our ability to move forward advocacy with them. In those kinds of individual circumstances there may have been second-best or third-best because we were dealing mostly with virtual service.

The other area is that many of those networking meetings, that are part of our day-to-day work, where we would go out and meet with leadership groups and meet with boards and meet with other groups that are working with young people directly to have the activities that we're doing be elevated and educate them and also receive information about what they're doing: lots of those kinds of meetings stopped or were reduced significantly. In that regard, I think we have – you know, we did pursue virtual means, and in some of those circumstances they work, but they certainly weren't at the level that I would have liked. The longer that time goes on that we are working virtually, the more impactful I think that that is. There

are changes in those organizations just like there are changes in our organization, and those connections and that networking need to be renewed and renewed and renewed. We are concerned about that, and the longer the pandemic goes, the more concerned we are.

The Chair: A follow-up?

Mr. Milliken: Yeah. I would just comment too that, if anything, I'd reinforce the fact that I think that your work really does revolve around face to face and creating those relationships. I know throughout your report you talked about relationships, and you talked about how often face to face can be the most effective way to intervene effectively.

I guess what I would say, then, is – and I'm not sure exactly where it was in the report. But I also noted – I think you mentioned that there were also some spinoff sort of positive externalities that you found from this. I know that in one case you mentioned that sometimes it was maybe, perhaps, difficult to get into certain communities even when face to face was available, but then through the virtual aspects you were able to put more time into those, so maybe though marginally less beneficial, overall more beneficial just by total content. Are there advantages that you've seen that you're going to be able to leverage going forward in order to ensure that even though, of course, face to face, I think, in most respects or in many respects is best, this kind of hybrid that you talk about with regard to going forward could be effective?

Mr. Graff: Yes. Thank you very much for raising that. There have been significant advantages to some of the capacities we now have within a virtual environment. One is, for example, that when we have committees for our investigative reviews and we need to have access to experts, our ability to do that virtually just unleashes a whole different set of potential resources. You know, some of the challenge with that is that we can get experts, people who have expertise in particular academic areas, for example, but often we'll be looking for an elder who can help us, and they may be available, but we have to take a laptop and go to where they are and link them in that way. It still works, really, much better than us trying to make it so that everybody comes together at the same time in the same location.

The other thing is that our ability to educate virtually has just really increased. We made reference to advocacy 101 workshops having doubled in number, and they've really doubled because of our ability to present information and to have interaction be virtual so that people can participate from their living rooms and from where they live as opposed to coming to a central location. So those are two really good examples, and we know as well that young people don't always need us to be in person. If there's a connection and a relationship already, they seem to be just fine with us saying: hey, can we do a virtual call to talk about this? Seeing the person on the other end of that line is really a valuable thing, so there have been those advantages, for sure.

Terri, did you have any further comment about that?

Ms Pelton: Sure. I could just add a couple of things. I think the most beneficial thing we've seen is how timely we can be. An advocate can be in touch with a young person face to face within an hour of receiving an intake if it's urgent and if time allows. Still, as you said, face to face is ideal, so if we can get to a hybrid model where we can build the relationships face to face and have the follow-ups be virtual or by phone, our young people – now my age is showing, but, like, they love to text and all of the different platforms on social media. We've really learned to be adaptable and start where they're at.

Where it's the most challenging, of course, though, is those young people who can't direct. If we've got a five-year-old who's in a challenging situation and can't really talk virtually without an adult in the room, it doesn't allow for the privacy or the relationships that we need.

But I think that it certainly has been a learning, and we'll be able to take it forward and be able to even better advocate than we were before.

Mr. Graff: Mr. Chair, if I could just go back to that earlier question about this committee and its role in relation to recommendations. Could I just comment on that a bit further?

The Chair: Yeah. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Graff: The Standing Committee on Legislative Offices review resolution 9: that was the one that I was referring to. It says:

That practices be developed so that each time a report is under consideration of a committee of the Assembly, participation includes but is not limited to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate and department officials, similar to proceedings of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and that the relevant department provide documents in advance of each meeting.

It is reflective of what we'd hope this meeting could include.

The Chair: Thank you for that clarification.

Ms Sweet, you're on the list next.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to build a little bit on the comments that we're talking about in relation to the barriers of COVID and how that's impacted families and the rights of the child. I'm specifically looking at the rights of access for family visits as well as the right around legal representation and counsel. I'm just wondering if you have any comments or insight into whether or not the court delay process around . . .

Mr. Graff: Terri, are you good to do this?

Ms Sweet: Is Del good?

Mr. Graff: Yeah. I'm sorry.

Ms Sweet: No. That's okay.

If we could get some insight into whether or not there have been delays around permanency applications, children returning home, supervision orders, any other information around that court process as well as access to youth justice and ensuring that there aren't delays in children and youth going through their process, that if there are any potential criminal court issues, those aren't being held out longer or children aren't staying at EYOC or CYOC for longer than needed. Just some insight into sort of where we're at in the COVID world and how it's impacting the rights of the child, to make sure that those issues are being dealt with appropriately.

Mr. Graff: Yeah. Well, I can tell you that our office receives calls when there are those types of circumstances. We have been busy with calls, so that would suggest that there – I mean, we know that they're there, that there are delays in terms of decisions that might be made about, you know, visitation with family. There might be decisions that are made about court dates when the court dates then end up getting delayed because, of course, of not sitting because of the pandemic, those kinds of things. They're not an infrequent occurrence. They have significant impact on young people, and they or others who are involved with them will contact our office to see if we can advocate for either speedier resolution or something similar to that.

I'm going to look to Terri to see if there are some specific circumstances that she could respond with and perhaps provide some greater clarity.

Ms Pelton: Sure. I'm not sure about specific examples, but we absolutely have seen young people concerned about not having visits with their family and the timelines that they have wanted. With the assistance of an advocate, though, Children's Services has been receptive, for the most part, and I think young people are seeing their family at least now.

In relation to the youth justice and that court system, they're still doing virtual courtrooms. So if it's not a trial, they are resolving a number of issues that way. If it requires a trial, then, for sure, there's a delay.

2:10

What we have seen is that the numbers of young people in both of the young offender centres in Calgary and Edmonton are less than in the time I have been around. They are quite low. They have been receptive to having advocates continue to work with the young people in the centres. Yeah, there are barriers, but the virtual stuff is helping, and we've had receptivity when we've had an advocate involved.

Mr. Graff: The only other thing that I would add is that over time there has been some progress in that regard. I think that in early days of the pandemic most things just kind of stopped while adjustments were made, and there has been some improvement in those areas, like Terri is describing, over time.

The Chair: Thank you.

A follow-up?

Ms Sweet: Just a quick follow-up. Thank you for that information. I appreciate the role that the advocate has. I used to call Terri a lot, actually. But my question is around ensuring that we know. Are we seeing and ensuring that the reunification that needs to be happening with children in care is not being delayed because of COVID, and if it is, are there strategies that you may have for recommendations that could be advocated for to ensure that that reunification is occurring and that permanency is being created in a timely manner and that COVID is not hindering the ability for that to happen?

Mr. Graff: I think that's a wonderful question to have applied to the department who's responsible for those services, and you're in an opportune place to ask the question should they be invited to the table. We see what we do, and when we are involved, we try to make it so that that timeliness happens for young people, but we couldn't tell you about what overall that looks like in terms of the ministry's ongoing service.

The Chair: We'll go online now to Mr. Ceci for questions.

Member Ceci: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Like my colleagues in the room before, I'd like to say thank you, Mr. Graff, for all of your service, and best wishes in whatever is next on your agenda.

My question is a follow-up, in a sense, to the example you brought around the Public Accounts Committee and the accountabilities that ministries are required to show when there is a recommendation made. Certainly, in my time as Finance minister I remember when the Auditor made recommendations to ministries around their processes. There would be a pretty important focus on that from the ministries in terms of responding, and during annual reports they

had to address how they dealt with the Auditor's recommendations to their ministry.

I guess my question is – I'm thinking about finances and monies and how much of the tension is placed on that in terms of managing that and dealing with the Auditor's recommendations and then, regrettably, what I hear, the lack of follow-through from ministries in terms of a public, transparent way of addressing recommendations made by you as an advocate. Would that be a fair assessment, in your view? Perhaps how can we deal with that?

Mr. Graff: I think it would be more than a fair assessment, in my view. I can tell you that some time ago the Auditor General and I both released reports at the same time. In fact, we used the same media conference process. He was reporting on specific areas of Indigenous services, as was I, and one of the comments that he made afterwards – this is Merwan Saher – was: I'm not sure why you don't have any kind of accountability structure like we do at the Auditor General; you should.

In fact, when the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices did their review, Merwan asked to go forward and make that recommendation, and then it was followed up with a second presentation by Doug Wylie from the Auditor General's office to say: we think that this is a viable and healthy approach to address recommendations that are made for children by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. That's why we're here to suggest that – the submissions sit with that bundle of oral submissions that were made – and it really is, I think, an appropriate way to move forward and one that would be healthy and effective for the young people of this province.

Member Ceci: Yeah. Does the act need to change? Is that what you said earlier on, that the act has to compel ministries to follow through with accountabilities at a certain time? Did I remember that correctly from what you said?

Mr. Graff: I'm not sure whether that requires a change in our legislation or where it would require a change, but obviously that action is not being taken, and it's not an expectation. The only expectation that is reflected in our act is that one response after 75 days, and that was a requirement that ministries had always met. Whenever we made recommendations, they would respond right away. So that wasn't in addition to something else. That really is the only expectation that's been placed upon them.

Member Ceci: Great. Well, thank you very much. I think there might be recommendations coming from my colleague to address this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ceci.

Are there any other questions? Ms Pancholi.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In your annual report from 2020-21, on page 49 – I actually believe it's mentioned a few times in the annual report – you indicate that your office received 81 notifications of serious injury or death in that fiscal year and, of course, that you completed a number of reviews. I mean, that is a 31 per cent, I believe, increase from the year before, and I know that, as the advocate is well aware, in the following fiscal year – we're not through that fiscal year yet – we've seen again an alarming number of increases in the deaths of children and youth receiving services.

I'm wondering, Mr. Graff, if you could walk us through sort of – and many Albertans might be aware of it or may not be aware of it – the processes when you receive a notification of a serious injury

or death of a child, why that number might be different than what is reported from the Ministry of Children's Services in terms of deaths and serious injuries, because there is a bit of a different mandate or responsibility that your office has. If you could just sort of walk through the process and the numbers to help us understand perhaps what that process looks like as well as why the numbers may differ.

Mr. Graff: Sure. I can tell you first why the numbers would likely differ. The main reason is that we receive information about young people who are receiving a designated service from child intervention, about young people who are identified as a child in need of intervention, those two different definitions that I speak of, but also of young people who die within two years of receiving those services. Those numbers are not kept by the Children's Services ministry. We receive those through the vital statistics, so that creates just a different complete number than what they would provide in terms of the numbers of deaths and serious injuries.

With respect to the process and what action we take: is that what you'd also like to know about?

Ms Pancholi: Sorry. If I may, just sort of to clarify, you know: do you receive a notification from the ministry? You've just indicated, for example, that you get some information from vital statistics – right? – as opposed to . . .

Mr. Graff: Yes.

Ms Pancholi: So, you know, what is the relationship, I guess, in that process between yourself and the ministry once a notification has been received?

2:20

Mr. Graff: I'm a bit hesitant because there are different points in time. One of the first things that happens is that we receive an alert from them, which just provides us with information that says that there has been an adverse event. It may be that a child passed away on this date, et cetera, but it really is just to give us an awareness that this has taken place. They follow that up with a report, and that report provides us with some additional information.

We then are able to access our own information moving forward to identify some additional understanding of what's taken place, of what the circumstances might have been, et cetera, and we start on a process that has a decision-making tree, if you will, about which action we take by when. That results in us either moving forward with a mandatory review, because it meets that criterion of the death of a child, for example, who was in need of intervention at the time that they passed, or a systemic review if, for example, it was a young person who had just received assessment services and the identification of them being in need of intervention wasn't yet established. That would take a different kind of pathway. So it depends on both definitions as to how we move forward, but either way the process then becomes ours to take action on in terms of contacting people or accessing file information or requesting information from particular bodies to enable us to do a full review.

That review then goes through a process of, you know, being considered by experts, having a look at the research that addresses that issue, of drafting reports, reviewing them, and eventually having a report that is part of a public release, either through mandatory reviews or through a systemic report.

Ms Pancholi: As a follow-up: given that in this fiscal year the annual report was produced for, there was an increase of 31 per cent in terms of the notifications and then given what we've seen in the year since that time, is there a point where there's communication

directly between your office and the office of the Minister of Children’s Services, for example, where – you know, obviously, there is a formal process that happens where a notification happens and triggers the process you’ve described. But is there a point where there might be direct communication between your office and the Minister of Children’s Services, given the number of notifications?

Mr. Graff: There’s not a formal process between them, but certainly we have the capacity to contact them and to say: look, we are concerned. We are concerned, for example, about the number of young people who are dying from opioid poisoning. We are concerned about the transition planning of young adults and how that is affecting those tragedies that we’re being notified of. We can certainly – and we do – communicate with the ministry on a fairly regular basis about that.

Again, we operate with ministries at different levels. For example, Terri would be meeting with their director on a regular basis. I meet with the deputy minister on a regular basis to have discussions about those kinds of topics. I’ve also met with the minister about those as well, so it’s not unusual for us to have those conversations, but there isn’t a kind of formal “here’s how many circumstances have to be found” until we do have a conversation.

The other thing is that it may not always be us who initiates that. Certainly, the ministry has really been quite receptive about approaching us to say, “What are you seeing?” and “We’ll want to have a conversation about that.”

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Amery.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you, Mr. Graff, once again for listening to our questions and responding to those. I want to turn your attention to, once again, your annual report. On page 37 of that report it discusses a concerning trend where children are caught in high-conflict family disputes over custody and access. In particular, the report states:

Conflict is “the single most detrimental factor for children whose parents have separated.” This makes it imperative for there to be timely, appropriate services to help families resolve conflict before they reach a crisis point.

One of your recommendations, which continues onto page 38 of your annual report, states that you have

called on the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General . . . to mobilize an ongoing information/education campaign to raise awareness of how children are impacted by high-conflict custody and access disputes.

Can you please provide this committee with a little more detail on this trend, what you’re seeing currently, and, in particular, whether or not you’re seeing an increase in high-conflict situations, and then what led to this particular recommendation and what other recommendations your department has contemplated with respect to high-conflict situations?

Thank you.

Mr. Graff: The trends that we were seeing were reflected in the number of calls that we were receiving with concerns related to the well-being of children who were feeling caught in these kinds of circumstances. In 2019-2020 those calls increased, I think, by 13 per cent. We don’t have greater information than that in terms of where the trends are related to this issue overall in our province, but the information that we did have was sufficient for us to say that we need to do something.

This group, the young people in our province who are impacted by custody disputes, is not part of our designated service group for whom, you know, we are involved in child intervention or youth

justice services, so they are outside of that purview where we would be able to use our authority to get to information so that we can now look into those trends in a demanding kind of way. We wanted to be able to figure out: how do we get that to the attention of government, that this is concerning, that we’ve had these calls, et cetera? A statement of concern seemed to be the best vehicle that we’d had to say that this is something where our legislation enables us to provide advice to government on matters of importance to young people, and we’re going to exercise that capacity through a statement of concern with these requests to the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General.

Terri, did you want to provide any more information, or do you – I’m not sure that there’s much more that we have in relation to your question.

Ms Pelton: I think maybe just the last part, which was: what action have we seen? I think I heard you ask that. The ministry responded that they agreed with the intent of the recommendation, but we haven’t seen a public awareness campaign, so we’re looking forward to seeing what the agreement to the recommendation looks like.

Mr. Graff: Well, in fact, we have a call-in to the minister to arrange a meeting. We’ve been trying to get a meeting with Minister Madu for some time, and we anticipate meeting with him in the new year to talk about that very issue.

The Chair: Just a quick follow-up?

Mr. Amery: Yes, I do. Thank you for that response. I can appreciate that one of the recommendations was to implement an ongoing information and education campaign to raise awareness. Can you comment on any other recommendations that you might have made or have contemplated with respect to raising awareness about high-conflict family disputes and whether or not you’ve communicated that to the minister or anyone else?

Mr. Graff: I don’t think I can provide any further comment than I already have.

Mr. Amery: Okay.

The Chair: Okay. On that note, back to Ms Pancholi.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. Hopefully, we’ll have the opportunity to perhaps have the ministry here at this table to potentially ask them those questions. That would be great for this committee, I think.

In your presentation, I believe, as Ms Pelton mentioned, the work of the youth council, which is really critically important, right? – I mean, ultimately, this is about giving voice to young people. I know it’s been a year of transition for the youth council as well, many new members, especially during a pandemic. I can appreciate that that can be challenging, but I do commend those youth council members as well for committing their time and energies to giving voice to their experiences and those of the others they may know.

I’m wondering. You mentioned that the youth council had the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Children’s Services to discuss the changes to the supports and financial assistance agreement program and lowering the age of eligibility. I’m not asking you to speak for the youth council or to disclose any of those conversations and details, but, you know, from your work with the youth council, from that meeting, for example, can you highlight perhaps what some of the main concerns might have been and what the response was like from the minister to those concerns?

2:30

Mr. Graff: Certainly. It might be reasonable to start from a time before that, when the announcements were made that there was going to be a reduction of the age that support and financial assistance agreements were available to young people. I was involved at a youth council meeting when that information came forward, and the reaction from our members was that they were very concerned. We had three members of our youth council within that group. One was just at the point of contemplating needing a support and financial assistance agreement and was doing the planning for how that was going to move forward. We had a second who was in the middle of a support and financial assistance agreement and was very concerned about what would happen in her future. The third person we had was a mentor who had been through the child intervention system, had received a support and financial assistance agreement, had pursued an advancing futures bursary and, in fact, had come out with a degree and was mentoring our youth council. Three different reactions, different points in time, but all concerned about the change to the support and financial agreements.

To move forward to the discussion that you're referring to with the minister, there were significant concerns expressed by the young people there, questions about why that needed to happen, why it was young people that needed to do without when they had struggled so significantly with, you know, many of life's challenges, those kinds of things. There were certainly concerns expressed. There was also an appreciation for the minister being willing to listen to their concerns and to hear what they had to say. The collective sense at the end of it was that the young people seemed very pleased that they were able to have the opportunity to provide their views to a leader who is a decision-maker about this but also concerned that there didn't seem to be any adjustment to the decisions as a result.

The Chair: A follow-up?

Ms Pancholi: Yes, I do. Thank you, Mr. Graff. As we know, ultimately, as decision-maker the minister did go forward with cutting those supports for young people transitioning out of care during a pandemic, contrary to what the minister had promised to young people on that program. I guess my question related to that is: you know, in your role as advocate and your office's work did you find an increase? Or maybe just: what was the response from some of the young people who were on that program? Was that an issue that came up? In terms of young people contacting your office seeking supports or advice, was that an issue that was raised, the changes to the supports and financial assistance agreements program?

Mr. Graff: Well, certainly, we've heard repeatedly that that was a concern for young people. We heard it from when it was first announced, and we continue to hear it. Young people would like to receive additional support for additional periods of time. We know, from what we've been told, that there are some challenges with transitioning to adult programs when they are moving from one set of structures, youth-oriented structures, to adult-oriented structures in terms of program supports. Those areas are areas of concern that we hear about fairly frequently.

I don't know, Terri, if you have anything to add to that. An ongoing part of the struggle for young people is how to find sufficient supports for transitioning into adulthood.

You know, the first report that we did as an independent office was related to youth leaving care. This isn't a new issue. What was encouraging was, in fact, that the age was extended for a period of time, and it's discouraging that it is not.

A report that we did called A Critical Time was really about recognizing that late adolescence or emerging adulthood is a distinct time in the development of young people as they transition and that supports are needed for that population. So we are also of the view of being disappointed that that's not continuing.

Ms Pelton: If I could just add, I think one of the things that we're seeing is that there has been a commitment from the ministry that young people who are turning 22 will get the services they need to connect them to adult services. For most or many of them, we're not hearing much, but what has been identified as adult services are PDD and AISH. Where historically those would have been the young people who are falling through the cracks, young people who don't qualify for PDD or AISH are the ones who potentially aren't getting connected to the adult services that they may need. I think that that's something that we have to keep on our radar and be very, very vigilant about. When young people call us and if they're having trouble with their benefits being cut off, we're assigning an advocate, who is helping navigate. For the most part I haven't heard of anybody recently who has been cut off and left out in the cold. From my perspective, that's a good thing, but we can't not continue to pay attention to this.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

I don't have anybody else on the list for asking questions. I'll just put it to the floor one more time: are there any questions?

Ms Pancholi: Could I just ask one more?

The Chair: One more quick one coming in from Ms Pancholi.

Ms Pancholi: I have a long list. My apologies. It'll be one and a quick follow-up. You mentioned during your presentation about recommendations closing if they're unmet after four years. I'm just wondering if you can indicate in the time period of this annual report, 2020-21, how many recommendations were closed.

Mr. Graff: I couldn't tell you. We could get the information, but I wouldn't have it in front of me.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you.

Then perhaps, similarly, I guess, with mandatory death reviews and recommendations. There are recommendations that come out of that process as well. Are there any that were unmet, and how many during the 2020-21 fiscal year? A follow-up in writing afterwards is completely fine.

Mr. Graff: Okay. That's what we'll do, then. We'll follow up and provide a response to the committee that can then be distributed.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Graff. Once again thank you for your service as advocate to the children of Alberta.

Mr. Graff: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

One last call: are there any other questions?

Not hearing anybody trying to flag me down, Mr. Milliken, go ahead.

Mr. Milliken: If there are no further questions, I'd be willing to propose a motion to sort of round out the mandate.

The Chair: Okay. Yes. I will put you on the list, but let me just get through one quick thing here.

Given that there are no other questions, Mr. Graff, Ms Pelton, thank you for joining us. As this was likely your final presentation

to the committee, I'd just like to take a moment on behalf of the committee and the people of Alberta to thank you for your work, Mr. Graff, and your dedication to giving the children and youth of this province a voice. Thank you very much, and best of luck in whatever you choose to do next. If that's retirement, I'm jealous. Enjoy whatever it is.

Moving on to section 4(c), having had the opportunity to review the office of the Child and Youth Advocate annual report 2020-21 and having heard from the advocate, this committee must now decide what is next in terms of this review. Does anyone have any thoughts in this regard? Mr. Milliken, go ahead.

Mr. Milliken: Yeah. I, too, would like to take an opportunity and thank you very much for your service and everything you've done over I believe it's the last 11 years. Thank you very much for that.

With regard to the aspect of the agenda that we're on right now, I would propose potentially to move a motion from the floor with regard to setting out and concluding the mandate of this.

The Chair: There are two things we're going to have to go through for a motion to be brought forward. You can introduce the general topic of it. We do not need the wording. Then there will be a question to the committee as to whether or not they are going to hear the motion. Depending on the committee's choice at that point, if it is yes, then we will hear the motion. If not, then we will not. So you can give a brief outline. We don't need the wording but just so that the committee has an understanding. Then we will put the question to see if we're going to hear the motion.

Mr. Milliken: Sure. The mandate, of course, with regard to this meeting was to review the annual report. I guess what I would do is that I would move a motion to conclude the review of said report – I don't want to go into all the wording or anything like that; that's the bulk of it – and probably authorize the chair to approve a report that might be produced by research services with regard to this committee's review. Beyond that, I think that would probably wrap up the mandate as per Government Motion 105.

2:40

The Chair: Okay. Having heard the general outline of that, just a reminder to the committee that because of Standing Order 52.041, which I had asked to be put in, a substantive motion coming from the floor needs the approval of the committee. In relation to the question as to whether or not we're going to hear the motion, we'll go to Ms Pancholi. Go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. I would imagine that if we approve a move to vote on this motion, that would obviously, then, conclude the work of this committee with respect to the review of the annual report whereas I feel that that's a bit premature. I believe we heard some very clear recommendations from the advocate around further work that this committee can do before the matter is referred back to the Assembly, and I'd like some consideration of that other work before we take a vote on this motion.

The Chair: Thank you.
Mr. Milliken.

Mr. Milliken: Yeah, and thanks for bringing that up, too, by the way. I would also just draw to the attention of the committee that the final questions made by Member Pancholi were going to be provided, I believe, in writing as well, so I think there needs to be some sort of allowances with that. I think that that can be taken into account with regard to the wording of the motion, which, I would say, would probably allow for approval of the draft report that

would be produced by research services upon having had the opportunity for it to be reviewed by the committee. I think that that would be in the wording, so it would allow for that potential look at the end of it once the draft is created.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go over to Ms Sweet, but just a reminder that the initial question that we have to answer is: are we going to hear the motion? Before we get into the debate of the motion or the topic of it, we have to decide that first portion of it, so let's keep the comments to the initial question that the committee has to answer, which is: are we going to hear the motion?

Ms Sweet: If I could just get some clarity, actually, Mr. Chair. I agree with you that debating an actual comment on a motion is not what we're actually discussing. We're discussing whether or not there is going to be unanimous consent for motions to be introduced on the floor . . .

The Chair: A majority vote, not unanimous consent.

Ms Sweet: Sorry. That the majority of the committee be allowed to introduce motions.

I guess my question is: is the motion that you've proposed that with the majority of the floor we can present motions, or is it specific to one motion that we haven't been able to discuss as of yet? If we're going to allow one, are we going to allow more than one?

The Chair: That I don't know the answer to, but what I can say is that each motion or amendment – this doesn't include subamendments. Each amendment would require first a vote from the floor as to whether or not it's going to be heard. I just want to double-check with Ms Rempel that I've got that correct.

Ms Rempel: Yes. Each motion is an individual decision.

The Chair: Yes. So each motion is an individual decision.

Ms Sweet: But we haven't introduced the motion yet, so how can we agree or disagree with whether or not . . .

The Chair: You're not agreeing with the motion. All we're going to get initially is just sort of the sense of what it's going to be about. We're talking about: are we going to hear the main motion? That's the initial question. Maybe I shouldn't say "main motion." Are we going to hear the motion? If the committee votes yes, then he'll read that into the record, and we can start debating that. If no, then we move on.

Ms Sweet: I guess, to get more clarity for myself, could we not just have a motion that would say that we will now allow motions, more than just one motion, to be introduced onto the floor to be debated for the remaining period of the committee for today?

The Chair: Dr. Massolin.

Dr. Massolin: I think the developing practice here, since this Standing Order 52.041 is new for the 30th Legislature, is for committees of the Assembly to vote on whether or not to accept a proposal of a motion, as is happening here, on a case-by-case basis.

The Chair: That's how I read it as well, Ms Sweet. We will decide each motion individually and then each amendment individually, and this does not include subamendments if we get to that.

So the question right now, if there are any other comments to it, is: are we going to hear the motion from Mr. Milliken? Are there any other questions or comments to that? Ms Pancholi.

Ms Pancholi: Can I just ask MLA Milliken to just clarify? I mean, I know we're not getting into debate, but I am unclear as to what the general content of his motion is. Is it to wrap up the work of this committee with respect to this annual report? I'm just a little unclear as to what the general motion might be.

The Chair: Mr. Milliken, if you want to . . .

Mr. Milliken: Sure. Yeah. I don't have the benefit of the Blues or anything like that, but I think verbatim I said something along the lines of a motion to effectively wrap up the mandate pursuant, I guess, then, to Government Motion 105 now that we've gone through the review of the annual report. However, I think that just maybe going beyond what I should be talking about with regard to the motion, I think I clarified also a little bit that, within the wording of what I would propose anyways, there would be an opportunity that if there was a draft report, potentially, that would have been created by research services, that would be reviewed.

Again, I think that under the standing orders it's just simply: hey, are we going to hear a motion without content or discussing or arguing about the motion or discussing the motion? If that is accepted by the majority of the committee, then we would hear a proposed motion that hasn't been agreed to yet in any way, shape, or form, and then that would be debated and then likely voted upon by the committee as a whole. Just the standing orders are what I'm trying to work with here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Milliken.

Any other questions to this initial proposal?

Not hearing any, to the question of

whether we're going to hear a substantive motion being brought from the floor,

all those in favour in the room, please say aye. All those opposed in the room, please say no. Moving online, all those in favour online, please say aye. All those opposed online, please say no. Hearing none,

that motion is carried.

I'll now go back to Mr. Milliken. [interjection]

Was somebody else – probably just a delay in somebody's rural Internet connection.

Mr. Milliken, the motion is carried, so now you can bring forward your motion.

Mr. Milliken: Sure. MLA Milliken to move that

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices (a) conclude its review of the office of the 2020-2021 annual report of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, (b) direct research services to prepare a draft report on the committee's review of the 2020-2021 annual report of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, and (c) authorize the chair to approve the report after making it available for committee members for review.

I think that it's our goal here to ensure that the office of the Child and Youth Advocate is not only doing its work but that it's able to do its work, and I think that through this review we've seen that everybody here would agree that the work that you've done through your office has been – I think every single person here on the committee has congratulated you on the great work that you've done over the course of the last 11 years as well as this year throughout the process of the review of this annual general report. So that's the motion that I would propose.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Milliken. Before we go to Ms Sweet, I want you just to make sure that the wording on the screen is accurate, that they caught it.

Mr. Milliken: I read it quickly.

The Chair: We can take a moment here just to make sure. It's just easier to get this out of the way now.

Mr. Milliken: That sums it up. Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Ms Sweet, please go ahead.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the government wanting to conclude the report and the meeting as quickly as possible. However, I am going to recommend an amendment to this motion under section 1, "conclude its review of the office of the 2020-2021 annual report of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate." What I would like to recommend is that the review be concluded of the . . .

Mr. Milliken: Point of order, and not for any other reason . . .

The Chair: Sorry. Just hang on . . .

Ms Sweet: I haven't even gotten that far yet.

2:50

The Chair: Just hang on a second. If you're going to be referencing sort of the process here, Mr. Milliken?

Mr. Milliken: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. So if you want to move an amendment, Ms Sweet, you can just go over the same suggestion I gave to Mr. Milliken, just sort of the overall intent, I think, of your doing that. You don't need the exact wording. Then the decision can be made as to whether or not the committee will accept an amendment from the floor. You can go that route.

Ms Sweet: But the motion is already on the floor. Why do I need consent to amend it?

The Chair: For an amendment it would need consent from the committee, a majority vote; subamendments don't, based on the standing order.

Ms Sweet: This is such a process. Anyway. Okay. Well, I have an amendment I'd like to put on the floor, and my rationale is that we're not ready yet. And then I'll give you my wording and what it is I'd like to do.

The Chair: Well, we don't need the exact wording of the amendment. We just need the general outline, what you're trying to – what the amendment would do. We don't need the exact wording of the amendment. The committee then decides if they are going to allow an amendment to be brought forward. Then we get into the specific wording of what you want to have changed.

Ms Sweet: Very clearly, through the last little bit of the meeting that we've had, in listening to the advocate, the advocate has made it clear that to appropriately be able to evaluate the report that is written by the Child and Youth Advocate, the ministries need to be able to explain how they are responding to the recommendations that have been made and how we can ensure that those recommendations are being acted upon. We've not heard that. There hasn't been dialogue around any information provided by any of the ministries that have been identified under the Child and Youth Advocate's reports and the historical reports, and I believe that it is not in good conscience of this committee for us to just say: we like the report that was provided by the Child and Youth Advocate, and therefore we're going to rubber-stamp it and submit it to the Legislature.

We have a responsibility on behalf of these children that this advocate is responsible for, the rights of the child, which I have repeatedly spoken about today, to ensure that when issues are being identified, they are being acted upon on behalf of the ministries. I don't believe this committee is ready to say that this annual report and the questions that this committee has have been dealt with effectively today, so I have an amendment.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, MLA Sweet.

Any other questions or comments to the question of hearing an amendment from the floor? Okay.

Hearing and seeing none, then we will ask the question on whether or not we will hear the amendment.

All those in the room in favour of having an amendment brought forward from the floor, please say aye. All those opposed in the room, please say no. Moving online, all those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed, please say no. There's usually one that comes in a bit late, potentially.

Ms Pancholi: I'd like a recorded vote, please, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. I believe that motion was defeated,

but a recorded vote has been requested. We will start in the room. I will just go member by member, and then you can state your vote yes or no, and it will be recorded. We will start on my right. Mr. Milliken.

Mr. Milliken: No.

The Chair: Mr. Long.

Mr. Long: No.

The Chair: Mr. Amery,

Mr. Amery: No.

The Chair: Ms Sweet.

Ms Sweet: Yes.

The Chair: Ms Pancholi.

Ms Pancholi: Yes.

The Chair: Now moving online, I will give a longer pause to make sure that we can hear from everybody, just given some of the difficulties potentially of Internet connections. I will start with Mr. Ceci.

Member Ceci: Of course. Yes.

The Chair: I'll take that one as a yes.
Ms Rosin.

Ms Rosin: No.

The Chair: Mr. Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: Yes.

The Chair: Mrs. Allard.

Mrs. Allard: No.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: No.

The Chair: There it is. Usually a bit slow. Okay. Thank you, Mr. van Dijken.

For the vote I will turn to Ms Rempel for the . . .

Ms Rempel: Okay. So it's defeated six to four.

The Chair: Okay.

That motion is defeated six to four.

We are back on the main motion. Are there any other questions or comments to it? Yes. Ms Pancholi, go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Okay. Where to begin here? We just listened – I think we were all listening – to a presentation by the Child and Youth Advocate, where he outlined multiple times the importance of getting some accountability and transparency from ministries who have received recommendations from his office, and he suggested that this committee would be the appropriate place for that to occur. In fact, he gave some examples of where the response from government has been repeating certain key lines over and over again and perhaps sometimes just a statement in the media, about “we'll deal with this later” as a response to recommendations brought forward by the advocate that have direct implications for the most vulnerable children and youth in this province.

We know that his office, as he's indicated throughout his past work and in the annual report that was under review by this committee today, is dealing with incredibly important issues such as opioid use, youth suicide prevention, youth transitioning out of care. It is very clear that we are at a crisis point in this province when it comes to looking at the deaths of children and youth in care. The overrepresentation of Indigenous children has not changed. In fact, it has gotten higher, and some responsibility is required by this government to account for what actions have been taken in response to these recommendations. Albertans deserve to know that. This committee is the appropriate place for that to take place.

If we go forward with this motion as drafted, it means that we will not be hearing from the ministries who have been named in the annual report as having received recommendations from the advocate. The Ministry of Children's Services, the primary child-serving ministry in this province, directly responsible for the child intervention system, has a number of recommendations outlined in this report. We deserve, Albertans deserve, these children and families deserve to hear what work has been done and what work hasn't been done. As the advocate was very clear, there might be good reasons why the ministry has maybe decided not to take the specific recommendation or actions recommended from the advocate, maybe chose to go to a different path but achieve the same objective – I think the objectives laid out in those recommendations are things that we should all be behind – but we need to hear from that.

If we conclude the work of this committee at this point, we will not have that accountability and transparency that I believe the advocate was very clear about wanting to see. This is the committee where that's supposed to happen. It was laid out in the work done by the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention that it was not just about the advocate's annual report being reviewed by this committee but that there be some opportunity and accountability from the ministries who receive recommendations.

As the Official Opposition caucus we have put forward three times now, since this is the first three times that this annual report is reviewed by this committee, and asked for representatives from the ministries who've received recommendations from the advocate to come before this committee, like Public Accounts, as the advocate suggested today, and answer questions. I think that if we pass this motion today as drafted, we are essentially saying once again that the ministries responsible for serving vulnerable children and youth

in the child intervention system do not have to provide transparency and accountability. It's very clear. I think we simply have one – we have the capacity. This committee does not have to deliver its report back to the Assembly until, I believe, the end of February. There is time to still have those ministries come and speak to this committee. I think that if we pass this, we are ignoring the advocate's recommendations once again, and I don't think that serves the children or youth in this province, and it is not what was intended.

I think it's very notable how many of the committee members can't even make eye contact during this conversation. This is the third time that this government has tried to shut down accountability from its ministries for recommendations to assist children and youth in care. I don't know what they're trying to hide or why they do not support doing that, but this is an opportunity to come forward and be serious about taking some action. There have been no other actions taken so far. All we're asking is that we be able to ask questions from the ministries who receive recommendations from the advocate, and I think we'd be doing an incredible disservice not just to those children and families but to Albertans if we are going to move forward with once again rubber-stamping the annual report without hearing from the ministries and putting forward serious recommendations.

3:00

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Pancholi.
Mr. Milliken.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, and thank you, Member Pancholi, for your well-thought-out comments. There's a lot that I would agree with in what you've said, and you said it very eloquently. That said, I would disagree that this is the forum to change the mandate of this committee. I think that the mandate has been specifically stated within Government Motion 105, that was imposed on this committee by the Assembly at large. I think that it would be perhaps not the right venue in order to do what you're requesting.

I would also just make a quick note that the OCYA has within its recommendations talked about how there may be opportunities for forums, et cetera, where people could be engaged, stakeholders could be engaged. Specifically, that had to do with suicide prevention, but perhaps, you know, building off that, there could be an opportunity in the future for something like that in order to be able to take a look at those kinds of things that you've mentioned.

Again, what I would say is that, I mean, we're constricted by the mandate. I don't think that this would be the forum to do that in. Like I say, a lot of what you said has merit and it's great. I think that there are opportunities, even as provided in recommendations from the office, that there could potentially be a venue or a forum for some sort of an event such as that. Perhaps that could be the will of the Assembly, things of that nature.

Thank you. I would also add that I would vote in favour of the motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Milliken.

Just before I go to Ms Sweet, just a reminder for those online that you can raise your hand, but you can also send a message if you want to get on the list. It could just help us keep track.

Ms Sweet. Oh, Ms Pancholi, go ahead.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. I do want to point out for MLA Milliken that the Ministry of Children's Services did actually come forward two years ago and did present to this committee. The ministry officials did provide some information. So this is, actually, precisely the forum in which that should take place. In fact, as the advocate mentioned, in 2017 the Legislative Offices Committee actually

supported the idea that ministry officials should come forward to this committee to answer for their implementation of recommendations from the advocate. This is precisely the forum for it to take place, this committee.

Further, I would add – and I appreciate that MLA Milliken brought up that there was a suggestion, a recommendation actually, from the advocate about having a forum on youth suicide, but the point is that that's a recommendation where no progress has been made. That's exactly the point that we're trying to get at: that was a recommendation made to the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children's Services, and there's been no action taken. That's what we would like to ask, for those ministries to come forward to this committee and answer that. Maybe they say that they have something planned, maybe they don't, but according to what they've said to the advocate, they just said: it'll happen sometime after the pandemic.

I appreciate your support for those forums. We support them as well, but what we'd like to hear – that is a recommendation that came from the advocate to the ministries, and it hasn't happened. So that is precisely why we need to have accountability for those ministries at this committee, which is precisely the forum in which that was intended.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Pancholi.

Mr. Milliken: Again, I just want to thank you for your comments. I'd reiterate that I think that the possibility of a forum where we could delve into some of those issues has even been presented pursuant to the recommendation. I think that the exact wording that was used would go along the lines of, you know, engaging the relevant stakeholders to highlight the actions taken and the results achieved. I'm hearing from you that you and, of course, the office as well may say that there are obviously opportunities for doing better or doing more. I would probably agree with that statement, but again I think that the mandate has been put to us to review it. We have done so.

I think that if we all remember, just going back a little bit in the agenda, there was an opportunity for all members of this committee to ask further questions and make further comments. I think that it was Member Pancholi who specifically stated that she had one last one and one quick follow-up, and we went through that.

Ms Pancholi: For the advocate.

The Chair: Through the chair.

Mr. Milliken: For reviewing . . .

Ms Pancholi: Through the chair, for the advocate.

Mr. Milliken: For reviewing this document, which we have done. Again, I'm just looking at the government motion. That's all. I think that the motion works within that, and then, of course, there are opportunities for another venue, as even recommended by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

With that, I would vote in favour of the motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Milliken.
Ms Sweet.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to follow up on the Government Motion 105. I appreciate what the member opposite is saying in regard to it being a referral that was sent to us from the Legislature, which we are an extension of. I don't dispute that part of it. But I also sit on another committee, the Real Property Rights

Committee, which also was referred and created through a government motion, for which we have just recently – right before we rose for the winter break – requested an extension of the work that we were doing, at the will of the Legislature and the Government House Leader, in order to be able to draft a report and to have appropriate consultation and have the committee do the work that they needed to do.

Although I appreciate what the member opposite is saying, when it says that we were given a government motion and, you know, this is what happens, there is nothing that prevents a committee from going back to the Assembly and requesting an extension on the work that they are doing if they deem that the issue is important enough and relevant enough to do so. Now, in saying that, it does give us 90 days, and we haven't exactly hit that, and we don't go back to the Chamber until February 22 as the current calendar sits.

So we have four weeks where there is the capacity to be able to virtually invite members of the ministries to present on the requests and the recommendations that have been made by the Child and Youth Advocate, that would still fit within the mandate of the government motion that was provided, that would still meet the requirements of the 90 days, and would still allow us to sit while the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued. Those are all the clear – those are points 1, 2, and 3 of the Government Motion 105. So I respectfully disagree with the member opposite that we have to work within what he has interpreted as being the government motion, because the way that I read the government motion, it clearly says that as long as this is happening during the period of the Assembly being adjourned or prorogued, in accordance with section 21(4) of the Child and Youth Advocate Act the committee shall report back to the Assembly within 90 days. So we have time.

I think that, again, as my colleague has mentioned, out of respect for the fact that there are some very serious issues that have occurred and that are occurring in relation to children in care, in relation to the opioid crisis, in relation to the fact that we are in COVID and that has had serious impact on reunification of families, serious impact on adoption applications, serious impact on youth justice, serious impact on the day-to-day lives of children that are interfacing with Children's Services, that we have a responsibility to have more dialogue and conversations with the ministries that are working with those children.

Now, this is not uncommon to happen. I don't understand what the resistance is, but I think that using a government motion to say that this is the reason why it must be passed and stamped today isn't a good rationale because we have time. We have another four weeks. I'm more than happy to have more meetings and discuss this issue, and if people need to get substitutions because they have other plans, then they get substitutions, and we can continue to meet.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Sweet.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Member Sweet. I'm listening to you, and what you're saying is good. There's just – I think there's a little bit of confusion. What you referred to with regard to real property, that select special committee, has to do with an extension. It has to do with an extension in order to be able to meet the mandate. So your logic for extension doesn't apply to expanding the mandate; it has to do with completing the mandate.

Again, I'm just looking at Government Motion 105, point 1.

1. The 2020-2021 annual report of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate be referred to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices for review.

And that's us. It's not us with a bunch of stakeholders or anything along those lines. We're literally doing what the government motion has asked us to do.

3:10

And, going back, we had the opportunity to review it and ask questions, and we did. We asked extensive questions. In fact, it was Member Pancholi, I believe, who mentioned that she had the final questions. So with those final questions being done, I'm just at a loss as to – the mandate is the mandate. That's all I'm saying. I'm not trying to expand it or anything like that. I'm just saying that that's what we're dealing with, courtesy of what has been given to us by the Assembly at large, by all 87 MLAs.

Again, to reiterate, it sounds like there's opportunity for a forum in another venue in order to dive deeper into the issues that were so eloquently stated by Member Pancholi. Again, just within the realm of the mandate that we have, I think the committee would be inclined to probably vote for this motion.

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Milliken.

Ms Pancholi, did you . . .

Ms Pancholi: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm really disappointed, I have to say, with Member Milliken's understanding, especially considering as well being Deputy Chair of Committees, that he doesn't understand that committees may request for other stakeholders, but in this case it's ministries. I have sat on a number of committees as well, where we have the authority to call those – in fact, this very committee did that and called the Ministry of Children's Services on the 2018-2019 annual report of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. It's absolutely within the mandate of this committee to do that.

The member read out the first line of that Government Motion 105, and nothing in that says that all we are allowed to do is ask questions of the advocate and move on. Nothing in Government Motion 105 in any way limits the ability of the committee to bring in ministries, and in fact, as stated before, it has happened in this committee before, and it was part of the original mandate of this committee when reviewing the annual report of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. So apart from the semantics and the technicalities and all of that, at the end of the day we are still talking about transparency and accountability for implementing the recommendations from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

There is no other committee that does that. There is no other committee that has the mandate to do that. This is the committee for that, and we heard very clearly from the advocate how important he felt it was to have some accountability for the implementation of those recommendations. He could not have been clearer, actually, about that. He gave a wholehearted yes when asked whether or not he believed those ministries should come towards this committee, and it is within our purview to do so, and nothing in Government Motion 105 limits it. To me, it speaks to this government's increased secrecy and lack of transparency.

I don't know why they would put up these barriers, and quite frankly they're not real barriers. They're throwing them up. They're artificial. We've already just shown why that's not factually accurate, to say that this committee doesn't have the mandate to do it. I don't know why the committee members would not want to hear from these ministries. Ask those questions to the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children's Services: will they be holding a forum on youth suicide? Ask the Ministry of Children's Services whether or not they've improved their process for file transfers. Ask them if they're making progress on whole-family residential treatment, as the advocate has recommended.

I know that Member Amery had some interest in the issue that the statement of concern addressed about high-conflict custody issues and the impact that was having on youth. Let's have the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General come forward, and we can

ask questions about what steps they're going to take. That is the role of this committee. It is clearly what the advocate is looking for. I cannot hear any rationale from the government members as to why they wouldn't want to hear that. We have the time to do it, and I urge the members to vote against this motion at this time.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Pancholi.

Is there anybody else on the list online? No. Okay. I'll ask one more time to committee members, either online or in the room, if there are any other questions or comments to the proposed motion, giving that extra little delay for everybody online. I'm not hearing any – oh, Mr. Ceci.

Member Ceci: Sorry.

The Chair: Yeah. Go ahead.

Member Ceci: Great. I'll just briefly say that what I heard the advocate say is that there is a problem with follow-through and accountabilities. It may be that ministries are doing some of the work or indeed all of the work, but it's not clear to me that there is a clear line of reporting back on decisions or recommendations that the advocate makes. I shared that in my time as Finance minister, when ministries got recommendations from the Auditor, they treated those very, very seriously. There was a series of reporting back not only in their ministries' annual financial reports, but a report was done by the Finance department that would tabulate all of the Auditor's recommendations and report back on what was done by ministry. So there were two levels of report there. They were substantive, and people didn't brush them off.

Now, I don't know if that's happening with regard to the OCYA's recommendations, but I would like the opportunity to ask of the ministers or their staff what their response, what their actions – what are they doing with regard to the recommendations that they have received from the OCYA? It's not like we're talking about insubstantial matters. We're talking about, in many cases, the health and welfare of young Albertans and their families, and if that's not important to tie the knot, to go full circle on in terms of understanding what outcome has been undertaken, I don't know what is, Mr. Chair. So I would urge members of the committee to spend the time to get the answers so that we can answer the question: yes, the OCYA's recommendations have an effect, have agency, and people through ministries are listening to that and dealing with them. That's what I want.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ceci.

I will just ask one more time if there's anybody in the room or online who has any additional comments or questions.

Okay. Hearing none, we will move to the question on the motion as proposed by Mr. Milliken. All those in favour in the room, please say aye. All those opposed in the room, please say no. Moving online, all those in favour of the motion, please say aye. All those opposed online, please say no. Okay.

I believe that motion has carried.

Thank you very much.

Moving on now to other business, section 5, officer contracts, given some of the sensitivity around discussing officer contracts, I would suggest that the committee along with . . .

Member Ceci: Was there a recorded vote?

The Chair: There could have been, Mr. Ceci, but we have moved on in the agenda.

Member Ceci: Can you tell me what the vote was?

The Chair: Well, it wasn't recorded. Oh, sorry. If you didn't hear, the motion had carried.

Member Ceci: Okay.

The Chair: Back to 5(a): in discussion with the appropriate legislative office staff, we consider moving in camera for our next agenda item as we may touch on specific details around contracts of the officers of the Legislature. The possible motion would be that someone move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, including Legislative Assembly Office staff, move in camera. Is there somebody who would like to move that motion? Mr. Long. Mr. Long has moved that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, including Legislative Assembly Office staff, move in camera. All those in favour in the room, please say aye. Anybody in the room opposed, please say no. Moving online, all those in favour, please say aye. Anyone opposed, please say no. That motion has carried. We'll now move in camera.

[The committee met in camera from 3:20 p.m. to 3:29 p.m.]

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much. We are back on.

We will need to now have the motion brought forward asking the Government House Leader to look for a candidate for the position of Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner. Would anybody like to move that? Mr. Amery would move that

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices recommend to the Government House Leader that a motion be introduced in the Assembly to establish a select special committee to search for a candidate for the positions of Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner.

Is there any discussion around that motion?

Hearing none, all those in favour in the room, please say aye. Anyone in the room opposed, please say no. Moving online. All those in favour online, please say aye. Anyone online opposed, please say no. Okay.

That motion is carried.

Thank you.

Are there any other items for discussion in other business? Ms Sweet.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wonder if I would be able to put something forward to the committee under motions in committee, 52.04, where we're able to look at – oh, no. Sorry. That's the wrong part of the standing orders. Basically, looking at the fact that the policy committees have the ability to look at any other issue that may be relevant to the committee, so 52.03: "committee may on its own initiative . . . review any regulation, amendment to a regulation or prospective regulation within its mandate." I'm just wondering, given the fact that we've now put a motion forward to say that we're going to support the OCYA's report, if we could put, at the will of the committee, that we also invite the ministries relevant as it does pertain to the work of the Legislative Offices Committee to be able to discuss with them the recommendations that we have now approved and will be submitting to Legislative Assembly for further follow-up on the recommendations that have been provided.

The Chair: You would like to move a motion that would then ask for further – like, the same question that the committee just answered? Like, if you can help just make sure that I've heard that correctly.

Ms Sweet: I would like to, under 52.03, as a legislative policy committee may on its own initiative look into any issue that is

relevant to the committee – now that we’ve approved the report from the OCYA, saying “with the following recommendations,” and we are submitting it to Legislative Assembly or will be at the will of the committee, I would like to request that we further take our initiative and look at inviting the ministries relevant to that report for further discussion. The report is always available to the committee to be reviewed at any time. That is also part of the standing orders. Any report that is referred to the committee we have the ability to review under our own initiative. I’m asking that we further our initiative and use 52.03 to invite those ministries to present on what they’re working on with the OCYA.

The Chair: I’ll just turn it over to Ms Rempel to explain what you just passed on to me.

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I stand to be corrected, of course. I believe the member is referring to Standing Order 52.07(2), that reads that “a Legislative Policy Committee may on its own initiative, or at the request of a Minister, inquire into any matter concerned with the structure, organization, operation, efficiency or service delivery of any sector of public policy within its mandate.”

Ms Sweet: That is correct. Thank you.

Ms Rempel: I would also have to point out, then, that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices is not one of the legislative policy committees.

Ms Sweet: Well, then why would we review the OCYA report?

Ms Rempel: Because that was referred to this committee by the Legislative Assembly specifically . . .

Ms Sweet: Okay. That’s fine. Thank you.

Ms Rempel: . . . and by legislation that requires it to be reviewed annually.

The Chair: Sorry. Ms Sweet, do you need any . . .

Ms Sweet: No. I’m fine. Thank you.

The Chair: You’re good? Okay.

All right. Any other business to discuss? Ms Pancholi.

Ms Pancholi: I just wanted to indicate that the members of the opposition will be filing a minority report and allow for time, I guess, in the process for us to . . .

The Chair: Are you looking for a date specifically that you might want to get that in by?

Ms Pancholi: Yeah. I don’t know if we have a date. I mean, obviously, we have until the end of February – right? – for this report to go back to the Assembly. Is that correct? Yeah. So . . .

Mr. Milliken: Fifteen days into the next sitting, right?

3:35

The Chair: Right.

Are you looking for specific, like a – maybe you can help out on a specific day you’d like to receive that by.

Ms Pancholi: Yeah. That would be helpful.

Ms Cherkewich: Yes. Ms Pancholi, my understanding – and Jody can correct me if I’m wrong. The deadline for reporting back is

February 22, so technically the committee has until then to report back.

Ms Pancholi: Okay. I don’t know if we need to put forward a motion or anything to indicate that. I don’t think we do to submit a minority report, but as long as it can be noted that perhaps the committee clerk can communicate with the committee members around timelines, and I’m sure we can work within those timelines.

The Chair: Okay. Ms Rempel.

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, certainly, happy to do that. We’ll be reaching out to the whole committee as the report is prepared for review. Just a general note: usually about one week is allowed for the submission of minority reports.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Any other business? Ms Pancholi.

Ms Pancholi: Sorry. Thank you. I just want to see if we can under other business – and I’ll defer to the committee clerk and Parliamentary Counsel as to whether or not this is within the mandate or whether or not we can do this. I would like to put forward the possibility of a motion for this committee to conduct a review of the Child and Youth Advocate Act. This is consistent with what we heard today, and it is something that this committee has done in the past, so I’d like to put that forward.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms Pancholi.

I will defer to Ms Rempel here in a moment.

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just some general information, as I was fortunate enough to be working with this committee when it did the review of that legislation. Just for the general information of the committee members, that review of the act was required by that piece of legislation, and it was assigned to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices by the Legislative Assembly.

The Chair: Okay. So that review was already pending?

Ms Rempel: I’m just saying that the review that was done was specifically assigned to this committee by the Assembly because it was required by legislation that needed to be done as well.

The Chair: Okay. Ms Pancholi, you have a question on that?

Ms Pancholi: Yes. I’m aware that when it reviewed it in 2017, it was pursuant to what was then at the time in the Child and Youth Advocate Act. I’m simply asking, not because of it being required by legislation but given the mandate, I suppose, of this committee: is it within the scope of this committee to conduct again a review of the Child and Youth Advocate Act?

The reason I ask, of course, is that I think not only did the advocate himself put that forward today, but also the important issue of Bill C-92 was raised and the implications that that will have in terms of the advocate’s mandate. We certainly anticipate that certain Indigenous groups in Alberta will be taking control over their child and family services, and that may require a review of the authority and jurisdiction of the advocate, as well as there are other issues that he highlighted in his report that are outstanding. That’s what I’m putting forward on the table today.

The Chair: Okay. Then it would still be, as we did earlier, a substantive motion from the floor, which we require a vote if we’re going to hear the motion and the specific wording of it, and then we would have to work on the wording to make sure that lines up with

what the committee is able to do and not able to do in terms of requesting a recommendation to review legislation, or can it just review legislation on its own? We will get to that point if needed, but I think the general topic of what Ms Pancholi is trying to achieve here has been brought forward. If there is any other discussion to that, you can bring it up now, or we will begin with the question of whether the committee is going to hear the motion. That is the first question that needs to be answered, similar to the process that we did earlier this afternoon. Any other questions or comments? Okay.

Hearing none, to the question of

whether we will hear a motion from Ms Pancholi from the floor.

All those in the room in favour, please say aye. All those in the room who are opposed, please say no. Moving online, all those in favour, please say aye. And online all those opposed, please say no.

Member Ceci: Recorded vote.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ceci.

Typically there's one more vote that comes in a few seconds later but not at this point.

I will do a recorded vote. We will go member by member, initially in the room and then we will do that online. So to my right.

Mr. Milliken: No.

Mr. Long: No.

Mr. Amery: No.

Ms Sweet: Yes.

Ms Pancholi: Yes.

The Chair: And now moving online, so everybody can get their mute buttons prepared.

Member Ceci: Yes.

Ms Rosin: No.

Mr. Shepherd: Yes.

Mrs. Allard: No.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken? That always takes the longest. Okay.

The motion is defeated, five to four.

Any other business?

Hearing none, just a quick update for committee members to advise that Jill Clayton has kindly agreed . . .

Mr. van Dijken: No.

The Chair: There it is. Thank you, Mr. van Dijken. You can actually probably start voting now for adjournment. It'll come in just in time.

Jill Clayton has kindly agreed to stay on as Information and Privacy Commissioner until a new commissioner is in place this summer.

Agenda item 6. The date of the next meeting will be at the call of the chair. However, for committee members to be aware, of course, in December the government of Alberta announced that it's lifting salary restraint measures for non-union employees under the Public Service Act. This means that some of the staff working in the offices are now eligible for a one-time in-range salary increase retroactive to December 1, 2021, and potentially to also receive an additional in-range salary adjustment on their employment anniversary date beginning in the '22-23 fiscal year. This could mean that some of the officers need to update their budget requests. In addition, the committee will also need to meet again as early as next week to be briefed on how this change may impact the salaries of the officers and to provide direction on this matter for the upcoming fiscal year.

Any other questions to that agenda point?

Hearing none, we will move on to adjournment. Can I get a motion to adjourn? Mr. Milliken has moved that the committee adjourn. All those in favour in the room, please say aye. Anybody opposed in the room, please say no. Online all those in favour, please say aye. Anyone opposed, please say no. That motion is carried.

This meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 3:43 p.m.]

