



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Legislative Offices

Thursday, December 14, 2023
8 a.m.

Transcript No. 31-1-3

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The 31st Legislature
First Session**

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC), Chair
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Deputy Chair

Chapman, Amanda, Calgary-Beddington (NDP)
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)
Eremenko, Janet, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sinclair, Scott, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)*

* substitution for Amanda Chapman

Also in Attendance

Johnson, Jennifer, Lacombe-Ponoka (Ind)

Legislative Officers

Kevin Brezinski	Ombudsman, Public Interest Commissioner
Diane McLeod	Information and Privacy Commissioner
Terri Pelton	Child and Youth Advocate
Glen Resler	Chief Electoral Officer
Marguerite Trussler, KC	Ethics Commissioner
W. Doug Wylie	Auditor General

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Participant

Kim Spicer	Director, Investigations and Legal Representation for Children and Youth
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Support Staff

Shannon Dean, KC	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
Abdul Bhurgri	Research Officer
Christina Williamson	Research Officer
Warren Huffman	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Christina Steenbergen	Supervisor of Communications Services
Shannon Parke	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schwegel	Director of Parliamentary Programs
Amanda LeBlanc	Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

8 a.m. Thursday, December 14, 2023

[Mr. Getson in the chair]

The Chair: All right. Well, I'd like to welcome all the members, the staff, and the guests of this meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices.

I'm Shane Getson, the MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland and chair of the committee. I'd like to ask all members joining the committee at the table to introduce themselves for the record, and then we'll hear from those joining remotely, going from my right.

Mr. Dyck: Nolan Dyck, MLA for Grande Prairie.

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

Mr. Sinclair: Scott Sinclair, MLA, Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Long: Martin Long, MLA for West Yellowhead.

Ms Sweet: Good morning. Heather Sweet, MLA for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

Mr. Bhurgri: Abdul Aziz Bhurgri, research officer.

Ms Robert: Good morning. Nancy Robert, clerk of *Journals* and committees.

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

The Chair: Just a couple of housekeeping items. We have Ms Sweet joining us this morning, substituting for Ms Chapman.

A few items of business at hand we'll need to turn to.

Oh, sorry. Remotely. Sorry. Folks are staring at me on the screen right in front of me. In the bottom right-hand corner I have MLA Eremenko. Did I finally get it right today?

Member Eremenko: Good morning. Janet Eremenko, MLA for Calgary-Currie.

The Chair: Awesome.

Then just above, to the right of her, I have MLA Johnson. If you'd like to introduce yourself.

Mrs. Johnson: Sure. Jennifer Johnson, Lacombe-Ponoka.

The Chair: To the left of her on my screen we have MLA Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: Good morning. David Shepherd, Edmonton-City Centre.

The Chair: In the lower left-hand corner I have MLA van Dijken.

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

The Chair: Excellent. I think that is everybody that I can see unless there's anyone else online that I'm missing.

Hearing none and seeing none, a few housekeeping items. The microphones are obviously operated by *Hansard*, so you don't need to be messing with the buttons. Committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and TV. Members participating remotely should ensure they're prepared to speak or vote when called upon, and videoconferencing participants are encouraged to have their cameras on when speaking. If you do have pets wandering around, I

can see them on my screen, as we found out last time. Please turn your cellphones and other devices off or to silent during the meeting.

With that, the agenda. I'd like to draw everyone's attention to the agenda of the meeting. Would anyone like to propose any amendments to the agenda?

Seeing none, would a member like to move to approve the agenda? MLA Hunter. Apparently, we're voting. All in favour? Any opposed? On the phones, all in favour? Motion carried.

Approval of minutes from the last meeting. We also have a set of minutes, obviously. Would anyone like to propose any amendments to the minutes from the last meeting?

Seeing none, would a member like to have a motion to move that we accept and approve the meeting minutes from the last meeting? Oh, here we go. MLA Renaud. All in favour? Opposed? On the phones? Motion carried.

Oh, we're just ripping right along here today, guys. This is good.

Budget estimates: here's where we're at now. Committee members will recall that on December 1 we met each of the offices of the Legislative Assembly to review the annual reports and the business plans. I'd like to note for the record that the Public Interest Commissioner and the Chief Electoral Officer have provided the written responses as per the requests during those meetings.

Decisions on the budgets. Yeah, we're here today to make the decisions, guys.

Mr. Dyck: Once you're done reading, I have a comment.

The Chair: Okay. Perfect.

To ensure that we have the appropriate wording in each of the budget estimates and consideration, I've asked the committee clerk to provide a draft of the motions used during our deliberations. What we are going to do, if everyone is comfortable with it, is just go in the order that the presenters were and the budget estimates, and away we're off.

The first one that we had in the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices was the office of the Ombudsman. Discussions and motions from each submission. The first one that we had under consideration was for the office of the Ombudsman, the amount of \$4,657,800 as submitted.

Over to the committee. MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I'd like to make a motion that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2024-25 budget estimates for the office of the Ombudsman in the amount of \$4,574,080 as amended.

The Chair: Okay. Hearing that motion, any conversation or debate? Okay. We'll vote on the motion. All in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any opposed? We'll go to the phones. All in favour on the phones? Opposed?

Motion carried.

The Standing Committee on Legislative Offices to approve the 2024 budget estimates of the office of the Public Interest Commissioner in the amount of \$1,478,000 as submitted. MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I'd like to make a motion that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2024-25 budget estimates for the office of the Public Interest Commission in the amount of \$1,439,610 as amended.

The Chair: Open for discussion. I call the question. All those in favour? Opposed? On the phone – or videoconference, that should be – opposed?

Motion carried.

The next item we have is the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, \$8,992,295 as submitted. MLA Hunter.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I'd like to make a motion, please, that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2024-25 budget estimates for the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner in the amount of \$8,713,638 as amended.

The Chair: Open for discussion. I'll call the question. All those in favour? Opposed? On the videoconference, in favour? Opposed? Motion carried.

On to the next one. In the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, the amount of \$11,588,000 as submitted. MLA Dyck.

Mr. Dyck: I would like to move a motion that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices direct the Legislative Assembly Office to prepare a crossjurisdictional analysis of the current approved operational budgets of statutory officers in select Canadian jurisdictions with mandates that are comparable to the following offices of the Legislature in Alberta: the Auditor General, the Child and Youth Advocate, the Chief Electoral Officer, and the Ethics Commissioner.

The Chair: We'll just put it on the screen for everybody to see it, MLA Dyck, to make sure that that's consistent with what you've just said. You want to give that a once-over?

Mr. Dyck: Yeah. That works. Do you want me to reread it?

The Chair: No. If it's consistent, that's okay. Open for discussion. MLA Sweet.

Ms Sweet: Mr. Chair, I'm just curious as to why the member is requesting that there be a crossjurisdictional analysis on this. Is this a way to – like, is this on top of approving the budget that was just put forward for the office? We have a motion on the floor specifically to one office, and then this motion now speaks to four different offices, which doesn't align with the current motion that's on the floor. I'm not sure how we got to this motion as it is right now. But, also, is it to avoid approving the next set of budgets?

8:10

The Chair: Just for clarification, I will go back to the member so he can restate what the positions are in those items. But what we were doing is going through in the order of the presentations, MLA Sweet. What I have in front of me is basically their budget, so it was opening up for any motions accepting those or opening it up for other motions from the floor. That was to start the conversation, I guess, in that regard. I'll put it back to MLA Dyck so he can respond to your question. Hopefully, that helps.

Mr. Dyck: Yeah. Thanks, Chair. Yeah, I believe we were elected just to manage Alberta's finances and taxpayer dollars well. I do believe that Albertans expect us to do our due diligence. Some of these are significant budget increases, so we want to make sure we're doing our due diligence in this. I do see that a crossjurisdictional analysis between some of our comparatives across Alberta can be a worthwhile investment of time as well as of our resources to make sure that we're on point.

That's the submission and one of the reasons why. I think this is something that all committee members, to make good, wise financial decisions, need to do. This is on every person in this committee no matter which side of the House they sit on, but we all need these, as all committee members, to be able to make good, wise financial decisions. Yeah. We just want to make sure that their submissions are reasonable right across so that we have some – before we vote on larger increases, we want to just make sure they're reasonable. I think this is a way forward for us to have

reasonable increases, so we can we look at that. That's the reason for the motion.

The Chair: Okay. MLA Sweet? MLA Renaud?

Ms Renaud: Go ahead.

Ms Sweet: Just a point of clarity. Sorry. I recognize that I'm a sub to the committee, but past practice is that all of the motions have to be presubmitted to the committee ahead of time. Just curious: I didn't see this motion put forward under the standing order, that was required to give appropriate notice to the committee. Is this actually in order at this point?

The Chair: Yeah. Speaking with the clerk earlier, you have the options of presenting in advance in written notice, and then you also have the option of presenting from the floor. It comes back to the committee, if the committee is willing to accept motions from the floor.

Now I've got a clarity here. I apologize.

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to also draw members' attention to the fact that this is a motion requesting research support, and the memo that the chair put out regarding Standing Order 52.041 does indicate that these motions do not require notice, like this specific kind.

The Chair: Okay. MLA Shepherd caught my eye. MLA Shepherd, go ahead.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On a similar note, we had a motion put forward that was passed before I had a chance to sort of speak to it, in which the budget that was put forward – I believe it was for the IPC. The motion was a figure as amended. Now, I do not see any motion that was presubmitted that had a number that was amended. Similar to the point that Ms Sweet just raised, that sort of a motion, I believe, would have had to have been approved to be accepted by the committee before it could be put forward and moved and accepted. I just want to clarify in terms of our procedures if that motion was in order.

The Chair: Yeah. Again, just looking at it here, MLA Shepherd. We'll just go through this, folks, to make sure. Again, what I had read into the record had the number, and behind it – and maybe I missed this; I apologize to all members if I did miss the second part – was "as submitted" or "as revised." There were revisions that came from the floor, and we just voted on the revisions of those numbers for that budget.

Mr. Shepherd: If I may, Mr. Chair. When were those revisions submitted or given the opportunity for discussion? That did not happen at the last meeting, as I recall.

The Chair: Yeah. We just voted on them, MLA Shepherd. They came from the floor. I was going through and I read into the record the numbers from the budgets, as requested from the groups in the order that they presented, and then I opened it up for discussion, motions on that. MLA Hunter had moved on the three. So it's either the number as submitted or amended.

Mr. Shepherd: Okay.

The Chair: We provided an amended number from the floor, and then we just voted on the amended number.

Mr. Shepherd: All right. Well, thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Shepherd.

Ms Sweet: Sorry. I'm going to just go back to the standing orders and how the practice is supposed to go. So if there is an amendment, under 52.041 – correct? – the motions had to be submitted to the committee prior to the committee meeting, if there were going to be any motions put forward on the floor with changes, so that all committee members would have time to research and be able to do that. If that doesn't happen, then it's the chair's prerogative to allow those to come to the floor, but it's also, then, a discussion that needs to occur at committee, with all committee members to vote that we are going to agree that motions come off the floor. And then it has to be practised for the whole meeting. That is my understanding.

So if there were motions that were changed from what was provided to the committee prior to this meeting, we need to go back and have a discussion about whether or not we're actually going to debate off the floor any changes to any of the information that was provided to the committee. If the will of the committee is to allow motions to come off the floor with those changes, then I guess the point is moot, but I think we've missed a step in Standing Order 52.

The Chair: Yeah. On advisement from the clerk, we're still within bounds with the way we've proceeded at this point. There's practice, and there's a bit of a grey area; let's put it quite frankly, folks. We already had it from the floor. We accepted a revised number. We voted on it. If the will of the committee is for me to go back to the start of the meeting and to ensure that everyone is keeping up to speed on the revised numbers that you all just voted on – there was no one opposed to the last three items that we did from the floor – I'm more than willing to have that conversation, but at this point maybe we should take the pause, to your point, MLA Sweet. Is everyone up to speed with taking motions from the floor? It's still allowed if the committee wishes that. We've already just voted into the record on three numbers. I said the number of what was originally presented. Another MLA proposed an alternate number to those, and we've already voted it into the record.

I'll put the question to the committee. Is everyone comfortable with taking motions from the floor as we have? The item that MLA Dyck has brought up has research connotations, which was allowed, again, by the memo that was put out in advance. So the question I would put to the committee: is everyone comfortable with taking motions from the floor at this time? All in favour? Those opposed? Okay. Just to make sure, why don't we do a count here, just to make sure we have all of that into the record? In the room, we have how many in favour? Throw your hands up. Four in favour. Online, we have how many in favour? Those opposed, just throw your hands up in the room here, too. And on the phone? So that would be four against; five for. We're taking motions from the floor.

Motion carried.

That should take care of the housekeeping items. Now to the next point. I apologize, guys. I'm new in the chair here, too, just working through this. I appreciate everyone's patience with the new chair working through these items as well this morning.

All right. Now we're all caught up. For those at home, this is going to be the best entertainment you've had on a Thursday morning at 8 o'clock. We currently have the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices motion that MLA Dyck has on the floor. Now that one is open for discussion, and where we were, catching up, was the reason for the back and forth. MLA Dyck had responded, and now we're back on that.

8:20

Ms Renaud: You know, I just wanted to make a quick comment. I believe what Member Dyck said was that one of the reasons for suggesting this motion was because of the large increases. Well, I think that the members opposite have had more time to look at the

budget and look at the rationale presented by the offices, but these are not big increases, and to my understanding they were explained completely both in the last meeting and in writing. I just wanted that on the record, just to counter some of the comments from Member Dyck.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Any more discussion?

Ms Sweet: Another point of clarity. Recognizing that we're going into budget season and that the budget needs to be drafted – this is the whole reason why we're here, making sure that these numbers are prepared and ready for the Finance minister to be able to do what he needs to do come February – we are already in mid-December. Recognizing that there will be a break, given Christmas, and then asking to have research come back what I would assume would be sometime by the end of January, because they're going to need time, then you're going to need another meeting to talk about the report that research is going to have. Like, this is not feasible, nor is it reasonable, I would say, to request that research do this when the budget submissions need to be done for the February budget.

I think had the government decided that they wanted this information prior, this should have been decided at the last meeting, that the committee had to allow fairness to our LAO staff to be able to do the work that the government is requesting to have happen. As I see it, unless the numbers are changing, the offices that are being requested to be reviewed actually are not asking for increases, and I'm not sure I understand why that would be. Again, being elected for nine years as well, this has never been practice. We have always been respectful of the independent offices in being able to set their budgets and to provide fairness and evidence as to why it is that they expect to have those budgets. Maybe there are increases, but the reality is that this is just outside of the practice of how we have been respectful of these independent officers in the past. So I'm not sure I understand, other than trying to push this off so that we can't get these numbers in in time for the upcoming budget.

Mr. Hunter: Well, first of all, Mr. Chair, there's no government on this side. There are government members, but we're all members of this committee, so there's nobody in government here.

Second of all, you know, whether or not it's happened in the past or not is actually moot. The truth is that we have a responsibility in this committee to make sure that the taxpayers are getting the best bang for the buck, so I think that Member Dyck's approach to this is prudent in that we should review through cross-jurisdictional analysis, which is done often – in most practices it's done – in order to be able to figure out whether or not we're comparable to other jurisdictions or not. I just think it's very prudent to do this at this point.

Now, in terms of being able to get the information, I think that Ms Sweet actually brings up a very important point, which is: can LAO staff get the information to us in time to be able to make this happen? I guess that's a question maybe for Nancy and her team: can LAO staff and research get this done in that time?

The Chair: Ms Robert, would you respond?

Ms Robert: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Hunter. Well, I mean, we'll obviously undertake to do the work that you're asking us to do if the committee decides to agree to this motion.

If I may, I would perhaps want to maybe manage some expectations in a task like this. You know, the roles of these different offices across the country may well be not the same. It may be difficult to do, as it were, an apples-to-apples comparison. So that is something that the

committee should be aware of. For instance, in Nova Scotia the Ombudsman also is responsible for child and youth advocacy. So, you know, if the research team was looking at Nova Scotia for a Child and Youth Advocate, they would have a pretty difficult time trying to carve that out.

The other thing is that I think the best approach might be to look at jurisdictions that are similar in size to us. For example, if we're looking at the Chief Electoral Officer's budget here compared to Ontario: Ontario has 124 MLAs; we have 87. Of course the budget is going to be different, right? Those are considerations that we will have to take into account when we're trying to do this and that you should be aware of when receiving a report like this from us. In terms of comparable roles, as I said when I first started, that may be difficult to pinpoint because these offices might have different roles across the country, but we will undertake to do it as best we can.

The other thing that I think is important to note is that the last annual reports that are published and released I think across the country – I've not looked – would be for the 2022-2023 fiscal year. That's the last report that our officers, you know, have published. That's two years older than what you're looking at in terms of a budget for '24-25. I mean, certainly, we could look at approved estimates for the '23-24 fiscal year. Again, that would be a year out.

I would also, I guess, draw your attention to – I just had a quick look, and there are some jurisdictions – B.C. comes to mind – where they often get supplemental funding throughout the year. The Chief Electoral Officer will for by-elections and things like that, so their approved budget for '23-24 might not be the end number.

You know, all that to say that we can undertake to do this to the best of our ability. We will get the information back to you when you need it. Anyway, I just wanted to sort of manage expectations a little bit, because this exercise might not be as straightforward as, say, comparing statutes, because every jurisdiction can incorporate whatever it wants into any of these roles.

Thanks.

The Chair: I had MLA Sinclair, MLA Dyck, and I'm not sure if anyone else had their hand up on this. No. Okay.

Mr. Sinclair.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, everybody. I just wanted to make, you know, a couple of comments and maybe a suggestion here. The first one is that whether the members who spoke up about this agree, these are large amounts. They are increases. We've all been elected to manage other people's money, not our own, very carefully, and we're talking about millions of dollars here. I think that's important to note, that every dollar is examined closely.

In terms of the comment, thank you very much, Nancy, for that. I wonder if it's possible that we look at some comparable provinces, like you mentioned, like B.C., Ontario, and Quebec, that are similar in size, that allows your guys' scope to be maybe a little more narrow and maybe a little bit more efficient timewise, if that is a concern, and then we leave it at the discretion of research services if they deem any other provinces or areas as relevant.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Dyck: I was just going to comment, too. Thank you for the comments just on scope. I don't know. This is a question for you: do we need to add scope into the motion, or is this just a suggestion if we do add scope or give suggestions on scope to you? Is this an amended motion, or is this just a suggestion for your research team in order to do the scope of maybe comparable provinces? I'm just curious on the process going forward.

The Chair: Right now it's your motion. We read it in.

Mr. Dyck: So it's my motion. You read it in.

The Chair: You have the ball; we're having discussion on the motion. So if you need to . . .

Mr. Dyck: I like my motion right now, but I'm just kind of curious on scope. If we do suggest a scope, is that just a suggestion that they take, or is this . . .

8:30

The Chair: Yes. Just for clarity, we're giving direction. You're not giving suggestions; you're giving direction as a committee, and then our group is going to take that direction.

Nancy – sure; we'll get you in there – then Renaud and then Shepherd. That is what I have.

Ms Robert: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Sorry. I'll just quickly try to respond as best I can. Of course, yes, whatever the committee wants, we will endeavour to do. I might suggest, if I may, that leaving the motion the way it is in terms of scope might be beneficial in that it'll allow our team the opportunity and the ability to look at jurisdictions that are as comparable as possible.

I know, Mr. Sinclair, you mentioned Quebec and Ontario. They're quite large compared to Alberta, so I'm not sure if they would be a good comparator or not. We haven't looked into any of this yet. I think B.C. probably would be. I think their population – and, certainly, they have the same number of MLAs that we have. In terms of the Chief Electoral Officer and the Ethics Commissioner: that would come into play, I would think. But, yes, again, whatever the committee wants, we will endeavour to do. That would be my advice.

Thank you.

The Chair: We had MLA Renaud and then MLA Shepherd.

Ms Renaud: Yeah. Actually, it's a point of clarification, and I'm not entirely sure that it's appropriate right now with this discussion, but I just have a question about the estimate process for this committee. I don't know. Maybe I can hold on to it until we're done this.

The Chair: Sure. We can come back to the estimate process. We'll do that after this discussion on the motion so that we get that sorted out first, and then we'll come back to that, MLA Renaud.

MLA Shepherd, then followed by Hunter.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I do appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion. You know, Mr. Sinclair talked about the need for every dollar. He said that every dollar is examined closely. He talked about the protection of public dollars as being appropriate scrutiny being levelled by the committee. I just want to note that members of this government do seem to be, shall we say, selective about which dollars they want to examine closely and which public dollars they want to protect.

We have here the officers of the Legislature, who are doing important work on behalf of the people and, we should note for a number of these officers, extremely important work holding the government to account. We know that a number of these officers are currently investigating errors of this government, questions from the Information and Privacy Commissioner, whose budget they just cut with very little discussion, no scrutiny or justification, using what I will say is a questionable process that goes beyond – certainly well beyond – the past practice of this committee.

This is a government that spent \$70 million on off-brand children's Tylenol, most of which never arrived, most of which will not arrive. Sorry. Am I still there?

The Chair: Yeah. We're still listening to you. I don't know how germane it is to the conversation, but you're still there. We can hear you.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, Mr. Chair, I'm speaking to the member's contention that this is about protecting public dollars and the scrutiny of public dollars. This is providing context on past practice and what members of this government have supported in terms of government spending. We are talking about scrutiny of public dollars here. The fact is, again: over \$70 million on this medication, most of which will never arrive, and of that which arrived, most will never be used.

I do take some exception that these members are suddenly very, very concerned about moderate increases on budgets that are well below the 7 and a half million dollars that the government just spent on questionable numbers, propaganda in support of an APP. That's 7 and a half million. That's more than some of these officers are spending in an entire year. Again, we have members that are, I would call this to some extent, grandstanding in choosing to say that these officers need to be scrutinized when these officers are very clearly doing the work. These officers have been incredibly diligent with their budgets.

Again, I've been on this committee for eight years, and I've watched these numbers go through. Yes, we are seeing some larger increases this year than we may have seen in previous years, but each of these officers, I think, provided very good justification for why that would be the case. They are increasing operations in their offices; they are hiring additional staff; they are working to provide better service to the people of Alberta.

Certainly, you know, if we want to go ahead with this cross-jurisdictional analysis, that's fine, but it's my hope, then, that we will see similar willingness to scrutinize this government's own spending, that these members will hold their own government to account in the same way that they seem to be determined to hold the officers, who are in the process of holding their government to account, to account.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yeah. Thank you, MLA Shepherd.
I have Hunter and then Sinclair.

Mr. Hunter: Yeah. I just wanted to indicate, Mr. Chair, that in the motion it specifically says, "officers in select Canadian jurisdictions," which I think gives good latitude to research to be able to figure out which are the right jurisdictions to be able to do that cross-jurisdictional analysis. I am very happy with the motion, as I stated earlier. I think that it's reasonable, and I'd like to thank Member Dyck for being able to bring it forward.

The Chair: Thank you.
MLA Sinclair.

Mr. Sinclair: I'm actually good, Mr. Chair. I'm okay. Thank you.

The Chair: MLA Sweet, and then I have Shepherd.

Ms Sweet: Yeah. I'm just wondering, just for a point of clarity again: if we were to backtrack from the day that budget submissions need to be completed to today, what timeline would the LAO need to be able to achieve this so that we can still meet the budgetary

timeline cut-off as well as ensure that there's a committee meeting that can occur at that time?

The Chair: Yeah. From what we've seen so far, we'd still be within it, to your point, MLA Sweet. It is tight. Like, we would have to have this timely. What we can do is allow the clerk to come back, but so far we're not getting indications – we wouldn't miss the budget cycle. We would still be able to pull it in. But, again, the committee would have to be willing to meet in January. I mean, really, what you have to do is get it before the budget submissions.

Ms Sweet: I appreciate that, Mr. Chair. I guess, in fairness to staff – like, as elected members we have to meet when it needs to get done. I get that. Actually, I don't really think that that's part of the issue. The issue that I have is that we're being fair and reasonable with the staff to be able to achieve this outcome to make sure that we hit the budget. I actually think that there should be an accountability to this committee to make sure that these budgets are approved, whatever the committee's will is as to what the number would be, so that they make it into the budget.

If this misses the budget, this is a whole other – it's going back to: we need to talk about the estimate process and the fact that all this still has to get voted on at estimates and all of the other things. I want to make sure that we're being fair and that all of a sudden we're not expecting staff to be doing an exceptional amount of overtime to achieve an outcome that I'm not sure is actually going to change the numbers and/or achieve whatever outcome the member opposite is trying to achieve.

There are other ways that we can have accountability when it comes to budget numbers. It goes through the estimate process, and if the member opposite is concerned about being able to look at how those numbers are voted on and whether or not they can be amended at estimates and all of those processes, there is a secondary step that can occur as long as these numbers get into the budget. I would actually encourage the committee to really reflect on whether this is the mechanism to be able to achieve the outcome that is looked at or if there is a conversation that can happen prior to when the numbers can be submitted to the budget so that that conversation can still occur.

Then when you go into estimates and have to review the estimate process and have to vote on the actual numbers during estimates, if the member still has concerns about that process and whether or not these numbers actually achieve what the member feels should be achieved, then that is an opportunity to do that. But I would discourage the members from voting on this amendment without approving the numbers as they have been presented to the committee. Then if the information comes back, at least the numbers have been submitted into the budget and they live there for now, and if the members want to change those numbers during the estimate process, they can use the estimate process to do that.

8:40

The Chair: Just a point of clarity, I believe. Legislative offices are outside of the ministry offices, and that's why we have this committee in the first place, to come up with the budgets. So these would be the budgets that are submitted for the budget, the overall 2024 budget. That's my understanding on that.

Ms Sweet: We've got to approve the legislative offices' budgets, though, which would be inclusive.

The Chair: Correct. But it's this committee that makes that decision.

I think, to your point, your concerns are having the staff put in extra time. The overtime is what I'm hearing, that point. Then the other one is to make sure that it gets within the budget cycle itself.

I believe we're all in the same place on that. From what I've heard or seen the indications of, we wouldn't be missing the budget cycle based on the information. But they're very salient points, guys. Like, honestly, it's good to have this discussion to make sure we don't shoot ourselves in the foot.

To MLA Sweet's point, for what we're trying to obtain here of that scrutiny and making sure everyone is comfortable with the numbers, you are the folks that are responsible for these numbers that are submitted. But it is a salient point to make sure we have the timelines, and from what I'm seeing here and in going back and forth, it's still within those timelines. We wouldn't mess it up.

MLA Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to follow up on another point that was raised earlier about the specific term used in the motion here, "select Canadian jurisdictions." I do want to ask, I guess, how we determine which Canadian jurisdictions we want to include in this. Now, I ask this because we have seen past practice on reports under the previous iteration of this government, prior to the last election. I think in particular of the MacKinnon report, where the government looked at select Canadian jurisdictions in trying to assess overall spending on various aspects of health care. I can get very different results, depending on what I want to achieve, depending on which jurisdictions I choose to look at, and we certainly saw that to some extent, I think, in the past. We have seen some cherry-picking of data by the use of particular jurisdictions to try to get the outcome that the government at that time, I believe, wanted to achieve in terms of being able to declare that there was a need to make cuts or reductions in spending.

So I do ask . . .

The Chair: MLA Shepherd, I hesitate to interject for a sec, but it's not the government that's doing the research.

Mr. Shepherd: I understand that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We're asking the LAO offices . . .

Mr. Shepherd: I understand, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: If I can just finish here, sir. The motion as read – I'm not sure if you're seeing it on your screen there – is basically giving the LAO offices that discretion, that latitude to try to pick the right ones, back to Nancy's point.

I'll let you continue. I just wanted to have that point of clarity there for you, sir.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate your interjection and clarification.

What I am saying, Mr. Chair, is that it's important to think about which jurisdictions we're including. Perhaps we want to give some guidance, then, in what we want to achieve here in terms of when we say, "select Canadian jurisdictions." I guess: what criteria? Perhaps I'd be happy to hear from staff at the table on how they might make that decision.

If I can just finish, I guess, explaining why I think this is important. Overall budget for spending is a broad measurement, I'd say to some extent at times even a crude measurement, of whether or not we have effective spending. There are a lot of different things you're going to look at. You're going to look at, I suppose: what is the size of the province? What is the size of the population? What are the demographics? Those are all things that could impact what an appropriate level of spending may be for a particular office.

Let's talk, for example, about the Child and Youth Advocate. The Child and Youth Advocate: their job is to advocate for children and

youth in a province. You know, a province may be a large province, and maybe it has a higher population of older persons. They may be able to have a smaller budget for the CYA because there are simply fewer youth. Another province may be of comparable size or, you know, even on a per capita level but may have a higher number of youth. We also need to consider that, for example, with the Child and Youth Advocate: they are specifically often advocating for children that are high risk or high needs or having challenges, and that can differ from province to province, depending on the demographics, the number of youth but also on other factors in the population.

We know that, for example, the Child and Youth Advocate in Alberta is focused a lot on Indigenous children and youth who are in care and other things. Now, that may differ from province to province, and therefore that may make a difference in the size of budget that is appropriate. Again, perhaps we can hear from, I guess, the staff at the table: are those factors that are going to be considered in how we choose which jurisdictions we are going to compare ourselves to?

Another example, the Information and Privacy Commissioner: their job, of course, is to handle privacy legislation and all the implications of that. Privacy legislation will differ from province to province. Again, are we going to be looking at whether or not the workloads and responsibilities of each individual jurisdiction that we look at are comparable to the situation here in Alberta? We know that they may have different levels of investigations and other things that they need to carry out. Again, we know that there are currently quite a few investigations, as we heard from them at the last meeting, into the current situation in the FOIP system and the practices of the current government. Are the workloads going to be the same there?

In terms of what is the state of their freedom of information system in these individual provinces: are they all at the same state? I know that we have seen that the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta has called for a review, a number of changes, a number of changes to privacy legislation. That may impact the level of work they do and how they need to do it. The Information and Privacy Commissioner talked about their work now to prepare Alberta for the incorporation of AI and other new technologies, that being a big part of health innovation here in the province of Alberta. Is that going to be the same in each of the other jurisdictions that we're looking at?

The Chair: MLA Shepherd, did we want to . . .

Mr. Shepherd: Again, I just want to note that this – pardon me, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: It's a little awkward with the videoconference here, but Nancy is just itching to respond to you.

Mr. Shepherd: Absolutely. Having made my point, perhaps I'll take a moment, then, and allow Ms Robert to respond.

The Chair: Thanks, MLA Shepherd.
Nancy.

Ms Robert: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I guess what I will say is that I'll reiterate what I said when I first spoke about this, that it's going to be very difficult to do an apples-to-apples comparison, you know, and we are limited by time. That's the other thing. The research team just found out about this, so we haven't looked into really anything much at all. I would say that as a starting point they would be looking at provinces that have the office that you're wishing a comparison on and, next, that they are of a similar size in terms of population.

From there I'm not sure where we'll go. As I said, you know, the roles, to Mr. Shepherd's point and to just generally the point: jurisdictions have complete authority to decide what they want these officers to be responsible for, and they are not expected to be aligned across the country. At the risk of repeating myself, it's not an exercise that's going to be an apples-to-apples comparison.

The Chair: Okay. With that, we've had lots of discussion. We've got the Child and Youth Advocate next.

I see MLA Shepherd's hand up, but I'm going to go back to the mover of the motion. We do have a motion on the floor. The mover of the motion, after hearing all of the debate going back and forth, are you still comfortable with your motion, having it as is?

Mr. Dyck: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. At that point, folks, just in fairness for timeliness, to make sure that we can move on to the next items as well, I'm prepared to call the question on the motion on the floor. All those in favour? Okay. All those opposed? Hearing none here, on the phone or the videoconference? You can tell my age again. On the videoconference, all those in favour? Those opposed? One against.

Motion carried.

Now, we have another item for the Child and Youth Advocate.

Oh. Sorry. I apologize, Marie. We did have some discussion. MLA Renaud had her hand up to talk about estimates and the process. I think that was the item.

Ms Renaud: Yeah, I did. My comment is that we might not realize it, but actually the public is paying attention. The purpose of the work that we do here in committee is to provide oversight to look at budgets and to look at budget estimates, but the point here is that these estimates have to be presented in advance so that we actually have time to look at the numbers, to look at the difference, to ask the questions. Not only is what happened here this morning really out of step with the standing orders or normal practices of the committee; I think it's out of step with the practice of budget estimates. You know, it's not fair for people watching. They probably have no idea what's going on with new numbers, have had zero time to examine the numbers, even to ask questions about the difference. For that reason – I don't know – I'd actually like to move a motion on the floor here.

Are you ready?

8:50

The Chair: I was born ready.

Ms Renaud: Okay. For us to consider the remaining estimates so that the offices of the Auditor General, the Child and Youth Advocate, the Chief Electoral Officer, and the Ethics Commissioner be invited to a committee meeting to allow for clarifying questions on their budgets.

The Chair: Okay. Is there a specific meeting? I would assume it would be for . . .

Ms Renaud: Sure. We can call a specific meeting. I think because, well, there are now budget reductions, I would like to have some time to look at those reductions, come up with, you know: how were those numbers determined, and how will those decreases impact the work of these offices?

The Chair: Okay. Just to be clear, there were none opposed to the motions of approving those budgets. So your motion would be to now bring back in the officers to again talk about their budgets that we've already approved.

Ms Renaud: To talk about the new budget estimates . . .

The Chair: Yeah. I'm not understanding.

Ms Renaud: . . . that we've all voted on already.
Sorry. Go ahead.

Ms Rempel: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I didn't catch that word for word. Are you talking about the three that have passed with amendments or the four that have no number yet?

Ms Renaud: Right.

Ms Rempel: So the Information and Privacy Commissioner, Ombudsman, and Public Interest Commissioner?

Ms Renaud: Let's hang on one second here. I'm looking at the offices of the Auditor General, Child and Youth Advocate, chief electoral, and ethics be invited to a committee to allow us to ask questions.

The Chair: Okay. So those ones: we haven't voted on budgets. That's the motion we just passed to do research. Okay. That was the clarity I needed, because if it was bringing back the other ones that we had already voted on, then that would make it awkward. Okay.

Maybe, MLA Renaud, just read it back in again. We'll catch up here. Apparently the caffeine is taking a little while for me, too. I apologize.

Ms Renaud: Okay. I want to move a motion that the committee will consider the remaining budgets and that the offices of the Auditor General, Child and Youth Advocate, Chief Electoral Officer, and Ethics Commissioner be invited to a committee meeting to allow for clarifying questions on budget.

The Chair: Okay. Do we have it on the – oh, there we go.

MLA Renaud, do you want to take a look at the screen and make sure we're capturing your thoughts?

Ms Renaud: One second. Yeah. Okay.

The Chair: All right. Does that capture, Marie? Okay.

We have a motion on the floor. We'll open up for discussion. MLA Sweet.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I mean, I support this motion. I think, again going back to the member's questions around what happens in crossjurisdictional analysis, what their budgets look like, and what other jurisdictions are doing, I bet you that if we ask the lovely independent officers whether or not they know that information and if they can provide us with some information around why their budget exists the way that it does in comparison to other jurisdictions, you might just get the answer. Having them come and present that and allowing the member to ask the questions of our independent officers, who are the experts in their area: I believe this may achieve that outcome.

The Chair: I appreciate that. I didn't mean to giggle at your comments. You just made me laugh because it was humorous.

Mr. Hunter: I need just clarity maybe from Ms Renaud. Is she asking us to do this prior to doing the crossjurisdictional analysis?

Ms Renaud: Why couldn't you do both at the same time? I mean, they're not going to stop their work for us to have a meeting.

Mr. Hunter: Again, just looking for clarity, Mr. Chair, through you. Is this in order to be able to just provide us with the independent

officers' take on that research that's been done? I'm just trying to understand what the intent of it is.

The Chair: MLA Renaud, do you want to respond to . . .

Ms Renaud: Not really.

The Chair: Okay. MLA Long.

Mr. Long: I appreciate the discussion on this. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've received all the clarification from the officers that I need about what they're presenting. For me, I simply want to see what other jurisdictions are doing. I can't think of any more questions today that I have for those officers, personally. That's my take.

The Chair: MLA Shepherd – sorry; I missed you on the screen there – you're up.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to speak in favour of this motion. We have seen members proceed with cuts to the budgets of three officers so far this morning when I did not really see any significant questioning of those officers about that or sort of, frankly, any discussion or justification of the same.

If the members are considering making further cuts, and it certainly seems that – based on the actions we've seen taken today and now the crossjurisdictional analysis and the way we've seen that tool used in the past by members of this government, it suggests to me they are, so it seems to make sense to me, really; let's bring these officers to the table. Let's have the opportunity to speak with them and hear from them about these proposed budgets, then. I think it's a reasonable part of this process. You know, it does not have to be at the same time as the crossjurisdictional analysis. If this is of this much importance for these members, and given the significant impact this could have on important work of these officers, we could certainly make time, then, once the crossjurisdictional analysis has been received, to schedule a meeting of this committee to speak with these officers about that crossjurisdictional analysis.

I am uncomfortable with members, I guess, entertaining further cuts to officers' budgets without having the diligence of having those officers in the room to be able to speak to their work and the impact it could have on – particularly, as I will say again, as some of these officers are currently conducting investigations into actions of this government.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I see MLA Eremenko. Hopefully, I got it right this time.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah. I suppose I just want to add my voice in support of this motion from Member Renaud. It's been made clear that a crossjurisdictional review, selective as it may be, would still be imperfect at best. I think it is absolutely incumbent on us to hear from the people who know those files better than any of us do here combined, to be able to speak to those comparisons because they are going to be, as the researcher there mentioned, not apples-to-apples comparisons. Therefore, making sure that the information that is provided is, in fact, pertinent and relevant to this conversation around budget estimates for the year ahead – I think it behooves us to hear from those officers to identify how the mandates may differ, how they may be the same, and whether or not those budget comparisons are, in fact, accurate and fairly representative of the work here that we're doing in Alberta and in other places. It was an important step to discuss initially the budget estimates with the officers. I don't see why, if

we are considering additional budget changes, that would not be required once more.

That's all I have to say. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, MLA Eremenko.

MLA Hunter, you have the last word.

Mr. Hunter: I just wanted to say, look, we've just heard the members opposite many times say that we're running out of time. I'm sure that this is a situation where once again bringing them in – we've heard already the value proposition from each of those independent officers. Their value proposition was X amount. Then we're going to hear from counsel that will provide us with a crossjurisdictional analysis. Nancy has already stated to us that it's going to be difficult, but I have full confidence in their professionalism and their capabilities of being able to provide us with some good data and good information.

I think at that point it's our responsibility as the committee to be able to make the determination about what those budgets should be. That's what we're elected to do in this committee. We've already heard the value proposition from those independent officers, so I'm not sure that I will be supporting this, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. With that, I'm prepared to call the question on the motion. All those in favour, please say aye. All those opposed? We'll go to the videoconference line. All those in favour, please say aye. Those opposed.

The motion is defeated.

9:00

Ms Sweet: Mr. Chair, can I have a recorded vote, please?

The Chair: Oh, absolutely. We'll have a recorded vote instead of calling a division and ringing the bells. Those in favour of the motion. Oh, here we go. Sorry. I have a script. MLA Sweet is giggling here; she's the old hand.

A recorded vote has been requested. The process to record a vote in the committee is similar to the process for the division of the House. I'll first ask those in the room in favour of the motion to raise their hands. The committee clerk will call the names of those who raise their hands and record the vote. We will then follow the same process for those who are against the motion. If you wish to abstain, don't flinch; don't raise your hand; don't speak. Then we'll go to the videoconference participants right after that same process. Those in favour, please raise your hands, in the room.

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have Ms Sweet and Ms Renaud in favour of the motion.

The Chair: Those opposed to the motion, just raise your hand. There you go.

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have Mr. Long, Mr. Sinclair, the hon. Mr. Hunter, and Mr. Dyck against the motion.

The Chair: We'll go to the videoconference. Those in favour, raise your hands, your virtual hands, I guess. However we do that.

Ms Robert: Call their name, and they will say aye or no.

The Chair: Oh, that works even better. We'll call your names. The clerk will do that so I don't mess up anyone's name.

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I see Ms Eremenko.

Member Eremenko: Yes.

Ms Rempel: Voting in favour or against? In favour?

Member Eremenko: Sorry. In favour.

Ms Rempel: Thank you.
I see Mr. Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: In favour.

Ms Rempel: Thank you.
I see Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Opposed.

Ms Rempel: Okay. Mr. Chair, there are four votes in favour of the motion and five against.

The Chair:

The motion is defeated.

I'm not sure. MLA Shepherd, did you have a question, or was that a residual virtual hand?

Mr. Shepherd: I wish to make a motion once this motion has been dealt with, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead with your motion, Mr. Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to make a motion that – and pardon me. I just have this written down here just to make sure I'm reading this correctly. I would like to move that the mover of the amended motions for the budgets of the Ombudsman, the Public Interest Commissioner, and the Information and Privacy Commissioner provide to the committee the total amounts of the reductions for each officer and how those numbers were determined. I'll give them a moment to capture that, and then I would be happy to speak to the motion, Mr. Chair.

Mr. van Dijken: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair: A point of order has been called.
Go ahead, MLA van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: I'm going to cite 23(c). We've made decisions on these items, and the needless repetition to raise matters that have been decided on during this committee meeting already. I believe that there was opportunity for discussion at the time, and I see no reason why we keep going back to what has already been decided.

The Chair: MLA van Dijken, I tend to be inclined to go with you on this. I've also sought the guidance of the clerk. We have in fact voted that the matters of hand on those items were carried. We didn't have a recorded vote, but I can assure you that from the chair's eye there were none opposed to those motions. They were in favour by the committee; they were passed.

With that, what I would like to do, folks, is move on to the second order of business for the meeting today. We'll consider these items closed at this point, and we'll carry on with the agenda. The review of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate annual report: maybe what we'll do is give five minutes for those folks to come into the room. Everyone grab a coffee, and we'll see you back here at 9:10.

[The committee adjourned from 9:05 a.m. to 9:10 a.m.]

The Chair: All right, members. Let's get back at it. Our next item of business: we have the review of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate annual report. Our mandate was to review the report and outline them by Government Motion 18, which was agreed by Assembly on December 5, 2023. We're required to report back to the Assembly within 90 days of the referral. This committee has

been assigned the annual responsibility for several years now. Since we have a new legislative committee, members: does anyone have any questions regarding the mandate?

Seeing none, presentation by the Child and Youth Advocate, Ms Terri Pelton. Welcome back again. You've joined us here today, and you have 20 minutes or more or whatever you need. We're not going to put you on the timer. I'll turn the floor over to you to continue with your presentation to the members. Did you want us to do introductions, or are you comfortable with everyone in the room?

Ms Pelton: I think we're familiar with everybody in the room. We were just here two weeks ago. Thank you.

The Chair: Yeah. Please proceed. Thank you.

Ms Pelton: Good morning, Chairperson Getson and committee members. Thank you for taking the time to meet with us today. With me is Bolu Idowu, our director of strategic support. As we begin, I'd like to respectfully acknowledge that we are on Treaty 6 territory and that the work of my office extends throughout the province on the traditional territory of the many Indigenous peoples of treaties 6, 7, and 8 and the Métis settlements and the Métis Nation of Alberta.

When we last appeared before the committee on December 1, we presented our annual report, business plan, and budget estimates. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak more in depth about some of the work we're doing to advocate for young people. Given that we met very recently, I'll keep my comments short. However, I'm happy to answer any questions afterwards. Today I'll review the core functions of our office and some statistics from our work over the past year, highlight some of the positive work accomplished on our strategic priorities, share some of the critical issues affecting young people, and provide an overview of our recommendations and our new recommendations evaluation framework.

Our role is to represent the rights, interests, and viewpoints of young people. We do this through providing advocacy and legal representation to children and youth, engaging with young people, community stakeholders, and decision-makers, investigating the serious injuries and deaths of young people who meet the criteria for an investigative review, and providing advice and recommendations to government on issues that affect young people. Our mission is to stand up for young people, and everything we do connects back to this core focus. As we carry out our work, we do so with the goal of fulfilling our vision that young people in Alberta succeed in their lives and in their communities.

The Chair: Are you able to carry on, Terri, without it, or do you need the presentation?

Ms Pelton: Sure. Yeah, I can. The numbers are a little bit – but we sent the package, so they're in your packages.

By the numbers our unwavering commitment to children and youth is reflected in the number of young people who reach out to us for help and in our ongoing work to raise concerns about the issues that affect them. Over the past year we completed over 3,600 intakes. Over 1,400 young people worked with an advocate, and over 3,000 worked with a lawyer. In total we served over 4,400 children and youth by providing them with an advocate or a lawyer, of whom around 60 per cent were Indigenous. We also released public investigative reviews examining the circumstances of 33 young people who had passed away and made three new recommendations to government.

Our 2020 to 2025 strategic plan outlines three priorities that help guide our work. While each is distinct, the work to achieve them is

integrated throughout our office. They are aligned with our mission and vision and reflected within our staff performance plans to ensure that we are working collectively to advance them. Our first strategic priority is that we are guided by both individual and collective rights. We believe it's important that young people know what rights they have, both as individuals and as members of larger groups that they may belong to such as the rights specific to Indigenous peoples. We've worked hard to expand our understanding of how these rights can be used together to have a positive impact. Through our engagement work we're learning how collective rights can support a young person in their community while at the same time ensuring their individual rights are honoured and respected.

Over the past year steps we took to move this strategic priority forward included welcoming a knowledge keeper to our team; participating in land-based learnings, sweats, smudging, a pipe ceremony, and coming together in circle; having almost half of our staff complete omanitew training, which helps service providers learn more about colonization and the transmission of intergenerational trauma while deepening their understanding of the importance of language, ceremony, and Indigenous world views; beginning work on our ceremonial room, where we will soon be able to gather and learn from Indigenous elders, knowledge keepers, and community members.

Our second strategic priority is that we are a model of youth participation. Young people benefit when their voices are heard and their perspectives are considered. This is particularly critical for those involved in the child intervention and youth justice systems, where decisions that are made about them have the potential to profoundly impact their lives.

We've recently dedicated more resources to youth engagement, and as a result, we've seen a large increase in the number of young people interested in being involved in the work of our office. We have a vibrant and engaged youth council, who over the past year participated in our Legal Representation for Children and Youth Conference, took part in land-based learning opportunities with our knowledge keeper, and completed a collaborative art project, which is the cover of this year's annual report. They offer valuable insights into issues from a youth perspective, providing input on our reports, consulting with children's services, and advocating on issues affecting Indigenous, Black, and other racialized young people in government systems. I'm pleased they are so meaningfully involved in our work, and I hope you have the opportunity to read the interviews with two of our council members on pages 22 and 23 of the annual report.

Our third strategic priority is that we are meaningfully involved with communities. The communities in which young people belong play a vital role in their lives. Through building meaningful relationships with these communities, we can advocate more effectively and enhance the capacity of others to do the same. Over the past year this work included participating in 155 community engagement activities, which include presentations, workshops, booths and events; engaging with school communities through classroom presentations, teachers' conventions, and the School at the Legislature; connecting with diverse groups, including the 2SLGBTQ-plus community and the disability community; and holding a province-wide art contest to help celebrate National Child Day and to help children and youth learn about their rights. Throughout today's presentation we've showcased some of the artwork we've received, and it's also featured in our annual report.

Many critical issues affecting young people are reflected in both our advocacy and investigative work and our recommendations to government. This year through our recommendations we called on government to address service gaps for children and youth with complex needs and to help Indigenous young people connect with

their cultures and communities in ways that are meaningful to them. We also know that many young people in the child intervention and youth justice systems have experienced early childhood trauma, which may cause them to struggle with mental health problems and turn to substance use. We must ensure they have early access to robust mental health supports and a full spectrum of substance treatment options. I continue to call on government to develop a youth-specific opioid and substance use strategy to address this urgent need.

Young people also need appropriate supports as they transition to adulthood. This is a theme that is reflected in a number of our recommendations and something we continue to hear about directly from young people. In recent years Alberta reduced the age of eligibility to receive financial transitional support from 24 to 22. However, we're now seeing other provinces increase their age of eligibility such as British Columbia, which recently increased the age to 27. While Alberta is a leader in providing postsecondary support for young people through the advancing futures bursary program and we've recently seen the rollout of the new transition to adulthood program, we cannot overlook the unique challenges young people with child intervention involvement experience as they get older. We must do more to help those who have spent much of their young lives struggling with mental health and addictions, moving between placements, and disconnected from their families, cultures, and communities. Their paths have not been easy, and we need to support them as they transition to adulthood so they can have the brightest possible futures.

We make recommendations to improve services and supports for young people. Recommendations are developed to be specific enough that progress can be evaluated yet not so prescriptive as to direct the practice of public bodies. Based on information provided by the public body, we determine whether recommendations are meeting the intended outcome or whether further action is required. Of the 31 recommendations that were evaluated this past year, four were met, two were closed, and 25 are ongoing. We're pleased when our recommendations are accepted and implemented as they are intended to improve the experiences for young people in child-serving systems. I'd like to share examples of three recommendations evaluated in '22-2023: one met, one ongoing, and one closed.

9:20

In March 2021 we recommended to the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General that when no-contact conditions are imposed, they should give clear information to young people and their caregivers so they know how to change or remove these conditions. I'd like to thank the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services for their work to meet this recommendation. We've developed strong relationships with these ministries, and their commitment is a testament to the positive change we can create for young people when we come together.

An example of an ongoing recommendation comes from our special report on youth opioid use in Alberta, which was released in June 2021. We recommended that the government develop and support the implementation of a youth-specific opioid and substance use strategy. Since then, we've seen some promising steps taken to improve services and supports to young people, including expanded mental health services and the virtual opioid dependency program. However, an alarming number of young people are still dying from opioids and substance use. Young people have distinct needs because of their developmental stage, and this must be considered when providing them services and supports. I'll continue to call on government to implement a youth-specific strategy to address this crisis so we can hopefully reduce the number of young lives lost.

Finally, I'll share an example of a recommendation that was closed. In September 2019 we recommended that the ministry of children's services should ensure that there is a process for ongoing evaluation of how policy changes, assessment tools, and practice frameworks are being integrated into day-to-day and casework practice. The ministry has introduced promising policies and tools, but we continue to see gaps when it comes to integrating them into practice and evaluating effectiveness. In March 2022 the ministry indicated that they considered the recommendation met and would not be providing further updates. However, the information we had received was inadequate to determine whether the actions taken met the intent of the recommendation; therefore, the recommendation was closed at its last evaluated status of some progress.

Since April we've experienced a renewed sense of collaboration with the Ministry of Children and Family Services. I've met with both the deputy and the minister, and moving forward, my understanding is that they will not be assessing a recommendation as met without consultation with my office, so I'm hopeful we will not see a closed recommendation that is unmet this current fiscal year or going forward. We all want what is best for young people, and we recognize that in order to create change within systems, we must work together and remain engaged in finding an agreeable outcome that meets the intent of the recommendation.

This year we developed and finalized a new framework to guide our evaluation of recommendations. Recommendations are evaluated based on four key principles: balance, accountability, integrity, and collaboration. They are informed by research, findings from our investigative reviews, and conversations with public bodies and are followed by a robust evaluation process to measure responses against expected outcomes, ensuring accountability and transparency. Built into the framework are ongoing conversations and collaboration with ministries to ensure they're on the right track and that we're on the same page in what needs to happen to meet the expected outcomes. Recommendations are evaluated once a year, and their progress status is posted on our website. They will continue to be evaluated until they are deemed met or unmet. You can view the new framework in its entirety in appendix C of the annual report.

As we move forward, we'll continue our advocacy work on the significant issues facing the children and youth we serve. Over the past year we've met with a number of young people with disabilities as well as their families, caregivers, and service providers to learn about their experiences in the child intervention and youth justice systems. We are currently finalizing a special report that will share what we heard and what could be done to improve the circumstances of this particularly vulnerable group. I anticipate this report will be released early in the new year. We'll continue to pay close attention to the systemic issues impacting young people, including opioid and substance use, suicide, transitioning to adulthood, housing and placement concerns, and the overinvolvement of systems in the lives of Indigenous young people.

As I've said today, I'm optimistic about the positive relationships we've developed with the ministries and the increased collaboration we're seeing on the recommendations, and I'm hopeful this trajectory will continue. Finding solutions may sometimes be challenging, but when we keep young people as our core focus, together we can make a meaningful difference in their lives.

As we close, I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize my staff for the outstanding work they do every day. Advocacy is a passion and a calling, and I'm grateful for their dedication and commitment to making positive impact for young people, families, and communities across Alberta.

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us today. I'm now happy to answer any questions.

The Chair: Thank you for the presentation, Ms Pelton. MLA Hunter, you just caught my eye.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for being here today and providing this report. I just have a couple of questions. I'm just trying to understand when it states, "Placement of young people who died while receiving child intervention services," and then it goes through where they were. Eighteen were in independent living. It goes down and it says that two of those who died were in unknown care. Is that homeless, or what would you describe that as?

Ms Pelton: It could be homeless. It could be that they – what page of the report are you on, please?

Mr. Hunter: I just have a summary.

Ms Pelton: Oh. It'll just take me a minute. It usually means that they may be homeless. They may be AWOL or have left their placement without permission. Sometimes those ones are over 18, and we don't know where they are. So there are a number of reasons why they might be unknown.

Mr. Hunter: Then the other part that I just wanted to know, for clarity if I could, Mr. Chair, for the follow-up: it also says that of those who died or had serious injuries, 76 per cent were Indigenous, 18 per cent non-Indigenous, and then 6 per cent unknown. Again, I'd like to understand what that unknown would be.

Ms Pelton: That's when caseworkers haven't entered their racial origin in the child welfare system, or we've been unable to determine what their racial origin is.

Mr. Hunter: Six per cent: is that normal, or is that outside of the – do we normally have an unknown, like, a percentage unknown?

Ms Pelton: Yes.

Mr. Hunter: Okay. And then I guess the last point is that 76 per cent were Indigenous. Do you have three-quarters of your staff that are Indigenous?

Ms Pelton: No, I don't. I'd like to say that I do.

Mr. Hunter: What percentage is it?

The Chair: MLA, we'll just go back and forth. We do have MLA Shepherd as well. Do you have a bunch of questions, or how would you want to do that?

Mr. Hunter: That was my last.

The Chair: That was the last. Okay. I'll let you proceed, then. Sorry.

Mr. Hunter: What percentage?

Ms Pelton: I don't know the percentage. I did a count in my head. I think we have about 12 of 70, and our current recruitment ads always indicate a preference for Indigenous, that they're Indigenous. It's a challenge recruiting Indigenous staff, but, like, for sure, our Indigenous engagement staff are all Indigenous. I think it's about four of our advocates and about four of our investigators.

The Chair: Perfect. I see MLA Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ms Pelton, for joining us again. I appreciate your presentation and the opportunity to ask some further questions about your report. I did

note and I'm glad to hear that you feel there is a renewed sense of collaboration with children's services such that they have agreed now that they will not be closing any recommendations until they've consulted with your office. That is a good sign of progress, I think, on what had been identified as a bit of an issue.

On that, I am curious, though. A lot of your recommendations that you're providing are addressed to different ministries. We recognize that impacts on youth are not just in children's services but across a number of the ministries, so Health, Justice, community and social services. In that sense, we don't have any single ministry, really, that's taking the lead or really being held accountable for achieving the recommendations or delays in meeting them. Given that, you know, you have this collaborative relationship with children's services but not necessarily with the others, I mean, do you feel that, I guess, you having to deal with each ministry individually on their separate recommendations is the most effective way of dealing with your recommendations?

Ms Pelton: I think it is. I only really spoke to children's services and Justice, but I've reached out to the ministers of all the child-serving ministries and have received responses that they're interested in meeting with me. And my senior staff meet with their senior staff regularly in the development of a recommendation and in the evaluation. So there is ongoing contact with those seven child-serving ministries.

9:30

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you.
May I follow up, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Absolutely, MLA.

Mr. Shepherd: I know that in some other respects, you know, when I talk with folks, for example, who work with folks that are street involved, say, in Edmonton-City Centre, some of those organizations have seen great value in crossministerial collaboration, and they have seen in the past some efforts made to bring ministries together to work together on specific issues. I guess, in your view, would there be any value in trying to move towards that sort of an approach, whether that's a specific ministry taking lead on addressing recommendations and then working on that crossministry collaboration or just trying to build a bit more of a collective table or collaborative model?

Ms Pelton: Oh, absolutely. The opioid report is a crossministry recommendation. Health has taken the lead on that, or I guess it would be Mental Health and Addiction now. I believe that when there is collaboration amongst those child-serving bodies, it is better for young people.

Mr. Shepherd: Excellent. Thank you.

The Chair: MLA Sinclair.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much for the presentation. It's nice to see you guys again today. I just have a question and then maybe just a comment regarding the hon. Mr. Hunter's question about the number of Indigenous people you guys have employed with you.

My question. I'm deeply saddened to read that of the 88 notifications your office received in '22-23, 67 children and young people, which is 76 per cent, were Indigenous, were injured or died last year. If you could maybe explain briefly how your office can explain this high number of death increases in this demographic.

Then more to the point of my colleague's question is: you know, 76 per cent of the kids that were injured or died were Indigenous, but my other colleague here just gave me the math on your rough

estimate, and 17 per cent is roughly how many Indigenous people you have employed in your ministry. I don't mean this in a negative way. I think I speak to this quite frequently straight across the board, but I think that just because this one is so disproportionately affected, it's more important that we examine our hiring practices, possibly. You know, if you could speak to that, maybe on what measures you're taking so that when this number comes back, I would love to see the numbers go in a different direction.

I understand it's not perfect and it's difficult, but I would very much just like to hear what the ideas are so that when we hear about the percentages of people affected that are Indigenous – it's very difficult for me to explain how important it is that there is a distrust often with a lot of this. A big way of overcoming that is having people that look like you and feel like you, or if they have lived experience, which I think is not spoken about enough in terms of the way we examine maybe our hiring practices. I don't mean to get off board here with you. I'm just curious if you have a strategy or something like that to be able to push that number a little bit more in the other direction.

Thank you so much for all the work you guys do. I understand it's incredibly upsetting lots of times and tough days.

Thank you.

Ms Pelton: I don't think we can talk enough about intergenerational trauma and how young people that come from families where they've been impacted by residential schools and colonization are still recovering. Our knowledge keeper tells me it's a process. It's going to take a long time. We're just starting.

What we are doing is – certainly, every competition where we hire staff, we have a preference for Indigenous people. Then those that work with us: I wish it was so that I had 76 per cent of my staff or even 60 per cent because it's 60 per cent that serve young people who are receiving advocacy or legal representation, the young people who are receiving daily services one to one. But I think the work that our knowledge keeper and our elders are doing with young people and with our staff to help them be more comfortable in ceremony and in talking about those things that have impacted them makes a difference. There's nobody at my office, I don't believe, who doesn't understand the impact of intergenerational trauma and why young people are in care.

The high number is also associated with the high number of children's services. Children's services, I think, now is at – well over 70 per cent of the young people they serve are Indigenous. Given that the children that we are involved with are involved with children's services, it makes sense. It doesn't make happy sense, but it makes sense that we would have a similar number. I've actually been surprised that the individual advocacy and LRCY numbers are lower than the investigations.

You ask: why do we think investigations of Indigenous people are so high? One of the pushes this year – and you'll see it in our recommendations – is that I don't believe the cultural plans and the connections that are being implemented are necessarily as meaningful as they should be. What we've seen in a number of the child death reviews we've done is that the cultural plans might talk about a child attending a powwow once a year or going to a class to make dream catchers. What I'd like to see – and I think you'll agree with me – is that they need to be more strongly connected to community, to their own people. They need to be in community; they need to be placed with family. The culture plans need to be made in conjunction with the young person and their community, not on this side of a desk. I think that if we can really focus on that strong need for these young people to be connected to who they are, I think we'll see improved outcomes. But if we are moving in a direction where those young people aren't being supported to be

connected to their family and community and their own identity, we'll continue to see a very sad trajectory.

The Chair: Do you have a follow-up, MLA Sinclair?

Mr. Sinclair: Yeah. I'll be brief if that's okay. I appreciate your answer, and I think the sincerity in what you guys do is real. I always just like to remind people that I hear this conversation so often about, you know – and I appreciate people having a genuine interest and a sincere amount of compassion for my people's culture and trying to understand it. Again, I would just really like people to put in real, practical measures to be able to try to find a way of recruiting more of our people. Having that way of connecting them to their community is by hiring people from their community.

No one is more aware of how difficult it is to find people for these positions. Again, we can talk at a different time if you'd like. I'd be happy to meet with you to discuss ways that we could, again, examine the human resources aspect of the hiring practices so that we can – I agree; obviously we want competency and qualifications, but again I really do believe that in a lot of areas like this lived experience needs to be measured in a way that's equitable to education. Obviously, you know, getting more people educated is tough.

I'm not taking that as a point of trying to jam something really hard into your department, just as something maybe to consider. I'd be happy to try and be a part of somebody that would advocate for a measure like that, again, just so we can see those numbers. We passed legislation on the land acknowledgement recently, which is amazing – and I'm so proud of it – but meaningful impact and change on these root causes of intergenerational trauma far exceeds any land acknowledgement that could ever be made, and if you hear from any Indigenous leaders, I believe they'd see the same.

I just wanted to mention that to you, and then, like I said, in a very positive way, I would like to be part of the solution here, not challenging you guys on your direction.

Thank you.

9:40

Ms Pelton: I don't think that I really answered all of your question in totality, so I'd be really happy to spend some time together and talk about what we can do. When we're hiring, we also reach out through Windspeaker and other Indigenous media. We also do – like, I'll connect with DFNA directors or if I know somebody on chief and council. We also try and get the message out to Indigenous communities that we're recruiting so that it's not just on the government website, that if you don't look there, you're not going to see it. We have been intentional in trying to get those competitions out to where they need to be.

The Chair: I have MLA Eremenko, followed by MLA Dyck. Go ahead, MLA Eremenko.

Member Eremenko: Thank you very much, and thank you, Ms Pelton, for joining us once again. I have a question in regard to the opioid crisis that we are dealing with and that you referenced in your presentation as well.

In appendix A of your annual report we have the list of the young people that lost their lives since October 1, 2021. I did a little bit of just some quick math here. From what I can see in those descriptions, 13 out of the 44 died from drug toxicity, and that's determined. Another five out of the 44 had a history of substance abuse. A number of the investigations – I'm sorry; I didn't actually count how many of those, but many are still under investigation. I would not be surprised if drug toxicity is found to be the cause of death for more of those children. We're easily looking at 50 per cent

or more of the young people who have lost their lives since October 1, 2021, as a result of drug toxicity.

You allude to this in your presentation, that it is a significant issue. I want to also note that in – excuse me one second; I just want to make sure I speak to this correctly – appendix D, where we're talking about notifications of death and serious injury that did not require a mandatory review, out of those, easily more than 10 would also report drug toxicity as the cause of death. This is an issue of epidemic proportions. We know that in our broad community, and we certainly see it amongst the people that you're trying to support.

I really struggle to see that the recommendation that was made in June 2021 to form "a panel, committee, or commission to develop and support implementation of a youth opioid and substance use strategy" has only made some progress. We're two and a half years later. The numbers are not changing. In fact, the numbers are getting significantly and incrementally worse. I'm just hoping that you can speak a little more, Ms Pelton, to the reasons that you've received from government on why this is taking so long and the reason for the delay. It's incredibly frustrating.

Thank you.

Ms Pelton: I think the focus is on adults, and it's because adults are dying at a disproportionate number as well. There has been some movement in terms of additional addictions facilities and recovery-oriented treatment. I don't know why there hasn't been an uptake on a youth-specific strategy. I believe strongly that we really need to focus on youth. They're at a different developmental stage. It's distinct; they don't have the same kind of understanding of consequences when they undertake drug use. I really think that it requires a spectrum of services from early intervention and prevention through to postrecovery supports.

We often see that young people who have been in addictions treatment get out of a residential facility, and they do well for a little while, and then they might go to a party. They don't have the same tolerance that they had before they stopped using, so it often results in a tragic outcome. I will continue to call on government to really look at what we can do for young people under the age of 25. They need different services and more intense, but we also have to start really young. These kids need to have education in elementary school about what drugs can do to harm them. Some of them are in homes where the drugs are being used, so it's not a surprise to them. It's really about being up front and honest and dealing with things in a very frank manner.

Member Eremenko: Thank you.

May I have a follow-up question?

The Chair: Yeah, absolutely.

Member Eremenko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's in regard, then – certainly related to mental health and addiction. We know that Mental Health and Addiction is a stand-alone ministry now and has been since the election in May. In your evaluation process is there room to adapt those recommendations? I would imagine that the recommendation was made in a period of time and that you wouldn't necessarily change the recommendation. But in the evaluation process and in that regular and iterative process of consultation with the ministry, how do you explicitly accommodate those ministerial changes, where once a recommendation was to the Ministry of Health – for example, in June 2021 there wasn't a Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction, a stand-alone ministry, but now there is. I'm just curious about where that kind of shift has been explicitly accommodated within your process.

Ms Pelton: The ministries have been good about letting us know where their parameters fall. They let us know that Mental Health

and Addiction is now responsible for this, and then we just carry on. Like, when we started this, Children and Family Services was human services. So it changes, and we just try to adapt and go along.

The Chair: MLA Dyck next.

And if anybody still wants to keep asking questions, Renaud, you're next, and then Sweet.

Mr. Dyck: Excellent. Thank you, Chair. Yeah. Thank you very much for coming, again. I appreciate the work that you guys are doing. As a young father there are always challenges to reading reports like this.

Yeah. There are many children that passed away, it sounds like, from various conditions – infections, complications, cancer – all really challenging things. I didn't see in the report how many children or youth were attributed to just the total number of children who have died based upon medical conditions. Can you provide some more information, just on how many of these deaths in this last year were due to medical conditions?

Ms Pelton: Certainly. For the period of this annual report 20 were medical deaths; 37 were accidental, and 21 of those were drug or alcohol related; 10 were suicides; there was one victim of violence; six were undetermined, so still waiting and – no; seven pending. The seven pending are the ones that we're waiting for, and the six undetermined: the ME has said that they don't know the cause.

Mr. Dyck: Can I have a follow-up, Chair?

The Chair: A follow-up. Yeah.

Mr. Dyck: Yeah. I remember you said that there's not too much we can do for the children necessarily if they are terminally ill, but what kind of process or follow-up – what services and supports does your office offer to the children who have various medical conditions, whether it's terminal or not?

Ms Pelton: We don't offer any services unless they are referred through individual advocacy. They also have to be receiving child intervention or youth justice services. Our mandate is limited to those young people. We could help advocate for them to receive services if they weren't receiving them. If a family member called and said, "You know what? Children's services or SCSS isn't helping us get the services we need to support our young person," then we would assign an advocate to work with that family to advocate for that with the system.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you.

The Chair: MLA Renaud.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. I just have a couple of questions around campus-based care. I'm just referring to page 15. When youth are in campus-based care, these are youth, obviously, that are in need of intensive supports. I note on page 15 there are 69. You know, 69 are in campus-based care. Of those 69, I would just like to know, I guess, if you could give us a sense of the work that the advocate is doing with those placed in campus-based care. Like, what is the scope? Is it just finding the placement? Is it supporting the youth in care? Is it helping with the transition? What does that look like?

9:50

Ms Pelton: It could be any number of things. If the advocacy issue that the young person – usually when they're in campus-based care, they're directing their advocacy supports. They might call us, and a common one is that they're not being connected to their community or family and they're being isolated or they've been isolated. So an

advocate would help them, would work with the casework team and with the facility to help get them that connection. Sometimes it's helping them move from the campus-based care to more family-based care. Sometimes young people are left in campus-based care too long, and they want to move to a family or they want to move somewhere closer to their community. It could be something as simple as – and I don't even want to say "simple" because these kids all have such complex needs – they're not getting their recreation fund. They want a bicycle, and nobody is paying any attention to that. So they will help elevate that voice to the decision-makers.

The Chair: A follow-up?

Ms Renaud: If I could just have a follow-up, yeah. I'm just wondering if you could just maybe expand on that. If you could describe for us, for the committee, just so that we understand the difference, the type of youth that are in this kind of care: what are the complexities or vulnerabilities that you are dealing with or that they're presenting with?

Ms Pelton: Kids in campus-based care are often the most complex young people that are involved with the system. They've been involved in street life. They have addictions, mental health problems, and sometimes what happens with this particular group is that some of them have cognitive disabilities. They have cognitive and mental health challenges, and they're really hard to serve because there isn't a system that is designed to really help those complex kids. I wouldn't want to say that they're the toughest, but they certainly are very challenging.

The Chair: MLA Sweet.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Indulge me a little bit if you can. I want to go back to the beginning of a child's journey and why it is that they end up needing services from children's services. I mean, the components of the reviews and the recommendations around children's deaths and services is an important conversation, but my belief, coming from working in children's services for a long time, is that the focus should be: how do we prevent kids from coming into care? I saw that one of your recommendations was being able to have a crossministerial group do a recommendation on that joint collaboration, so I'm curious as to sort of where that's at in the sense of being able to get your recommendations in a more global context around the social determinants of health.

We know that when the economy is not doing well, stressors in families increase, which then contributes to domestic violence, which contributes to quality of care for children. We know that when families can't access housing, people are not able to leave domestic violence or they don't have a safe place for their children to grow up. Daycares, access to schooling, access to health care, and having a family doctor and/or specialist: all of those social determinants of health, when wrapped around a family, create success, and I think that when we see continuous cuts to programs that support those sorts of things, that increases the stressors on families, which then contributes to the increase of children coming into care.

I'm looking at:

The Ministries of Health, Education, Children's Services, Community and Social Services and Justice and Solicitor General should develop and publicly report on a coordinated action plan to address service gaps for young people with complex needs while [long-term initiatives are being developed].

I would also say, in regard to how do we support families and young children coming into care, that it's one thing to address youth and how we ensure that youth are successful in transitioning, but if we can stop kids coming into care, then that down-the-river component

of having to have to address complex needs of use may decrease. I'm just wondering if you can explain sort of what that long-term initiative would look like, and is there an opportunity to maybe include: how do we prevent kids from coming into care?

Ms Pelton: That's a tough question, and I think it's been revisited for years. I really think that we have to start helping families and supporting them to keep their kids at home. One of the things that I believe is important is that when a family or a parent calls for help, they get the help they need, that they're not referred somewhere else, even if it's a matter of helping to walk them through the next steps.

I am concerned about the current process for how concerns are evaluated and when families are able to access services and supports from children's services. My understanding is that currently it's really focused on harm and not necessarily early intervention and protection. We're keeping a close eye on that because I do think that – I was also a child welfare worker for a long time. I agree that if you don't help families to be successful and give them what they need, you are going to end up with more kids in care, and when they come into care, they're going to be more complex. I agree a hundred per cent. I don't know what the long-term initiative is. I think all I can do is keep talking and identifying when a young person has those kinds of issues and elevating that in the reports.

We're changing how we're doing the reporting of child death and serious injury in this past year, so you'll see it in next year's annual report. In 2018 there were amendments to the Child and Youth Advocate Act after the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, which gave us the mandate that any open child welfare file or within two years if a young person died we had to do a public report. Prior to that, the advocate determined whether systemic issues were present and could release a report. With the very high numbers I really felt and continue to feel that it's important for the public to know the situations of all of the young people who are seriously injured or have died, so that raises the number of reports we're releasing.

In fact, in this year alone, since April 1, we've already received 66 notifications of death and serious injury. I would like to be at a place next year to release reports on all of those young people, not just the ones who had open child welfare involvement, because the ones that aren't being included are those young people over 20. They are considered to be systemic. They didn't have an open file within two years. We are really seeing an increase in the number of older young people dying.

The Chair: A follow-up?

Ms Sweet: Yeah, please. Thank you for that. Going down history lane a little bit and trying to speak to some of the concerns that were brought around the Indigenous engagement component. I mean, we're seeing a shift now with children's services, with the federal initiatives and what that partnership looks like. When I worked at children's services, we also had designated First Nations offices that were partnered with First Nations communities specifically, and workers were – that was our relationship. It was much easier to be able to ensure that the children and youth on my caseload were connected to their community because that was the only community that I worked with. I knew everybody in the community. I'm just curious if there are any conversations around looking at that model again or what those partnerships will look like. Then maybe as well, with the shift coming down from the federal government, if there are conversations around how we build strength in those relationships as we transition.

10:00

Ms Pelton: I wish I could answer that better. I believe that the ministry of children's services is going to be here tomorrow. I think that's a good question for them. I don't know what they're looking at doing.

The Chair: MLA Long. Just so everyone knows where they're at here between the virtual and otherwise, I've got Long, Shepherd, and then van Dijken. Looking at the clock, that would probably wrap it up at that point because we have a few more items to carry on with here.

Mr. Long: Thank you, and thank you, Ms Pelton, for the work you guys do. I wish I had all day with you. You know, I'd just like to go back to what you presented today and around page 37 and the recommendations. You had said that four recommendations were met, that two were closed, and that 25 remain at various levels of progress that you will continue to assess. I'm actually glad to hear how your office is co-ordinating with ministries and coming in for face-to-face meetings and working towards those relationships to come to solutions. I really appreciate that approach.

I sort of am curious if you could provide further details on the 25 recommendations that are ongoing and remain at various levels of progress and what those various levels might look like. Then, also, if you could expand on the four recommendations that were met and what changes were made and able to meet those.

Ms Pelton: We might be here for a while.

Mr. Long: I said that all day would be good. In summary if that's . . .

Ms Pelton: If I could provide a written response on the 25, that would be helpful because I can't really summarize them very quickly. I can talk about: we assess them as being either at no progress, some progress, significant progress, or met, and often it takes years to get to a point where a recommendation is met because ministries are large and bureaucracy moves slow. There needs to be a will. So they're at various stages over a period of time. Last year at one point we had decided that we would close recommendations after three years, and it became clear that that just was not a good idea, that we needed to take some time and let them take the time to do it.

It was the four recommendations that were met that you're interested in? The ministry has done work. On Kelsie they have done work with the band designate to have them more involved, and there is positive movement there.

The Care in Custody report: that was an interesting report. If you've got time to read it, it's interesting. They have made policy changes to reduce the time that young people are segregated. I believe that on the OC spray we're still waiting for them to write back just to keep updating us when it's being used. But we have seen a reduction in the use of OC spray.

This one, Teddy: he was a young man. Conditions were imposed on him to not be involved with his family. He needed to know about what was needed to remove those conditions, and they have changed their policy to do that. Actually, they have done a brochure to explain what it's done.

This last one, on quality assurance processes, was made to, I think, all seven ministries about having qualitative and quantitative evaluation of what they were doing, and Education was able to provide a very robust response in terms of what they were doing, and it's integrated into their policies.

The Chair: A follow-up?

Mr. Long: Thank you. I'm going to sort of shift gears a little bit because that's what I do. You know, I had a conversation recently with a psychologist, and he talked about the changing dynamics of family. With that, I've sort of been curious, in particular, about the technology age that we're winding our way through. They informed me about the number of cases they see around learning development issues and even to the verge of disability and then child neglect because of the inherent evil of the cellphone.

Literally it's people spending so much time on that useful tool but not able to separate themselves from that and actually pay attention to kids. As I said, when he mentioned neglect in there, it sort of caught my attention. I know that his office deals with yours on a regular basis, so I'm assuming this is not an isolated issue. I'm just curious if there are communication strategies that your office would be involved with, I'm assuming with the Health ministry and for new parents and young parents, around issues like that that we might not even be aware of broadly in society.

Ms Pelton: We've talked about it. Communications is an area where we need to increase our resources to have more presence on social media and on social media that young people pay attention to. They don't really care about Facebook. That is what I've learned. It's us that like Facebook. I think that that's another area that is really a good question for children's services, about whether they're seeing that. We've seen it in some of our investigations and are tracking it to see if we can make a recommendation, but I do agree with the psychologist that families are changing and that devices are not the healthiest way for young people to grow up. It doesn't mean that they shouldn't have them, but it means that they need to be monitored. I think we've seen an increase in Internet sexual exploitation. There's a report that has either been recently released or is being released shortly about a young person who was quite active on social media and had a tragic outcome. It was just one of the many factors that she encountered. So it is something that we need to pay attention to.

The Chair: Perfect. We have MLA Shepherd, followed by MLA van Dijken. We've got a hard stop at 10:15 here, folks, so if we can squeeze in the next one, then Renaud would be on the list if we can get through. Go ahead, MLA Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: If we're in fact facing a hard stop, Mr. Chair, I would be happy to cede my question to MLA Renaud and take her position, then, in the possibility box.

The Chair: That's very gentlemanly of you. Thank you, sir.

MLA Renaud, you're up. Again, the time of 10:15 would just allow us to get through the last orders of business here and let our advocate go.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Just a couple of questions. We know Alberta doesn't have accessibility legislation, one of the only jurisdictions in Canada that doesn't, and what this kind of legislation does is that it's enabling. It allows for governments to work towards, you know, identifying, preventing, removing barriers in not just the built environment but in the delivery and design of programming, facilities, all of those things.

Anyway, I did note in your report – and I'm looking forward to seeing that report, the specific report coming out I think you said at the beginning of January now, around children with disabilities. I think we've seen over the years, just in the investigations that are done, that children with disabilities and adults with disabilities are really sort of overrepresented in this group, sadly.

I'm wondering if there are any systemic recommendations that you can speak to that address sort of this lack of accessibility in

programming that is contributing perhaps to, you know, some of the really dark statistics that we're seeing in Alberta.

Ms Pelton: I can't think of any off the top of my mind, but I do know that the report that's coming out will speak to that. Because disabilities fall outside of my mandate, unless they're involved with child intervention or youth justice, we haven't focused on that.

Kim, do you know if there are any?

Ms Spicer: We made a number of recommendations around complex young people that often . . .

The Chair: We'll just get you to use the microphone – it just lit up there – so that it goes on the record. We'll need you to read your name into the record as well.

Ms Spicer: For sure. Good morning, Kim Spicer. We've made a number of recommendations that speak to the complexity of young people and specifically talking about cognitive challenges for young people, so sort of the hidden disability. Certainly, some of those recommendations would speak to the need for accessibility, primarily in schools so that people recognize their disability, properly assess them, and then properly support them. There are a few . . .

Ms Renaud: Are you talking about diagnostics?

10:10

Ms Spicer: Yes, but if you're thinking accessibility on a more physical level of disability, as Terri described, that would be coming in our next report.

The Chair: Do you have a follow-up?

Ms Renaud: No.

The Chair: Everyone is being so courteous. We might actually get all three in here in the end. This is good.

MLA van Dijken, you're up.

Mr. van Dijken: Okay. Yeah. I'll try to be quick. I think we're all very concerned with the opioid crisis in our province, and our government is committed to supporting Albertans who are struggling with addiction. You did share numbers with regard to total deaths that were possibly drug and alcohol related, and I'm just curious how those numbers compare to previous years. That's question number one.

Then you also talked about the youth-specific substance abuse strategy and that you're seeing some positive steps under way in that direction. If you could just allude to the steps that are being put in place and how that can lead to a more youth-specific substance abuse strategy that you talk about.

Ms Pelton: Okay. The first question, around the numbers: are they increasing? Yes, they are increasing because our numbers are increasing. What we're seeing is that older young people are really struggling, whether it's because they don't have a home or because they're not receiving the services and supports that they maybe need, and they tend to turn to drugs to deal with their hurts and their pains. That is continuing to increase. I'm very concerned this year. Last year we had 88 notifications of death and serious injury. As of yesterday we have 66, and there are still three months in the year to go. So we're anticipating that that number will be higher than it was last year.

In relation to promising practices, the promising practices are really more directly related to adult dependency programs, but they're open to young people I believe 16 and up as well. There is no strategy that speaks to young people from the age of, say, 10. I

don't think we've seen a 10-year-old die from substance use, but we've seen them starting to use substances as young as 10, and that's very concerning. If you think about 10 years old, that's grade 5. I've got a granddaughter in grade 5, and I can't imagine that she would be dabbling in marijuana or alcohol or any substance use. I really think that we have to focus – and the younger we focus on these young people, the more success we'll see. I believe there's a will to do better. I think the focus has been on adults, and we really need to shift to that developing brain. It's imperative that that become the focus.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you.

The Chair: Do you have a follow-up, with one minute?

Mr. van Dijken: No. That's fine. That answered my questions. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: MLA Shepherd, one minute if you choose to use it.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Perhaps the advocate can respond in writing, then, if we are not going to have the time here at committee. I just wanted to ask. There's mention of a new transition to adulthood program in the message from the advocate. Given that about 31 per cent of the 88 notifications of death were young people that are 18 or over and with this new TAP, you know, the transition to adulthood program, is there an expectation or does the CYA feel that this is going to help to reduce those statistics? Has there been continuous engagement with government on that program since it was announced?

Ms Pelton: There's been limited engagement with government on that program. We are privy to whatever public information is available. We haven't had private conversations about what that will be. But, like I said, we are in more collaboration, so I am seeing more back-and-forth conversations across the board on all kinds of topics.

I think the transition to adulthood program has lots of potential because it really gives young people agency in determining their services. It focuses on helping them become independent and learning the life skills they need. But when I talk to our youth council or to other young people we serve, what I hear is that reduction in age to 22 has impacted them greatly; even, like, the advancing futures bursary program can assist them up until the age of 29, which is amazing, and government should be applauded for that. It's a fantastic program. But not every young person can go to school. Not every young person that's been involved in child intervention is ready to go to school even by 29, and they need to be assisted to find whatever supports they need in the meantime. So when I learned that other jurisdictions across the country were raising the age and we had reduced, it really is concerning for me. We were a leader in this area, and we're not anymore, and young people talk about it. I am very concerned about that.

The Chair: Well, thank you very much for your presentation, taking all of our lengthy questions. I think you can see from all the members here: very interested in the work you do and very appreciative of it. Obviously, there's lots of good work and goodwill to go forward to try to take the recommendations and work with you folks as much as you can to do what we can from our side as legislators.

With that, you're free to go. You can hang out with us if you want to watch paint dry, or you can go back to wherever you need to go in your day. Really appreciate your time here today.

Ms Pelton: Thank you. Just a quick question for MLA Long: did you want me to respond on those 25 recommendations in writing? It's in the report. If you look at appendix D pages 74 to 85, it really explains it. But if you want a summary, I can do it.

Mr. Long: That's fine. Thank you.

Ms Pelton: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Having just received the presentation from the advocate as part of our consideration of the annual report, we're now at the point where we can decide what to do next in the terms of review. Does anyone have any thoughts?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Chair, I'd like to make a motion that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices invite officials from the Ministry of Children and Family Services to provide a briefing at the next committee meeting on the ministry's response to the recommendations in the 2022-23 annual report of the Child and Youth Advocate.

The Chair: We'll open that up for discussion. Any comments? MLA Sweet.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm concerned with this motion. If you note that – in the recommendations by the Child and Youth Advocate 26, 27, and 28, there are three different recommendations: "The Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General should report their progress to a Committee of the Legislature on recommendations made to them . . . The Ministry of Health should report their progress to a Committee of the Legislature . . . [and] The Ministry of Education should [also] report their progress to a Committee of the Legislature."

I think if we're going to ask that the Ministry of Children and Family Services provide a briefing, we should be following the Child and Youth Advocate's report and recommendations asking that Justice and Solicitor General, Health, and Education also provide their report to the Legislature as recommended. So I would ask that we amend this motion

that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices invite officials from the Ministry of Children and Family Services and include Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education, and Seniors, Community and Social Services.

The Chair: All right. Just working through the nuances here to make sure. We are allowing amendments from the floor, so that's very clear. Where I was going back to the clerk, for everyone else's edification, is that we have a motion on the floor now; I was wondering if the mover of the first motion accepts the amendment, or you deal with the first one first and then tack the amendment to it, or do you try to compile it all together? What we understand now – and the clerk will correct me if I'm wrong; she's really good – is that we'll take what you're proposing as the amendment and see if that goes to the first motion.

We can just get your, as part of discussion – and what we can do is continue on with the discussion at this point. Does the mover of the motion want to respond to the potential amendment of the motion? Do you have a response to that?

10:20

Mr. Hunter: Well, I would like to – I guess I'm just looking for some clarity, maybe from LAO staff. The OCYA: do they only work with our ministry of children's services, or do they work with the other ones as well when they do their work? Because we're addressing the issue of this report.

The Chair: Please.

Ms Robert: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Child and Youth Advocate is an independent officer. She's not aligned with any government department.

I think, if I understand the proposed amendment correctly, that there are recommendations in the annual report that relate to ministries, like, in addition to Children and Family Services. I think that's what the nature of the amendment is.

The Chair: There are a couple of ways of doing this, folks. You know, ground rules or house rules, we can try to take the friendly amendment on the fly if the mover of the first – no. We can't. Okay. Good. So that's clear.

It's just discussion at this point on the first motion with the proposal of the amendment. We're discussing the amendment. Okay.

Please, Nancy, walk me through this so I don't mess this up.

Ms Robert: Okay.

The Chair: Perfect.

Ms Robert: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay. Mr. Hunter made a motion. Ms Sweet has moved an amendment to the motion. That's now what we're dealing with: the amendment to the motion. That has been formally moved. The text has been put on to the screen. The clerk has done it based on what she's heard. We'll clarify with Ms Sweet if it's correct or not. Then that will be the debate. A decision will be made on the amendment. Then back to the main motion, either as is or as amended depending on what happens with the amendment.

The Chair: Fantastic. Thank you so much, again.

MLA Sweet had her hand up, then, at this point. Do you want to clarify and make sure it's what you wanted?

Ms Sweet: Yeah. My apologies. Community and social services was actually also supposed to be added; Justice and Solicitor General, Health, Education, and community and social services. It's also a recommendation in the report.

The Chair: With Nancy's clarification, now we're back on the amendment to the motion. Now we're opening up discussion on the amendment of the motion, for the amendment to be added potentially to the motion.

Ms Sweet: I can provide more rationale.

The Chair: Sure. Yeah. If you wish.

Ms Sweet: Yeah. Just to provide more rationale, I mean, the whole intention of this committee right now is to review the 2022-2023 annual report of the Child and Youth Advocate. It is clear in the report that recommendations have been made that those following ministries provide an update to a legislative committee, which would be this committee as it relates to the report. I am just following the recommendations as laid out in the report and encouraging all members of the committee to follow the recommendations.

In addition to that, as I had indicated earlier, the best way to prevent children from coming into care is to ensure that all ministries are working in collaboration and providing the best services to Albertans so that the factors that tend to bring children into care are minimized and Albertans are supported in a way that they can be. I feel that the ministries can update us on how that work is being done.

The Chair: Are there others here? I see two on the line. Just going quickly to the room, if there are any responses.

Seeing none, I'll go to – oh. It looks like MLA Shepherd was first here according to the little screensaver that we have. Awesome.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be brief. I just want to note that we've had a number of members certainly, including some from the government side, today who have spoken at length about the importance of doing due diligence. Whether that's looking at the budgets of the officers of the Legislature or whether looking at the recommendations of the officers of the Legislature, I think that should be true. Absolutely, then, if we are going to go into scrutiny on the budgets, we should go into equal scrutiny on ensuring that we are supporting the officers in their recommendations to the government and indeed in hearing from these areas of government on the concerns that have been raised and their progress on them. I support this amendment.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. MLA Eremenko, followed by MLA Hunter.

Now, folks, we are encroaching here towards the 10:30 stop that we had for the meeting. If we can make this quick, and then I'll have to ask if we can wrap this up by the time or we'll have to look at an extension. So really succinct, folks.

Member Eremenko: Yeah, you bet. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to voice my support for this amendment as well. My colleague Member Sweet has already alluded to why I think it is important right now. These recommendations that were made in March 2022 are said to be ongoing with some progress, and per the definition of the OCYA "some progress" means that significant actions are needed to be completed before the recommendation is actually met. This is the time. The recommendation is to advise five ministries individually to report to a committee of the Legislature as far as their progress that they have made toward achieving the recommendations made by the Child and Youth Advocate. This is exactly what the mandate of this particular ask is for, so I can't support it enough.

To the member opposite – I realize I'm on the phone, however – to hon. Member Hunter: he'd asked about whether or not children's services is the only ministry required. They are not. "The Advocate may make recommendations" – I'm reading from their report here that the recommendations "may be made to any public body whose policies, practices, and procedures impact the lives of young people." So this is absolutely salient and germane, and I support it wholeheartedly.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

MLA Hunter? Waive? Okay.

With that, in consideration of time, I'm ready to put the question on the amendment to the motion. All those in favour, please say aye. Opposed? On the phone or video, those in favour? Opposed?

Okay, I think it's been . . .

Ms Sweet: A recorded vote, please, Chair.

The Chair: Oh, we're going to go back to a recorded vote.

We're running short on time here, folks, so maybe right now, considering we've only got a couple of minutes to do a recorded vote, et cetera, a 10-minute extension: would that work for everybody?

Ms Robert: It needs to be unanimous.

The Chair: Yep. Again, just putting it back. So a unanimous vote for a 10-minute extension to get through this next part. Let's do it this way: all those opposed, say no.

Perfect. Okay. We'll put a 10-minute extension on the clock.

Those in the room in favour of the amendment to the motion, please raise your hands.

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have Ms Sweet and Ms Renaud.

The Chair: And those opposed in the room?

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have Mr. Long, Mr. Sinclair, the hon. Mr. Hunter, and Mr. Dyck.

The Chair: And we'll go to the videoconference. Those in favour, raise your hand, please.

Mr. Shepherd: In favour, Mr. Chair.

Member Eremenko: I'm sorry. I'm not sure if I'm waiting for my name to be called.

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Ms Eremenko. Are you voting in favour or against?

Member Eremenko: In favour.

Ms Rempel: Okay. Mr. Chair, I also see Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Opposed.

The Chair: And you read Shepherd in, too?

Ms Rempel: Yes. He was verbal.

The Chair: Okay. Good.

Ms Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have counted four votes in favour of the motion and five against.

The Chair: Oka

That doesn't pass.

Now we're back to the motion. I'm prepared to call the question on that as well. Those in favour? Against? On the phones, those in favour of the motion? Against that?

That motion is carried.

Mr. Hunter: I move that

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices invite officials from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to provide technical assistance to the committee if requested when officials from the Ministry of Children and Family Services meet with the committee regarding the recommendations in the 2022-23 annual report of the Child and Youth Advocate.

The Chair: Having heard the motion, I'll open that up for discussion.

Seeing none, hearing none, those in favour of the motion, please say aye. Any against? On the videoconference, those in favour? Any against?

Hearing none.

Motion carried.

Any other items? Going once, twice. Okay. Well, thank you very much for that.

The next meeting date is tomorrow at 11 a.m.

Would any member wish to move to adjourn this meeting? MLA Long. Those in favour? Opposed? Video? Motion carried. Thank you very much, everybody. We didn't need the time extension. Holy crow. Well done. We'll see you tomorrow at 11.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 10:30 a.m.]

