



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Children and Youth Services

Wednesday, April 14, 2010
8:30 a.m.

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The 27th Legislature
Third Session**

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (AL), Chair
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC), Deputy Chair

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Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
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Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)

Also in Attendance

Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND)

Department of Children and Youth Services Participants

Karen Ferguson	Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Strategies and Support
Mark Hattori	Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Program Quality and Standards
Shehnaz Hutchinson	Executive Director, Financial Strategies
Gord Johnston	Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry Support Services
Fay Orr	Deputy Minister
Susan Taylor	Acting Executive Director, Executive Director's Office

Auditor General's Office Participants

Merwan Saher	Acting Auditor General
Doug Wylie	Assistant Auditor General

Support Staff

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Shannon Dean	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Corinne Dacyshyn	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
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Diana Staley	Research Officer
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Wednesday, April 14, 2010

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like to please call the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order, and I would like to on behalf of all members welcome everyone in attendance.

Please be advised that you do not need to operate the microphones as this is taken care of by the *Hansard* staff. The meeting is of course recorded by *Hansard*, and the audio is streamed live on the Internet.

Now I will ask if we could perhaps quickly go around the table and introduce ourselves. We'll start with the deputy chair, please.

Mr. Rodney: Good morning and welcome, everyone. Dave Rodney from Calgary-Lougheed.

Dr. Massolin: Good morning. I'm Philip Massolin. I'm the committee research co-ordinator, Legislative Assembly Office.

Mr. Xiao: Good morning. My name is David Xiao, MLA for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Vandermeer: Morning. Tony Vandermeer, MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Chase: Good morning. Harry Chase, Calgary-Varsity. For the record, my colleague Darshan Kang with luck is on a flight from Delhi, having attended a funeral of a family member. That's why he sends his regrets.

Ms Taylor: Good morning. Susan Taylor, acting executive director with the prevention of family violence and bullying area with Children and Youth Services.

Mr. Johnston: Good morning. Gord Johnston, assistant deputy minister, ministry support services.

Ms Orr: Good morning. Fay Orr, deputy minister, Children and Youth Services.

Ms Ferguson: Good morning. Karen Ferguson, assistant deputy minister, community strategies and support.

Mr. Hattori: Good morning. Mark Hattori, acting assistant deputy minister, program quality and standards for Children and Youth Services.

Ms Hutchinson: Good morning. Shehnaz Hutchinson, senior financial officer, Children and Youth Services.

Mr. Wylie: Good morning. Doug Wylie, Assistant Auditor General.

Mr. Saher: Good morning. Merwan Saher, Acting Auditor General.

Mr. Sandhu: Good morning. Peter Sandhu, MLA, Edmonton-Manning. I'd like add congratulations to Merwan for the new job. Thank you.

Mr. Elniski: Good morning. Doug Elniski, the MLA for Edmonton-Calder. Welcome.

Mr. Olson: Good morning. Verlyn Olson, Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Ms Rempel: Jody Rempel, committee clerk, Legislative Assembly Office.

The Chair: Hugh MacDonald, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Dallas: Good morning. Cal Dallas.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Could I have approval of the agenda that was circulated earlier by Ms Rempel? Thank you very much. Mr. Elniski moved that the agenda for the April 14, 2010, meeting be approved as distributed. All in favour? None opposed. Thank you.

The next item on our agenda is approval of the minutes for the March 24, 2010, meeting. Thank you. Moved by Mr. Sandhu that the minutes for the March 24, 2010, Standing Committee on Public Accounts meeting be approved as distributed. All in favour? None opposed. Thank you.

This, of course, comes to our next item, which is our meeting today with the officials from Children and Youth Services. We are dealing with the Auditor General's reports today for April and October of 2009, the annual report of the government of Alberta 2008-09, which includes the consolidated financial statements, and, of course, the Children and Youth Services annual report from 2008-09.

I would remind everyone of the briefing materials that were prepared for the committee by the LAO research staff. We appreciate that. I hope members find that research informative and helpful in our discussions this morning.

I would now, please, invite Ms Fay Orr, deputy minister, to make a brief opening statement on behalf of Children and Youth Services. Thank you.

Ms Orr: Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, everyone. I do have a number of my staff with me, and most of them at table have introduced themselves. I'll just introduce a few other staff with us this morning as well: my executive director of human resources, Lori Cooper; communications director, Trevor Coulombe; Laura Alcock, our director of family support for children with disabilities; and Leann Wagner, senior manager of the child development branch. They're here as well.

Today I just want to thank you for the opportunity to be able to talk about our ministry's achievements during 2008-2009. Approximately \$1.1 billion was invested that year to support Alberta's children, youth, and families, to support our three core businesses, which were to promote their development and well-being, to keep them safe and protected, and to promote strong and healthy communities.

We made progress on our mandated priorities as well that year in terms of supporting the creation of new child care spaces, providing child care subsidies to assist low- and middle-income families, and expanding access to family violence prevention resources for aboriginal and immigrant communities.

The heart of our business in 2008-09 continued to be child intervention services. More than half of our budget that year was invested in keeping children and youth protected either by working with their families to address challenges or by removing children from the home in dangerous situations in order to ensure their safety. One of the highlights in '08-09 was the province-wide implementation of our casework practice model. The casework practice is a way of working with families that encourages our staff to focus increasingly on a more thorough assessment of the family and the needs of the child and providing more focus on providing supports early to the family to help them either get through a crisis or avoid a crisis.

There are a number of positive outcomes from that in our ministry, and while we still have way to go there, we were happy with the progress we made in '08-09. By working closely with families experiencing difficulties, we're finding we are able to help children remain with or return to the care of their parents.

In '08-09, in terms of one of our performance measures, nearly 82 per cent of children and youth who received family enhancement services did not require protective services afterward. We also helped to reunite with their families 1,100 children and youth who had been in temporary and permanent care in that year.

Despite our best efforts some parents are still unable or unwilling to provide safe homes for their children. When that happens, we do remove children from their families for their safety, and we do work very hard to find them a permanent, loving home. In 2008-09 we did achieve 550 permanent placements for children and youth either through adoption or private guardianship. That was 41 more than in the previous year and was in excess of the target we had set for ourselves that year.

Many of the children and youth who must be removed from their homes do find support in the homes of foster parents. Our province is fortunate and grateful to have thousands of committed and caring foster parents as well as kinship caregivers, and they do provide a safe environment for our children and youth when they do need placement outside the home.

Alberta's foster care system has received a great deal of public scrutiny recently over tragedies involving children and youth in care. I just wanted to point out that our target in this regard is zero injuries and zero deaths for children in care. We strive for the highest possible standard. We can't set the bar any higher than that for ourselves. In 2008-09 we achieved a .1 per cent rate, which translated into 11 children and youth in protective services that suffered an injury resulting in hospitalization or death.

I just want to point out, too, that that result is consistent with the result in terms of the percentage over the past five years, the .1 per cent. As well, in terms of actual number of incidents, that represented eight fewer incidents than three years previously, so we are seeing some progress in that regard. Our rate is also lower than the rate for Alberta's general child population. Of course, we are not content with the status quo. Our view is that even one injury or death is too many, and we are committed to continuously improving our system, our policies, practices, and legislation to help increase the safety and well-being of children and youth that are in our care.

In '08-09 we did take a number of steps to strengthen the foster care system. We implemented the recommendations of our foster care review. We also launched a province-wide campaign to recruit more foster parents and kinship caregivers. As a result of that campaign, by March 31, 2009, we had approved 202 new foster homes and 150 new kinship care homes. That resulted in a net increase for '08-09 of 10 foster care homes. That may not sound significant; however, I'd like to point out that for the first time in a number of years we did experience a reversal of a declining trend in our foster family pool, so we were really pleased to see a net increase in that pool. As I say, it was the first one in a number of years.

In terms of aboriginal children in care I'm sure everyone here is familiar that we do have an overrepresentation of aboriginal children in our intervention system. We are working hard with First Nations and with our delegated First Nation agencies, bands, councils, elders to try to address this issue. Our preferred option is to place aboriginal children with aboriginal families as much as we can so that they can grow up with a strong sense of connection to their heritage, their family, community, and culture.

8:40

Another important role for our ministry is in terms of assisting parents who face the challenge of raising a child with a disability. In '08-09 we invested approximately \$120 million in that area through our family support for children with disabilities program.

Also, our ministry is one of nine partnering ministries supporting the safe communities initiative, and in '08-09 we invested \$1 million to assist aboriginal people and immigrants affected by family violence. We also provided funding for 79 more beds in shelters for women in sexual assault centres. We also provided a 5 per cent salary increase for shelter staff. We also expanded our safe visitation sites across the province from five to seven.

In terms of child care, we did quite a bit of work in '08-09 in terms of helping to create more affordable child care and more accessible child care. We launched the creating child care choices initiative in May of 2008, which is our three-year plan to create 14,000 new spaces by 2011. In '08-09 we were able to support the creation of over 8,000 new spaces. Those were gross new spaces, and we netted out with over 6,000 new spaces across the province. Also, we helped to attract a net of 558 more child care professionals to the field that year. We also expanded the child care subsidy for eligible families with school-age children and increased the pre-school child care subsidy as well.

In terms of at-risk youth, we had a number of efforts in that regard to assist youth who are at high risk. As I think you know, many of the youth who come into our care have been affected by traumatic experiences, addictions, mental health issues, other challenges. What we're seeing, though, is that when they do have the right supports, they can succeed, and many of them do. Last year our ministry awarded 493 students with the advancing futures bursary. That is a program to help youth who have been in care or who are in care attend postsecondary education.

I'd like to give you an example of a young woman named Jessica from Edmonton, who's now 20. She came into care when she was younger because of physical abuse and neglect. While in care, she developed a strong relationship with her caseworker, Shawn, who has a background as a chef. Shawn encouraged Jessica to apply for support from advancing futures and inspired her to take the culinary arts program at NAIT. This year Jessica is graduating from NAIT with honours, and she was recently offered a prestigious position as chef-in-training at a top restaurant in London, England. We're very proud of her, and there are many other young people in our system like Jessica.

I guess to conclude, then, the safety and well-being of Alberta's children and families is the reason that the men and women of our ministry come to work each morning. The work of our ministry does not typically make the headlines in terms of the positive work we do because the efforts of the ministry's staff and partnering agencies usually do happen behind the scenes. But we do know that our work does make a difference, and it is helping change the lives of many people. On behalf of our minister and our ministry's senior leadership team and our dedicated staff across the province I assure you that we remain committed to our vision of supporting strong children, youth, families, and communities, and we're convinced that working together, we will create a better future for Albertans and continue to help many thousands of young people.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Does the office of the Auditor General, Mr. Saher, have anything to add?

Mr. Saher: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Doug Wylie will read our comments into the record.

Mr. Wylie: I'll be very brief, Mr. Chair. Our auditors' opinions on the financial statements of the Ministry and Department of Children and Youth Services and the 10 child and family services authorities for the year ended March 31, 2009, were unqualified; in other words, a clean audit opinion. We also issued an unqualified review engagement report on selected performance measures included in the ministry's annual report.

On page 173 of our October 2009 report we report that the ministry implemented a previous recommendation to strengthen the process used to award and manage contracts. There were no new audit recommendations.

We also refer the committee to page 337 of the same public report, where we list six outstanding audit recommendations. Five of these relate to our 2007 audit of the ministry systems to deliver child intervention services. We will be reporting the results of the follow-up audit on enhanced standards in our April 2010 public report. The results of the future follow-up audits on the remaining outstanding recommendations will be reported in future public reports.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Before we proceed to questions, the chair would like to welcome and recognize Ms Calahasen this morning and Ms Notley, who have joined us.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you.

The Chair: Certainly, any member of the Assembly can participate in the meeting, but only members of this committee can vote.

Welcome, Ms Notley. Would you like to be on the list for questions?

Ms Notley: Yes.

The Chair: You have two questions here, unlike the House, where there are three during question period. Preambles are to be brief.

Isn't that right, Mr. Chase?

Mr. Chase: Oh, definitely. Brief preambles. Once upon a time . . .

The Chair: You can proceed, Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Sandhu.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I want to start by congratulating Mr. Saher on assuming the position of Auditor General and note that under the excellent mentorship of Fred Dunn you're in a great position. You're assuming large shoes, but I have every faith in your ability to carry out the work given your personal abilities and those of your staff. Thank you very much.

Mr. Saher: Thank you.

Mr. Chase: Having made that comment about preambles, I would like to note for the record that a month has elapsed since budget debates of this ministry, at which time \$6 million was debated per minute, and I put a series of questions on the record for which I have not yet received written responses. I'm hoping I'll receive those shortly.

My first question. How many families received family enhancement services as a mechanism to avoid the need for child protective services in the 2008-2009 fiscal year?

Ms Orr: For 2008-09 in terms of families receiving family enhancement, there were 2,414 cases on the family enhancement caseload for our CFSAs, our child and family services authorities. In terms of our delegated First Nation agencies there were 247 families receiving services under family enhancement for the '08-09 year. Our total child intervention caseload for that year for the CFSAs was 10,992, and for delegated First Nation agencies it was 2,069, for a total child intervention caseload of over 13,000.

Mr. Chase: If I'm doing my math reasonably accurately, the numerator in terms of the number of families that received enhancement services versus custody was approximately 260 over 13,000. The point I'm making is that considerably more children were taken into custody than received family enhancement services.

How much funding was allocated towards the parent link centres? How does the ministry monitor the impact or success of these centres?

Ms Orr: In total the budget for our parenting resources initiative was \$23.6 million. Parent link centres as well as home visitation are comprehensive early childhood development and parenting programs that do provide a continuum of supports for our parents, including future parents. Through those two programs, parent link centres and home visitation, we promote parenting skills and knowledge and optimal child development. Hopefully, through our parent link centres and home visitation we can reduce the need for more costly child and family intervention by working with parents, especially young parents, to learn how to manage their children's behaviour.

8:50

You know, our experience has been and the evidence is that the early years of life play a crucial role for childhood and far beyond childhood, and research shows that many of the challenges in adult society, including mental health issues, heart disease, criminality, a raft of issues, do have their roots in early childhood. Also, research shows that in jurisdictions where there is triple-P parenting, which we've now introduced into our parent link centres, there is a reduction in incidence of child maltreatment. We have a lot of research and evidence to show that our approach with parent link centres, including home visitation, should go a long way to helping us in our efforts to reduce the number of children we have to take into care.

Our desire as a ministry and our direction is to work harder to keep children with family, either being able to leave them in the family home without having to take them out at all by being able to provide supports to the family or in cases where we do have to remove a child for their safety, our effort is to try to reunify them with their family more quickly and more often. You're right to point out that we do have more children going into the child protection stream than the family enhancement stream, and we do hope to see that change over time. Right now I can tell you that in '08-09 we did manage to reunite with their families, as I mentioned earlier, 1,100 children who had been in temporary care or permanent care, and we're hoping we can see those numbers grow.

Also, we're finding that more and more families are – through the assessment process and our casework practice model we're being able to provide them with supports and assistance and link them with supports in the community or their own family, and we're not even having to open files for those families. So there are families that

maybe aren't going into family enhancement, but they are being dealt with through the assessment phase.

In terms of the budget for the parent link centres . . .

The Chair: I think, Ms Orr, we're going to move on to the next question, please.

Mr. Sandhu: Good morning again. My questions are mainly on adoption and private guardianship. Page 46 of the ministry annual report presents results for performance measure 3(b), the number of children in the permanent care of the director for whom adoption or private guardianship orders are granted. There were 550 children placed in permanent homes, exceeding the target of 465 for this performance measure. What steps is the ministry taking to promote and improve permanence for children in care?

Ms Orr: Thank you for that question. By the way, our parent link budget is \$15 million.

We're doing a number of things to promote and improve permanency for children in care. We are as a ministry committed to finding permanent, loving homes for children that come into our care, whether it's through adoption or permanent guardianship. In 2008-09 we did secure permanency for 332 children through adoption and another 218 children through private guardianship orders. The achievement of permanency for children is paramount for their healthy development. It's extremely important that they fairly early get into a permanent, stable home, so every effort is made to find our children and youth secure, stable environments that will allow them to develop and connect to family and community.

While adoption and private guardianship remain our priorities, we also do acknowledge that a significant and enduring relationship can exist between a child and his or her foster family or kinship family. So in situations where a child has been with a foster family or kin family, say, from a very young age and they're now in their teen years, that sort of situation, we now can recognize that as a permanent placement.

We also have a number of ongoing efforts in our ministry to try to match children with prospective adoptive families. For example, we continue to have our website that features children who are ready for adoption. We also increased our *Wednesday's Child* segments on prime time on CTV from 30 per year to 39 per year, and those air province-wide on CTV. We continue to maintain our electronic matching system, which is used to match the profiles of a child's specific needs with families who have indicated that they're able to meet those needs.

We've also implemented a number of regional adoption initiatives, including adoption fairs. As well, we have the Child's Hope campaign that was developed by region 6, the Edmonton and area child and family services authority. That approach has been adopted by some other regions in the province as well, and that's one that's based very much on encouraging existing foster parents to actively recruit and identify other prospective parents and encourage them to come into our system.

We also entered into an agreement with Wendy's Wonderful Kids, the Dave Thomas adoption foundation, in an effort to find homes for difficult-to-place children and youth in region 3, our Calgary and area region.

Also, we establish permanency targets and timelines for all of our child and family services authorities, and each month we review the results of those targets. A number of regions, many of them, in fact, have managed to exceed what were stretch targets for them in terms of achieving permanency. We're also finding a number of regions are reducing the timeline to closure of adoption. Best practice in this

area is 24 months, and our ministry system-wide has yet to reach that 24-month best practice; however, we've set that as a target for our regions, and a number of regions have managed to actually do better than the 24-month best practice.

We have home assessment training in all regions for assessing and approving families according to the fairly new safe assessment model. Also, together with First Nation and Métis communities we're continuing to implement the permanency planning for aboriginal children initiative. That initiative was started a couple of years ago and includes a number of key components, including caseworkers receiving training on permanency planning, with a particular focus on planning for aboriginal children. Permanency plans must be developed for every aboriginal child in the permanent care of the director. As well, cultural plans must be developed for every aboriginal child in care to ensure they remain connected to their culture. That's particularly important for those aboriginal children who may be placed with nonaboriginal families because there's no other option. Those are some of the things we're doing there.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you very much for giving all that information. A follow-up question: what's the ministry's role in facilitating international adoptions?

Ms Orr: Okay. Thank you. We do have an international adoption program, which averages a thousand active files at any given time. That's managed through our adoption and permanency service. Our ministry works closely with federal, provincial, and territorial counterparts, including citizenship and immigration Canada, particularly with regard to emergencies or difficult cases. We recently experienced that with the situation in Haiti and the adoption of a number of children from that country.

On behalf of the province our ministry's adoption and permanency services unit negotiates international adoption procedures with countries which are not The Hague jurisdictions but wish to place their children for adoption. The unit receives all international adoption applications, and then it authorizes applicants to obtain a home study report through a private, licensed adoption agency. The unit also reviews all the international home study reports, and they provide provincial approval for the adoption application. That is then forwarded to the child's country of origin.

Once a matching referral is received from the child's country of origin, we agree to the placement and request a medical review. We can decline the referral as well if we feel it's not a suitable match. Once that match is agreed to, adoption and permanency services is responsible for issuing all the provincial documents that are required to allow the child to enter Canada as a permanent resident or citizen. Also, we're responsible for supervising the placement of that adoptive home when required by the child's home country, and when required we forward postadoption reports to the country of origin. Also, we're responsible for finalizing the adoption order in Alberta, again, when required by the child's country of origin.

Currently we have four private adoption agencies in Alberta that are licensed and monitored by our ministry. Those agencies do not receive government funding, but they do operate through the fees they charge adoptive families and through private fundraising. The adoption agencies provide services to those families seeking international adoptions, and that includes completing the home study reports, arranging for placements, supervising children in adoptive homes, and working with us to finalize adoptions.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you.

9:00

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Notley, please, followed by Mr. Xiao.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'm wondering, just before I start, if I could get the direction of the chair in terms of the process. I had a question to follow up on, one of the ones that the Member for Calgary-Varsity had asked. Am I limited to that topic in my second question?

The Chair: No. Ms Notley, we're dealing with the consolidated financial statements of the government of Alberta for 2008-09, the annual report for 2008-09 for Children and Youth Services, any information that has been provided to us by the Auditor General's reports from 2009. We're not talking about policy. We're talking about how this ministry spent the money that was allocated to them by the House for the fiscal year 2008-09. If you want to follow up on something someone else asked or on your own issues of interest, please proceed.

Ms Notley: Okay. Thank you. Maybe I will, then, just start by very quickly following up on an answer that you gave in response to the Member for Calgary-Varsity as it relates to the allocation and the use, I guess, of resources dedicated to family enhancement and, particularly, how it is that we're sort of measuring the effectiveness of that process. Specifically, you indicated that in the year under examination roughly 2,600 families had benefited from some form of family enhancement service, but I note in a previous Auditor's report – nonetheless, I still think it's relevant – from December 2006, that that number was closer to 3,400. What I'm actually seeing is quite a notable decrease in the number of families over two years that are receiving services through family enhancement. I'm wondering: did we see a parallel reduction in family enhancement resource allocation, or is there some other reason why the number of people receiving the benefits has gone down so substantially?

Ms Orr: Thank you. I should clarify that the numbers I gave were the average monthly caseload for family enhancement for the '08-09 year, and the average monthly caseload was roughly around 2,600 families receiving family enhancement services.

The amount of money provided to family enhancement in that '08-09 year was – and I'll just check the figure here – roughly \$22 million. Whether or not that was an increase over the previous year, I'd have to check and get back to you on that. In terms of whether or not that's a trend downwards in family enhancement for the '08-09 year, again I'd have to check the previous years on that.

Generally speaking, we're continuing to support and encourage family enhancement as a method of dealing with families because we are trying to reduce the number of children and youth that we take into care, and we are trying to do it through our casework practice model, which includes a much more thorough assessment period at the front end. Again, the practice model was just fully implemented in the '08-09 year across the province, so it was still fairly new.

The intent of that casework practice model is that through a more thorough assessment we will start to see one of two things, either more and more families being provided with supports and connected with community supports or extended family supports so that they don't need to come into our intervention system under either stream, or if they do need to come in, it will be under the family enhancement stream, and they will be provided with supports and services to enable them under family enhancement agreements to continue to look after their children at home.

Our hope is that having to actually take children into care, we want it to be the option of last resort. Are we there yet? Certainly, in '08-09 we weren't there yet, but that is the direction we're going and continuing to encourage our staff to follow and pursue. The casework practice model is designed to encourage that approach to child intervention.

Ms Notley: Just sort of as a finish to that particular thing, since the trend does actually seem to be the opposite of what the objective of the ministry is at this point, if you can get back to us with perhaps a written comparison of the funds and the numbers over those two years.

Ms Orr: The '08-09 year, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, through the clerk to all members, and you will receive that, Ms Notley.

Ms Notley: Thank you.

My second question relates to a different topic, and I'll try to be brief in my preamble. The outcome-based service delivery model is a model with which I have profound concern. I guess I'm not trusting that this is the kind of model that can be implemented without there being some problems, particularly given that the ministry has just recently reached the point where they've managed to address some of the concerns that had been raised a number of years ago by the Auditor General in terms of their management of contracts with service providers. What I'm looking at is a document that was, you know, distributed. It's just a PowerPoint that, I know, talked about the outcome-based service delivery model within your ministry. I raise it because, of course, it's identified in your annual report as something that you're moving forward on.

It does strike me as a very different way to deal with your contracting agencies, and since we've just barely achieved some kind of compliance with some of the recommendations of the Auditor General, to so significantly change how you're going to interact with these agencies, it raises some flags. In particular, I mean, we're talking about a model where agencies are paid on a case-rate basis, and then they have an incentive to get the work done faster because they get to keep the money regardless of whether it takes three months or six months to presumably get the child safe. Obviously, particularly with for-profit agencies, you can see where if this is not very, very clearly monitored, there's going to be an incentive, actually, for a reduction in care provided on the part of the agencies.

The Chair: Do you have a question there, please?

Ms Notley: I do. I guess the first thing that I would like to know, because it is mentioned as something that commenced in '08-09, is: is there any kind of revised list or description of a standard contract where these outcomes are specifically articulated so that we can get a sense of how success will be measured apart from the fact that the agencies are happy? What kinds of outcomes are going to be put in place for these agencies in these contracts, and what kinds of standards and strategies are going to be used to monitor and audit that they're happening? Will there be any monitoring and auditing throughout the course of the contract? If we wait until the end of the contract, there could be a lot of suffering in between.

Ms Orr: Thank you for that question. Outcomes-based service delivery, as you mentioned, was an initiative that we began work on in '08-09. In that fiscal year we did start work on that initiative, and

a number of the flags that you raised are, of course, flags and concerns that we had as well when we started out on this journey. We wanted to make sure and we continue to want to make sure that we do this right and that it does result in improved outcomes for the children and youth that are in our care. That's the whole intent of it.

In order to do that, in '08-09 we didn't move on this by ourselves but did move in conjunction with our agency partners. We had a conference in May of 2008 with a number of our agency partners, including the association responsible for the agencies that deal with family and social services in Alberta. We brought them with us for a conference to talk about how we could build a new relationship between our ministry and the hundreds of agencies with whom our CFSAs have contracts.

9:10

There were issues with the existing type of relationship in that we were hearing from our agencies that they were feeling stretched and underfunded and having difficulty finding and recruiting staff and that they were having difficulty delivering services in a way that they felt was of a high standard. So we worked together and together decided to go down this road of improving outcomes for children and youth in care and developing a new business relationship that would see us working more closely with our agency partners at the start of cases rather than bringing them in later on. It's really geared to a closer working partnership.

We didn't want to move too quickly with it. Again, we want to make sure we're doing the right thing, so we decided to take a pilot approach to this. We did launch two pilots in Edmonton and Calgary. I can't remember if it was '08-09 when we launched them. I think it might have actually been the next fiscal year. However, those pilots are well under way, and we are closely watching and monitoring those and observing what issues are arising and will be taking steps to ensure that we have appropriate monitoring standards in place to ensure that we are indeed achieving better outcomes for our children and youth.

In terms of what those outcomes are that we're trying to achieve, we're trying to reduce the number of times that children are shuffled around in our system from foster home to foster home. We want to reduce the number of placements our children are going through. We want to achieve quicker reunification of children and youth with their families in those cases where we've identified that families do have the ability to look after their children or will have the ability provided they get the support and service they need, including sometimes mental health support. Sometimes it might be assistance with income support. That is another outcome we want to achieve, quicker reunification.

The other key outcome we want to achieve is a faster move to permanency. In those cases where we've identified that the family is not willing to look after the child or is not able to, again because of serious issues, then we want to be moving children into permanency more quickly. Our objective is not to have children languishing in the child intervention system for years and years and years but to hopefully prevent them from having to come into the system and, once they do come in, getting them out of the system as quickly as we can into good, stable, loving homes.

The Chair: Thank you. The chair would like to intervene here. I'm sorry; there's a long list of, particularly, government members who are interested in participating this morning. I can appreciate, Ms Orr, that you are very well briefed and prepared for the meeting this morning – we appreciate that – but we're going to have to be more concise in our questions and our answers so that all members can participate.

We will now proceed to Mr. Xiao, followed by Mr. Chase. The chair would like to welcome also Mr. Benito this morning.

Please proceed.

Mr. Xiao: Mr. Chair, I probably do have a member's statement before I ask my questions.

First of all, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for what you do. Very often I think that people tend to forget the things that you do, the services you provide to our children. You always hear about, you know, the health care issues. I really want to tell you that as an elected representative I'm very appreciative. Also, I want you to know that I attended a foster parents dinner not long ago. I tell you, the stories I heard from them were incredible. They really provide a very secure and safe environment for the children who need a home and really provide hope for those children. I'd like to thank you for everything you have done.

My question is, I think, related to the budget of the family support for children with disabilities program. It seems that they are, you know, \$12.8 million over budget. I understand that it's due to the increase of specialized services and out-of-home placements, right? I want the deputy minister, if you may, to make some comments on this. What are those specialized services and out-of-home placements?

Ms Orr: Okay. Thank you for that question, too. There was an overexpenditure in that area, \$12.8 million as you mentioned, and that consisted of \$5.4 million in specialized services and \$4.1 million for out-of-home placements. Those accounted for most of that overexpenditure. The rest was because of a small caseload increase as well as some inflationary pressures.

In terms of the specialized services we had an increase in the specialized service cases of about 54 cases, which was twice the increase in earlier years and reflected an increasing demand for services to children. The types of services we're talking about are services that are provided when a child has a severe disability that significantly limits their ability to function in normal daily activities, and they need continual and ongoing assistance and supervision to ensure that that child is safe and is able to participate in daily living activities.

A child has to have a critical service need in two or more of the following areas: either behaviour, communication and social skills, physical abilities, cognitive abilities, or self-help skills. Specialized services typically involve a team of professionals that can include physical, occupational, or speech/language therapists, psychologists, or special aides.

In terms of our out-of-home placements – I'll just mention those as well – they're provided when the needs of the child can no longer be met by the family in the family home. The child then may be placed either with a group home or with a residential facility or perhaps with a family in their community that does have training to be able to deal with a child with those kinds of needs. We had an increase in the number of children requiring out-of-home placements in '08-09. There were about nine new children that needed out-of-home placements, which doesn't sound like a high number of children, but our cost for out-of-home placement is quite high. It ranges from about \$100,000 to \$250,000 a year to place a child out of home, which is why the expenses in that area can add up pretty quickly with a fairly small number of new young people coming into that.

Mr. Xiao: Okay. My next question is also related to this FSCD program regarding children with autism. What kind of special services can you provide to those children? As a side question,

probably, there's a very successful businessman, who is one of my constituents, Klaus Maier, who owns the BMW dealership. He donated the land and an extra \$1 million to try to raise money to build an autism hospital because he feels there is really a need for that kind of specialized service for those children with autism. I'd also like you to, if you may, make some comments after my question.

Ms Orr: Okay. Great. Thank you. In terms of the support we provide to families with children who have autism, there is a range of supports provided through our family support for children with disabilities program. Children with autism make up about 27 per cent of our FSCD caseload, and over 40 per cent of the FSCD budget does go towards supports and services for families with children with autism.

The average cost per case to support children with autism in '08-09 was 1.5 times higher than for children with other types of disabilities, so it is a fairly intensive level of service that we need to provide. Children with autism may receive a wide range of services from our program, and that can include respite and aide services. I think you should know that there's quite a range in autism. Those with a severe impact can receive an intensive level of support that involves professional services from speech, language, occupation, and physical therapists and psychologists. In providing service to not only children with autism but with any sort of disability, our FSCD program does consult with a multidisciplinary team of experts who assist us in helping to determine what the most appropriate supports are for that child and family to meet their specialized needs.

9:20

We also do a number of other things to try and enhance the resources and supports that are available for families with children with disabilities, including autism. For example, in June of '08 we did provide a grant of \$550,000 to Mount Royal University to develop and produce a web-based learning resource available to people working with children with complex needs, including autism.

Also, we trained and accredited 20 additional practitioners to support our pilot of what's called the stepping stones program. This is a parenting program that's aimed at providing parents with the information and strategies they need to manage their own children's behaviour. We have involved a number of families with children with autism in that pilot program, and we're hoping through programs like that to better equip families to manage their own child's behaviour and perhaps lessen the need for them to have to resort to aides or special assistance if they're able to manage it on their own. So those are a number of the things.

The Chair: Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Dallas.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I've previously referenced that despite the fact that there is \$14 billion in the sustainability fund, \$27 million was cut from child intervention services this year. However, referring to last year, referencing page 104, the program area of keeping children, youth, and families safe and protected, why was \$1.7 million unexpended for the child intervention services item listed on page 104? I can't believe that that money isn't necessary.

Ms Orr: Actually, for the department there was an underexpenditure of \$1.7, and ministry-wide there was an underexpenditure in that area of \$14 million. I think it was for child intervention. That was ministry-wide. Oh, child intervention services was overexpended ministry-wide, but for the department there was an underexpenditure.

Maybe I'll let either Gord or Shehnaz speak to that in terms of the department. Gord, do you want to take that?

Mr. Johnston: Sure. What that's undoubtedly related to is some surplus funds that would have been available in the department as opposed to the child and family services authority. As the deputy minister has referenced, as an overall ministry we had a deficit in that line item to the tune of about \$14.3 million. So we were fully expended in that line item and then some.

Ms Orr: So ministry-wide we were overexpended \$14.3 million roughly, and the cause of that overexpenditure – there were a number of reasons for that. One was that we did provide more funding that year to contracted agencies to help them hire and retain staff. As well, we experienced an increase in demand for our support for permanency program, which we took as a good sign because that was the result of our increasing the number of permanent placements, and those families are then eligible for support through that program. So we had a higher than projected expenditure in that program. Also, we did need additional funds to fully implement the casework practice model. Those were the three main reasons why ministry-wide we did end the year with an overexpenditure in that area.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Thank you. Last year I had attempted to introduce Bill 209, Children's Services Review Committee Act. That would have looked at how contracted agencies are remunerated. You've indicated that more money went out to contracted agencies, but my concern is that in comparison to in-house compensation, contracted agencies are forced to pay their employees about half the rate that government employees receive. Was anything done in 2008-2009 to bring that disparity a little closer?

Ms Orr: Well, as I mentioned, we did provide additional funds to agencies in '08-09 to assist them with recruiting and retaining staff, and that funding was used, at least in part, for wages for their staff. The issue of the gap in wages between agency staff and ministry staff was a particularly big issue in '08-09. I can't say that we managed to eliminate the gap, get rid of it, or even reduce the gap, really, but we did manage with that injection of funds to stabilize the differential and to prevent it from growing even wider. We have been working with our agencies to see what else we can do, again, to improve the business relationship with them.

I don't know if we'll ever be able to fully eliminate or reduce that gap since there are differences in the nature of the work that our ministry staff do and the agency staff do. They may seem similar on the surface, but there are things that our staff do in terms of delegated authorities that only our staff do and agency staff do not do. That explains part of the reason why our staff may receive higher compensation than some of the agency staff. We're not really comparing apples to apples when we look at the two groups of workers here, so that's another reason for there being a difference. As I said, we've stabilized the growth in that gap, but whether we can ever eliminate it completely, I don't know. I don't think so.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Dallas, please, followed by Ms Notley.

Mr. Dallas: Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks to all of our guests for their attendance today and all of the work that they're doing supporting children in Alberta. My questions are in the area of challenges that we have been facing with respect to attracting and

retaining competent staff to provide supports to our children. I'm looking at pages 30 and 31 of the ministry report and looking at some statements around the achievement of designing an out-of-school care accreditation program that was piloted. I was wondering if you could make some comments about what's happening with that but, more specifically, the certification process to develop and to provide ongoing professional development to those that are providing care for us. If you could make some comments about where we're going with that and the state of accreditation from the perspective: is that an internal accreditation that we've developed, or is there an external agency that's looking at the competencies associated with those that are providing the supports?

Ms Orr: Yes. Thank you. The accreditation that you're referring to is with reference to our child care program. In the ministry in '08-09 we did take a number of steps to try to improve and enhance the quality of care being provided by caregivers in our child care system. We introduced the new Child Care Licensing Act and regulation in November of 2008, and we did begin work on, as you mentioned, an accreditation program for out-of-school care. I'll have Karen supplement on our work in that regard, perhaps, before I proceed any further.

Ms Ferguson: Sure. The staff attraction incentive allowance helped recruit experienced staff, and that was extended to out-of-school programs in '08-09. We also implemented a new staff attraction allowance. This was introduced to attract staff to the child care field. After serving a year, they would receive \$2,500. That was a new initiative in '08-09. Also, in terms of accredited programs we continue with that, and the accreditation is done by an external body. As of March '09, 444 programs, daycare and family day homes, out of 586 were accredited. So it's a very successful program. We piloted accreditation standards for out of school in '08-09 and in April '09 introduced accreditation for out of school.

9:30

Mr. Dallas: Just to follow up on that, then. So all of the programs that we're offering now in that realm are audited and accredited. Is that the idea?

Ms Ferguson: Yes, it is.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Notley, please, followed by Mr. Elniski.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'd like to just quickly go back to the issue of outcome-based services because, although we did get sort of a conversation or discussion and description from you, what we didn't get, I don't think, was a specific answer to the question that I had. The pilots had commenced in the '08-09 year. What I'm looking for is documentation with respect to the specific outcomes that have been developed for those pilots as well as policies and procedures around how those outcomes will be assessed both throughout the pilot as well as subsequent to the completion of the pilot. Now, I'm not sure. The pilot may have actually completed outside of the period in question. If that's the case, then obviously I'm outside. Presumably the objectives and the outcomes have been stipulated, and the preliminary arrangements with the agencies participating in the pilot had been done in the year in question. What I'm looking for is specifics and documentation around that.

Ms Orr: Okay. Thanks for asking that again and clarifying it. The pilots are still ongoing, so the evaluation of those pilots isn't complete yet. In terms of what you're speaking to, I'll ask Mark Hattori, our ADM overseeing that area, to speak to it.

Mr. Hattori: Thank you. Just to make it clear, in terms of the outcomes for the outcomes-based service delivery work they are premised on the national outcomes matrix work done by Nico Trocmé, so there is congruency and alignment both with what's happening in outcomes-based service delivery and in the department in terms of our move forward, basically, on the notion and the premise of doing better by kids in our care. As a consequence of that, the pilots that you're referencing do have contracts and specific outcomes indicators that are related and aligned to that work and related and aligned to the work of the department.

So we do have that, and we can get you those specific outcomes that they're looking at. Again, because they're pilots, it's not that they're set in stone, but you can see, if you take the comparison between the national outcomes matrix work of Dr. Trocmé and others and the work that they're doing in the pilots, that there is some congruency and consistency in that. We'll send those over.

Ms Notley: Thank you.

My second question, just following up on that again, is whether there are any written policies, procedures, any other type of internal written document description you'd like to use outlining the mechanism of assessing throughout the process and doing quality control throughout the course of the pilot. I appreciate that they're not finished, but I assume that prior to their commencement that stuff would have been worked out so there was consistency with respect to those who are overseeing the pilot.

Mr. Hattori: Right. Again, the premise of outcomes-based is not something that we conjured up as a consequence of our own good thinking and innovation. It is something that, as you and others have pointed out, has some literature and science behind it. The process in terms of doing that work is again premised on what is going to make a successful initiative in terms of outcomes-based delivery. We do have processes that we have articulated that would say that we need to closely work in collaboration with agency partners around monitoring and evaluation, first agreeing upon what are the right outcomes that we're working towards and what is the scientific and evidence base for that, but then making sure that we have the monitoring processes to follow up. We do have, again, some draft articulated processes, and we can send those over as well.

Ms Notley: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Elniski, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you very much and good morning, Fay. I always like to look for the white space on the org chart and see what occurs in those particular places. My concern – and perhaps it's more of a dialogue item; it may not be covered in here because I actually can't find it other than a brief mention of Youth Secretariat on page 15 – is what happens to those individuals who reach the age of majority who have not, for example, achieved as much as they should have at that particular point in time. I think particularly of a young fellow that I know who is 18 years old. He's in grade 11. By virtue of the calendar he is now, of course, an adult. What happens to his supports and his mechanisms to prevent the good work that has been done up until this point in time from being undone?

Ms Orr: Thank you for that question. In terms of young people when they reach 18, if they have status with our system when they turn 18, we do have the ability to extend our services to them until they reach the age of 22, so that does help us transition them into adulthood in those situations. Similarly, the Child and Youth Advocate can continue to assist and take calls from youth once they've reached the age of 18 if they've been in our system up until the age of 22. So there do continue to be supports in place for that age group.

Mr. Elniski: Oh, wonderful. Thank you. Actually, I didn't know that.

I guess the next question – and you may not know the answer to this – is: do you have some sense or some idea of how many people would fall into that category? Is this a heavily subscribed service area for you or no?

Ms Orr: I'm not sure if I have numbers on that with me here. Let me just check in terms of our age groups. Actually, not really. I'll have to see if I can get back to you with that. In terms of the age groups that we serve in the 16-plus category, about 15 per cent of our caseload is 16-plus, but I don't have numbers with me on how many would be over 18 continuing to get service unless anyone else here has those? Not handy, so I'll have to get back to you with that.

Mr. Elniski: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Chase, please, followed by Ms Calahasen.

Mr. Benito: Mr. Chairman, sorry for the interjection. So the answer for that would be officially in writing?

The Chair: In writing, yes, circulated through the clerk to all members, Mr. Benito, and it will be posted publicly for interested readers.

Mr. Benito: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. With the 2008-09 year being the onset of the recession, I'm very concerned about the cuts and freezes to front-line workers and their personal well-being and, of course, their ability then to act in, in quotes, the best interests of the children that they are serving. My first question is: what was the average caseload for child intervention workers, broken down by region? I'm hoping that the committee, through the chair, will receive the answers that previously I've been unable to receive. How do these averages compare with other provinces? We have the greatest number of children in custody on a per capita basis, and I'm not sure that our system is sufficiently supportive of either the social workers or their charges, our children.

The Chair: Would you like to respond in writing through the clerk, please?

Ms Orr: Yeah, I'd be happy to do that. I don't have the numbers with me on average caseload by region.

I do want to make a point, though, on the comment that Alberta has the greatest number of children per capita taken into care. I'm not certain where the hon. member gets that information. I do have information that I can send as well – it's not for '08-09; it's more current – that does show that Alberta is not the number one in the country when it comes to taking children into care on a per capita basis, and I'd be happy to share that information, too, through the clerk.

The Chair: Certainly. We would appreciate that.

Ms Calahasen, please, followed by Ms Notley.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you very much. First of all, congratulations to the Auditor General. Good to have you on board as the new man on the block.

My questions are really to do with child care and aboriginal children specifically. Can you tell me what percentage of aboriginal children were in care from '08-09 as compared to '06-07? Can you tell me the percentage of the difference in terms of aboriginal children in care?

9:40

Ms Orr: Actually, I can tell you that in terms of aboriginal children in care in '08-09 the percentage was 60 per cent. Now, how that compares to '06-07, was it? The previous year?

Ms Calahasen: Yeah, just the previous year.

Ms Orr: I don't have that number. Mark, do you have it here, or do we need to get back to her? No. We'd have to get back to you with the per cent for the previous year. My suspicion is that it would be very similar. We haven't been seeing a decrease in that number. It's holding fairly strong at 60 per cent, in that range.

Ms Calahasen: I have to give you kudos. When I read the annual report, I see a lot of action and activity and ideas as to how to deal with the aboriginal component, so I want to congratulate the department for all the work that it's doing.

Ms Orr: Thank you.

Ms Calahasen: However, I think when you look at 60 per cent, that's a high number. That's unacceptable for children to be put in that situation. When I look at your information, if I go back to page 45, I see some deaths within the foster care system. I think whenever we have a high percentage of children in care, we begin to see those kinds of outcomes. Those are unintended outcomes. It seems like we don't want to advertise who these children are, so the marginalized become more marginalized, yet I see such great activity when you're talking about your performance measures.

I'm just trying to figure out how we deal with some of these areas that seem to be at the crux of some of the problems, whether it's the reunification, which I think you're doing, and the foster care to permanency. I think there are a lot of aboriginal children in foster care. I see the activity, but I don't see the outcomes as a result of that. I see more children in care. I'm trying to figure out from this annual report: how do we decrease that? I see some possibilities, and I'd like to know what your plans are in terms of being able to address that issue.

Ms Orr: Yes. Thank you. The overrepresentation of aboriginal children in care is an ongoing concern not only for Alberta but for a number of jurisdictions in Canada. We're all struggling with the same challenges. What we tried to do in '08-09 and continue to do is try and work very closely with First Nations, with Métis, with aboriginal communities on and off reserve to try and address this issue together. We do have in this ministry our 18 delegated First Nation agencies. They're agencies that are made up of First Nations people who are delivering child protection services to their own people on reserve. We think that will continue to be an important component of how we deal with this issue.

Something that our DFNA partners were unable to do until fairly recently was provide family enhancement service on reserve, and

that was because INAC was not funding it. INAC is the funder for our DFNAs. I believe it was in '08-09, or it might have been the year previous to that, that we were successful. Our DFNA partners were successful in persuading INAC to begin funding family enhancement service, and INAC did agree to provide \$98 million over five years. INAC is in the midst of evaluating the impact of that family enhancement funding. We're hopeful that that should help keep families together or help in reuniting aboriginal children with their communities through that sort of service, which was sadly lacking until quite recently. So that should help.

Also, each of our child and family services authorities has an aboriginal co-chair, and a number of our regions also have, in addition to an aboriginal co-chair, other members of the board that are aboriginal. One of their main jobs is to develop and engage First Nations aboriginals in urban settings and try and engage them more in the work that we're doing.

One of our performance measures involves the percentage of aboriginal children in care who are being placed with aboriginal families and kinship caregivers, and we didn't achieve our target there. We got close, but we didn't get there. We've seen modest improvement in that target over the last few years. One of the biggest barriers we've encountered with that one is that we're having trouble finding aboriginal families, Métis families willing to provide care for our children. So that's an area where we're continuing to work, again, with First Nations, with our DFNAs, with our partners, to try and, you know, work with us to help us identify who these families are because we very much want to engage them with us in our system.

With the Métis nation, for example, we did enter into a subagreement with the Métis nation association in '08-09, and under that agreement one of the initiatives is a genealogy project to help identify people with a Métis background in the province so that that can assist us in trying to match children that come into care with Métis families, people with a Métis background. It's that kind of matching and searching that will help.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you. Appreciate that.

Ms Notley, please, followed by Mr. Olson.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I'd like to switch gears really quickly to the issue of the intervention services information system, or ISIS, which is referenced in the annual report. I'm wondering if you could tell us specifically: what was the initial contracted cost for the implementation of that system, and where are we now in terms of how much has been expended or is going to have to be expended? My understanding is that the cost has gone up quite substantially.

Ms Orr: Okay. On that intervention services information system I don't have those contract numbers with me, but I will ask Gord Johnston to maybe provide a bit of an answer. I don't know that he has that information handy either, but I think if I could let Gord speak to that project at bit.

Mr. Johnston: Sure. In 2008-2009, if I recall the timing of the purchases of the licences correctly, that's actually when we went forward and purchased a lot of the licences that would enable us to begin work on the whole intervention services information system. In terms of the licensing costs I honestly can't recall what those are off the top of my head, but we can certainly get those. I can tell you that to this point in the project, as of now, we are actually fully on budget and expect to be up on full implementation later this year.

Ms Notley: But you will provide us with that. Okay.

Mr. Johnston: Yes.

Ms Notley: Can you give us a bit of an explanation about what the rationale was and how it was decided on this system and this provider and the process that was gone through to get to this provider?

Mr. Johnston: Yeah. We actually worked in partnership with other ministries in government; namely, E and I, Seniors and Community Supports, and, ultimately, Service Alberta as well. Rather than us as an individual ministry going out and procuring our own individual case management system and perhaps incurring additional costs in creating a system that was not going to be able to talk to other systems in government, with Seniors and Community Supports as well as Employment and Immigration, the decision was made right around the 2008-2009 time period or perhaps a little bit before that we should partner in terms of a procurement exercise.

We actually went to a formalized request for proposals process, that ultimately resulted in our choosing the Cúram Software solution out of Ireland, which is a real world-class case management system that has broad application in terms of the different components of case management that will serve our needs, serve Seniors and Community Supports' needs, serve Employment and Immigration's needs and will also in the future enable us to build on other Cúram modules like child care, perhaps the potential for family support for children with disabilities. So we had never intended this to be just a child intervention solution. We had actually developed a broad case management vision to replace most of our case management so-called Legacy systems in all of our program areas.

9:50

The Chair: Thank you. Any information, again, will be provided through the clerk to all members.

Mr. Olson, please, to conclude this morning.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for being here. My sense is that you folks have one of the toughest jobs there is in government. Maybe an indication of that is on page 79 of your annual report under note 8, contingent liabilities, the number of lawsuits that are outstanding against you. I'm just wondering if you can talk a little bit about the nature of these claims and whether there is a common thread and whether any kind of an analysis has been done which would help you in terms of, you know, limiting further claims?

Ms Orr: Thank you. We do have a fair number of legal claims. In '08-09 that page you referred to does point out we were a defendant in 82 legal claims.

Maybe what I'll do is ask Gord Johnston. His area is responsible for our legal services, so I'll have Gord supplement the answer there.

Mr. Johnston: We actually work very, very closely with risk management insurance in government to ensure that from an insurance perspective we are covered for any and all eventualities here. There is no question that there is a large number of outstanding lawsuits that have been launched against us. I'm not sure what else to add there. It definitely is a concern for us. Quality assurance is a very real and meaningful part of our business. We require our caseworkers to have a whole variety of training to ensure that they are very familiar with policies, regulations, legislation. So I hope that that answers your question there.

Mr. Olson: Well, thank you. I just was wondering about common threads, if there is something that's a recurring theme in these claims which would lead you to develop some, you know, policy options that would direct you away from those liabilities. Maybe that's being done.

Ms Orr: Yeah. There were some themes there in terms of that often it will be plaintiffs alleging that when they were children in care, they were abused or assaulted by their caregiver, or they may be alleging that there was negligence on the part of children's services staff while they were in care or receiving services. The nature of the claims tends to be along those lines.

Mr. Olson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase and Mr. Benito, I'm afraid you're going to have to read your questions quickly into the record, and hopefully we will get a response.

Mr. Chase: If I may, I'd like to get two sets on the record. First, salary and benefits increased for CEOs across the region in 2008-2009. It varied from 3 to 38 per cent, page 250, north central CFSA, 37.8 per cent, whereas page 200, central Alberta CFSA, 3.2 per cent, which is more in line with CPI. My second question follow-up. What processes and guidelines were used to determine these increases?

My second set. How did the ministry determine the, in quotes, outcomes in the outcomes-based programming that was implemented in region 6? What criteria were implemented to determine the success of this program?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Benito, please.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much to all of you for coming here this morning. My first question is about the review of the advocacy services in Alberta. It is referenced in your 2008-2009 report. Can you explain changes to the reporting relationship and how these changes assure the public that the advocate's advice and activities are not being influenced by the ministry?

My second question is about the shortage of foster parents. Albertans have heard that more foster parents are required to provide safe and secure placement for children in government. To address the shortage of foster parents in Alberta, one of the things you did in your ministry was to introduce the eight three-hour course or 24-hour caregiver training program for foster parenting. I attended that course, and it was an excellent course, I believe. But when I went back to the community and spoke to the different foster parent agencies, they said, for example, that if you attended that course and were qualified to become a foster parent now, you still have to do another orientation at the local level of the foster agencies. They feel that, you know, these ideas of how they should do the orientation should be incorporated into the 24-hour caregiver training program. I'm just wondering: what are your plans to meet this suggestion by the different agencies?

That's all, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Orr, if you could respond, again, in writing through the clerk to all members, we would appreciate that. On behalf of the commit-

tee I would like to thank you for your time before us this morning. I wish the very best to you and your department officials in this fiscal year, and I would remind you that brevity is not a beer in Bavaria. The next time you come, I would appreciate more concise answers. Thank you. You're free to go.

We have other business to attend to this morning. First, I would like to note for the record that in response to questions raised during committee meetings, the committee has received written responses from Alberta Transportation, Alberta Infrastructure, the Office of the Auditor General, and Alberta Energy.

Item 5(a) on our agenda is attendance at the joint Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees and the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors conference. At the last meeting a motion was passed approving the chair, the deputy chair, the committee clerk, and the committee research co-ordinator to attend the upcoming conference in Quebec in August. In the case of one of these individuals not attending the conference, we circulated a notice. Other members may be interested in attending. I will not be attending the conference. I appreciate the vote, but, no, I am not going to go to that conference. So if we could have a draw. There are four individuals who have expressed an interest in being an alternate. I think we should select two alternates. If we could do that now, the clerk has very ably provided the names in a very elegant dish. We will draw two names out of that. The first one will be someone to replace me, and the second one will be an alternate. Is that fair enough?

Ms Calahasen: Who asked to be on the list?

Ms Rempel: At this point I have received notification from Mr. Sandhu, Mr. Elniski, Mr. Olson, and Mr. Vandermeer asking that their names be on the list.

Ms Calahasen: Okay.

Mr. Rodney: Were there others that you'd entertain?

The Chair: If there are others, we've got another ballot.

Mr. Dallas: I just checked my calendar. I would be interested in being in the draw. I thought everybody was going to be in the draw.

Mr. Rodney: Well, is there anyone else who would like their name in? Okay.

The winner is?

10:00

The Chair: Mr. Elniski.

Mr. Elniski: Oh. Well, thank you.

Mr. Xiao: That's the replacement.

The Chair: That's the replacement. But there will be an additional in case.

Mr. Elniski: I'm the replacement, and then we have an in-case, right?

Mr. Rodney: No. You're going. Make your arrangements.

The Chair: And Peter Sandhu is the first alternate.

Mr. Xiao: You know, there's no need for the alternate because I'm sure Doug is going.

Mr. Elniski: Yeah. No problem.

Mr. Xiao: I would advise you to go to Baie-Saint-Paul. Beautiful. An hour's drive from Quebec City.

Mr. Elniski: I think it's all work, actually.

Mr. Rodney: That is the correct answer, Mr. Elniski.

The Chair: Okay. Item 5(b), out-of-session meetings. At the last meeting the discussion on holding out-of-session meetings was held over to a future date. As this may be our last meeting before the end of the spring session, this would be a good time for the committee to make some decisions on this matter. If the committee would like to have out-of-session meetings, perhaps the specific details could be sorted out by the chair and the deputy chair and other interested members. I'm told that we're going to start the fall session in September, but I'm just told that. In the past we've had out-of-session meetings in September and October.

Mr. Olson: Well, I do have a motion that's relative to this in a sense. I don't know if you want to have the discussion about just what we're going to be doing over the summer, but then related to that, I have a motion regarding how we communicate it.

The Chair: Okay. I don't understand this.

Mr. Dallas: Could I propose that we put the motion on the floor and then have a discussion?

The Chair: Well, certainly, we'll deal with this motion and any other motions that members may have on the agenda, but specifically with out-of-session meetings, do you want to have any? Do you not want to have any?

Mr. Rodney: That's the first question, isn't it, Chair: is there an appetite for out-of-session meetings?

Mr. Chase: Yes.

Mr. Mason: You know, I think it depends if we've got work that we think needs to be done in the meantime.

Mr. Rodney: Yeah, if there's work. We need to assess that. Do we have work that we need to do that we cannot accomplish in the course of the meetings that we've had in the past and/or the meetings that we have scheduled for the fall? We could have an extended session in the fall, which means that we would have more of these meetings, which might mean that we don't need as many out-of-session meetings or any.

Mr. Mason: Could I just suggest that if members have agencies or departments which they think should bear a little bit of scrutiny from the committee, they inform the chair and the vice-chair, and if there's enough interest in some specific things, that the meetings be at the call of the chair and the vice-chair?

The Chair: Well, that will be very difficult because we did this with Alberta Health Services. We had a motion passed by an hon. member, and then that sort of process was derailed by the committee

the next time they met. Last spring there was a motion passed to bring them before the committee, and then we dealt with it in another manner. That is really restricting and limiting this committee's ability to organize these meetings if we do that because any member at any time, the first time the committee meets again, can derail the whole process if they so choose.

Mr. Mason: Well, I think that if the full committee gives the chair and the vice-chair the authority – I mean, if the government caucus objects to it at any time, we know it's not going to happen. You know, we can leave that in the hands of Mr. Rodney to express, but between the two of you I think that we could proceed in that way.

Mr. Dallas: On this point, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Dallas: I think it was only a couple of weeks ago that we had a discussion that the committee as a whole should determine the business going forward, so I guess I'm not in favour of that.

Two years into this I'm convinced of a couple of things. One is that the work of this committee is very important; the second thing is that it's rarely urgent. So I guess my assessment of this is that I don't have a problem with conducting meetings out of session, but I think that the way that we organized this in a prior year, when we got to the point that we had a sense of when fall session was and when there was business for members of the Assembly that would find them in Edmonton so that they weren't specifically travelling here for a half-day meeting, that made sense if there was relevant exploration of some of these entities to do.

So my suggestion is – I don't know that there's urgent work of the committee to be done in the balance of the spring – that we defer on the basis of that to the fall, and that if we have a sense that we can't capture the volume of work that we need to do in the fall, perhaps we organize a half-day, a one-day meeting out of session but in the proximity to the beginning of session so that members are not travelling just for the purpose of attending a meeting here. I know that for some of us that are close by here, it doesn't seem like an inconvenience, but we also have members from the far reaches of the province, and I think we need to be cognizant of their needs, too.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Rodney, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to thank Mr. Mason and Mr. Dallas for their comments. I don't think it could be said more succinctly or eloquently, so I won't try to rephrase it. I will simply add this point in the spirit of the last two speakers. Because this session may be over soon and because the session in the fall may actually be a little bit longer and also because during constituency week, when we are to be in the constituency, it is considered nonsessional days – fair enough, but we could also take one of those nonsessional days during constituency week in the fall session to meet, at which point we might be in a much better position to gauge how many ministries or agencies or bureaus or commissions we would be able to see.

Long story short, I would agree with the notion that we wait until the fall, we see when we reconvene for the sitting, and we assess at that point how many additional out-of-session sittings we would like to do because I think we're all here for the same purpose. I wonder if we can entertain that notion to defer this until the fall.

Mr. Chase: Well, I'm sounding like a teacher here, but I want to remind people that the point of the Public Accounts Committee is

value for money. We receive \$2,000 a month whether or not we meet. This is a recession year. The government has made some large cuts to service provision of programs, and I would say that it's extremely important that we ensure that through the ministries and agencies, boards, and commissions we're getting every dollar's worth of value in these lean times. My feeling is that we can be efficient, as has been noted by Mr. Dallas. We could be scheduling . . . [interjection] I realize this is in *Hansard*, but I would appreciate the attention of members.

I do believe in efficiency. Previously we've had, say, a Monday and a Tuesday meeting when we saw different organizations morning, afternoon; morning, afternoon. So we could have efficiencies achieved by that kind of a process. That would make the distance which I experience well worth the trip, so to speak.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Chase, to clarify, I believe you meant \$1,000.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Yes, I did. I'm on two committees. That's where the \$2,000 came from.

10:10

The Chair: Okay. That's a good point.

What directions do you want the chair to follow? Are we not going to have an out-of-session schedule built as a result of the fall session, hopefully, reconvening in September? Do you not want any out-of-session meetings organized this year? We have to move on this issue. We have other matters to deal with, and I'm not going to go through what we did last year, spend all summer organizing meetings with Alberta Health Services and other organizations and have the whole process hijacked by the government caucus. So give me some direction here, please.

Mr. Mason: Well, I would like to make a motion that if additional out-of-session meetings are required, they be at the call of the chair and the vice-chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Rodney: If I may add to that. I appreciate the all-party spirit. I truly do. I think that still can be accomplished because if there is an earlier fall session, as we think there might be, there are still out-of-session days during constituency weeks, at which point we can utilize one or more of those. So we can accomplish all of our goals and do so at an efficient rate for the Alberta taxpayer because, honestly, as Mr. Dallas has stated before, a number of people come from the far reaches, and that is not free. We want to get all the work done, and I think that we can.

The Chair: Mr. Mason, I have a question regarding your motion. What makes this standing committee of the Legislative Assembly different from others, that the vice-chair has to be very active in organizing the meeting and the schedule? Other standing committees which I serve on don't limit and restrict the chair the way your motion will. So what makes this one different? Is it different because it's chaired by an opposition member?

Mr. Mason: Well, I guess, in part. It was just in response to your previous comments which you just made about how the government caucus had either changed its mind or interfered with a decision.

The Chair: And I object to that.

Mr. Mason: Yes. I understand that. So I'm simply trying to make a motion that reflects that political reality. That's all. If you find

that objectionable, I apologize, but I took into account what you just finished saying about your frustration, and I was trying to accommodate that.

The Chair: Well, before we get to the next speaker, to Mr. Olson, I would like to say I get quite frustrated at times on other standing committees whenever the chair just dictates, without any consultation, when a meeting is going to start and where, and whether or not I can make it or readjust my calendar is my business. The chairperson of those committees does not take that into consideration.

Mr. Olson.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This discussion is actually taking us directly towards the motion that I was wanting to make, so my comments that I'm about to make probably will apply to both issues. First of all, I want to thank you for your advice in directing me to the practical guide for committees because in my wanting to frame a motion relating to how we communicate and so on, I did have a question about authorities: what are the authorities that apply? So I appreciate your advice.

I did take a look at the practical guide for committees, which governs all of the standing committees and the policy field committees. Maybe I can just paraphrase a few things that it says. The overriding theme is that committees are masters of their own procedure. It says that in the practical guide. The practical guide refers to the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* as authority for that. It also refers to *Beauchesne* for that. So that's kind of the bottom line: the committee governs its own process.

The guide also says that the standing orders are largely silent on the powers of standing committees. As with many issues, if you're looking for an answer, you don't find the exact, word-for-word, direct answer to the question. You know, there is kind of information around it, but I think it's very clear that the bottom line is that the committee is the master of its own procedure. It also says that the chair may set the days and hours of meetings with the consent of the committee. We see that over and over again. When it talks about the committee clerk and her duties, it talks about carrying out her responsibilities under the direction of the committee, its chair, and deputy chair. So there are a number of references that seem to suggest that it's really the committee that decides how they want to govern themselves. I will concede that there are some other references talking about correspondence being signed by the chair. It also talks about the deputy chair having the same powers as the chair.

Anyway, I think it's reasonable for the committee to have a hand in these procedural things, and it's not in any way meant to be provocative. It's just meant to avoid the kinds of situations that we may have experienced in the past. So if there is an issue, let's debate it and deal with it, you know, beforehand rather than after the fact. I think that's what it will achieve. It'll achieve good co-operation and communication.

I should also mention, without wanting to put her in an awkward position, that I did speak to Parliamentary Counsel about the motion I intended to make, and she said that on a quick look through the authorities she saw nothing out of order about something that would require the chair and the deputy chair.

The Chair: I want to respond to this, please. You're right about your motion. Your motion, from what I can understand, Mr. Mason, is very similar to his.

First off, you're right: committees usually govern themselves, and if there are matters such as privilege or if a member feels that the privileges of the Legislative Assembly Act are violated, then it goes

to the House. I find it peculiar, after our dealings with Alberta Health Services, as chair of this committee for eight years, that we didn't have any scheduling problems before, or there were no matters where the chair was overstepping his or her boundaries, and now we have this motion restricting and limiting the chair. We're also going to have to consider whether this will also apply to the other standing committees of the Legislative Assembly because, certainly, that has not been the case, and I'm going to refer to the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, where meetings are set at the will of the chair.

I find this quite unusual. You are right: the rules are sort of silent. That being said, there have been no issues in the past with how we have scheduled this meeting until we came up with a billion-dollar deficit in Alberta Health Services, and certain members, in my view, wanted to restrict the amount of time that this committee would examine those budgets. So I have a strong exception to either one of these motions. I don't think they're necessary. We've dealt with these matters, I think, rather well for the last eight, nine years, and I just find it unusual that at this point we are entertaining a motion from Mr. Mason and from Mr. Olson.

With that, I will conclude by noting that I received oral notice yesterday regarding Mr. Olson's motion, as I believe I did from Mr. Mason as well.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Chairman, I'm happy to withdraw my motion. I was merely trying to find a way for the committee to give the direction which you requested from the committee about meetings between sessions. You know, I take your points, and I will withdraw my motion. Mr. Olson can bring his if he wishes.

Mr. Olson: Well, I think I will proceed with my motion just to get it on the table, and there can be some further discussion then. Maybe I can just read it.

The Chair: Yes. Please proceed.

10:20

Mr. Olson: I'll give you a copy of it. It's quite simple. It just says: that all future correspondence on behalf of the Public Accounts Committee be signed by both the chair and the deputy chair. That's it.

Again, sir, I want to stress that I'm looking for a way of making this work without the problems that you identified that you encountered last year. The comments that I just made, I think I would essentially repeat. Maybe I can just read a citation from *Beauchesne's*. This is citation 760(3). "The Speaker has ruled on many occasions that it is not competent for the Speaker to exercise procedural control over the committees. Committees are and must remain masters of their own procedure."

To me this motion is just kind of reinforcing what already exists. It's not changing anything. I think it's maybe clarifying things so we kind of all know where we stand, and we can hopefully move ahead and conduct our business in a way that's collaborative.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Chairman, I don't see any need for this. I think that you've conducted yourself honourably and professionally in the discharge, and to undermine the position of the chair, who alone in this Assembly and in parliamentary tradition is chaired by a member of the opposition – and it is chaired by a member of the opposition precisely to ensure that there is effective oversight of the public accounts. You find that in the federal parliament. You find that right across the country. I think that this specific motion undermines that principle and is simply, I think, an attempt to further

extend control by the government caucus of any oversight of the government's financial activities. So I take strong exception to this motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase: I also want to echo Brian's concerns. There's a parliamentary established procedure not just in this country but in the British parliamentary system that, as Mr. Mason has pointed out, puts an opposition member in the role of chair of Public Accounts. By putting forward this motion, which reminds me of the story about the mice trying to bell the cat, what is being done is the undermining of the chair's authority. It is the equivalent of giving veto power to the vice-chair. I don't believe that power is deserved, necessary, and it undermines the collaborative process that this committee is supposed to be carrying out. Trying to rewrite parliamentary established rules with a motion I don't think is acceptable. If the group by their majority power votes in favour of this motion, they've just basically undermined 150 years of Canadian democratic process and hundreds of years of British parliamentary procedure.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rodney, please.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you. I know that people do have to leave shortly. This is very important, and we do need to have some resolution today. I actually was completely of the understanding that Mr. Mason's motion was very much in the spirit of this motion, so I was a little bit surprised by the comments. Mr. Chase, I would never accuse you of blowing things out of proportion, sir, but the truth of the matter is that I believe the spirit of this is in all-party co-operation. The chair has expressed disfavour with a previous experience, before my time of sitting in this chair, that work that had been done in subcommittee or on the chair's behalf was undone in committee.

As is in all of our rules and regulations the committee gives direction to the chair. I guess my question would be: if the chair is acting in good faith with what the committee is asking the chair to do in his correspondence, how is this a problem? This is about co-operating and making sure that there is a common understanding for things as practical as quorum. If a date would be set by the chair, for instance, on a day when the government has its annual retreat, as an example, there would not be quorum. In the meantime all sorts of government departments, agencies, bureaus, commissions, et cetera, people would be asked to do all kinds of work, which wouldn't make any kind of sense at all. I think we should get on with things, and if this is all party, then there should be no problem with two signatures in the spirit of co-operation. I think that we should have this vote and move on.

Mr. Chase: The notion and the suggestion, even if it was just an example, that the chair would deliberately call a meeting when the majority of government members were not able to attend is an absolute farce. You're a teacher. You can come up with a better example than that to justify your concerns.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Well, I want to ask the government members if they're prepared to pass a similar motion in all of the other standing policy committees and give the vice-chair the same authority.

Mr. Rodney: We can't speak on their behalf. As the regulations identify, this is up to them.

Mr. Mason: No. This is a one-off, Mr. Rodney. This is a one-off because this committee is chaired by a member of the opposition. Your caucus will not accept giving the powers to vice-chairs of the other committees who happen to be members of the opposition. This will only happen in this committee and only because the chair of this committee is a member of the opposition. It is a farce. I agree with Mr. Chase. This is a joke.

The Chair: It's a joke, and I feel my privileges as chairman of a standing committee of the Legislative Assembly are being jeopardized here this morning. That's all I will say on this matter. I know we all have schedules. I think this is a dark day for Public Accounts in this province. You're trying to restrict and limit my ability to do my job as chairman of this committee. Sorry.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Mason: I call Orders of the Day.

The Chair: You call Orders of the Day. I think we will have a vote on this matter. The chair will not be voting, but the chair will conduct the vote. All those in favour, please, of the motion – and the motion, as presented by Mr. Olson, Wetaskiwin-Camrose, reads . . .

Mr. Mason: On a point of order.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Mason: You know, we have a scheduled adjournment at 10 o'clock. If everybody ignores it, we can carry on. If someone calls Orders of the Day, the committee is adjourned, and I respectfully submit that you must respect that, and this committee is adjourned.

Mr. Chase: I would also like to point out that we do not have Parliamentary Counsel present to gain advice. We're getting second-hand: oh, I quickly passed it through.

The Chair: No, Mr. Chase. The member has every right to bring forward the motion.

I think that in light of the hour, Mr. Mason, let's have a vote on this. The chair is ruling that we started with the procedures. You yourself had a motion that was to be discussed after 10 o'clock, so let's proceed with this. I'm sure the vote is not going to take long, and this is the last item on the agenda, and so be it.

The motion reads that

all future correspondence on behalf of the Public Accounts Committee be signed by both the chair and the deputy chair.

All those in favour of the motion? Okay. All those opposed? For the record Mr. Chase and Mr. Mason are opposed. So that's how we're dealing with that, and we will probably not hear the end of that.

Is there any other business committee members want to raise?

Mr. Chase: Yes. I would be very interested from Mr. Olson in when the ramifications of this decision will be passed on to all the other all-party standing policy committees so that we have consistency in the regulation that you have just proposed. If this is a one-off, it's unacceptable.

The Chair: No, Mr. Chase. We're moving on.

Item 6. Assuming we are still in session, the next meeting is scheduled for April 21 at 8:30 a.m. with Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Rodney: And if we're not?

The Chair: If we're not, I have no idea what's going to happen here.

Now, may I have a motion to adjourn? Motion to adjourn by Mr. Olson. All those in favour? Thank you very much. Have a good day.

[The committee adjourned at 10:29 a.m.]

