



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Justice and Solicitor General
Service Alberta

Wednesday, October 11, 2017
9 a.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature
Third Session**

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (UCP), Chair
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP), Deputy Chair

Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (UCP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (NDP)*
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP)**
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (Ind)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (Ind)
Gill, Prab, Calgary-Greenway (UCP)***
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UCP)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (NDP)****
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (NDP)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (NDP)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (NDP)
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (NDP)*****
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (NDP)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (UCP)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (NDP)*****
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP)

* substitution for Robyn Luff

** substitution for Prasad Panda (morning)

*** substitution for Prasad Panda (afternoon)

**** substitution for Nicole Goehring

***** substitution for Marie Renaud

***** substitution for Barb Miller

Also in Attendance

Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (UCP)

Office of the Auditor General Participants

Merwan Saher	Auditor General
Eric Leonty	Assistant Auditor General
Maureen Debaji	Principal

Support Staff

Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Clerk
Shannon Dean	Law Clerk and Director of House Services
Trafton Koenig	Parliamentary Counsel
Stephanie LeBlanc	Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin	Manager of Research and Committee Services
Sarah Amato	Research Officer
Nancy Robert	Research Officer
Corinne Dacyshyn	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
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Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Participants

Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General	PA-523
Philip Bryden, QC, Deputy Minister	
Gerald Lamoureux, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services	
David Peace, Assistant Deputy Minister, Justice Services	
Kim Sanderson, Assistant Deputy Minister, Correctional Services	
Bill Sweeney, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Security	
Eric Tolppanen, Assistant Deputy Minister, Alberta Crown Prosecution Service	
Barbara Turner, QC, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Resolution and Court Administration Services	
Brad Wells, Senior Financial Officer	
Ministry of Service Alberta	PA-541
Mark Brisson, Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Modernization	
Stephen Bull, Assistant Deputy Minister, SuperNet Secretariat	
Althea Hutchinson, Executive Director and Senior Financial Officer	
Colin Lloyd, Assistant Deputy Minister, Consumer and Registry Services	
David Morhart, Deputy Minister	
Doug Morrison, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Open Government	
Laura Wood, Assistant Deputy Minister, Shared Services	

9 a.m. Wednesday, October 11, 2017

[Mr. Cyr in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Scott Cyr, the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, and I am the committee chair. I'd like to ask the members, staff, and guests joining the committee at the table to introduce themselves for the record, and then we will go on to the members on the phone lines. To my right.

Mr. Dach: Lorne Dach, MLA, Edmonton-McClung, deputy chair.

Mrs. Pitt: Angela Pitt, MLA, Airdrie.

Mr. Ellis: Mike Ellis, MLA, Calgary-West.

Mr. Gotfried: Richard Gotfried, MLA, Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Wells: Brad Wells, SFO, JSG.

Mr. Peace: David Peace. I'm the ADM for justice services in Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Bryden: Philip Bryden, the Deputy Minister of JSG.

Mr. Lamoureux: Gerald Lamoureux, ADM, corporate services.

Mr. Sweeney: Bill Sweeney, senior ADM, public security division.

Mr. Saher: Merwan Saher, Auditor General.

Mr. Leonty: Eric Leonty, Assistant Auditor General.

Ms Debaji: Maureen Debaji, engagement leader.

Dr. Turner: Bob Turner, Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hinkley: Bruce Hinkley, MLA, Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Carson: Good morning. Jon Carson, MLA, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Malkinson: Good morning. Brian Malkinson, MLA for Calgary-Currie.

Mrs. Littlewood: Good morning. Jessica Littlewood, MLA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Dr. Massolin: Good morning. Philip Massolin, manager of research and committee services.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

The Chair: Well, thank you, everyone.

Now I will go to the members on the teleconferencing. Mr. Barnes, are you there?

Mr. Westhead, are you there?

Mr. Westhead: Good morning. Cameron Westhead, MLA for Banff-Cochrane.

The Chair: Mr. Piquette, are you there?

Mr. Piquette: Yes, I am. Good morning. Colin Piquette, MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to note for the record the following substitutions for this morning's schedule: Mr. Hinkley for Ms Goehring, Mr. Carson for Ms Luff, Mr. Ellis for Mr. Panda, Ms McKittrick for Ms Renaud, and Mr. Piquette for Ms Miller.

A few housekeeping items that we need to address before we turn to the business at hand. The microphone consoles are operated by the *Hansard* staff. There's no need to touch them. The audio and video of the committee's proceedings are streamed live on the Internet and recorded by *Hansard*. Meeting transcripts are obtained via the Legislative Assembly website. Please turn your phones to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Are there any changes or additions to the agenda?

Seeing none, would a member move that the agenda for the October 11, 2017, meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed? Thank you, Dr. Turner. Any discussion on the motion? All in favour? Any opposed? On the phones? Okay. Thank you. That motion is carried.

Do members have any amendments to the minutes? If not, would a member move to approve the September 6, 2017, minutes? Thank you, Mr. Carson. Any discussion on the motion? All in favour? Any opposed? On the phones? Okay. Thank you. The motion is carried.

Would a member move that the minutes of the September 7, 2017, meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed? Thank you, Mrs. Littlewood. Any discussion on the motion? All in favour? Any opposed? On the phones? Okay. This motion is carried.

I'd like to welcome our guests from the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, who are here to address funding sustainable and cost-effective legal aid services, the progress report for control systems at the office of the public guardian and trustee, and the office of the Auditor General's outstanding recommendations as well as the ministry annual report for 2016-17.

I'd invite officials from Justice and Solicitor General to provide opening remarks not exceeding 10 minutes. Mr. Bryden.

Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General

Mr. Bryden: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. For the record my name is Philip Bryden. I'm the Deputy Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce my executive team. Here at the table, to my immediate right, is Gerald Lamoureux. He is our assistant deputy minister for corporate services. To his right is Bill Sweeney, our senior ADM for public security. To my immediate left is David Peace, who's the ADM for justice services, and to his left is Brad Wells, our senior financial officer. Behind me I have Kim Sanderson, who's our ADM for correctional services; Eric Tolppanen, who's our ADM for the Alberta Crown prosecution service; Frank Bosscha, who's our ADM for legal services; Barb Turner, who is our acting ADM for resolution and court administration services; Rodney Yaremchuk, our executive director of human resources; Fiona Lavoy, our executive director, policy and planning services branch; and Dan Laville, our director of communications.

JSG has overall responsibility within government for the administration of the province's justice and public security systems. In many instances this involves direct interaction of our staff with Albertans; for example, the work that our correctional services branch does in providing both custodial and community corrections services, the work that our family and support order services staff does in helping people with their maintenance enforcement and other family support order issues, the work that our law enforcement groups do: our traffic sheriffs, our heavy-vehicle law enforcement, and fish and wildlife law enforcement officers within the public security division.

In other instances it involves working with other organizations such as the RCMP, with whom we contract for the provision of provincial policing services, or with the Alberta judiciary, for whom we provide support through the resolution and court administration services division. In addition, we provide important financial support to community organizations that play a vital role in the operation of our justice system, organizations such as Legal Aid Alberta or numerous community organizations that we were able to support through victims of crime grants, and they, in turn, are able to provide assistance to victims of crime.

We don't control, in the main, demand for the services that we provide, and in many instances demand is increasing more quickly than the population. To give just a couple of examples, the inmate population in our correctional institutions has grown by a little over 16 per cent over the last two years and by 50 per cent over the past decade. Between 2012-13 and 2016-17 there was a 35 per cent increase in the number of criminal charges laid in Alberta's Provincial Court and a 37 per cent increase in the number of civil claims filed in Provincial Court.

In order to meet these demands at a time when government resources have been under stress, we've had to develop ways of doing our work more efficiently. To take just one example, the Alberta Crown prosecution service has developed a system of electronic disclosure that enables us to meet our disclosure obligations to accused people by providing electronic files rather than paper files. This has cut down on the average time needed to meet these disclosure obligations from a matter of weeks to a matter of days and has both saved on paper cost and provided information in a way that is typically easier for defence counsel to use.

9:10

Over the past year, in 2016-2017, we spent nearly \$1.5 billion in meeting these obligations, and during the year our expenses were \$66.3 million, or 4.8 per cent, higher than the previous year. This included funding to address a number of operating pressures, including bringing the Alberta first responder radio communications system, or AFFRCS, online and increasing manpower costs for corrections, the Alberta Crown prosecution service, and resolution and court administration services to help meet some of those demands I referred to earlier.

In terms of revenue, the ministry generated \$353 million in 2016-17. That was up \$16.9 million, or 5 per cent, over 2015-16. This increase is primarily due to increasing traffic ticket volumes but also includes a \$2 million increase in federal transfers for criminal legal aid and missing and murdered indigenous women initiatives.

I'll now say a few words about each of our divisions, starting with the Alberta Crown prosecution service. The Alberta Crown prosecution service, or ACPS, prosecutes offences under the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, and provincial statutes in all of the courts in the province and appeals to the Supreme Court of Canada. In 2016-17 the division spent \$93 million, which is \$3 million, or 3.1 per cent, lower than in 2015-16, partly due to lower supply and services costs. But we recognize that there are increasing pressures on ACPS, and during the course of the year we began a process of hiring 35 additional Crown prosecutors. This is particularly important in light of the Supreme Court of Canada's Jordan decision, that set 18- and 30-month presumptive ceilings for cases in the Provincial Court and the Court of Queen's Bench, respectively. At these points delay becomes presumptively unreasonable, and unless there is some justification for the delay, the cases can be stayed.

The division is also committed to enhancing our bail system. In August of 2017 the Court of Queen's Bench determined that prosecutors rather than police must present at first-appearance bail

hearings. Previously the practice had been that police did those hearings. We had anticipated that this might be a possibility, and we began a pilot project in Edmonton in October 2016 to evaluate the Crown appearing at first-appearance bail hearings. As a result of the court's decision, we now have a system across the province where the Crown is providing bail.

Moving on to resolution and court administration services, or RCAS, this division supports the operation of Alberta's courts through administrative services in providing Albertans with enhanced access to information, dispute resolution, and court assistance. In 2016-17 the division spent roughly \$208 million, basically flat from 2015-16. During the year work continued on the court renewal initiative to help provincial courthouses address increased caseloads. This initiative will ensure cases are heard as quickly as possible and helps keep the judiciary, staff, and members of the public who use the courthouses safe.

The public security division is responsible for a wide range of programs that keep Albertans safe and secure, including contracting for provincial policing services, grants to municipalities for their policing activities and police oversight. The division is also directly responsible for sheriffs, fish and wildlife officers, and commercial vehicle enforcement officers. In 2016-17 the division expended \$535 million, which is \$41 million, or 8.3 per cent, higher than 2015-16, but that is mainly due to an increase in amortization and operational expenses as the Alberta first responder radio communications system, or AFFRCS, became operational.

One of the important programs of the public security division is the victims of crime program. During the year, the victims of crime unit spent \$40.3 million, which is nearly \$4 million, or 10.7 per cent, higher than 2015-16 due to an increase in the financial benefits liability expense for open case files. The unit provides financial benefits to victims of crime and supports 77 police-based and 39 community-based victims programs, helping to ensure that victims are treated with dignity, compassion, and respect.

The justice services division includes key program areas such as the maintenance enforcement program, the office of the Chief Medical Examiner, support to Legal Aid Alberta, and, as of this past year, the office of the public guardian and trustee. In 2016-17 justice services spent \$70.5 million, not including the Legal Aid grant, which is roughly a million dollars, or 1.5 per cent, higher than 2015-16. As noted a moment ago, in January 2017 the office of the public guardian and trustee moved to our ministry from the former ministry of human services.

A significant part of the work of the justice services division is the provision of grants to Legal Aid Alberta. Legal Aid Alberta is an independent organization that provides legal aid support to vulnerable Albertans. It's important that Legal Aid operate operationally in a manner that's independent from the government because obviously we are prosecuting many of the clients who are receiving legal aid services. Those services need to be run independently from our ministry, but we nevertheless have an important role in providing financial support for those services. Legal Aid Alberta received \$78.3 million in grants in 2016-17, and that was up from \$66 million in 2015-16. We've been working on a review of the legal aid system to assess and refine the current scope of services.

Moving to the legal services division, it consists of two branches, the civil law branch, that provides legal services to all government ministries and represents them in courts and tribunals, and the Legislative Counsel office, that drafts government bills, regulations, and orders in council. In 2016-17 legal services spent \$54 million, which is \$2.1 million, or 3.8 per cent, lower than in 2015-16.

The correctional services division provides secure custody for sentenced and remanded adults and young offenders. It also provides

court-ordered community supervision of individuals in both pre- and postsentence situations. In 2016-17 correctional services spent \$285 million, about \$10 million, or 3.8 per cent, higher than in 2015-16, largely due to the increases in our correctional population that I referred to earlier and, in particular, to increases in our population of inmates on remand. The division has been working with stakeholders to examine best practices and find more innovative and effective ways . . .

9:20

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bryden. That would be your 10 minutes.

If we could move on to the Auditor General for his comments. Mr. Saher, you have five minutes.

Mr. Saher: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll make only one point this morning, and I'm referring to our May 2017 report, page 93, Justice and Solicitor General, progress report on control systems at the office of the public guardian and trustee. I'd just like to read you the key finding from that progress report, and that can be found on page 95. It reads: "efforts to date," "to date" meaning four years after the office made its original recommendations to the office of the public guardian and trustee. Four years after making initial recommendations, "efforts to date have failed to make needed changes to trust administration, and plans going forward lack the rigour needed to ensure success."

I make that one point, and I stress that this morning because it's in anticipation of the Public Accounts Committee delving into the rate of progress and the plans going forward and seeking assurance that management's assertion that they will be ready for us to come in and do a full follow-up audit is realistic. The target date is March 31, 2018.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Saher.

Mr. Fildebrandt, would you announce yourself for the record?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Derek Fildebrandt, Strathmore-Brooks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fildebrandt.

Our time allotment format for questions from the committee members has been revised for today's three-hour session. The first rotation will be 20 minutes each for the Official Opposition and government members. We will then take a 10-minute break for the first rotation. The second rotation will be 20 minutes each for the Official Opposition and for the government members, and then there will be a five-minute time slot for independent committee members, providing a maximum of five minutes per member. A third rotation will reduce these time slots to 10 minutes each for government and opposition members. The final rotation will be five-minute time slots each for the opposition committee members, followed by the government members. Finally, for any independent, Alberta Party, Liberal, PC members in attendance who wish to participate, with the agreement of the committee, the rotation will continue in five-minute increments for any time remaining.

I will now open the floor to questions from members. Mrs. Pitt.

Mrs. Pitt: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for attending today's meeting. Just to start off, are there officials here from Legal Aid and the office of the public trustee?

Mr. Bryden: No. Legal Aid is an independent organization, so they don't appear.

We mainly brought ADM-level officials. Mr. Peace is able to answer questions on the OPGT.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. So who is responsible for oversight of Legal Aid? I understand it's arm's length, but, I mean . . .

Mr. Bryden: The justice services division is responsible for oversight of the grant and ensuring that the government gets value for the grant that's provided.

Mrs. Pitt: And who would that be? That would be you? Okay. We know there are some challenges with legal aid, so I'm hoping that you can answer some questions in regard to that.

The Chair: Mrs. Pitt, I'm sorry. An invitation came from myself as the chair. Was an invitation sent from your office to Legal Aid to be present here today?

Mr. Bryden: I apologize if there was a lack of communication. I didn't receive any communication from your office, so I'm afraid I can't help you.

The Chair: Okay. So you didn't receive the letter on August 15, 2017, from my office to Minister Ganley requesting that you invite senior officials from the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, from the agencies, boards, and commissions reporting to the ministry to attend the committee meeting scheduled for today?

Mr. Bryden: I regret that I'm not aware of that letter.

To elaborate, Legal Aid Alberta is not an agency, board, or commission that reports to Justice and Solicitor General. The Human Rights Commission reports through JSG. The Law Enforcement Review Board is one of our agencies, boards, and commissions. But Legal Aid Alberta is a grant agency. In similar fashion we provide grants to municipal policing agencies, and we provide policing services under a contract through the RCMP, but they don't report to us in the way that the agencies, boards, and commissions do.

The Chair: This is strange that the Auditor General's report actually focuses on Legal Aid, and somehow Legal Aid isn't present at this meeting.

Mr. Bryden: Well, I think that the Auditor General's report – and he can correct me – is directed to the oversight that we have of the grant and ensuring that Albertans receive value for the grant services that they provide. But for the reasons that I identified earlier, Legal Aid Alberta needs to operate on an arm's-length basis from our ministry.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Saher, do you have a comment?

Mr. Saher: Well, I can confirm what the deputy minister has just said. The two recommendations that we made as a result of our audit of legal aid services were directed to the Department of Justice. The first read that we recommend that the Department of Justice and Solicitor General "determine, through analysis, the type and scope of services Alberta's publicly funded legal aid system can provide and sustain." And the second, also directed to the department, read that we recommend that the department "ensure there are processes in place to measure, monitor and report on the quality, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of publicly funded legal aid services."

The Chair: So you believe that it's reasonable that Legal Aid wouldn't be present today, responding to your recommendations, as they are a stakeholder?

Mr. Saher: I think, obviously, Legal Aid has a view on all of these matters. I think that what the deputy minister has told you is technically correct. Legal Aid is not an agency, board, or commission in the sense that those terms are used. I believe that if the committee had wanted Legal Aid to be here, perhaps the request needed to be more precise.

The Chair: Fair enough. Thank you.

How about the public guardian and trustee? Was an invitation sent from your office to their department?

Mr. Bryden: Well, the public guardian and trustee is a part of the justice services division. Mr. Peace is the assistant deputy minister responsible, and he can answer any questions that you may have in relation to the office of the public guardian and trustee.

The Chair: So you think that it's reasonable that you have no senior people from that department here to advise you, sir, especially when this is within the scope of the Auditor General's office or report?

Mr. Bryden: Mr. Peace is here to advise me, and he is the supervisor of the public guardian and trustee. I have confidence in his ability to address questions that relate to the audit of the OPGT.

9:30

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Pitt, you can continue.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Peace, how do you ensure accountability within the legal aid system given what we've just heard with it being an arm's-length agency and the granting and funding coming from the province of Alberta? I know there's no representative here from Legal Aid Alberta, but as the funder of this program how do you ensure accountability?

Mr. Peace: With the support of the Auditor General we have developed a robust performance metrics framework that Legal Aid Alberta reports on monthly with our staff that speaks to a number of different measures that allow us to see what's happening in the number of certificates that are going out in their current actual expenditures versus their forecast expenditures, the nature of services that are being offered. We use that as our day-to-day. We also have regular oversight meetings in terms of where we're going in the renewed negotiations coming up to develop a long-term, sustainable governance structure with Legal Aid Alberta. We also have ongoing working groups focused on creating efficiencies in the criminal justice system in response to some of the pressures that are coming from the Jordan decision.

Mrs. Pitt: The introduction message from the minister at the beginning of the annual report states that the department is undertaking "a review of the legal aid system to assess and refine the current scope of services." Now, the AG's report, as previously stated, states that the department currently does not have processes for being able to answer two key questions. The first one: "How much is it able to pay for a sustainable legal aid program?" and "What non-mandatory services should it pay for?" How can both statements be correct?

Mr. Peace: We did do a legal aid review in the previous year, and that produced a number of engagements with legal aid clients, with other stakeholders in the system, with some focus groups and cross-jurisdictional research on an assessment of Legal Aid Alberta's efficacy and efficiency. The results of that were compared with the

observations of the Auditor General, which we appreciated and provided us confirmation that our legal aid review had highlighted to us what the issues that needed to be resolved were. The Auditor General made some good observations about how we were communicating what our priorities were in terms of that scope of service in getting what we're paying for, essentially.

Going into negotiations, which are due to start in the next week or two, we are looking at producing a tiered model into the legal aid plan that expresses the government of Alberta's position on tier 1, which is constitutionally or statutorily required support from Legal Aid Alberta, and tier 2, which are other priority services that are important to the government of Alberta to fund out of legal aid either wholly or partially with the other funders of the legal aid plan, and tier 3, which would be a developmental tier of services that Legal Aid could offer as financial support from other departments in the government, other levels of government, or other not-for-profit agencies to provide social support or innovation services related to the legal aid plan in Alberta.

So the government of Alberta's contribution to that would be one piece of it, and it would allow us to express where our priorities lie and the funding levels that are associated with that.

Mrs. Pitt: Recently an announcement was made that there would be a fee charged up front, and then the decision was reversed. Why was that decision made in the first place? What was the reasoning behind that? Is the program not sustainable?

Mr. Peace: Legal Aid Alberta is a wholly independent organization, and they made an operational decision to charge a first instalment of a payment plan to recover costs only from those clients that could afford to repay, which is not the totality of their client base. There were some misperceptions that somehow that would prevent access to legal aid, and that wasn't true, but it concerned our ministry. So our minister invited Legal Aid into a meeting to explore the motivations, and their motivations were strictly to enhance their ability to recover costs from the clients that could afford to pay. That decision is on hold right now while the minister and Legal Aid consider what options are available.

Mrs. Pitt: How can a client be deemed able to pay for legal aid when they've qualified for legal aid in the first place?

Mr. Peace: Yeah. That's a good question. It really comes down to the perception of the legal aid. Some people think that it's strictly focused on the financial eligibility guidelines. But if there was a property dispute between couples, for example, and one of the recipients who was a legal aid customer or client benefited from that settlement, they might be in a financial position where they could afford to repay, just as one example of a situation where repayment would be possible.

Mrs. Pitt: If they win the settlement and they're in a financial position to pay it back, then they might.

Mr. Peace: That's right. They might come in underneath the financial eligibility guideline but leave well above the financial eligibility guideline.

Mrs. Pitt: Is that true in divorce cases where one spouse may not have an income going into the divorce but have, you know, half of the assets coming their way after the divorce, and then they're required to pay that money to Legal Aid?

Mr. Peace: I couldn't speculate on the hypotheticals. What Legal Aid Alberta decided to do in this case was to assess every single

case that came in at a managerial level in their organization to ensure that there was no financial hardship before they started to recover any money. Nobody that was unable to pay was being forced to pay before they could access legal aid services.

Mr. Bryden: It's useful to recognize that Legal Aid Alberta has been undertaking client recoveries for a considerable period of time. If you look at their financial statements every year, there will be a line item in there related to client recoveries, and it's in the sort of couple of millions of dollars each year that's important for their operational activities.

What was different about this particular move was working on client recoveries at an earlier stage and the process, and that's given rise to some concerns and some ongoing discussions of whether that's the best way for Legal Aid Alberta to try to operate within their funding envelope.

Mrs. Pitt: Do we have system to measure how many clients may have been turned away from an announcement like this, a policy decision like this?

Mr. Peace: The feedback that I received from the chief executive officer of Legal Aid Alberta was that that did not happen at all. They received no direct feedback from clients objecting to this. All of the feedback that was portrayed in the media came from other participants, not directly from their clients.

Mrs. Pitt: Now, in terms of policy decisions like that, what sort of oversight does the ministry or the funder have in regard to policy changes within Legal Aid Alberta moving forward? Have systems changed?

Mr. Peace: They've not changed yet. But going into negotiations, not only are we negotiating a long-term, sustainable funding model that talks about scopes of service and what government of Alberta wants to pay for as its contribution into the legal aid plan for Alberta, but it also talks about changes and improvements to the governance structure. So right now making that kind of a decision is in the purview of Legal Aid Alberta as an independent organization. It's an operational decision on how to execute a control measure in an effort to try to control costs, I would also say. Coming out of negotiations, that situation could be different, and we have a number of negotiating positions that we're going to try to achieve over the coming six months.

Mrs. Pitt: How confident are you in that process?

Mr. Peace: Very confident. I would say, if I could add in, that our cosignatories in the governance agreement, the Law Society of Alberta and Legal Aid Alberta's board of directors, are also confident that negotiations is the way forward here.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Sorry; it comes back for review in six months?

Mr. Peace: We're hoping to have a final new agreement in place by March 31 of 2018, yes, ma'am.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. I want to talk about the victims of crime fund. Who would be responsible for that?

Mr. Peace: Mr. Sweeney.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Wonderful. Thank you, Mr. Sweeney.

How does the ministry further its purpose of assisting victims of crime when the budget for the victims of crime fund is cut by \$3 million?

9:40

Mr. Sweeney: The budget actually was increased as a consequence of increased investments on the financial liabilities. The compensation that is paid to victims of crime that qualify for that compensation actually increased. We have been working very hard within the ministry, with our stakeholder community to actually take the recommendations from the Auditor General and breathe life into them and to make recommendations to our minister with respect to how we might be able to access the surplus to invest wisely to support victims across the province of Alberta but also to maintain fiscal responsibility with respect to a reserve fund, which was also a part of the recommendations that we received from the Auditor General. A number of factors are starting to converge.

The Auditor General also asked us to consider a comprehensive business plan with performance measures and reporting publicly. All of that can't be completed until we get policy direction with respect to the reserve fund and the additional investments that we're making recommendations to the minister on. That would allow us to complete the business plan and actually move forward, but we actually are making significant progress on all those fronts. We have a contractor that's going to assist us with performance measures. Perhaps I shouldn't say it this way, but government typically has not been particularly adept at coming up with performance measures that are both defensible and understandable to the public, so we're seeking some assistance with respect to that component.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. What type of investment recommendations are you making?

Mr. Sweeney: There's a scope of options that we're hoping that the minister will give serious consideration to. Of course, she will have to go to her Treasury Board officials to get affirmation and authority to make additional investments, but our gap analysis and our stakeholder communities are saying that we need to invest in our major centres, domestic violence – sexual assault issues are predominant across the province – indigenous issues, and making sure that the people we have in place are actually well supported with the funding models that we have. Currently we rely almost exclusively on volunteer advocates. As you can well imagine, across this province those volunteer advocates are doing yeoman work, but our stakeholder communities are saying that they need professional support. They need full-time professional support, so we're working through some models on how that actually could be materialized within the funding envelope that we're recommending to the minister.

Mrs. Pitt: Good. I'm happy to hear that. Victims' services groups across the province have not seen an increase in funding for many, many years, and they're certainly struggling. To ask organizations like that to go fund raise so that they can support victims is just absolutely ridiculous.

Is it true, Mr. Sweeney, that funding allocations via the victims of crime fund can be made via ministerial order?

Mr. Sweeney: The minister will make decisions with respect to how the funds are allocated but within the confines of the legislation. The legislation is quite prescriptive.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mrs. Pitt.

I'd like to have Ms McKittrick introduce herself for the record.

Ms McKittrick: Annie McKittrick, MLA, Sherwood Park.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms McKittrick.
Mr. Carson.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, all, for being here this morning. I look forward to your answers. First, I would like to discuss two bills that your ministry recently introduced and passed: of course, Bill 9, An Act to Modernize Enforcement of Provincial Offences, and Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence.

First of all, I would just like to say thank you for both of those pieces of legislation but especially Bill 2. Both are equally important, arguably. Bill 2 was announced in my constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark at the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton, and I've heard first-hand accounts from people that this has helped, not only from the staff that work at SACE and other community organizations across our province but also from survivors of domestic or sexual violence. They have quite amazing stories about how this has helped them move forward, so I appreciate that.

My first question is in regard to Bill 9. I'm hoping that you can speak to any cost savings or improvements that have been realized from this bill.

Mr. Bryden: What Bill 9 does is remove the use of warrants as a mechanism for the enforcement of unpaid fines. We don't have any direct evidence that I can give you specifically of what the cost savings associated with Bill 9 are, but we do know that there are two areas where it achieves advantages, institutionally for us and for law enforcement agencies. That's to say nothing of the advantages that are available to members of the public who have unpaid fines.

The advantages from our perspective are helping to deal with the challenges that we face in our correctional institutions with our remand population because those people are not being picked up and sent to a remand centre. We're using different kinds of enforcement mechanisms. From a policing standpoint that's an advantage because they aren't having to pick people up on warrants.

In both instances we think that there are better mechanisms to engage in that enforcement, such as what's been authorized in the legislation, which is nonrenewal of motor vehicle licences. If you have outstanding fines for traffic historically, you can't get a new motor vehicle licence. We're now doing the same thing for other kinds of bylaw offences.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for that answer. Do you have any numbers on how many cases Bill 9 has affected?

Mr. Bryden: I don't at this point, but we can see what we can generate for you and provide a written response.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much.

Now just moving on to Bill 2, An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence, I'm wondering: now that the term limits have been removed, has there been an increase in claims?

Mr. Bryden: We've seen media reports of individuals filing claims that would previously have been statute barred. I mean, it's a relatively short period of time since the passage of Bill 2, and I can't give you anything other than anecdotal evidence of media reports that some people are coming forward with claims that previously would have been statute barred and are now pursuing those claims.

Mr. Carson: Uh-huh. I think all of us would be very interested – I don't think you have an answer – in finding out more about how many claims have been brought forward that would have previously been past that deadline. I think that would be very important.

Mr. Bryden: We can certainly look into that.

Mr. Carson: Yeah. Thank you.

On page 17 your report lists four new victim programs: a complaints program, a restitution program, a family information liaison unit, and a program for missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. These were all, as far as I can see, federally funded. I'm just hoping that you can talk about the finances of these programs and the intended outcomes of these programs and any progress that you've made so far.

Mr. Bryden: Bill, could you address that?

Mr. Sweeney: Yes. Some of the programs that you indicated are funded federally, but some of the programs were driven by the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights, for example the complaints resolution component of it. We now have that up and running as of November 2016. Victims are given the opportunity to express dissatisfaction with their exposure to the criminal justice system, and that is pretty broadly interpreted. It could be the prosecution services. It could be the courts. It could be how the police operate. It could be a range of activities.

9:50

It's very slow on the uptake in terms of complaints. Since November 2016 we've only received eight complaints against the Alberta Crown prosecution service, two against JSG and financial benefits – that's the financial benefit program that the victims of crime program administers – one against the courts, and one against JSG. So it's very slow on the uptake, and my sense is that it's probably attributable to the fact that it's brand new. Until people become accustomed to using that service to resolve issues or concerns or make complaints, it's likely to continue that way.

The missing and murdered indigenous women and girls inquiry, the FILU program that you referenced: those people have been hired and actually are out in the communities interacting with families of victims, that are obviously in a great deal of stress and need, and assisting them as they work through the inquiry process. I can get the levels of the funding to you. I have them in my book, but I probably would take a little bit to find them. The federal government has been very generous with respect to their support of victims.

Mr. Carson: When some time has passed and you go back to evaluate these programs, how will you decide if these were effective for the cost?

Mr. Sweeney: The evaluation framework: because they are so new and because the government of Canada felt that the requirements were so immediate, the evaluation process is something that we will have to develop with Canada with respect to these program areas. The missing and murdered indigenous women and girls inquiry is ongoing, and the hiring happened after the inquiry started their work. You've identified the very critical element of assessing whether or not these investments were worth while, but it's a work-in-progress.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for that answer.

An ongoing concern of Albertans with our justice system is its ability to deliver justice in a timely manner. This is especially pertinent now given the Jordan decision limiting how long cases can take. Earlier this year you hired 35 Crown prosecutors and an additional 30 court support staff to address current pressures in the system. I'm wondering if you've seen any improvements in the timelines of delivery.

Mr. Bryden: We've seen some improvements in the timelines at the Provincial Court level. We haven't seen as much improvement at the Court of Queen's Bench level. Part of that is due to a shortage of judges. Queen's Bench judges are appointed by the federal government rather than the provincial government, and we have commitments from Canada to support an increase in the number of Court of Queen's Bench judges. We've slowly started to see judges being appointed to fulfill that commitment, but it's been a slower process than would be ideal. As a result, we're seeing some continued pressure in the Court of Queen's Bench.

Mr. Carson: Thank you. I've heard from community members that it can be challenging to access court documents for people who perhaps now live in a different city than where their court proceedings took place. Is there anything being done within your ministry or your department in terms of using technology or electronic records to more effectively provide these documents to citizens?

Mr. Bryden: Could I ask Acting ADM Turner to respond to that question?

Ms Turner: We do have a long . . .

The Chair: Just one second. Sorry. Can you announce your name and your department, please?

Ms Turner: My name is Barbara Turner, acting ADM for resolution and court administration services, Justice and Solicitor General.

The Chair: Thank you. Please proceed.

Ms Turner: The question was whether or not there's any electronic ability to access court records?

Mr. Carson: Or if you're working towards improvements of that system, yes.

Ms Turner: Right. That is something that we are working on in terms of an e-court system in the long term, a digital-by-default type of system which would allow people to have access to records in a more electronic format and doing everything, for that matter, in a more electronic format. That is a much longer term process. That is something that we are investing in at this time, though.

There may be others that can speak to the status of the e-courts initiative. Mr. Lamoureux might want to speak to that.

Mr. Lamoureux: We are in the process right now of doing a lot of facilitated discussions with stakeholders, the judiciary, and court administrators to look at and plan what we're calling e-courts, basically a digital system to do courts, moving from what's largely a paper system today to an electronic system. You would make your submissions electronically. You would be able to pull things up electronically. We're seeing bits and pieces of it. We have the electronic disclosure piece that's out there right now, today, but this would look at the entire system and how we move to an electronic system that would give people access from anyplace. Now we're in the planning process. We're working on a business case that we expect to have done this fall. That will be taken forward, and we'll look for funding to develop the system. We're talking, you know, a multiyear project. It's not something that will happen over one or two years.

Mr. Bryden: If you look at the court system as a pyramid, the appellate court systems have been typically further down the road in the e-courts process than the trial level courts. If you look at

electronic records on the Supreme Court of Canada, there's a fairly sophisticated and elaborate process of being able to access submissions electronically. But they're not a trial court. They're not hearing evidence, so the volume of documents is much smaller. I think our Court of Appeal is moving forward more quickly than the Court of Queen's Bench and the Provincial Court, but over the longer term we're interested in all levels of court being able to operate on a more electronic basis.

Mr. Carson: Thank you.

On page 18 of the annual report you indicate that your target for 2016-17 for performance measure 1(a), the percentage of victims satisfied with services provided, is 86 per cent. Can you speak to how your key strategies outlined on pages 15 to 17 will help to achieve this outcome?

Mr. Sweeney: As you've probably noted in our report, there has been a slight drop in victim satisfaction within the province of Alberta. It's a slight drop. There has been an increase, unfortunately, in crime rates in the province of Alberta. In 2016 and 2015 crime severity indices are actually up considerably. One of the considerations in trying to explain why there's a slight drop in victim satisfaction might take us to assessing the crime situation here in the province of Alberta. Property crimes are up as well. There have been a number of rural communities, in fact the chair's community in particular, that have been quite concerned with the increase in rural crime rates and police responses to those incidents. The province of Saskatchewan has also experienced those sorts of manifestations.

In terms of our ministry's attempt to address these issues, first off, I think, from a victim's perspective some of the things that I spoke to earlier with respect to enhancing the services to victims generally: the recommendations that have gone to the minister are intended to address those issues that victims have identified to us as being problematic. They actually correlate to a great degree with the CSI, the increase in domestic violence, increase in sexual assaults, increase in physical violence. These sorts of recommendations are to support victims who find themselves in those situations, but the department is also doing a lot of work on trying to prevent and intervene and rehabilitate so that we can have a positive impact on those crime severity indices and crime rates generally.

10:00

We're working very hard on restorative justice recommendations that might see us able to relieve the pressure on the courts for those cases that are appropriate so that the courts can focus on those serious cases.

We are looking at integrated offender management programs, that are being piloted in the RCMP's jurisdiction and the city of Edmonton, where we're actually taking these offenders and providing the type of supervision and interventions that get them into treatments that might actually have a very positive impact on recidivism. We've had this assessed by independent organizations to determine whether or not this is a promising best practice. It has considerable potential to have a very positive impact on recidivism and administrative breaches that occur.

We are working very closely with the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police with respect to the Alberta law enforcement response teams to have a much more robust enforcement strategy and co-ordinated, integrated policing so that we're actually using the scarce resources that we do have much more effectively and smarter than we have in the past. Not that it's been dumb in the past, because that was part of the past, but it can be better.

Mr. Carson: Mr. Chair, how much more time do I have?

The Chair: Two minutes.

Mr. Carson: Two minutes. Okay. Thank you.

You touched on it a little bit here, I think, but I'm just wondering if you can speak to how performance measures 2(a), 2(b), 2(c), 2(d) – hopefully, you have those in front of you – will help to achieve outcome 2, “Justice system partners collaborate to make best use of resources [in terms of] prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation.”

Mr. Sweeney: Okay. There are a number of initiatives within the public security division on prevention and intervention and rehabilitation. One of the things that we think we need to do better is to make those appropriate interventions for people with complex needs that tend to be high users of our criminal justice systems. We've actually created a Mental Health Police Advisory Committee, which includes Health officials, Children's Services officials, police, prosecution services, our folks – we try to be as inclusive as possible – to make recommendations on how the system can actually respond much more appropriately when we are dealing with an individual that presents as a criminal justice issue but is not necessarily a criminal justice issue in the context that the underlying factor that is causing the aberrant behaviour is a mental health issue.

Mr. Carson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll take a quick 10-minute break for those that need to have a quick coffee or restroom visit.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 10:04 a.m. to 10:15 a.m.]

The Chair: All right. I'd like to resume this meeting. It's been 10 minutes.

Let's start with Mr. Ellis.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Chair, and thanks to everyone for being here today. First, let's start with the office of the public guardian and trustee. In the May 2017 AG report the Auditor General had some recommendations. Maybe you can explain to this committee what the rate of progress is and if you will indeed be meeting these target deadlines of March 2018 as suggested by the Auditor General.

Mr. Peace: Yeah. Thank you, sir. I'd be glad to answer that. It's rather lengthy, and I could go through each recommendation one by one if that's all right with you.

Mr. Ellis: Sure.

Mr. Peace: The first recommendation that the Auditor General made with respect to the office of the public guardian and trustee was the supervisory review of client files. We will be ready for the Auditor General to revisit us by March 31, 2018. We've made significant progress in reviewing the files that we have. We've developed a quality management system that links reviewing data to training and policy, a total quality management type process, so that when we identify an error or an omission in a file, we go back and do some root-cause analysis on what caused that error or omission and then go back and fix that process.

That methodology is all internal to the office of the public guardian and trustee. One of the observations that the Auditor General had was that we were using our internal auditors too much for internal checks and balances and not as an independent auditor of the integrity of our files. In answer, we've moved the internal audit function out of the public guardian and trustee to another

branch in my division to ensure that integrity and that autonomy so that the internal audit can do the functions that it was designed to do.

We have supervisor training that's under way and is doing well in ensuring that they're better able to do that file review. We have core curriculum that's been developed in conjunction with the JSG Training Academy so that it's professionally constructed and delivered to the 280 or so employees in the office of the public guardian and trustee.

We're also implementing a data mining project using advanced forensic skills, with the assistance of the corporate internal audit service from Treasury Board and Finance, to go through our electronic filing system, our information management system and pull files that respond to specific flags that could indicate an error or some other problem with a file. That will allow us to target it even more and have a greater degree of assuredness that our systems are going forward.

We've developed a risk registry in conjunction with our ministry information security officer. We formed an IMT working group that looks at industry standards and best practices across jurisdictions and brings that back, again improving the processes that are involved in the office of the public guardian and trustee.

Recommendation 3, their second one – the way they were numbered in the report makes it recommendation 3 – was with respect to the internal audit role, and I already spoke to how we've moved that out of the office of the public guardian and trustee to ensure its integrity. We're developing a three-year audit plan for them specific to OPGT to ensure that we have a robust audit system internal to us, and that is progressing well.

Recommendation 4 was to improve and follow policies. Again, we'll be ready by March 31 for that. We have a business process re-engineering project that's been ongoing and a quality management services project that's replacing the Auditor General's in that operational function and documentation process that I spoke to earlier. The branch is also developing that root-cause analysis tool that I spoke to.

Recommendation 5 is on the segregation of duties. In the Auditor General's report in May he said that we were already doing well in that regard.

Recommendation 6, or the fifth one in this case, is with respect to documentation. Again, we'll be ready by March 31 for re-evaluation. We have checklists, administrative guides, spreadsheets, and other electronic or paper-based tools in our existing system. We're also working on the development of a new information management system called the public guardian and trust information system. It'll be combining the information management system of the public guardian with the information management system of the Public Trustee and modernizing both of those to have better documentation control. Both the procurement of that system – and when that system is in place, it will have that total quality management system. When we identify a problem, we don't just fix it; we fix the root cause so that we're not re-experiencing that problem again.

I'm confident that the public guardian and trustee is going to be ready by March 31. We've also been lucky to have ongoing informal meetings with the Auditor General's office at a program level – their staff meet with the office of the public guardian and trustee monthly – and then at an executive level Eric and I meet to make sure that the progress is ongoing and that we're moving forward in a way that makes sense in accordance with the best practices, that the Auditor General is aware of as well.

Mr. Ellis: Great. I look forward to seeing that report after March.

Okay. Mr. Sweeney, something just caught my attention here. You had mentioned that victim satisfaction was down. Was that correct?

Mr. Sweeney: Yeah, by about I think it was 2 per cent.

Mr. Ellis: Two per cent? Okay. Sorry, but it's just my experience talking. You know, certainly, any time I hear anything regarding victim satisfaction or public satisfaction, my first inclination is to think about public trust and erosion of public trust. I guess my question to you is: in response to something like that, what are the proactive steps that you hope to be doing or that your department hopes to be doing in order to improve those types of numbers?

Mr. Sweeney: Well, I think it's very important that the context of the environment that we're operating in today is something that is taken into consideration. In taking a look at the drop in our surveys with respect to Albertans feeling safe in their home and victim satisfaction, both of those had a slight dip, not significant, but certainly, from my perspective and, I believe, from yours, it's going in the wrong direction, so that's significant in and of itself. But we've had, as I mentioned earlier, a significant shift in crime trends even though the crime rate today is lower than it was 10 years ago. The rate had been dropping, but it's actually going up at a fairly significant rate, 12 per cent and 18 per cent on the CSI side, crimes against persons, and then the property crime is also going in the wrong direction.

With those two factors, the fact that crime rates are actually going up and that people are not feeling safe and victims are expressing concerns, I think there's a correlation there. I can't say with any degree of confidence that there's a causation, but I would say that there's a correlation.

From my perspective, the things that we can do from a law enforcement perspective are basically to become much more focused, much more integrated, much more collaborative, which the chiefs are also in agreement with, in terms of having a common approach to dealing with issues within their communities, being much more selective and focused on those influences that are causing the most harm in their communities, which requires, as you well know, good intelligence and good work at the executive level.

It's always easy to be integrated at the tactical level, not at the strategic. The strategic level is always the most complex element of it. We have been working with the Alberta law enforcement response teams participants, the chiefs of police in particular, and the board of directors to try to reconfigure the governance of ALERT so that the chiefs of police are actually taking ownership and giving direction to those units that are actually on the ground doing the things that we've just spoken about in terms of targeted enforcement and being much more selective and much more intelligence led.

10:25

Mr. Ellis: Sir, communication, as you know, is really part of, well, the majority of any successful operation, right? You spoke of ALERT, and of course I think everybody here is aware of what the value is of ALERT and a province-wide response to certain crimes.

Now, that being said, Edmonton and Calgary, we know, are very large municipalities. They have their own resources. They, of course, put their resources, as do all communities, into ALERT. Now, I have heard that they don't feel as though they're getting, we'll say, the bang for their buck. What is it that you guys are doing to not only make them feel included but also to ensure that the necessary communications are in place? Whether it be for a crime that has occurred in a rural jurisdiction – you know, crime has no borders, right?

Mr. Sweeney: Right.

Mr. Ellis: So, you know, how would that positively impact a larger municipality, whether it be Medicine Hat or Lethbridge or whatever the case may be, right? What are we doing from a communications standpoint for ALERT?

Mr. Sweeney: Those are all excellent observations. The chiefs of police have expressed concerns to us from time to time that ALERT has not had the relevance within their communities that it ought to have, primarily because ALERT is acting as an autonomous entity and is governed by a board of directors and not the chiefs of police. As you may know, there used to be an executive for the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police that was very narrow. There were five members of the executive. The chiefs believed that to increase the level of communications across policing generally in the province, the executive of the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police should be all the chiefs. So there's nobody excluded; everybody has a voice.

They also believe that in directing the ALERT resources, which are highly specialized, highly trained, very, very effective resources, it actually should be the executive committee of the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police that is giving direct, you know, orders with respect to the priorities that the ALERT teams will target. That would allow for the sorts of variations in targeting that would accommodate Calgary and Edmonton based on the priorities that are identified by the chiefs and their executive team.

Mr. Ellis: Right. I mean, in my experience, for example, Mr. Offender will go set up his, you know, shop – we'll call it that – in rural Alberta, of course, but he's doing all his business in the larger municipality, right? There is a symbiotic relationship between rural and, of course, urban.

I happened to be in Thorsby yesterday speaking with the community out there, obviously, with the tragic events that occurred there the other day. Of course, we have, you know, a community that just feels – and this is coming from the council and the mayor – as though they're just not getting, we'll say, the services that maybe they should be getting. I guess my question is: what is it that you can do – and I say this collectively as Albertans here – to ensure that the folks in rural Alberta feel included, especially when it comes to police services?

Mr. Sweeney: The influence that we have with respect to the RCMP services in rural Alberta is a contractual one. We get to provide, through the minister's office, the commanding officer, the priorities for provincial policing, and we provide oversight with respect to how they deliver on those priorities. Clearly, one of those priorities is to be responsive to the individual needs of communities right across the province. Each detachment commander is expected and is required to have a local operational plan, which is developed in concert with the communities.

Now, the expectation and the actual execution: sometimes there's a gap between the two. The provincial government has the opportunity to intervene if, in fact, the expectation is not implemented.

Mr. Ellis: Do you have a check? We might as well go down this road. One of the messages I was hearing from the community last night, maybe a consistent message that I've heard from other rural communities, is that they feel – I keep hearing the word "underfunded."

Now, however, I'm certainly familiar with resource deployment and stuff like that. I guess my question is: do you, in your department, have any sort of check-balance system or a relationship with the RCMP, as an example, whereby a small community, if they

have a sergeant and four constables, that there is a sergeant and four constables and not three people that have been deployed somewhere else due to, sadly, a major tragedy? When people call 911, we have to make sure that those services are there. Again, this is about communication with these other departments.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Sweeney: Yes. We have the opportunity, in fact, this Thursday – our senior financial officer and I meet with the commanding officer on a regular basis to discuss issues of mutual concern. They could be anything from financial decisions that the commanding officer might be making or operational issues, as you have just identified.

I meet regularly with community leaders right across the province. I would say that between AUMA and AAMD and C I probably meet with 70 different mayors and reeves and councils over the course of the year. The minister makes herself available to meet with these communities when issues arise, and I generally attend those meetings with her, which typically happen around the conventions, when people are in the city and have accessibility to ministers.

So there are ongoing communications, and when we do hear those things – and we don't always hear them in a timely fashion – we take them up with the commanding officer immediately.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. Thank you, sir.

Maybe it was Mr. Bryden; it might even have been you. You talked about focusing on serious crimes, I think maybe in reference to – we talk about the Jordan decision, and, you know, we want to focus on this now. Again, my experience talking, to me that serious crime is very subjective. What is the direction you have provided your department as to what the threshold is regarding a serious crime?

Mr. Bryden: We do within the Alberta Crown prosecution service have three different levels depending on the nature of the offence. Level 3 would be serious and violent offences, level 1 would be relatively minor offences, and level 2 is in the middle. Our direction with respect to priorities is that we don't want to lose any level 3 offences to delay. At the same time, we don't want to take the position that level 1 offences get a free pass. So we have to try to develop a system of identifying priorities and allocating resources that achieves that critical goal of not compromising on the serious and violent offences but still providing oversight in relation to the other levels.

One of the things that we're trying to emphasize is the early resolution of matters. If we can achieve resolutions that are appropriate and are agreed to by the accused, that saves resources down the road. One of the challenges that we face is trying to convince people in the defence bar that we make . . .

10:35

Mr. Ellis: Would you be able to provide this committee these levels? I'm still a little perplexed on those.

Mr. Bryden: Certainly. We can do that.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ellis.

Mr. Malkinson.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, you know, and thank you so much to all the various representatives from the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General for being here this morning.

[Mr. Dach in the chair]

I'm going to start off with a couple of questions just on the general subject of the bail system review, so I think I will be sending most of these questions towards you, Mr. Bryden. On page 23 of your annual report, under key strategy 2.4, you elaborate on the remand reduction project and the bail navigator pilot project. Now, my understanding is that this project is about connecting people with community resources and reducing the number of bail cases that result in short stints in the remand centre. Can you speak to the bail navigator roles that were added to the Edmonton police headquarters and whether these positions are improving outcomes or if they are reducing costs?

Mr. Bryden: We're doing ongoing evaluation – and I'll ask our ADM Kim Sanderson to speak specifically to that – but at this point we're reasonably satisfied that they are improving outcomes. Reducing costs is a more challenging evaluation.

Kim, can you speak to that?

Ms Sanderson: Good morning. Kim Sanderson, ADM for correctional services division. With respect to the remand reduction project and the bail navigators there are two individuals that are working out of the Edmonton Police Service downtown, and their role is to interview individuals as they're coming into custody to see if they can speed up the process of them actually being able to meet the conditions of the bail so that they don't have to be housed at the Edmonton Remand Centre. Anecdotally what we're hearing is that there are a number of offshoots of that service that are actually helping individuals, including a number of referrals to community agencies to support these individuals as they achieve bail and are back in the community.

The evaluation process is under way, so we don't have particular figures yet in terms of hard numbers, but we're very pleased with the process to this point, particularly with the referrals that the John Howard Society is making to community agencies to assist these individuals.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much.

Now, I was wondering if you could – you know, Mr. Bryden was saying that calculating if there's been any cost reduction is, of course, a bit challenging, and I think you alluded to that a little bit in your answer. What are some of the challenges in calculating whether there has been a cost reduction?

Ms Sanderson: The challenges are the complexity of determining how many of those individuals actually might not have achieved bail without the service that was provided. How many people would have gone to the Edmonton Remand Centre as opposed to being released without that intervention? We don't know what that figure is. The other complexity is determining how many days they may have stayed at the Remand Centre. We don't know that either. Trying to put a dollar figure to that becomes difficult.

[Mr. Cyr in the chair]

Mr. Malkinson: Perfect. Thank you.

With that, you were saying that, you know, there are referrals through the John Howard Society. Have you found that that's been successful for some of these individuals who are in remand to get some of the help they need? Have you seen any improvements in recidivism at least between when the person is in the system until when they're . . .

Ms Sanderson: Yeah. It's too soon to comment on recidivism, but what we're seeing is an uptake in the services that are being provided by John Howard Society. The individuals that are the bail

navigators are John Howard Society employees. What we're seeing is an uptake in their services, which is always a good thing. When you can connect individuals with community resources that are there to help them in the long term, that's always a positive thing.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Bryden: If I could make one additional observation, in terms of cost savings there are two types of cost savings that are achieved by reducing the number of people who are going on remand. One is the cost of feeding, clothing, housing an inmate on a day-to-day basis. The other is that when you achieve enough of a reduction in the inmate population that you can close a pod, then you achieve significant savings because you're not required to man all of the posts in the pod. So it's a bit of a stepwise process. There's a slow, incremental cost decline, and then you get a big jump if you can have enough success to close a pod. That's the goal that we're working towards, getting that reduction sufficiently significant so that we can start closing pods.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you for that.

You know, also according to the same report – you, actually, Mr. Bryden, alluded to this in your opening remarks – there are now Crown prosecutors who are replacing police officers at first-appearance bail hearings, and I believe you mentioned that started in October 2016 if I'm correct.

Mr. Bryden: That's right.

Mr. Malkinson: You know, with that happening, have you had any issues that were perhaps unexpected? Alternatively, have you seen benefits as well from that project? I'm sort of looking for both sides of the coin on that one.

Mr. Bryden: Sure. There's always a certain level of complexity that's involved in making administrative changes. We still have to get information packages available to our Crown attorneys who are able to make evaluations on what positions they want to take in relation to bail hearings. But I think that overall, when we've had some difficulties, particularly in relation to timing, we've been able to work those out. In terms of outcomes I think that we are seeing some evidence of Crown attorneys being able to make, with more confidence, decisions to not oppose bail or to have more restricted conditions that have helped to make some improvements in terms of remand reduction.

It's not to criticize police officers, but I think that the Crown attorneys are in a somewhat better position to make evaluations of the kind of risk-reward approach that is relevant as to whether somebody's a good risk or a bad risk in relation to bail. Nobody wants a repeat of the sort of Shawn Rehn incident, where somebody's released on bail and then commits a murder or other serious crime. So we work on trying to make as good and as sound predictions as we can within the framework of the law. It's something that we have to do as a matter of the law anyway, but I'm satisfied that we're making progress in terms of the overall program goals as well.

10:45

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much. You know, I definitely sympathize that when you are trying to predict who is a high risk or low risk with bail, sometimes people can be a bit unpredictable that way. I definitely sympathize with the difficulty for any individual, whether it be Crown prosecutor or police, to try and figure that out.

Continuing on the theme of bail, you know, there was the Alberta bail review last year, and there were 30 recommendations for

improving the bail system. I would imagine that some of those, like having a Crown appearing at bail hearings, are some of those recommendations. I was just wondering what the status update is on the implementation of the rest of those recommendations.

Mr. Bryden: Could I ask Eric Tolppanen to respond to that?

Mr. Malkinson: Sure.

Mr. Tolppanen: Good morning. Eric Tolppanen, the assistant deputy minister of the Crown prosecution service. In response to the question about the update with regard to the recommendations, a great many of the recommendations had to do with the exchange of information between police and Crown prosecutors should Crown eventually take over bail, which we have. Those recommendations have been largely implemented with the electronic file management system that's been implemented across many of the Crown offices in the province. We also have improved the telebail system and have implemented video bail as the recommendations suggested. In addition, of course, as was indicated, the justice of the peace system in Alberta has been improved in the sense that there is increased education.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Eric.

Moving on, in June Justice and Solicitor General launched a system to track responses to the fatality inquiry recommendations. I couldn't find any mention of this in your 2016-2017 annual report, but it would be interesting to know if the fatality inquiry process has been improved. Can you provide us with some information on the new system? You know, I do want to make sure that the fatality inquiry process is open and accountable and accessible to the public.

Mr. Bryden: Certainly. We had a recommendation from a fatality inquiry that we develop a reporting system, and the minister asked us to put a reporting system in place. We've done so on a go-forward basis. What we do is that when there is a fatality inquiry report, our staff sends out letters to the organizations where there are relevant recommendations. The organizations respond within a set period of time, and then we post those responses. Sometimes I get requests from my staff to prepare a response to recommendations for our ministry, and we provide those responses. They're now posted online and have been for – it's been several months, in any event, since we've been doing that. You know, I think we've been getting good responses from the various actors that we've been asked to get responses from.

Mr. Malkinson: Excellent. Thank you very much.

Switching gears a little bit again, you know, on the theme of justice and specifically the buildings that it takes place in, you mentioned key strategy 3.5. Under outcome 3 of your annual report you mention capital funding for a new Red Deer justice centre and that this, as you quoted, "will address a long-standing shortage of space in Red Deer's current courthouse." I know that my colleagues MLA Schneider and MLA Miller, of course, having visited Red Deer recently, were quite excited about this new project and what it could do. Unfortunately, they weren't able to be here for this meeting. Can you speak to how that project is coming? What's the project timeline? And as far as: what's going to be the impact in the surrounding community and for being able to process the cases in Red Deer? Again, I think it goes back to a Supreme Court case as well, that we do things in a timely manner.

Mr. Bryden: Gerald, do you want to speak to the project timeline?

Mr. Lamoureux: We're working with Alberta Infrastructure on this, and I believe we've had the first three meetings with stakeholders, the judiciary, and court administrators to talk about the needs, the specific needs for their new courthouse or justice centre. It's going to be more than just courtrooms; it'll also include sort of a sister building next door or joined that will deal with sort of mediation and resolution matters as well. Right now we're looking at about a four- to five-year project to pull this all together. The funding announced was, I believe, \$97 million. So we're just at the early stages of developing the sort of requirements for the new facility.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, if I could ask where I'm at timewise.

The Chair: You have three minutes, 30 seconds.

Mr. Malkinson: Three minutes and 30 seconds. Excellent and precise.

Mr. Lamoureux, you did mention that the courthouse will, you know, provide resolution, mediation, and arbitration services, and, of course, those do provide an alternative to court. I was wondering if you could expand a bit on how that works, and I was wondering if this would be perhaps a way to help lighten the load on Legal Aid Alberta. I mean, we've heard a lot of discussion that there are pressures on the legal aid system, and I was wondering if, you know, something like these resolution, mediation, and arbitration services could be something that could perhaps lighten that load on legal aid in Alberta. That's to everyone.

Mr. Bryden: The resolution services element of resolution and court administration services is the program area that makes available both information about court processes to members of the public and provides mediation services as well. It tends to focus on the civil side as opposed to the criminal side, and that's not a negligible part of the work of Legal Aid Alberta, but it's not the majority of the work of Legal Aid Alberta. I understand that there have been efforts to have referrals to mediation services for some of the types of family matters that would be appropriate for resolution in that particular way.

We generally think that for most families the ability to have some assistance to resolve their disputes themselves rather than having to have recourse to adjudication is desirable. We know that we're not going to solve all problems by way of agreement, but if we can solve a substantial number of them by way of agreement, that tends to make for more stable resolutions as well as reducing demands on our court system so that our judges can focus on the cases that actually do need an adjudication to address the challenges that families are facing.

10:55

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you.

You mention in there that a part of it is related to family mediation. Would that be things like child custody? Is that sort of an example of the type of family mediation you were talking about there?

Mr. Bryden: That's right. It can be disputes about custody, disputes about access, disputes about property division, those sorts of things.

Mr. Malkinson: I'm done. Thank you very much for your answer.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Malkinson.

Mr. Fildebrandt, you have five minutes.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, officials, for joining us today. I appreciate you being here. My first question is on the legal aid front. Can you speak to the breakdown in demand on legal aid, how much of it is being used for the youth criminal justice system versus full adult courts and how well you believe your department is meeting the demands on the youth criminal justice side?

Mr. Peace: I would have to research that information and get it back to you. I don't have those statistics with me right now.

Mr. Fildebrandt: You have no breakdown on its use on youth versus adult?

Mr. Peace: I'm sorry. I did not bring those statistics, but I could get them for you and report back to you.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Okay. All right. Thank you very much.

Rural crime is an issue. I know that Mr. Ellis has mentioned it. It's a very real and growing problem for many of our constituents. You know, the reality of the justice system is very different for a lot of people, particularly those who are further out in the country. The police are not just a few minutes away. It can often be a very long time. What measures are your department taking right now to address remote, rural crime issues that are not in line with the way you would normally deal with it within your towns and cities but much further out, where the justice system is not particularly as responsive as it is in urban areas?

Mr. Sweeney: It's Bill Sweeney here responding to that question. I've had a number of conversations with the commanding officer of the RCMP. The RCMP's resource base deployment is a decision that the commanding officer takes from an operational perspective. It's not a decision that the province gets to make on the commanding officer's behalf. But he is very much alive to the issue with respect to the increase in rural crime rates.

When I asked the question, "What are you going to do about these alarming trends that are starting to emerge in rural communities?" his response to me was that he felt that the best thing that the RCMP could do is to become much more intelligent with respect to how it deploys its resources and how it uses its resources. About 60 per cent of crime is committed by 10 per cent of offenders. If we are much more adept at identifying who those 10 per cent are from a prolific offender perspective and target enforcement against those people that are causing the most harm, there is significant promise to be much more efficient and effective in using the scarce resources that are out there today.

The RCMP intelligence program needed to be enhanced. He has accepted that as being a primary focus for him. The provincial criminal analytical capability, which actually resides within ALERT, also needs to be enhanced. He has talked to his colleagues within the policing community to actually focus on CISA, Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, so that more useful intelligence products can actually be produced. Essentially that is his approach, and I believe the chiefs of police in the major centres are also becoming much more selective in the types of enforcement that they're doing based on good intelligence.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I hear that a lot of folks in Wheatland county in particular – you know, they've had a robbery or something on their property. They call the police, but it can often be hours before anyone even gets out there. They don't feel like the justice system is doing much besides taking reports for many of them. Do you feel that adequate resources are being put towards having enough officers dedicated to rural justice?

Mr. Sweeney: Obviously, any chief of police or commanding officer will always say that they need more resources. I think that that would be the stock answer. His response is to use his resources more intelligently.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

I will ask the Official Opposition, Mrs. Pitt, if you would. You would have 10 minutes.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On September 7 and May 30 economic development and the Ministry of Health were before this PAC. Not only were all deputy ministers and ADMs attending the meeting, but senior officials of arm's-length agencies also attended the meeting.

Now, I have a copy of the letter that was sent from the chair, specifically stating: "The purpose of the meeting is to review: Funding Sustainable and Cost-effective Legal Aid Services [and] Progress Report on Control Systems at the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee." Given that, you know, we've been told that the reason why Legal Aid is not here is because they're an arm's-length agency, even though specifically that's what we were asking to review in this meeting here today, and given that in previous PAC meetings there have been representatives from all sorts of different agencies, why is it that in this specific Public Accounts Committee these arm's-length agencies are not in attendance at this meeting?

Mr. Bryden: Our response to the Auditor General's recommendations is a response for which the department is accountable. He's made recommendations to the department about the administration of our grant program, and we've accepted those recommendations. We're responsible for implementing them, and the head of our justice services division is here to report to you on the progress that we have made in relation to that.

It's not that, from my perspective, there's anything objectionable in principle in the Public Accounts Committee inviting other organizations to attend, but I did not understand that letter from Mr. Cyr to be an invitation to Legal Aid Alberta. That would be an unusual situation in my experience. I'm not saying that it's never happened. You've obviously come up with examples. But from our perspective, our responsibility was to respond to the Auditor General's recommendations, which are recommendations to our ministry. We are happy to answer questions and address what we've been doing, and we have the appropriate officials here to make those responses.

Mrs. Pitt: Sorry. I just find it interesting and suspect – I would use the term – as to why in previous circumstances there's never been an issue, it appears, with ABCs attending these types of meetings. I mean, Legal Aid has been in the news. There's some controversy. I just wonder if perhaps, you know, the head is not in attendance because it's convenient to have that agency at arm's length today. But you had stated that the minister has met with Legal Aid after some problems arose in the media, where that would appear that it's not arm's length. I'm just trying to figure out what the relationship is with this department and Legal Aid, or is that not defined, and that line sort of moves with the headlines of the day?

11:05

Mr. Bryden: We have a relationship with Legal Aid where we're a grantor. We set conditions and expectations with respect to the grant. At the same time, it's important that that organization be operationally independent from us, particularly in relation to the administration of criminal matters where the minister and her officials are prosecuting the clients of the legal aid agency, that's operating at arm's length, whether they're using staff lawyers or

contracted defence counsel. From my perspective, that's been an important foundation of the relationship.

That doesn't mean that on matters of policy we don't have ongoing discussions, as Mr. Peace has indicated. He meets regularly with the staff, and his staff meet regularly with the staff from Legal Aid Alberta to ensure financial accountability and to make sure that we've got program consistency. The minister, I think, rightly believes that it's productive to have discussions with Legal Aid officials about matters that are of concern to Albertans.

Mrs. Pitt: Where did the direction of prepayment come from, then? It seems to me that the relationship of the government and Legal Aid is more of a funding type of relationship, policy-type stuff, if I heard you correctly . . .

Mr. Bryden: That's right.

Mrs. Pitt: . . . whereas you very much will stay out of the legal proceedings, the cases specifically. That would make sense. So it would be fair to say that the policy or direction of prepayment came from the ministry.

Mr. Bryden: No. That was an operational decision by Legal Aid Alberta when it first came out, but it is something that we think is worth while to talk to them about because, as you've indicated, it does have policy overtones.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay.

Mr. Bryden: Just to be clear, we didn't direct Legal Aid Alberta to do prepayment – Legal Aid Alberta made that decision themselves – but we are interested in the implications that it has for Albertans and think that it's appropriate for either us as officials or for the minister to have discussions with Legal Aid Alberta about whether that's a good idea or not.

Mrs. Pitt: Chair, can I share my time?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Ellis.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I have a question here just in regard to legal aid submissions, I guess, to you, Mr. Bryden. Has there ever been a legal aid submission that was so large that, like any one of us who've received a bill before, you went, "Oh, my goodness; we might need to look at that one"? Has there ever been a bill that has been questioned? Has there ever been anything where you thought, "Wow; we might need to audit this"?

Mr. Bryden: We do keep track of the spending that Legal Aid has globally. We don't keep track of files for individual bills though we're interested in the integrity of the billing process. What's important for us is not to get into the details of whether a particular lawyer is charging X amount on a criminal defence matter because we don't want anybody to believe that we're somehow manipulating the defence of that individual when we're at the same time prosecuting that individual. That would be totally inappropriate.

Mr. Ellis: So they don't get audited at all? Nobody looks? Nobody questions? They just submit their bills without question?

Mr. Bryden: Well, Dave, there are audits of Legal Aid Alberta.

Mr. Peace: That's right, and just recently their CEO, through the executive mobility program, seconded an auditor from Treasury Board and Finance into their organization to provide more of that type of auditing.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Mr. Ellis.
Ms McKittrick.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Chair. First of all, I really wanted to thank all the work that has gone on in terms of looking at that legal aid because it's such a crucial part of the work of government and it meets the needs of so many Albertans. I really appreciated the fact that there's been increased funding to legal aid from your department and from the government and that we've paid attention to the fact that lower income Albertans need access to legal aid.

There was a question that was raised in the LAO report that I'm interested in. Why is the legal aid plan in Alberta a negotiated agreement between the government, the Law Society, and Legal Aid instead of statute-based, similar to most other provinces? What are the benefits and disadvantages of both forms of governance? I also was wondering if there has been any thought around changing the current governance.

Mr. Bryden: Certainly. The current governance arrangements are a historical artifact. Legal Aid Alberta was set up a number of years ago as a kind of three-part agreement with the board of Legal Aid Alberta, which is a voluntary organization, a society established under the Societies Act; the Law Society of Alberta; and the government of Alberta. We have a governance agreement that, you know, has been in place. It's been renewed on a number of occasions, and the most recent renewal takes us out to, I think, March 2019. So we've got an agreement that's currently in place.

When we did the legal aid review, there were segments of the community who suggested that a statutory model was a desirable goal, and that was one of the models that we seriously considered. During the course of discussions the position of some of those community organizations, criminal trial lawyers, criminal defence lawyers, and the Law Society became more open to the possibility of continuing with the current arrangements.

From an operational standpoint there is some attractiveness to avoiding a somewhat disruptive transition because if you move from a society which has employees and property and other kinds of things to a government agency – the employees aren't chattels; you can't just transfer them over. There are some complications making those transitional arrangements.

We thought that it was a good idea to see if we could get a longer term governance agreement in place under the current model. That's the mandate we've been given, to try to move in that direction. If it turned out to be unsuccessful for one reason or another, the statutory model is another option, but at this point we're optimistic that we're going to have success in negotiating a longer term agreement. That will mean that we don't have to go through those transitional arrangements.

11:15

Ms McKittrick: I can really understand how any disruption in the services of Legal Aid is going to impact a lot of people, and I appreciate your careful thoughts given to that.

Now, the Auditor General's report in May talked about the fact that Legal Aid Alberta had been lacking concrete performance measures for many, many years, and it noted that your department recently required Legal Aid Alberta to add performance measures to its three-year business plan. I'm wondering if those have been put in their annual report and what improvement you have noticed.

Mr. Bryden: Yes, they have been put in their most recent annual report.

Maybe I could ask Mr. Peace to talk in a bit more detail about them.

Mr. Peace: Absolutely. Effective this year, as a coincidence and a result of the OAG recommendations that were coming out, the department and Legal Aid Alberta have implemented a series of performance measures, including measures that speak to the delivery of programs and services, the funding in risk and expense management, collaboration with partners, the provision of services to indigenous people, workforce development, and governance. We're going to continue to refine those performance measures throughout this negotiation period that we're just about to embark upon. Depending on how those negotiations shake out, we'll make sure that the performance metrics, both from Legal Aid Alberta but also from my division up to our deputy minister and our minister, reflect the results of that negotiated, long-term, sustainable governance structure.

Ms McKittrick: I guess that means that those performance measures will be reported in the next set of reports that we see.

Mr. Peace: We get them monthly now through a monthly meeting with my staff and Legal Aid Alberta's staff so that we can monitor the performance and react to that on an ongoing basis. Also, as part of the business planning and annual reporting process they'll be reported publicly in those documents as well.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you.

I understand that other jurisdictions have done the same kind of performance measures and so on. Are we using the work in other jurisdictions . . .

Mr. Peace: We're using . . .

Ms McKittrick: . . . or how did we get there?

Mr. Peace: Sorry to interrupt. Yeah, we're using that work to inform us. Our set of performance measures is nuances that are particular to Albertans' interests that we've heard from the Auditor General and our legal aid review and our own experts and the other signatories to that governance agreement because, again, the legal aid plan in Alberta is cogoverned by us, the Legal Aid Alberta board, and the Law Society of Alberta. So we're trying to integrate all of those interests into a performance metrics model that will work for everyone.

Ms McKittrick: I know that accessing legal aid is sometimes a challenge for a lot of people. Family and civil law services seem to be, from the report, what most people access. I was wondering if either the Legal Aid Society or the ministry had thought of other programs that could divert residents needing legal aid for those issues, like the mediation program or some of the other community-based programs.

Mr. Peace: That's exactly our approach to all the challenges that relate to legal aid, ma'am. We try to take a systems approach to it to make sure that Albertans can find the right information, whether that's from some services within government, like resolution services, that my deputy spoke to, or externally through other not-for-profits or other levels of government in services that they provide, plus the services that we're granting money to Legal Aid Alberta to provide. We're looking at the system's needs and trying to optimize those. We're not coming to those discussions strictly as government and Legal Aid Alberta; we're bringing multiple stakeholders and participants and partners to that conversation,

including the judiciary, members of the private defence bar, associations that represent various elements of the justice system.

Ms McKittrick: So from what you're saying, in actual fact, Legal Aid, although it's defined as being part of one agency – you're involving a whole group of interested service providers and community organizations in making sure that the delivery is appropriate. Is that fair?

Mr. Peace: That's correct. Yes.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you. I appreciate it.

I know there's always concern about hard-to-access legal aid, and I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about what happens around legal aid if you don't live in the major cities.

Mr. Peace: They have a provincial call centre, that receives calls. You can walk in if you happen to be in one of the cities that they're in. When you go through their teleprompter system, rural Albertans are recognized as a priority. It's an emphasis that Legal Aid Alberta has been putting on optimizing their call centre performance right now. Similarly, potential clients that are in remand have a prioritized access to their call centre.

I mentioned in my earlier comments that Legal Aid Alberta is doing an awful lot of internal process and productivity improvement to try to deliver their services in line with the budgets that they receive from ourselves, the federal government, and the Alberta Law Foundation. A lot of that is focused on increasing access and also increasing the efficacy of the assignment of counsel.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Ellis, you have five minutes.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Chair. Gentlemen, 2013-14 – please correct me if I'm wrong – the numbers that I have: Legal Aid was sitting around \$47.9 million. Now we're in 2016-17, and I look at this book here, and I see a number, \$78 million. Wow. That's a large jump. You know, I understand the dip in the economy. I do.

My understanding as well is that there are cost drivers for legal aid. Please correct me if I'm missing one of these, but we have the hourly fee for lawyers, demand on the services, the scope of the services, and, of course, the income threshold. Am I missing any one? No?

Mr. Bryden: Those are the major ones.

Mr. Ellis: Those are it. When we look at the hourly fee for the lawyers, if you had to compare that, which I'm understanding is around the \$92 an hour mark, give or take, how is that compared to other jurisdictions throughout Canada?

Mr. Bryden: It's low relative to Ontario. It's about comparable with British Columbia. It would be higher than tariffs in, say, Atlantic Canada, but that would be consistent with rates of pay for lawyers in Atlantic Canada generally.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. When we look at, for example, scope of services, if we had to compare that to other jurisdictions as well, are we – you know, I think we've seen the police – doing more with less?

Mr. Bryden: I would say that we're reasonably comparable. I think that Ontario has a broader legal aid plan than we do and that Ontario spends more per capita than we do. There are other jurisdictions that, you know – if you go to the other end of the scale, New Brunswick's legal aid plan, I think, is fairly restrictive. We're somewhere in the middle.

Mr. Ellis: Somewhere in the middle. Okay.

Also, in regard to the income threshold, these numbers that I have seen here talk about family sizes from one to six-plus, and somehow a six-plus family's annual income is \$43,050. Are these dated numbers? Have they been updated? I guess the way I'm seeing this is that when we see a family of six-plus at \$43,000 and, God forbid, somebody gets in trouble with the law – but if we talk about \$44,000, then all of a sudden that could cripple a family, bankrupt them.

Mr. Bryden: Our thresholds were increased towards the end of the previous government's mandate and early in this government's mandate. They were designed to make sure that people who were eligible for AISH coverage would be also eligible for legal aid. By national standards they're on the more generous end, if you will.

11:25

Mr. Ellis: Okay. Is this something that's going to be reviewed, though?

Mr. Bryden: Well, part of the overall thinking about the legal aid program is: where we should be at in terms of eligibility?

Mr. Ellis: Sir, you mentioned that in 2015, obviously before the election, the previous government did serve notice to Legal Aid that they wished to pursue a different delivery model. At the time you could hire 250 in-house lawyers for basically the same amount that we were paying for legal aid. Is there a reason why that was shelved, or is there a possibility of it being looked at as part of the review?

Mr. Bryden: There's, you know, a mix of service delivery models – some of it is private bar delivery; some of it is in-house counsel – and that mix is something that we and Legal Aid are interested in.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ellis.
Dr. Turner.

Dr. Turner: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the deputy minister and his staff for a really informative morning. I want to turn our attention to another important entity that your department is responsible for, and that's the office of the public guardian and trustee. I want to start my questioning, actually, by quoting from the May 2017 report of the Auditor General. He asks why this matters to Albertans. In February 2013, which, I'll remind all of us, was under the previous government, the Auditor General reported on a public trusteeship system that had significant problems. It is now 2017 and many of the problems of 2013 still exist. [The OPGT's management] must make changes, and the department must ensure these changes happen – vulnerable Albertans depend on it.

I would really agree with the Auditor General on this.

On page 95 of the May 2017 report the management of the OPGT had indicated that all five recommendations that the Auditor General had noted hadn't been completed from 2013 will be implemented by March 31, 2018. Where are you at with that now, and will this deadline be met? What information or reporting do you base your responses on? I would ask a specific question: what is the department doing to make sure that the public guardian and trustee actually meets this deadline?

Mr. Bryden: Dave, do you want to . . .

Mr. Peace: Yeah. Thank you. The transfer of the public guardian and trustee to Justice and Solicitor General, to the justice services division, which is my division, was coincidental with me coming onboard. It was made perfectly clear to the executive director of the

office of the public guardian and trustee and to myself that remedying the observations made by the office of the Auditor General was of prime importance. It is a focal point in our attention, and we have regular progress and performance meetings between myself; the assistant deputy minister of corporate services, Gerald Lamoureux, to our deputy minister's right; and the executive director of the public guardian and trustee, who is coincidentally the acting public trustee as well.

Earlier in my response I gave a bit of an overview of where we were in each of those recommendations. I'd be happy to revisit that if you'd like, but the short answer is that we're on schedule for meeting with the Auditor General again post March 31, 2018, to have him re-examine the office. I'm confident that we are going to do well. We have regular meetings with the Auditor General apprising them of how we're fixing these problems so that if there are tweaks or observations of best practices that they can bring to our attention, we can incorporate those into what we're doing.

There is an awful lot of support going into the public guardian and trustee, including services from throughout our ministry. We have support from our program support office so that program management best practices and techniques are incorporated into all of their change management. We have change management experts. We have information management experts that can do analytics on the data to make sure that things are being flagged to us. We have training experts from our training academy to make sure that the delivery of the required changes is happening in each of those. It's a large organization distributed across Alberta, so having consistent training models – we have consistent and trackable, traceable, and auditable processes in place there. So I'm quite confident that we're going to do well in this.

Dr. Turner: Thank you for that.

Just as a supplemental and perhaps to get some more information, there were three specific areas that the Auditor General mentioned. You've referred to some of it in the updating of policies and procedures, but what about controls to strengthen the payment process and to achieve a new file structure?

Mr. Peace: In terms of the payment process, as I alluded to a bit earlier, when the Auditor General visited last, their team observed that the way we were making sure that a file was correct for disbursement involved a team of people that we referred to as internal auditors. If those internal auditors are going to be checking the checks and balances of the public guardian and trustee, they shouldn't really be involved in doing the checks and balances. So we have separated those two functions and beefed up the internal quality management.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. Fildebrandt.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to echo the comments of Mrs. Pitt that it's quite unusual for individuals of a department that we've called to be here on a specific topic to not be here.

I have a question about the tariff rate. How are those block rates determined? What are the block rates for legal aid, and who determines the certificate that allows for any hourly billing?

Mr. Peace: Sure. The tariff structure for Legal Aid Alberta is commonly referred to, the rate, as some of you here have mentioned, of \$92.40 per hour for a roster lawyer. That's only one element of the tariff document. The tariff document is part of the governance structure, and it's thick. I would guesstimate somewhere around 25 pages of fee structure, essentially. So some things can get billed out

at an hourly rate, some things are a flat fee for those services, and all of those are considered to be the tariff.

Those were set in 2015 with the changes that were made to the financial eligibility guidelines. As we go into the governance negotiations that we're just embarking on, one of the elements of those negotiations is the governance structure itself. How often will we revisit financial eligibility guidelines and the tariffs, and what will be the mechanism for doing that? Again, we're one of three signatories, so that needs to be a negotiated solution, not something that we impose upon our partners.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm interested in how arm's-length this is and, really, where you draw the line. What capacity does your ministry have in determining the rates, and can the ministry overrule a decision by Legal Aid Alberta?

Mr. Peace: The minister is responsible for signing off on the Legal Aid Alberta business plan every year. In doing that review, essentially an audit of their plan, there's an opportunity for the ministry to respond with areas of concern to Legal Aid Alberta and in the context of doing so would inform the other signatory, the Law Society of Alberta, about those interests.

11:35

In terms of our ability to shape financial eligibility guidelines and the tariff rate, the rules for Legal Aid Alberta say that significant changes like that need to be conveyed to the minister because we're the largest grantor into the Legal Aid Alberta organization, and it's a direct impact on our department's ability to fund our portion of the legal aid plan.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'd like to get a sense of: where do you draw the line? Like, how arm's-length is this process in determining this? Is it determined entirely by Legal Aid Alberta, or to what degree, other than just simply signing a signature in a procedural sense, does the ministry have over Legal Aid Alberta and block rates and tariffs?

Mr. Peace: I wasn't clear earlier. The tariff package and the rules that govern how Legal Aid Alberta does its business and the roles and responsibilities of the three signatories are all contained within a master governance agreement. That's the governance agreement that my deputy said has been extended through to March 2019 in order to give us time to renegotiate that master agreement to take into account the scope and the scale of services as well as the controls and measures that each of the signatories will need, including performance measuring.

Those negotiations we're just on the cusp of entering into. We have a professional facilitator that's going to guide us through discussions over the coming weeks and months, and we expect to have a finalized new governance agreement that reflects a long-term, sustainable arrangement, both for funding and for governance, by March 31, 2018, this coming March.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Before my time is up, I just want to say that while no rules, I think, were broken by not having specific officials from Legal Aid Alberta here, it is quite out of the ordinary for the practice of this committee for the ministry not to bring them. So any specific questions that myself or other members of this committee have had with regard to Legal Aid Alberta for which you have not, perhaps, given a clear answer – I hope you'll direct those officials to help respond in writing to the questions that we've had.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fildebrandt.

Mrs. Pitt: Would you agree that the current level of our alcohol delivery system in Alberta is working quite well and provides

safeguards that do their best to keep alcohol out of the hands of children in Alberta?

Mr. Bryden: We're not responsible for the administration of the alcohol system in Alberta – that's through AGLC and the Ministry of Finance – but I have no reason to have specific concerns with respect to the administration of the alcohol system.

Mrs. Pitt: The framework of the regulation works.

Mr. Bryden: Right, as far as I can tell.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. The minister's message at the beginning of the annual report states that the ministry is working on developing the legislative framework to implement cannabis legalization. That implementation has been unclear thus far and is still sort of in the development process, as we understand. I'm just trying to understand the framework for cannabis legalization. Does the conversation or the expertise that's been given very much echo the regulatory framework of the AGLC in this province?

Mr. Bryden: What we've been doing thus far is seeking the views of Albertans, and we've done this in a two-phase process. The first phase was designed to help inform the framework that the minister announced last week. There is further consultation that's ongoing with Albertans, through online surveys, telephone surveys. There are some elements that the government feels reasonably comfortable with and other elements where there's still more input that's being sought from Albertans. So, you know, if you've reviewed the framework document, you'll see that no decisions have been made about public versus private retail, and we're looking to see what Albertans have to say about that. We know that there are different models that are being proposed in different parts of the country, and we pay attention to those developments as well as the views of Albertans, and the government will have to make a decision at some point.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Thank you.
I'll give my time to Mike.

The Chair: Mr. Ellis.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Chair. Mr. Bryden, of course, one of the issues, I think, near and dear to everybody's heart here is the opioid crisis that we're facing right now. Certainly, the police have their role and they do their part. I guess my question to you maybe is more related to Justice and maybe specifically the prosecutorial approach to this. Although I would never, you know, ask you or anyone else to tell them how to prosecute a case, has there been encouragement, certainly with the prosecutors, to look at these cases very seriously that come before you?

Mr. Bryden: The way that prosecutions are divided in Canada, the Public Prosecution Service of Canada has general responsibility for drug prosecutions. So PPSC does that drug prosecution work, as distinct from the Alberta Crown prosecution service. I'm sure that the PPSC are conscious of, you know, concerns about opioids and that they're taking appropriate responses, but we don't, as a general proposition, control those prosecutions.

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. You don't handle the drug files.

Mr. Bryden: No.

Mr. Ellis: Do you handle the homicide files? I can't recall.

Mr. Bryden: Yes. That's a Criminal Code prosecution.

Mr. Ellis: Right. Exactly. So I guess my question – certainly, I've had opportunities to talk to people in the justice field. You know, some of these drug dealers, I mean, knowing full well what they are doing, that they can kill people: is there encouragement to prosecute people under manslaughter-type charges?

Mr. Bryden: There are some prosecutions ongoing. I can't speak about the specifics.

Mr. Ellis: No. I'm not asking you to speak on a specific case.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Ellis.
Mrs. Littlewood.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, Chair. The Auditor General's report mentions on page 38 that in November 2015 Legal Aid Alberta had expanded family duty counsel availability to Provincial and Queen's Bench courts outside of Edmonton and Calgary. So I'm wondering: while you examine the sorts of services that you'll offer by Legal Aid Alberta, does the department consider access to legal aid services in rural Alberta, and how do you work with setting those priorities?

Mr. Peace: When we go into negotiations, what we heard both from the legal aid review and the Auditor General's observation about specifying the scope and scale of service, we have a list of factors relating to the types of service delivery that Legal Aid does, and we'll be going to those negotiation tables to essentially broker the best deal for government with our contribution into that legal aid plan. So access to legal aid from rural Alberta will be top of mind going into those negotiations. Again, we expect to have those concluded by March 31, 2018.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you. That was the context that it was in, talking about the context of efficiency and cost savings. What sort of cost savings are you looking to gain through that?

Mr. Peace: I'm not trying to be elusive. I just don't want to compromise government's position going into these negotiations with our partners. I can say that there are multiple different ways of providing services. Legal Aid Alberta will have a view on how those should be done, the Law Society will have a view on how those should be done, and government has heard from Albertans, through our legal aid review, on what we think should be done. So we'll be going to those negotiation tables to attempt to reconcile that.

11:45

Mrs. Littlewood: Okay. Thank you.

I just have one more question about the maintenance enforcement program. Obviously, our offices deal with maintenance enforcement on both sides of the coin, through the debtor and the person that is trying to receive payments. As I have talked to maintenance enforcement before, they said that there were some legislative changes, amendments that were adopted in the interest of allowing people that were behind in payments to be able to catch up if they present to the court that if given sufficient time – and there are time limits on it – they will be able to catch up once they are employed if they are currently unemployed. Would you be able to speak briefly about that and if that has improved the ability to catch up on maintenance enforcement?

Mr. Peace: I'm not quite clear what staff might have told you. There was consideration given during both the wildfires and the floods for people that were temporarily out of employment and out of home to get through that and then resume their plans without

getting an awful lot of additional enforcement from the maintenance enforcement program and making their condition even worse in the emergency of the situation. If that's what you're alluding to, those were short-term plans.

The maintenance enforcement program is not allowed to compromise on the court-ordered payments. What we're allowed to do is develop payment plans for the arrears that might be owed on a file. If the parent that's owing the money or the person that's owing the money happens to be in a situation where they can prove to us through a certified statement of finances that goes through a review process that they're unable to make those arrear payments, then we can enter into a payment plan that is suitable to their conditions until they are able to resume the court-ordered payments that were given to them.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you.

Dr. Turner, I believe, has questions.

Dr. Turner: Thank you. I'll go back to my questions about the office of the public guardian and trustee. The Auditor General commented in 2013 and 2017 about the need to safeguard the \$600 million plus that that office has. I would like to hear what the response of Mr. Peace or the deputy is in terms of where we're at in making progress on that, particularly in terms of managing the investments.

Mr. Peace: Am I allowed to answer?

The Chair: Sure, if it's a short answer.

Mr. Peace: We've had six consecutive positive audits of our common fund. The management of that fund and putting in the safeguards for that fund are of prime importance to us. That speaks to some of my earlier comments about the supervisory file system, the automated audits that we're doing to augment those and identify files of alert to us so that we can take appropriate actions. It's part of what the Auditor General will be examining when he comes back to us on March 31, 2018, for which we'll be ready.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. Fildebrandt, do you have some questions?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah. I'll keep it short and sweet here. Following on Mrs. Pitt's question on the government considering various options for the legalization of cannabis, what consideration does your department have for the possibility of private distribution, as we do for liquor and tobacco on one side, versus a direct government control of cannabis, as the Ontario government has said it will follow?

If so, what is the estimated capital cost of setting up and starting a government-owned and -directed cannabis distribution system?

Mr. Bryden: We've been asked to explore both private and public models of cannabis retail.

The Chair: Sorry. Mr. Fildebrandt, do you have a specific area in the annual general report that you're referring to? Is this past consultation of some sort that you're referring to?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Isn't it your report that says you have to deal with, you know, considering various options, the implications of the legalization of cannabis? Following on that, I'd like to know: what are the costs associated with the public option? I think that's found on page 4. I'm asking the department officials: what are the costs associated with following the public option under consideration?

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Bryden: I can't give you a specific answer. A lot of costs will depend on the specific model, if the government went in that direction, what the details of that model would be. If the government made those kinds of choices, then we might be in a position to give more information.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm asking more specifically what the costs would be for following an Ontario-style model of public ownership and distribution.

Mr. Bryden: I don't have an answer to that question, Mr. Fildebrandt.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Would you be willing to provide one in writing to the committee?

The Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt, I would hazard to say that this is looking forward, not backwards. If they had put in their annual report that they had a plan that they were going to be implementing, I think that you would probably have some avenue to be able to make that request. Did you mean something more or less on how much has been spent on the consultation process in making this decision?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, that would be a fair question to ask. How much has been spent to date on the consultation process?

Mr. Bryden: We'll get those numbers for you and get back to you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Did you have any further questions, Mr. Fildebrandt?

Mr. Fildebrandt: No. I'll cede the rest of my time.

The Chair: Okay. Well, I would say that at this point we don't have enough time to do a full rotation, so we will adjourn this morning's session.

Sorry. There are a few minutes left before I adjourn, though, to go around the table and ask members if there are any questions that were not answered or responded to, that were incomplete due to time. No preambles, please, strictly questions to be read into the record for a written response from the ministry. One question per member rotation.

Mr. Ellis.

Mr. Ellis: Sure. I just wanted to confirm with Mr. Bryden that he was going to provide this committee with a written copy of those levels.

Mr. Bryden: Yes.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. The government, do you have any questions for written response? Okay.

Going back to the opposition, do you have any further questions for written response? Nothing? All right.

I would like to thank the officials from the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General for attending today and responding to the committee members' questions. We will ask that any outstanding questions be responded to in writing within 30 days and forwarded to the committee clerk.

Members, we are adjourning for a lunch break and will be reconvening at 12:30 p.m. in the Grassland Room for a closed

session. The committee will return to the record at 2:15 in the Rocky Mountain Room to hear the Ministry of Service Alberta.

Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned from 11:54 a.m. to 2:14 p.m.]

The Chair: We are back on the record. I'd like to welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Scott Cyr, MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I am the chair of the Public Accounts Committee. I'd like to ask the members, staff, and guests joining the committee at the table to introduce themselves for the record, and I will then go to the members on the phone lines. To my right.

Mr. Dach: Lorne Dach, MLA, Edmonton-McClung, deputy chair.

Mr. Gill: Prab Gill, MLA, Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Gotfried: Richard Gotfried, MLA, Calgary-Fish Creek.

Ms Hutchinson: Althea Hutchinson, Service Alberta.

Ms Wood: Laura Wood, Service Alberta.

Mr. Morhart: David Morhart, Service Alberta.

Mr. Brisson: Mark Brisson, Service Alberta.

Mr. Lloyd: Colin Lloyd, Service Alberta.

Mr. Saher: Merwan Saher, Auditor General.

Mr. Leonty: Eric Leonty, Assistant Auditor General.

Dr. Turner: Bob Turner, MLA, Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hinkley: Bruce Hinkley, MLA, Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Ms McKittrick: Bon après-midi. Annie McKittrick, MLA, Sherwood Park.

Mr. Carson: Good afternoon. Jon Carson, MLA, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Malkinson: Brian Malkinson, MLA for Calgary-Currie.

Mrs. Littlewood: Good afternoon. Jessica Littlewood, MLA for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Dr. Massolin: Good afternoon. Philip Massolin, manager of research and committee services.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

The Chair: Okay. Those that are on the telephones?

Mr. Westhead: Good afternoon. Cameron Westhead, MLA for Banff-Cochrane.

The Chair: I'd like to note for the record the following substitutions for this afternoon: Mr. Hinkley for Ms Goehring, Mr. Carson for Ms Luff, Mr. Gill for Mr. Panda, Ms McKittrick for Ms Renaud, Mr. Piquette for Ms Miller.

I would like to welcome the officials from Service Alberta today.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Chair, Derek Fildebrandt, Strathmore-Brooks, here on the phone.

The Chair: I apologize, Mr. Fildebrandt. Can you announce yourself for the record?

Mr. Fildebrandt: I just did. Derek Fildebrandt, Strathmore-Brooks.

The Chair: All right. Is there anybody else left on the phones? Okay. Thank you.

I'll start again. I would like to welcome the officials from Service Alberta attending today to address the outstanding recommendations from the Auditor General as well as the ministry's 2016-2017 annual report.

I invite the ministry officials to provide opening remarks not exceeding 10 minutes.

Ministry of Service Alberta

Mr. Morhart: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon. Thank you, everyone. It's our pleasure to appear before the committee and speak to Service Alberta's 2016-17 annual report as well as remaining recommendations from the Auditor General's May '17 report.

To help answer your questions, I'm joined by members of our Service Alberta executive team. To my immediate right: Mr. Mark Brisson, ADM and chief information officer, service modernization. Behind us is Stephen Bull, ADM, SuperNet Secretariat. If you could just raise your hand. We have Colin Lloyd to my far right, ADM of consumer and registry services. Behind me to the left: Doug Morrison, acting ADM of open government. To my immediate left is Laura Wood, ADM of shared services, and to her left is Althea Hutchinson, our senior financial officer.

I'll start by introducing Service Alberta itself, and then I'll outline some of the accomplishments over the past fiscal year. As the name of our department suggests, service defines what our operations are all about. Our department is at the forefront of delivering government services touching the lives of Albertans on a daily basis. Whether registering a car, buying a house, or starting a business, Albertans are accessing one of these services offered by Service Alberta. We also play a key role in Alberta's economy through the oversight of provincial registry services and by supporting a fair and competitive marketplace for consumers and businesses.

While it may not be readily apparent, we also help connect Albertans to the Internet by leveraging the SuperNet, a high-speed, high-capacity broadband network. Public-sector facilities such as schools, libraries, and hospitals as well as rural and remote communities across the province have access to high-speed Internet because of that network.

At our call centres Service Alberta staff answer over a million inquiries each year and help connect Albertans to the information they need. Our services don't stop there. In addition to serving Albertans, we help departments across government do the very same. We are responsible for information technology, payroll and benefits, and the procurement of goods and services.

I would like to expand on one of the highlights of the last fiscal year, which was our work to protect consumers from unfair practices and businesses from unfair competition. New protective measures were introduced to protect people where they are most at risk in the marketplace. These measures include the ban on door-to-door sales of energy-related products, everything from energy contracts to furnaces; introduction of the country's strongest protections and lowest interest rates for payday loan borrowers; and improving the structure and operations of the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council to better protect the interests of consumers in the automotive sector.

2:20

I'd also like to note that our office of the Utilities Consumer Advocate handled nearly 40,000 inquiries from Albertans last fiscal year. This includes everything from answering questions, connecting consumers to the right resources, and mediating disputes between consumers and utility companies on issues such as bill charges or energy contract matters.

Enforcement of consumer protection laws further helps us to minimize potential losses for consumers while ensuring a level playing field for Alberta businesses. As part of our enforcement activities, last fiscal year we completed 639 investigations into various contraventions of fair trading laws. The results are that over \$328,000 in fines were levied to individuals and businesses for contraventions such as misleading consumers, operating without licences, or failing to refund customers. Nearly a million dollars in restitution was back in the hands of consumers. In addition to these court-ordered penalties, Service Alberta undertook a number of administrative actions, including issuing 22 director's orders and more than 30,000 administrative penalties. Our performance with respect to enforcement continues to demonstrate that breaking the rules and taking advantage of consumers does not go unpunished.

I'd also like to point out that we have expanded our consumer protection presence in Fort McMurray. Our enforcement branch has been proactively inspecting home builders and contractors to make sure they have proper business licences as well as warranty coverage or securities to start taking deposits for the work they will be doing as the community rebuilds from that devastating fire. This helps to minimize the potential for unfair treatment of consumers in that area. It's important to note that our services also proved vital during the provincial crisis response to the Fort McMurray fire. We co-ordinated telecommunications disaster support from the SuperNet Secretariat, and we led the procurement of transportation equipment that was necessary for the response activities.

Overall, our focus in Service Alberta is to provide services in a way that is easy for people to access. We know that Albertans' online dealings grow each day. That's why we continue to ensure that government's online capacities match Alberta's expectations. This includes ongoing additions to the MyAlberta e-services portal to ensure people have convenient and secure access to services. A great example of this is MyAlberta notify, where more than 140,000 Albertans have registered to see renewal reminders for car, driver's licence, and ID cards.

Thank you again to the committee for the opportunity to appear before you. I do want to thank the office of the Auditor General and their partners for the important role that they provide and the recommendations that they provide in our operations. We're committed to addressing all of these recommendations and look forward to their future advice. I also want to take the opportunity to thank the broad Service Alberta team across this province. They work hard to serve Albertans every day.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll hand it back to you for questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that brief description.

I will now turn it over to the Auditor General for his comments. Mr. Saher, you have five minutes.

Mr. Saher: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In fact, I don't think I need to use the five minutes. No comments to make at this stage. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you to the Auditor General.
Mr. Gill.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, everybody, for being here today. Key strategy 2.3 under desired outcome 2, that the government is transparent and information is secure, page 29, is to "improve the way government shares and receives information with and from Albertans." Yet our UCP caucus learned recently through a FOIP request that 800,000 e-mails were deleted and employees were even encouraged to reduce their volume of e-mails and were offered iTunes gift cards to do so. Where did the direction come from to delete the e-mails? Since Service Alberta oversees FOIP and electronic services, was it made by this department?

Mr. Morhart: Thank you very much for the question. We have a couple of individuals that will help with this answer. In summary, no, there's been no direction from Service Alberta in that regard. Our response and responsibility on everything related to document management and FOIP is to oversee a general process and make sure that we've got the right systems and controls in place. Under Mark's leadership our IT team oversees the storage of documents, which includes e-mails, so he can comment on some of the specifics there, and I will ask Doug Morrison just to comment on the FOIP applications that have come in in this regard.

Mr. Brisson: From an e-mail inbox perspective, we always encourage all of our staff to make sure they have a clean inbox and that they're filing their records appropriately. For those records that have information that is pertaining to a policy issue and it's an ongoing issue, make sure those are filed away so that you can speak to them later when called upon. But for those that are duplicates or those that are not relevant to a meeting or to a policy or to those types of things, we encourage that they delete them so that we're able to make sure that we're not incurring large inboxes, large infrastructure, large sets of data that we really don't need. It's making sure that we have a clean process that really does reference back to our standard processes around information management guidelines. We have guidelines and processes and standards for information management that have been implemented across the government and are communicated across each of the ministries by Service Alberta.

Mr. Morrison: Yeah. I don't know if I have much to add to that. All I can comment . . .

The Chair: Could you state your name and your position for the record?

Mr. Morrison: Oh. I'm sorry. Yeah. My name is Doug Morrison. I'm the executive director of information access and protection, and I'm here to talk mainly about FOIP. I might be talking a little bit today; I'm not sure.

All I was going to say was that I think that the deletion of e-mails you're talking about was primarily, in my understanding, due to the fact that there had been a previous request asking for the number of e-mails in inboxes. When we saw the numbers that came out of that request, it became clear, to Mark's point, that we had individuals that had saved years' worth of e-mails that should not have been saved. They were of no purpose to the organization, so there was an effort to clear some of those of e-mails out. I'm not familiar with the programs, the contexts that took place, if any did take place, across government, but I believe that was really what was the impetus for that.

Mr. Gill: Thank you.

What is the criteria to delete e-mails, and who determines that? Is there any protocol set in place, and is there something new that

is happening right now? Has it always been practised by the department going back to previous governments?

Mr. Brisson: We have established information management guidelines and practices that have been implemented across government for many years. We have recently as well developed online tools for training on those IM guidelines and practices, and those guidelines and practices speak to what records are transitory, that are of no value anymore to government and can be deleted. Those records could be in documents or could be e-mails, could be visuals. Then those documents that are not transitory, that are relevant to a policy, to a program, to a funding area: as such, we do store and keep those. Those guidelines and practices are based on international standards, and they themselves are implemented across the ministries, and Service Alberta's role is to make sure that those practices are updated and consistently communicated across government.

Mr. Gill: Okay. Thank you.

So the Premier's office didn't provide any direction about the e-mails? I ask because the FOIP documents indicate that two of the Premier's closest officials had only sent one e-mail during the 10 months of their duration. That should be concerning. Ten months on the job, and you send one e-mail. My question is: are there any private e-mail accounts or servers that are being used at the higher levels of government? I mean, we have seen what happened in the United States.

The Chair: Mr. Gill, are you asking about a policy that is on all government workers, and you're just using that specific past employee as an example?

Mr. Gill: That's right. Yes, sir.

The Chair: Thank you.

2:30

Mr. Morhart: To address that question, I'll re-echo what Mark had described, and that's really our general practice and looking at best practice around the world. We are not aware of private e-mail accounts. We're not aware of that. Again, individuals have to exercise their own discretion about what a transitory record is and where they need to keep certain things. We have guidelines. We've had them in place for many years in that regard, so we are recommunicating those guidelines to everyone. I can't speak to the specifics of an individual's discretion.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, sir.

Who do you think would be the appropriate person to answer that question?

Mr. Morhart: We'd have to go back to the individuals that, you know, you're inquiring about. That's the topic of the request.

Mr. Gill: Can you get them to table before and after, like, before the deletion of these e-mails versus after? I mean, 10 months and one e-mail: that's very alarming.

Mr. Morhart: Yeah. I can't speak to . . .

Mr. Gill: We all believe that we are in this room on behalf of Albertans, and they have the right to know what's going on here.

Mr. Morhart: Right. I can't speak to the specifics there.

The Chair: Mr. Gill, again, are you asking the deputy minister if he's concerned whether we're using personal accounts versus government accounts for government business?

Mr. Gill: Mr. Chair, I'm just following . . .

The Chair: Because if you're going to a specific employee today, this might be problematic.

Mr. Gill: Okay. I'll just go to the next question, Mr. Chair, if that's okay.

The Chair: That's fair enough.

Mr. Gill: What is the cost of government of Alberta employees storing their e-mails?

Mr. Brisson: If you want a specific amount, I'd have to get back to you. We have estimated that the infrastructure for our e-mail services across the government is just under \$900,000 per annum, but that varies with the amount of e-mails that continue to stay in inboxes, the amount of infrastructure we use going forward. We have been able, over the last seven years, through our GOA domain migration project, to migrate all of our employees onto one e-mail system. We've incurred several cost decreases by economies of scale and being able to mass those together. So I see it more as an efficiency than more of an incremental cost going forward.

Mr. Gill: So by deleting e-mail, like, you're saying that there could be a cost saving.

Mr. Brisson: By deleting e-mail – it's an incremental cost, and it goes up and down. But we do rely on our having standard practices. The IM standard guidelines and practices – e-mail are part of records, but the larger part of records are the information documents and presentations and images like geographic images, that we keep to support farming and ranch, and of the environment. As such, as those get bigger, as we store them, we do encourage that if we have an e-mail and it has an attachment of something that is no longer required for policy or program, we delete it such that we're able to not incur those large storage costs. That's where the large impact is, not necessarily on the actual e-mail.

Mr. Gill: Okay. Thank you, sir.

Do you know how many employees participated in this e-mail deletion program? Any number?

Mr. Morhart: We do not have those specifics, no.

Mr. Gill: We learned that incentives were provided to delete those e-mails.

Mr. Morhart: Again, we're not aware of those specifics.

Mr. Gill: Okay. What kind of follow-up has your department taken upon learning of the deletion of these e-mails?

Mr. Morhart: I think the most important follow-up is just to reiterate the best practices. Again, as Mark was outlining before, it's important that we try to refrain from keeping duplicates of things, that we keep official records, whether they're graphics, presentations, decision documents, but all of the transitory pieces where you're duplicating are not necessarily kept. It's around reminding people of best practices and how you manage that individually.

Mr. Gill: Okay. How does this whole e-mail deletion project align with the mandate and strategic plan for the ministry? I'm speaking specifically of key strategy 2.3, which aims to improve the way government shares information with Albertans.

Mr. Brisson: I can speak to that. I guess it goes back to my previous comment. Service Alberta is responsible for the development and maintenance of the IM, information management, guidelines and practices for storage of information, which includes the destruction of information, the creation of information, et cetera. There's a life cycle of information there. We're responsible for the communication of that across government to ensure that all employees are aware of the information that they have and what the storage guidelines are, what the destruction guidelines are, what the security nature of those guidelines are if it's a secure document versus some that are more public or public documents, that are there. At the end of the day, our responsibility is to make sure that that is well communicated. We provide advice, and we provide training, and we provide direction on appropriate practice.

I'm not aware of a government-wide program that was announced to reduce e-mail specifically. It's part of a broader strategy to make sure we manage our information appropriately for the size of organization we have.

Mr. Gill: Okay. Thank you.

Page 32 of the report notes that the 2015-16 60-day completion rate fell to 82 per cent, 4 per cent below the previous year and much lower than the 95 per cent target. The report states, "Prior results typically hovered around 95 per cent or over; however, a downward trend has emerged since 2013-14." What is the reason for the downward trend? Does it have anything to do with this government's encouraging employees to delete hundreds of thousands of e-mails?

Mr. Morhart: I'm going to ask . . .

Mr. Morrison: The main reason is very simple. There's been a huge increase in the demand – in other words, the influx of requests – over the previous year. We had an 8 per cent increase in the number of requests. In addition to the number of requests going up, the types of requests have become far more complex. By "more complex" I'm talking mainly about the fact that we're seeing a lot more crossgovernment requests, requests that touch more than two departments, that are asking for similar information. It really comes down to volume.

Mr. Gill: Okay. So the volume has increased.

Mr. Morrison: Has increased and continues to increase.

Mr. Gill: Okay. Thank you, sir.

What is Service Alberta, the firm responsible to ensure that Albertans have access to government information, doing to reverse the trend and bring it back to, at the very least, the 95 per cent we had before this government came to power? Are we increasing funding? Are we increasing staff? Are we not accepting the requests?

Mr. Morhart: Well, thank you for that question. We are actually working in earnest to streamline and consolidate and create consistent practices across departments. Each department is accountable for its own records. As Service Alberta we're working hard to really try to share best practice standards so that we can, where there are crossgovernment requests, process them in a consistent way, work crossdepartmentally to make sure that we're

addressing things in the same way, to share information across the board as well.

I think the two other things that we are working on, of course, are, you know, making more information available in real time through our open government portal. We lead the country right now in the number of data sets that we have out in the government portal. That continues to grow, and it certainly is proving popular with Albertans and researchers as well because we are putting more of that information out. Where we see routine, regular requests on things, we're trying to put more of those things out proactively.

Mr. Gill: Okay. Thank you, sir.

As we all know, our former colleague Mr. Manmeet Singh Bhullar initiated the Support Our Troops plates. In the results analysis, page 11, the report notes that 7,390 Support Our Troops licence plates were issued in 2016-17 for a total of more than 31,000 since the program began, raising more than \$1.7 million for Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services. Is it not correct that farmers and Albertans with commercial plates cannot participate in this program?

2:40

Mr. Lloyd: I think it is available to anybody who wants to purchase the Support Our Troops plate.

Mr. Gill: Okay. So the commercial vehicle plates and farmers can get the Support Our Troops?

Mr. Lloyd: There's no merger of the plates, so anybody from any walk of life in Alberta can go into a registry agent and purchase a Support Our Troops plate, and that plate will be affixed to their vehicle. But it won't replace a commercial or farming plate.

Mr. Gill: Okay. If that's the case, that's good. I was maybe under the impression that the commercial plates and the farmers' plates won't get registered if you have this Support Our Troops.

Mr. Lloyd: Well, they don't replace them. The Support Our Troops plate is generally applied to ordinary, passenger-class vehicles. They're not applicable to a commercial or farming operation vehicle, an industrial vehicle, in effect.

Mr. Gill: Thank you.

The annual report, page 37, mentions determining the direction for the SuperNet time and again, with a dialogue with stakeholders to help "inform the government's ongoing direction." Can you please elaborate on what this statement means? What is the plan for SuperNet?

Mr. Bull: SuperNet is at a crossroads. We have a contract that expires on June 30, 2018. What we're looking at doing is coming up with a vision to take SuperNet forward to make sure that it continues to meet the evolving needs of the public sector – our schools, libraries, hospitals, government facilities, 3,400 of them, that are connected today – also providing some stronger performance metrics to make sure that the services that are delivered meet the expectations of those user organizations while at the same time looking to see how we can improve rural broadband services through the purchasing power that the government has. In the fiscal year that we are talking about today, we met with over 280 elected people and communities around the province and Internet service providers to gather input that helped to put some recommendations forward for government to make a decision with regard to the direction that SuperNet will go.

Mr. Gill: Thank you, sir.

When will the rural component finally be completed? Is it going to be tied with the June 30 . . .

The Chair: I'll let you ask that question in your next block.

Mr. Carson.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, all, for being here today. My questions are regarding outstanding recommendations from the Auditor General's office from various years. First of all, from May 2017, recommendation 3 on page 51 of the OAG, or the Auditor General's, report recommended that "Service Alberta complete its plans to implement a comprehensive inventory system [for information technology] applications used across government, with supporting processes to maintain the inventory." I'm hoping you can give us an update on progress that's been made on this recommendation.

Mr. Brisson: I can. In 2016 Service Alberta, working with our chief information officer council, established an application transformation committee, with the mandate to look at all of the application catalogues that exist in each of the ministries and move towards having one source of truth for that application catalogue. Throughout the 2016 year we worked on what our requirements were, what technologies were out there, how we could move in a common direction.

In June 2017, by way of an update, we implemented an application catalogue of all IT applications across government that we have had input on from the ministries. That information is about 1,495 applications. We also in that catalogue speak to the health of those applications, how old they are, and when they need to be updated. This allows us to forecast where our needs will be for the future and tie that back to where our investment plan needs to look at the same time.

Mr. Carson: Thank you.

I did have a supplemental, but I believe you answered it. It was: does your department have the authority to complete and maintain a comprehensive list through multiple ministries or departments? It sounds like you said yes.

Mr. Brisson: In working collaboratively with the ministries at this time, we have developed this application catalogue, and we all have agreed that we will keep it updated to help support our investment in our systems as well as our disaster recovery needs and business continuity needs. So it's in the best interests of all ministries to work together, to collaborate, and maintain this application catalogue for the betterment of a one GOA delivery of IT services.

Mr. Carson: Thank you.

In October 2014 recommendation 5 on page 45 of the Auditor General's report recommended that Service Alberta improve their recovery of critical information technology applications for the government of Alberta. Have you been able to address this audit recommendation?

Mr. Brisson: Yes, we have. Last year, in 2016, Service Alberta developed an IT disaster recovery framework, which really did speak to best practices, guidelines, tools, monitoring, and reporting of what is required by the ministries and for our shared services and IT infrastructure, so that our plans are consistent and effective. In November 2016 the government of Alberta was able to complete a full failover disaster recovery test, where we were able to take our infrastructure from our main data centre and fail it over to our backup data centre and then, through a period of testing all of our applications, move back GOA successfully to our main data centre. We

are one of the first, from what I understand, provinces that are able to do this scale and size of a disaster recovery test. This is but one part of a process, but it's a first step, and we are annualizing that process every year in the November time frame.

Mr. Carson: Thank you.

In his October 2008 report the Auditor General recommended on page 346 that "Service Alberta ensure adequate logging and monitoring processes are in place in all application systems that host or support financial information and Albertans' personal information." I'm hoping you can share what progress has been made on this recommendation.

Mr. Brisson: Thank you. That's a very good question. Preventing unauthorized access to or misuse of Albertans' private information that's entrusted to government is a top priority. Service Alberta is committed to ensuring that we have systems in place with the effect of mitigating risks of unauthorized access and potential misuse. We have implemented internal controls to monitor access to and track activity in our registry systems. We have implemented in several of our registry systems some of these controls, where we're able to log the date, time, and access file of any user that is accessing those systems; for example, in our new land titles systems that we're updating. As well, we have made strides in our motor vehicle system to ensure that we are monitoring any access to the system from a user access perspective.

Mr. Carson: Just going back to that, are there further things that are being done to strengthen this process?

Mr. Brisson: This is an ongoing process, to make sure that as we update these systems, we're putting the right security controls in place, not only from unauthorized access outside our firewalls but also for those users that are using it on a day-to-day basis. Part of that is systems changes; other parts are process improvements, training and communication for the users on how they need to use the system, and potential misuse of that system. So part of it's policy, and the other part is systems.

Mr. Carson: Thank you.

In October 2008 the Auditor General's report recommended on page 349 that Service Alberta document its system conversion activities to ensure they comply with the approved test plan for system conversion and data migration. What steps has Service Alberta taken to address the Auditor General's 2008 recommendations on the system conversion process? It looks to be still outstanding. I'm hoping you can give us an update on that.

2:50

Ms Hutchinson: Yes. The recommendation is quite old. What has happened over the last 10 years is that – the recommendation was quite specific. It talked about the data conversion aspect in terms of systems conversion. What's happened during that time as well: Service Alberta has developed quite a number of systems. We never actually had a project that we could go back to the OAG with where we could demonstrate that we were doing data conversion in accordance with how they'd laid out the recommendation.

That being said, there is a project that we are currently working on that's quite significant, quite complex that we think would be ideal for the OAG to look at in terms of the follow-up. We have been and we continue to be in discussions with them about what an appropriate time would be for them to come in and actually work with us in terms of replacing the ERP system, to address this recommendation.

Mr. Carson: Okay. Thank you very much for your answers.

I would like to turn over my remaining time to MLA Hinkley, please.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Chair. This spring I had the chance to put forward private member's Bill 208, which has to do with consumer protection, and involve the Utilities Consumer Advocate. I met with him this summer in a very productive meeting.

I have a couple of questions, and I'm looking mainly for clarity. On page 11 of the annual report you state that the Utilities Consumer Advocate "participated in 33 Alberta Utilities Commission proceedings, resulting in an estimated \$204 million in cost disallowances to benefit consumers." Now, since I'm working with enhancing his capabilities and strengths, can you explain how the UCA goes about this process? How did that calculation come about? Where did those numbers come from?

Mr. Lloyd: Colin Lloyd, ADM for consumer and registry services. I'd be pleased to answer that question. The cost disallowances relate to appearances before the Alberta Utilities Commission, and it relates to the evidence that the AUC relies upon when, typically, a utility service provider brings forward costs that they would like to be considered and then disbursed to consumers. The UCA – and I'm sorry about the acronyms, but it's the Utilities Consumer Advocate, working on behalf of Service Alberta – puts forward the argument about why these cost allowances should be tested. Wherever the commission agrees with their argument, a calculation is made as to precisely how much the cost would be reduced by, and then it's attributed to the UCA. So it's directly related to the decisions that go on record at the commission, and that's how it's actually attributed.

In other instances, where the UCA is one main intervenor on behalf of consumers and the Consumers' Coalition of Alberta is on the other part, if their costs are shared, the UCA only, as it were, claims the amount of allowance that was specifically won by them in the arguments they brought to the commission.

Mr. Hinkley: Okay. Just as a précis of that, the consumer will contact the advocate, and then, as a result, he is able to make these recoveries on their behalf.

Mr. Lloyd: Yeah. I think that's a very good way of putting it.

Mr. Hinkley: Okay. My second clarification, then, also from page 11 of the annual report. It states that "83 households were reconnected by the UCA through the Winter Utility Reconnection Project," which is new to me. Therefore, I'm asking you if you could share and tell me – tell us, I guess – what the winter utility reconnection project is. How does the UCA reconnect people?

Mr. Lloyd: For a variety of reasons, mostly due to very difficult circumstances that people find themselves in, they're disconnected from utilities, but there is a regulation that determines that nobody can be disconnected from a utility during the winter months. So over the summer, for those people who remain disconnected and who have exhausted opportunities to work with a utility provider, their details are passed on to the UCA.

[Mr. Dach in the chair]

Then our mediators work specifically with individuals to try to find them different ways of meeting their obligation, to work out a kind of deal with the utility provider and ultimately get them reconnected. So the intent and impetus behind this are to ensure that, to the extent possible, nobody is left without heat or power during winter.

Mr. Hinkley: Okay. Just a supplemental question, then. Eighty-three households: is that number high or low? Is there a trend happening in that area?

Mr. Lloyd: It remained fairly average. There's a lot of work that goes into working with people and trying to track them down. Not everybody, in fact, is interested in being reconnected.

Mr. Hinkley: Okay. Well, thank you for the clarification.

Deputy Chair, if I may, Ms McKitrick will continue on.

The Deputy Chair: Ms McKitrick.

Ms McKitrick: Thank you very much. Every time Service Alberta comes to a committee meeting, I'm always reminded of the breadth of the kind of work that happens in Service Alberta. It's everything from IT to how you work with other departments to managing the registry system and then to some very specific consumer protection items that really impact the lives of people. I'm sure it must sometimes be a challenge with the diversity of issues.

This afternoon I'm really interested in the residential tenancy dispute resolution because I think it's really an important service that you're providing as part of consumer protection. I note in your annual report that there's been a continuous rise in the demand for the services. Apparently, it looks like there was a 6.2 per cent increase in the number of applications from 2015-16 to 2016-17. I was wondering: given budgetary constraints and service abilities how is the ministry managing its service capacity to ensure that Albertans who require your services around residential tenancy disputes are served in a timely manner?

Mr. Lloyd: Thank you. I'm pleased to answer that question. You know, it's not an insignificant increase, 6.2 per cent, of course, but we're looking at quite a number of different initiatives to keep pace with that: introducing initiatives for online registration, triaging to make our staffing more flexible to be able to service that, looking for improvements in accommodations, making the service more accessible to people who would apply to the RTDRS for service. It does at times seem quite a daunting flow at over 10,000 people a year, but it's something that we have been able to deal with efficiently and keep pace with and refine our management systems to maintain the level of efficiency and confidence in the service.

Ms McKitrick: Are you suggesting that you're moving to longer hours of available IT staff and different points of access?

[Mr. Cyr in the chair]

Mr. Lloyd: We're looking at all options at the moment. I think what is clear to us over time is that this is an issue that is important to Albertans. We're still sort of analyzing why that increase has occurred. It may have something to do with the fact that, you know, as people lose employment – and, of course, that's a factor – they're unable to keep pace with rent, and that brings them into the ambit of dispute at times with their landlord. That shouldn't necessarily be seen to be a complete constant. But, you know, at the same time – and you heard from Mark here about wanting to do more and more online and continue to ensure that there is access to the system by anyone, anywhere. The at-any-time piece I think is a challenge but one that we're looking at as well going forward.

3:00

Ms McKitrick: I was just wondering: have you done any studies around the numbers of people who have challenges around accessing online?

Mr. Lloyd: You know, we haven't done any studies. One of the considerations that we've got under way is a survey, a user survey.

Ms McKittrick: Okay. Thank you very much.

I don't have much time in this area, but I'll ask my questions, and maybe you can answer later. In December 2015 the Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015, passed unanimously in the House. I want to thank my colleague again for doing that. According to your annual report on page 23 the regulations came into effect in August 2016, so about a year ago. How many individuals were supported this past year through these changes, and have you worked with landlords and other stakeholders to implement this change?

Mr. Lloyd: Thank you. Over 150 individuals have been assisted by this amendment to the legislation. It has been very successful in enabling people to break a lease, as you've pointed out. The work that we have done with the Alberta Residential Tenancies Advisory Committee has been helpful over time to, as we always should do, kind of review how the legislation is working. Is it working as the minister intended? The feedback that we're getting is: "Yes. Yes, it is." Landlords are understanding it better and better. We did a lot of outreach, you know, beforehand, and we continue to do so. RTAC is a body that has representation from landlords large and small, and the feedback that we're getting is that this is effective and it's meeting its purpose.

Ms McKittrick: I want to congratulate you on the success with one year of operation.

Are there any particular areas that you think might have been more challenging to this? I'm not sure about rural areas, for example. Has it been a challenge to implement this act?

Mr. Lloyd: No. We've not noticed that. I mean, we're in contact with Community and Social Services colleagues as well. You know, it's a pretty broad-based and well-integrated system, and we converse often. There will be a time coming up in the next little while when there comes an opportunity to consider amendments, but there is nothing coming forward that is obvious to us at the moment.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you very much.

The other question I wanted to ask you is on payday loans. Again, I just want to congratulate the ministry for its innovation around payday loans. I think it's something that was long overdue in Alberta, and I know you worked closely with stakeholders around this. In the annual report on page 25 you discussed this in spring 2016. Again, it's only a year old. I'm wondering what impact...

The Chair: Thank you, Ms McKittrick.

Mr. Fildebrandt.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, officials. I thank the officials for joining us today.

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Fildebrandt. Apparently I am out of rotation.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Oh.

The Chair: I jumped to inviting you to speak too early. I apologize.

Mr. Fildebrandt: You don't know what you missed.

The Chair: I can't wait.

Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to jump back to some of the FOIP and e-mail conversation that we had earlier for some clarification. My first question is: is the ministry worried that government of Alberta employees may be perhaps innocently using voice mode or personal e-mail, which may circumvent or undermine the FOIP Act?

Mr. Morhart: Again, we're not aware of any broad use of this. We have pretty standard practices and availability of services for employees to use. We remind employees of their responsibilities and the tools that they have available to them, but we're not aware that there is any contravention using personal use in that regard.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. I'm wondering if you can provide the previous and updated guidelines to the committee for us to review. Is that possible?

Mr. Morhart: Yes.

Mr. Gotfried: I'd also like to ask you: what's being done to ensure not only compliance but understanding by government of Alberta or ministerial employees? It sounds like maybe, again, there could be some innocent or inadvertent use of other modes of communication that might circumvent the spirit of the FOIP Act, and I'm just wondering what's been done to educate and ensure understanding – again, not just compliance, but understanding – so that they are meeting the spirit of that act.

Mr. Morhart: Right. Again, a very good question. This is an evolving area because the tools to create documents, to create information, to share information continue to evolve, so we have to keep amending and updating our policies accordingly. I think to the point that you've just made, constant retraining is important. We've rolled out a series of e-courses that remind employees, remind everyone of their responsibilities and the tools that are available and what best practices look like. We'll continue to do some of that work. For Service Alberta part of its mandate is helping with that information and document management standard. That's our role, to help share best practices and get that out to employees.

Mr. Gotfried: As we understand, transparency is a goal of the ministry and also this government. Could you provide us, then, with some of the plans in place through education, information, e-learning, as you said, to ensure that the e-mail guidelines are being followed?

Mr. Morhart: Sure. We can provide some more details to the committee in that regard, just the types of courses that have been rolled out, some of the statistics related to it.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. Can you tell me: what would be the sanctions on an employee if it's found that they are not adhering to e-mail guidelines?

Mr. Morhart: I'd say that the first place that we go to is, you know, our employee code of conduct. There are some pretty stringent guidelines there, and those are publicly available, the expectations of employees to manage, collect, and retain information. We need to make sure that employees adhere to that. Where it comes more specifically to the standards of information management, e-mails, records, those types of things, we have guidelines, and through training we remind people of those. Where we find egregious use or inappropriate use, we need to deal with that in a personal and direct way, so we hold people accountable in that regard.

Mr. Gotfried: We're talking here about deleting e-mails, and we've heard earlier that in many cases it's encouraged to delete certain types of e-mails, but we're not sure if people understand the guidelines, so we're doing ongoing education. My question to you is: we all know that e-mails are backed up and saved on servers I think on a daily basis if not a real-time basis. Do we have access, maybe on a random basis, to deleted e-mails to monitor some of the adherence to the guidelines?

Mr. Brisson: It'd be very difficult to monitor how many people are deleting e-mails or not because of the number of e-mails that are transmitted per day. The government of Alberta receives e-mail traffic in the range of 700 million per day coming through the different ports that we have. As such, to monitor that traffic going – sorry; that's per month, not per day. That's a lot of e-mails, so I apologize. To put the technology in place to actually monitor when one is deleted or not would be quite expensive, and I'm not sure that we would have the value that would accrue to really understand why that was deleted or not – right? – and whether it was a transitory record or an official record.

Mr. Gotfried: I'm not an IT or a communications expert at all, but I'm assuming, you know, each of us has an Outlook account, and each one of those Outlook accounts has an inbox, and each inbox has a certain number of e-mails in it, and to delete it you actually have to delete it. When it gets deleted, it gets into a deleted folder, and then we would delete the deleted folder. I'm quite curious that there's not some simple mechanism to track the number of deleted e-mails and in some cases to then go in and qualitatively have a look at those on a random basis where you may see a spike in volume. That would allow you to actually go back and do some random spot checks to see whether those e-mails being deleted are following the guidelines. I have a real hard time understanding that we don't have the ability with today's technology to do that.

3:10

Mr. Brisson: We have the ability to identify deleted e-mails. We have the ability to identify when they were deleted, how many, and by whom. That's not in question. The question is: we don't put manpower or technology in place today that is able to determine whether the deletion of that e-mail is because it is a transitory record or an official record because that would take analysis based on the insight of the individual deleting the e-mail. So when we look at the volume, that would be a pretty high workload for us to be able to do that with each of the individuals deleting, with 30,000 employees.

Mr. Gotfried: So you are not in a position to do some spot checks? I mean, it sounds to me like this is exactly going to the issue of whether guidelines are being followed. If guidelines are not being followed and you have the ability to find out whether guidelines are not being followed, possibly you could maybe highlight or do some of those checks in ministries that either have very sensitive information or a high volume of deletions. It seems to me that if we are doing nothing on whether guidelines are being followed on a qualitative basis and we're doing it purely on a quantitative basis, we will never know whether we have guidelines being followed or not.

Mr. Brisson: We've taken a proactive approach with respect to how we work across the government from an information management perspective. We have information management leadership in each of the ministries as well as a shared service who meet regularly to speak about some of the issues with respect to e-mail management, document management, file management, et cetera. It's an ongoing practice of the government to move towards

an efficient adherence to our policies and guidelines. At this point in time I'm not aware of whether e-mail practices are not being followed because our assumption at the start of this is that as we work with our partners across government, they are being followed and that we put the right practices in place and we put the right technology in place for them to do that.

Mr. Gotfried: But if the objective is secure and transparent and you're not aware, how will we know whether they're actually achieving transparent and secure?

Mr. Brisson: I do believe we are transparent and secure with our use of our information technology tools.

Mr. Gotfried: Do you have any proof or statistics to back that up?

Mr. Brisson: I don't have a negative on a negative.

Mr. Gotfried: So if it's not broken, don't fix it?

Mr. Brisson: I don't believe it's broken.

Mr. Gotfried: But you don't have any proof to prove otherwise?

Mr. Brisson: I don't have any proof that it's not broken.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. So there is no mechanism for you to do some random checks on the qualitative nature of deleted e-mails?

Mr. Brisson: We could use a manual process using our tools to do a manual check on e-mails and through communicating with employees through a spot check if, in fact, that was a high enough priority for the government to do so.

Mr. Gotfried: All right. And you don't believe that that's a worthwhile or high enough priority at this point in time?

Mr. Brisson: I do believe in the employees of the government of Alberta, that they are adhering to the policies and processes that we've put in place and that, in fact, through the communication channels we have, we are clearly expressing to our employees the appropriate practice for use of these tools. In fact, I can't guarantee that every individual is adhering to them, but I'm fairly confident, and I would hope that the large majority of them are.

Mr. Gotfried: All right. You know, I also try and like to believe that everybody is following it, but when we have certain high-level officials with one e-mail after 10 months, maybe we need to have a little bit more qualitative information.

But having said that, I'm going to move on to my next topic here. I'm going to ask a few more questions about the SuperNet. It's my understanding through some conversations with some individuals involved with the SuperNet that, of course, it is coming up for a review of contractual obligations on it. Could you tell me: is there a plan to sell the SuperNet?

Mr. Bull: Stephen Bull, assistant deputy minister, SuperNet Secretariat. There is nothing to sell. Originally the SuperNet model was that there would be some elements of the infrastructure that would be owned by the province, but a decision was made a number of years ago to transfer ownership of the asset to Bell, and in return we received lease agreements, so we don't actually have any assets to sell off as part of SuperNet.

Mr. Gotfried: So that asset was sold to Bell already?

Mr. Bull: Yes. Correct.

Mr. Gotfried: So the asset, that was paid for by the Alberta government, was, I believe, intended to be an open network. Is that correct?

Mr. Bull: Yes, partly. The original intent of SuperNet was to connect together the public sector: our libraries, schools, hospitals, et cetera. As a by-product the SuperNet infrastructure is also available for private companies to use to enable residential/business Internet services, primarily to rural Alberta, and that is an open network and still is today.

Mr. Gotfried: That would also facilitate use of that SuperNet as a wireless network backbone. Is that correct?

Mr. Bull: That's correct. Yes.

Mr. Gotfried: That being owned by Bell, does it limit the latitude of other users to have access to that for Internet and wireless services?

Mr. Bull: No, it doesn't. Bell does not provide residential services here in the province of Alberta. Their model is that they actually wholesale out access to other private corporations in order to provide those services. In fact, it still is an open-access network today that people can purchase bandwidth from.

Mr. Gotfried: But what about as a backbone for a wireless cellphone network?

Mr. Bull: As a wireless cellphone network?

Mr. Gotfried: If you've got fibre network out to Grande Prairie and you have a third-party cellphone provider that can put a tower there and route through that fibre network, by not having that network there, they may not be able to provide that kind of wireless service. Is that now limited because of the Bell ownership?

Mr. Bull: The SuperNet infrastructure isn't used for cellphones, but it would be used for fixed wireless that would be provided from one of the sorts of towers that we're talking about. There is nothing that prevents a fixed wireless Internet service provider from being able to purchase access into the SuperNet infrastructure for that backbone purpose. They could build a network of their own towers and then connect it into SuperNet.

Mr. Gotfried: All right. By contracting with Bell?

Mr. Bull: By contracting today with Axia, who is the SuperNet operator.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. All right. Do you see any potential pitfalls with the ownership of that network by Bell at this point in time, going forward in the next five, 10, or 15 years?

Mr. Bull: No. Steps are being taken to make sure that as of the 1st of July, 2018, we still have a continuity of service for those 3,400 public-sector locations as well as the same continuity for any private organization that is using that infrastructure today to provide residential services.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. Thank you very much. That gives me a little bit more clarity on what I hope is protection for competition and for Albertans. Thank you very much, Stephen. I think I'm comfortable.

I'd like to move on to some registry services information. The results analysis for service modernization on page 14 notes that 85,000 Albertans have signed up for vehicle registration reminders

with MyAlberta notify. Could you tell me: what percentage of the total of Alberta vehicle owners does 85,000 represent?

Mr. Brisson: I'd have to get that number.

Mr. Gotfried: Is it fairly safe to say that it's a minuscule portion of the vehicle ownership in this province?

Mr. Brisson: I would say that it's . . .

Mr. Gotfried: I'll tell you what it is. It's 1.6 per cent of 5.11 million.

What was the target of the program when it was first unveiled, in terms of penetration, to Alberta vehicle registrants?

Mr. Brisson: We did not have an original target for it. We were opening up the service to make it more accessible for Albertans to have a renewal service. In addition to that, we worked with the registry agents of Alberta and the AARA in their establishing a service as well so that when other Albertans come to the front counter, they're able to elect for the service there. We work collaboratively, together, to make sure we're providing access to Albertans.

Mr. Gotfried: Do you know how many are registered through the AARA members?

Mr. Brisson: We would have to get that information for you.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. So you don't actually have a target for the MyAlberta notify program in terms of what your expectations were? A percentage?

Mr. Brisson: Knowing we were working with the registry associations and the registry agents, we didn't set a target. Our target together was to maximize the service for Albertans.

3:20

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. Can you tell me what the investment was to put in place MyAlberta notify through Service Alberta?

Mr. Brisson: I would have to get back to you on that, but the MyAlberta notify initiative was done with internal resources and was all done by staff.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. I'd like to find out what the costs are and the return on investment for that and whether it's justifiable.

Is there any cost to Service Alberta for the AARA to do the online notification system? Is there any cost to us?

Mr. Brisson: No. My understanding is no. They provide that service to Albertans.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. I'd be interested to see what the total penetration is between AARA and yourself, so if those numbers can be provided, that would be great.

Under service modernization it also notes that 56,000 Albertans have signed up for driver's licence and ID card reminders. What percentage of licence and ID card holders are using that system, represented by the 56,000? Do you know what the percentage of that is?

Mr. Brisson: Sorry. I was writing your request down.

Mr. Gotfried: What percentage of licence and ID card holders are represented by the 56,000 Albertans that have signed up for driver's licence and ID card reminders?

Mr. Brisson: Where are you referencing, sir?

Mr. Gotfried: That's also through service modernization, so I believe it's on page 14 as well.

Mr. Brisson: Right. That's similar to the other number. We would have to go back to get the whole number and then be able to provide that to you.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. It's 1.8 per cent of 3.134 million, so it's a very low penetration. Did you have a target for this program?

Mr. Brisson: Both of those programs were unveiled at the same time.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. Is it also available through registries, that notification system?

Mr. Brisson: We work collaboratively with them as well on that, yes.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. Do you have any sense of what the numbers are on that?

Mr. Brisson: Not for those purposes.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. I'd also be interested in those numbers and comparisons and also the cost to us of having the MyAlberta notify system for the driver's licence and ID card registrations.

Moving on to one of the concerns that was raised, on page 44 the department decided to mail renewal reminders to seniors until at least April 1, 2018. Correct me if I'm wrong, but this was originally supposed to end on April 1, 2017. Could you tell me what accounts for this change in policy, the extension by a year of the mail reminders to seniors?

Mr. Lloyd: I can answer that one. The decision was made because the feedback was that seniors – from advocate groups we heard that seniors required being given more time to adjust to the changes, so a year's extension was given.

Mr. Gotfried: All right. Can you tell me how many senior Albertans have received \$270 tickets for failing to renew?

Mr. Lloyd: I don't have that information, but I can get back to you with it.

Mr. Gotfried: All right. I'd be interested in how many are issued in total and how many, if you've been able to identify, are issued to senior citizen Albertans.

Are there any other groups that have been identified that have sort of fallen through the cracks because of lack of access, possibly, to online services for notification?

Mr. Brisson: We have not reduced the access to online services and notification. What we've done is that we have removed paperless reminders, just for clarity, with the exception of seniors groups. Albertans aged 70 or older will receive it until April 1, 2018.

Mr. Gotfried: Oh. So it's not seniors. It's actually 70 and older. Is it specifically limited to that?

Mr. Brisson: To help seniors make the transition to paperless, Albertans aged 70 and older will receive . . .

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. So 65 to 70 is not included in that.

Mr. Brisson: My understanding is 70 and older, yes.

Mr. Gotfried: Seventy and over. Okay. That's good.

I have some questions with respect to MyAlberta as well. Service Alberta has launched its own digital portal to offer services to Albertans, including what we've just discussed. It can be seen as competition to the private agency network, the AARA in many cases, that they claim to support. Statistics presented in this report also indicate . . . [Mr. Gotfried's speaking time expired] I'll have to finish this question later.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gotfried.
Ms McKittrick.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you. I'm going to go back to the questions I probably asked around payday loans because I think it's an important part of the work of the ministry. I think we need to talk about it in this committee today.

I'm interested in: since the legislation came into effect about a year ago, what have you seen as the impact of the legislation in Alberta, and then what has the ministry done specifically to implement the legislation and to inform Albertans of it?

Mr. Lloyd: Thank you. The report on payday loans by payday lenders licensed in Alberta will be presented in the Legislature in 2018 by the minister.

What we are hearing is that most payday lenders continuing to operate in Alberta are focusing on other products or have terminated their payday loan licences, and other financial services are testing new products in the marketplace. For example, ATB has partnered with Cashco. That has enabled clients to access ATB chequing and savings accounts that include automatic overdraft protection at a percentage rate far below that of payday loans. Over 5,500 people have now signed up for that option.

The credit unions are now involved. Servus Credit Union and Connect First Credit Union have launched small-dollar, lower interest accounts and instalment loans for members. Again, the mainstream lending institutions are coming back into the marketplace for lower income Albertans.

Concerns related to other high costs of credit, like with rent to own, have been raised in the consumer protection consultation that we have held over the summer. We're absorbing the feedback from that consultation and considering what that should mean for, kind of, policy adjustments going forward.

Ms McKittrick: So we'll get a full report in 2018, but you're already seeing some changes in the way that the payday loan industry is working. Is that a fair kind of statement?

Mr. Lloyd: Yes.

Ms McKittrick: You've had ATB and the credit union come in. Is there anything that you've had to do as a ministry in terms of the changes from the legislation?

Mr. Lloyd: Well, one of the things that we will do as a matter of course is, obviously, monitor the effectiveness of the changes. The other thing that we're doing in particular is ensuring that the payday lenders who continue to operate are playing by the new set of rules. Of course, we have audit and compliance teams that look at that and a team of investigators that are also available to look at any sort of allegations that the industry is not complying with the changes that have been made.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you very much. It's nice to see the community partners like ATB and the credit union system coming onboard to make this happen.

I'll turn it over to my colleague Mrs. Littlewood now.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you. In the annual report, in talking about SuperNet, it was saying that the SuperNet Secretariat has

worked with the federal government and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission on their respective 2016 program and funding announcements, including advising on unique internet challenges and opportunities for rural Alberta.

It says here that the ministry provided guidance to municipalities and indigenous community leaders in regard to federal funding opportunities. I'm wondering what sort of guidance was provided.

Mr. Bull: Thank you. Stephen Bull, assistant deputy minister, SuperNet Secretariat. Yes, we worked with our partners, as you said: municipalities, districts, counties as well as indigenous peoples. We, first of all, informed them about the programs that were coming up so that they were aware of them, so that they knew to start preparing grant applications, et cetera. We also performed surveys through the AUMA and the AAMDC to get feedback and input that helped us in the lobbying that we do with our federal counterparts. Then we also physically assisted them with some of the applications themselves, providing them with contacts in the private sector because in some cases they needed to partner with Internet service providers in order to be eligible for funding. Last but not least, we also provided letters of support from Service Alberta to 13 different organizations, including some municipalities, districts, and counties, to assist with the applications themselves.

3:30

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you for that, and thank you for being present at the meetings of the regional economic development alliances, like Alberta Hub over in my neck of the woods. Thanks for your support.

Would you be able to also give us some information on how the secretariat was involved in the Fort McMurray fires? I see that there is some information in the annual reports about some rather dangerous situations that the secretariat had a hand in supporting.

Mr. Bull: Absolutely. There were primarily a couple of things that we did. First of all, because of our contacts in the private sector with the telecommunications providers, we were able to work with them and stickhandle them through the process of making sure that some of their repair crews could get access to the fire area with minimal delays to start repairing systems so that they would become available. But also during the emergency the operations centre was forced to move on a couple of occasions, and we were able to redirect and increase the amount of bandwidth that was available to the locations that they were moving into so that they continued to have communications with the outside world. That also meant that in some locations, to make sure that the Internet was still operating, we sent in people with generators because mains power was going down and because backup batteries would fail after a few hours. We needed to put generators on-site to make sure that, basically, the network would continue to operate.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you very much, and thanks for your work.

Chair, I believe I will be ceding to Dr. Turner.

The Chair: Please, Dr. Turner.

Dr. Turner: Thanks, Chair, and thank you to Service Alberta for being here. It's really been an interesting afternoon.

Perhaps the most frequent communication I get from constituents regarding the work of government is related to condominiums and particularly in Edmonton-Whitemud, where we have a large number of condominium properties. We also have a life-lease property or at least one life-lease property. I'm actually very interested in page 22 of the annual report, that says that Service Alberta is going to "strengthen protections within Alberta's condominium industry to safeguard purchasers of... condominiums, enhance governance and insurance of the industry and establish a more expedient dispute resolution process." I think the same comments could be made about the life leases as well. I'd be interested to know what progress has been made toward strengthening protections within the condominium industry in Alberta.

Mr. Lloyd: Thank you. I'm pleased to take that question. The goal is to ensure that we've got balanced legislation that advances the interests of everyone involved in condominiums, be they the developers or people who live there or people considering purchasing.

We're currently developing amendments to the condominium property regulation to support the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014. As part of this, we have been – and, Dr. Turner, you have been present when we've been conducting consultations in relation to the condominium property regulation. We've had five open houses across the province. A public survey will shortly be released, in the next several weeks, to solicit further feedback about potential policy options to address outstanding issues. We had a good reception at open houses, with over 1,100 people attending the five sessions. The issues have certainly addressed concerns that have been brought in over time, raised by Albertans, as well as the regulations that we require to proclaim the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014.

We're at stage 1. This is a three-stage process where we have developed regulations in consultation with the stakeholders, including the condominium development industry, real estate representatives, and condo owners, managers, and boards. So far proposed amendments have received overall positive reception from stakeholders. They see the changes as balancing the interests of stakeholders while increasing the protections and confidence in the condominium market.

Dr. Turner: Thank you very much. I can attest to some of the positive impacts of those consultations in my community.

I'd like to turn to a different aspect of the annual report. On page 29 another key strategy is to

lead initiatives related to government transparency and protection of personal information, including modernization of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act [as well as] the Personal Information Protection Act.

If it could be done briefly, I'd appreciate it. What initiatives has the ministry undertaken in regard to this key strategy?

Mr. Morhart: Thank you for that question. We've been working on a number of initiatives in this regard. I highlighted some of those earlier in this discussion, including a proactive release of information. More importantly, we're trying to work on strengthening our consistency of receiving, analyzing, and responding to applications for information that are coming in. That involves a lot of training. It involves a lot of discussion and collaboration among departments so that we are consistent in that regard. We are also working on a longer term system enhancement as well so that we've readily got more IT capacity to help us with

some of this. It is an evolving process, and as was highlighted earlier, there is a growth in demand in the area, and we're trying to put more structured resources and responses into it.

Dr. Turner: I realize that we did speak a lot about FOIP, but is there anything about the PIPA changes that you can highlight, particularly about where you've seen improvements as a result?

Mr. Morrison: Hi. Doug Morrison. I'm not sure I understand specifically what you're asking for. You're looking for what changes have been recommended to the legislation?

Dr. Turner: Well, we heard a lot about the changes with the FOIP. What changes have been made to the Personal Information Protection Act that have resulted in improvements to Albertans?

Mr. Morrison: Yeah. Other than the consultations that have occurred, there have been no changes that I'm aware of.

Dr. Turner: Thanks.

Effective January 21, 2017, the government of Alberta has banned door-to-door sales of energy products. Would you be able to share if the ministry has been receiving any complaints about violations of this ban?

Mr. Lloyd: I don't have any specific information on consumer complaints in this regard other than, of course, a thousand complaints leading to the actual ban itself. We've asked the question during our consumer consultations to determine whether and to what extent people are aware of the ban and whether other products need to be banned. We're still absorbing the results from that consultation. Clearly, we want to ensure that people feel protected, particularly in their homes, when products and services are being sold. Of course, we will continue to monitor. We will continue to investigate wherever complaints are made and ensure that vendors, businesses are actually complying with the change in legislation.

3:40

Dr. Turner: Thank you. Again, I can attest to the interest in the community on this, particularly among our seniors. I think this legislation and the way you're implementing it is going to be very valuable to our seniors population. Even SHARP, the seniors' home adaptation and renovation program, ties in very well with this. I think it's important that our seniors have kind of an increased level of protection since they can be vulnerable to coercion at the door.

Maybe I'll turn to my last question out of this group. This sounds like really good news. On page 15 of the annual report it says that the ministry has "contributed more than 13,000 computers and related devices" to school programs. Can you tell us about this program? Actually, help me a little bit. What are related devices?

Ms Wood: Laura Wood, assistant deputy minister of shared services. Thank you for the question. The program Computers for Schools is a nonprofit organization where we donate the computers. It started in 1994, and we've provided now, free of charge, over 200,000 computers to kindergarten to grade 12 schools province-wide and have expanded that service to other social supports for seniors' and low-income groups as well. Surplus sales track the computers itself, so once they're deemed surplus goods, that's the point at which we donate those computers. As to the devices that you're talking about, I would imagine it would be keyboards and things that surround or support a computer.

Dr. Turner: Printers?

Ms Wood: Yes.

Dr. Turner: Okay. Thank you very much.

Chair, I'd like to turn over the residual time to MLA Piquette, who's on the phone.

The Chair: Mr. Piquette, are you ready?

Mr. Piquette: Yes, I am. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Just referring to the annual report again, on page 21 the report states:

The growing digital marketplace increases the likelihood of unfair marketplace interactions like misrepresented products and the theft of personal information or finances. The Department continues to lead and participate in a number of education and awareness initiatives in response to this risk.

Sounds good, but just in detail, can you share with us what types of education and awareness initiatives the ministry is undertaking?

Mr. Lloyd: We are making available more of our both printed and online tip sheets. We are creating much more of a presence on Facebook through the consumer protection Alberta Facebook page, and I've seen a tremendous amount of increase in traffic and likes. I think that's the right terminology. We are increasing our outreach efforts to ensure that, in particular, when students come to school, to colleges, to universities, we are meeting them at their place of what I would call need in terms of information on a variety of different subjects, some of which is, you know, how to rent accommodation effectively, how to keep your information secure, how to conduct e-commerce effectively. We are investing a good deal in terms of education as a means of mitigating risk and ensuring that people are more confident to play in the marketplace.

Mr. Piquette: Okay. Thank you very much.

Now talk to me about unfair digital marketplaces. How does the ministry measure whether the digital marketplace is secure and fair? How is that done?

Mr. Lloyd: We have a consumer contact centre that receives calls for information . . .

The Chair: Is your answer brief?

Mr. Lloyd: Yes, I think it can be. We provide both an online and a telephone venue for people to be able to report concerns and complaints in the marketplace.

The Chair: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Mr. Piquette.

Mr. Fildebrandt, you have five minutes.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On the topic of payday loans, can you speak to: how are financial products changing to meet the needs of low-credit individuals? Are you measuring changes in the numbers or sizes of unregulated loans in the marketplace?

Mr. Lloyd: Perhaps if I deal with the unregulated market first. I think we do recognize that this is a difficult area to, well, I would say, police, for want of a better description. Often it's people who are in very difficult and straining circumstances who, for a variety of different reasons and mainly because they have very low credit, go to payday loans and who even, when they can't get a payday loan, may go into the online, unregulated space. They are statistically far more unlikely to report the fact that they're either being scammed or, in fact, are being persecuted.

This is a difficult area for us, but notwithstanding that, we are working with community organizations. I would mention Momentum, for example, as one community action group in

Calgary that is better positioned, I would suggest, to be able to touch into this space and gather information. We're regularly in contact with them, and they're doing a lot of thought leadership and some very good research and producing reports that . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: But do you have any indication of any change in the number and size of these unregulated loans?

Mr. Lloyd: No, we don't.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Okay. All right. Is the department measuring it? I appreciate that it's difficult to measure, but is the department attempting to measure it in any way?

Mr. Lloyd: Yes. I mean, certainly, with people who contact Service Alberta and make a complaint, that's obviously an issue that's recorded, and it's assessed. If we can, we will investigate it. What we are not seeing is any major upswing in that regard.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Okay. Thank you.

On the topic of the mass deletion of e-mails in the department, you've stated that the e-mails deleted were transitory, which would be allowed. I'd be interested to know: what steps did you take to ensure that only transitory documents were deleted and not documents that should have been retained under the law? Did the department explicitly give instructions when this was happening? When employees were being instructed and incentivized to do this, were they specifically reminded only to delete transitory e-mails or not?

Mr. Morhart: Thank you for the question. As I've mentioned before, a lot of our focus in this regard is on retraining on a regular basis the expectations of employees with respect to information and document retention.

To your specific question about a mass deletion, I don't have specifics on that. We're not investigating that per se at the moment. But we do really reinforce the general best practice about: it should only be transitory. Transitory can include duplicate documents, drafts that are done that are work towards a final product. It just helps us retain what final products are there for the record.

Mr. Fildebrandt: My question, very specifically, is: when this went out, were employees specifically instructed only to delete transitory e-mails or not?

Mr. Morhart: Our general policy is that transitory e-mails can be deleted as well as duplicates. That is our general policy and instruction to employees.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Okay. But no specific indication was given when this instruction and incentivization program went out? No specific reminder was given that only transitory and duplicate documents should be deleted?

3:50

Mr. Morhart: Again, our policy is pretty clear. It's been consistent for a number of years, and I can't speak to any specifics on an incentive to do with anything other than that policy.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Okay. Do you know who specifically gave . . . [Mr. Fildebrandt's speaking time expired]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fildebrandt. The bell rang here.
Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just had one last question on the SuperNet. It's my understanding that the SuperNet is going

out for a new operator tender. Can you tell us when it will be awarded? I think it's for Mr. Bull.

Mr. Bull: Stephen Bull, assistant deputy minister, SuperNet Secretariat. The procurement is currently under way. The intention, of course, is that we need to have a contract awarded for the future direction of SuperNet before the current contract expires, which is on the 30th of June, 2018. We want to do it as far ahead of that date as possible so that we can make sure that we do the appropriate planning, to make sure we have that consistency of services that I was mentioning earlier.

Mr. Gotfried: Is there any preference in that tender for Alberta-based or headquartered companies?

Mr. Bull: There was actually a prequalification that was performed back in the beginning of 2016, and the three prequalified organizations that remain as part of the bidding process are Axia, Telus, and Bell.

Mr. Gotfried: Great. Thank you. That was just a follow-up question there.

I just wanted to turn to some questions on MyAlberta. Service Alberta has launched its own digital portal to offer services to Albertans. That can be seen as competition to private agency networks, but statistics presented in this report also indicated that so far it's been a bit of a failure. For instance, the department had a target of 300,000 people, for digital MyAlberta accounts, to use its new portal. Our information is that the actual result was only 18,548. That's approximately 6 per cent of the target. My question is: what has been the cost of the portal to date, including building and operating it and marketing it to Albertans?

Mr. Brisson: I'd have to get back to you on the exact number.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. Before embarking on that, had you considered partnering with existing agency/registry networks to provide a province-wide system that will actually work and where you'll have, actually, a lot of people promoting that not only to the current customers but probably through advertising? Was that looked at as an option before this was embarked upon?

Mr. Brisson: Perhaps I should just give some background on the MyAlberta digital ID. The MyAlberta digital ID set of services, which includes electronic services for commerce as well as MyAlberta notify and some other services that you can pay your fines and tickets through, is a service that is government based for the departments in the government of Alberta. Our work, in a collaborative way, is that we work with all ministries across government, looking for those opportunities where they can align those services for the business processes they have today.

For example, we worked with our Justice ministry, who owned the process for paying online fines. They were responsible for that payment, which was previously subcontracted out to the AARA. As such, we've brought it back in-house to deliver the service more efficiently and in a better, more economical way. That's an example of us working with a department to provide the technology for them to actually execute their business process.

We are working with several ministries right now, and have been over the last two years, to prepare them to start to leverage these tools and services. We have several online right now, some that are in the recreational pass type of service, merchandising, working very closely with some of our social support ministries on benefits programs, on perhaps being able to execute payment out to Albertans through the MyAlberta portal.

On one hand, it looks like we haven't reached a date of getting folks online, but we've been working over the last two years on building that base and on changing, from a change management perspective, what services can be realigned into the MyAlberta portal.

Mr. Gotfried: All right. It sounds like you've had a fairly successful working relationship with the Association of Alberta Registry Agents, and I'm assuming that you have the ability to look at the cost and benefit of that relationship in terms of the fees they charge or that you remit back to them. If you were to take those same services in-house that are being done at the registry level right now, have you done an analysis of what the cost and the benefit would be for those with respect to the justification in terms of economic justification or the cost justification of that?

Mr. Brisson: We have done costing models on how we could deliver some of those services, and those are internal numbers which we've used until a policy decision is made on how those services would be provided in a different way.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Chair, it's supposed to be a 10-minute rotation if I'm not mistaken.

The Chair: It's five-minute rotations. Sorry.

Mr. Gotfried: I'm sorry.

The Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt, if you're available.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Chair, the rotation on my sheet shows 10 minutes for the Official Opposition and 10 minutes for government.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'll cede my remaining time to the Official Opposition.

The Chair: Sorry. There are two schedules. There's a three-hour schedule and a two-and-a-quarter-hour schedule. I believe, sir, you're looking at the three-hour schedule.

Mr. Gotfried: This one was circulated to us this morning. My apologies.

The Chair: Right. It's understandable.

Thank you for that, Mr. Fildebrandt, but we would go back to a normal rotation.

Oh, I apologize. I'm skipping Mr. Piquette. I'm creating a pattern here. Mr. Piquette, are you ready to take a five-minute rotation?

Mr. Piquette: I certainly am. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a question on what's happening with the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council, or AMVIC. In particular, what's the status of the Cuff report recommendations, that were presented in December 2016? Just kind of what the status of that is.

Mr. Lloyd: Mr. George Cuff made 23 recommendations in a report related to board governance and the operation of the Alberta Motor Vehicle Industry Council. There is good progress being made on implementing recommendations. Four of these recommendations fall under the control of Service Alberta, and of those four, one relates to vacant public member board positions, and work is being done to ensure that those board positions are filled. One related to the Cuff report, and of course the report has been released. Two relate to the timing and structure of a legislative review panel and the licensing of automotive businesses. Work is still being done on those. I might say that we know that work is going to be more

effective when there is a balance on the board, and as I mentioned, work is being done to do that.

AMVIC itself has hired a registrar, a human resources manager, and in-house counsel as recommended by the report, so they, too, are working hard to implement the recommendations, and we will continue our work to ensure that the recommendations are implemented in a timely way and that consumers are properly protected.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you very much.

I don't know how much time I have left, but whatever it is, I'd like to cede it to Mr. Westhead.

The Chair: Please, Mr. Westhead, you have two minutes and 25 seconds.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to ask some questions about outcome 2, but perhaps with the very limited time remaining, we can just wait until the next rotation comes around.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Fildebrandt.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm good.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Gotfried, do you have more questions that you'd like to . . .

4:00

Mr. Gotfried: Yes. I certainly can. With respect to the MyAlberta initiatives, I just had sort of a final question. Would the intent of Service Alberta be to build the MyAlberta online portal to replace the previous relationship working with the AARA, and if so, has the infrastructure been put in place to achieve that, to handle that kind of a volume?

Mr. Brisson: Before I answer that question, I'd like to just read into the record the data that you asked for before. Registering for free electronic reminders from a local registry agent or the AMA or at e-services Alberta: so far we are at 378,000 Albertans who have signed up. That's the total number for both of those. As of October 4, 2017, 94,000 people have signed up for registration renewal reminders, and 73,000 have signed up for DL ID reminders through Alberta services. Just to read that into the record for that.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay.

Mr. Brisson: Can I ask that you just repeat your question for me?

Mr. Gotfried: Yeah. It was whether the infrastructure that you put in place under the MyAlberta portal has the capability to handle the kind of volume that's currently maybe being done by a third party through the registry agents.

Mr. Brisson: The infrastructure for the MyAlberta portal has been put in place to help support transformation of government services in the departments, the services they would like to provide online and transform into a new digital world.

Mr. Gotfried: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Malkinson.

Mr. Malkinson: I believe Mr. Westhead on the phone was . . .

The Chair: I apologize, Mr. Malkinson.
Mr. Westhead.

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you very much. Thank you, all, very much for being here today and taking the time to answer our questions.

Like I said, I'd like to ask some questions about outcome 2 and specifically measure 2(c), which is reporting on the number of data sets and publications that are available online. My question is: how does an increase in the published data sets support communication, citizen engagement, and open government?

Mr. Brisson: I'll try and answer that for you. The open government data portal is meant to be accessed by both government departments as well as citizens to get access to the rich data sets we have in the areas of science, in the areas of business, in the areas of finance, and some of our social services. By providing access to that data, it gives an insight to Albertans to be able to see the services that are being provided, the type of information that is available for them to use in their own analyses and potentially in a research project, where they can then provide that back, either through an academic experience or to government, on new opportunities for policy that we could consider as part of our policy decision process. An increase from 7,000 to 10,000 really does demonstrate a continued strategy of government to make our data accessible to citizens for their use, that they basically provide through their tax dollars.

Mr. Westhead: Okay. Thank you very much for that.

As a follow-up to that, I wonder if you can tell us a bit more about having an open-data strategy and specifically what kind of initiatives are being implemented to make this data and information more open and also to engage Albertans. I'll just use a specific example that I encountered recently. With the municipal election campaign going on right now, some constituents had asked me for information regarding municipal tax rate data across the province to compare different municipalities. You know, with a quick search online I was able to find the information that was in an open-data set. They were quite pleased to see that this data was available and in a format that they can use. It was really good to see that as a real practical application of having an open-data strategy. Can you just tell us a little bit more about what other initiatives are being implemented to make the data and information more open and to engage Albertans in the process?

Mr. Brisson: I can give one example. We have been, through working with some of our universities as well as some consumer groups, planning on putting forward an approach of, I think, what's been characterized as a hackathon, where we will invite a number of groups to participate in a process where they would access the data and they would be able to build out products. They'd be able to build out applications, or apps, for your phones. Through that process we could unearth innovative ways that perhaps could be leveraged by other industries or could be leveraged by government to implement in returning that service back to those citizens. That's an innovative way of crowdsourcing many individuals into what type of innovative approaches we could implement for government but, also, industry could leverage at the same time. Each of those is a learning opportunity for government to see what type of additional data then could be exposed in the open-data government portal for those purposes. It's an ongoing process of innovation and insight into the data that we have and source in government.

Mr. Westhead: Great. Thank you very much for that.

I'd like to move on to outcome 3, about government being modernized. The annual report states that the ministry works with other ministries "to modernize the business processes and introduce [new technologies to] increase government productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness," for example. There are two performance

measures that apply specifically to that goal, those being the per cent of invoices that get paid electronically as well as other departments' satisfaction with the services that they receive from Service Alberta.

With those things in mind, could you please help the committee and myself understand the relevance of those particular measures to the outcome of a modernized government?

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Westhead, would you be okay with them replying in writing to that question? Your time has elapsed.

Mr. Westhead: Perhaps next time, if we get another turn on the rotation, they can answer at that point in time in the committee.

The Chair: For sure.

All right. Mr. Fildebrandt.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm good for the rest here.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Gill.

Mr. Gill: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. In June the Privacy Commissioner noted that an alarming 314,000 Albertans had their personal data breached. Has the MyAlberta portal experienced any privacy breach?

Mr. Brisson: We have not experienced any, no.

Mr. Gill: Okay. I think we had a case recently. Like, one of the government employees is going to court, and it's news, a breach of privacy or something. What's going on with that particular case we don't need to talk about. What action is Service Alberta taking to ensure that our personal information is secure from employees and from the system point of view, both?

Mr. Brisson: We take a two-pronged approach there. One will be on the policy side, setting information security guidelines and practices across government. Those practices are part of an information training module that all employees are asked to take. We are tracking their admission and completion of that education course, education, communication, following best practice.

At the same time, we have a cybersecurity strategy in place and an information security strategy in place for the government of Alberta which speak to the policy side – thou shalt follow policy – but then the other side speaks to the technology we have in place for access to our firewalls, limiting that access, tracking access on our desktops, our servers, and also threat-risk protection at all of our network intrusion points. At every access point into government we have software in place that monitors that.

Mr. Gill: Okay. Thank you.

We have seen, you know, that the numbers are really low. Do you think this is one of the reasons that Albertans aren't signing up for a digital account, because they don't have faith? Maybe the department has failed to convey the message to them: your information would be secure.

4:10

Mr. Brisson: No. I would answer that in two ways. One, the information on the MyAlberta portal is secure. It is protected by our software and hardware protection as well as by our policies and processes that are in place for all employees that are supporting it.

As I previously had commented on, where we will see uptake on the MyAlberta portal and digital ID is as we work across government with ministry departments on refining and modernizing

processes that we want to put online to work in a digital world. We have a number of candidates – right now we have 35 – on the MyAlberta digital portal, which account for over 700,000 transactions per year. We see that in the next 16 to 24 months we will double or triple that, and that is what our targets are.

Mr. Gill: Okay. Awesome. Thank you.

Last year in estimates I asked the minister about making SPIN 24 hours. If my memory is correct, I was told that in December 2017 SPIN would be available to our professionals 24/7. Are we still on track with that?

Mr. Brisson: We are tracking to that number. Pardon me; we're tracking to that date.

Mr. Gill: Okay.

Mr. Brisson: We are, with this project, working with the stakeholder community through some pilots to try and move the software forward. We're experiencing some minor project delays in that, and we're working towards how we can remedy those dates and make sure that we're in line with our pilots, that are moving forward.

Mr. Gill: But it will still be more or less, like, pretty achievable. That's what I'm assuming, right?

Mr. Brisson: Our target is there. With Christmas break and those type of things . . .

Mr. Gill: For sure.

Mr. Brisson: The intent here is that we are able to, at a minimum, within the fiscal year, have that fully automated and out the door.

Mr. Gill: Awesome. Thank you very much.

Just a quick question on the consumer investigation unit. On page 27, under new or expanded consumer protection initiatives, a graph titled Consumer Investigations Unit offers a couple of interesting stats. Amount Fined was almost a million dollars in 2015-16 . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gill.

Mr. Gill: Thanks.

The Chair: Mr. Westhead, would you like to re-ask your question?

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you. I'll just state the question again, for clarity. Regarding outcome 3 there are two performance measures for that goal, and those performance measures are the percentage of invoices paid electronically and other departments' satisfaction with services that they receive from Service Alberta. Can you please help us understand the relevance of those measures that have been selected to the outcome of achieving a modernized government?

Ms Hutchinson: I'll speak to that. The very first one, that talks about the percentages of invoices paid electronically: one of the processes that we're always looking at for Service Alberta is how we can provide – or, you know, what efficiencies can we achieve within the ministry that will benefit government? A couple of years ago – actually, more than a couple of years; I'd say about 10 years ago – we engaged in a contract with BMO to provide us with P-cards because, anecdotally, making payments through a P-card actually costs less than going through the traditional route of getting an invoice and cutting a cheque. So it's one of the steps that we've taken in terms of modernizing.

In addition to the P-card, we've also looked at other sorts of high-volume, low-dollar vendors that we can work with. We've got a system called EPS, which is our electronic payment system. It's loading in those vendors again. It's all towards ensuring that we've got payments out in a timely basis and minimizing the amount of handling that we actually have to do in order for payments to be made within government.

In terms of the other one, which is the satisfaction, that survey that we do, the benefit of that survey is mining the data and the rate of responses that we get through that survey. It not only gauges how effective we are as a sort of central service provider in assisting our clients in ensuring that they're able to deliver their front-line services by providing some of the back-end work. We also use the data from there, the verbatim ones, to gauge: is there anything else that we haven't thought of as a team, as a ministry, that we can do in order to help government be more effective and efficient?

That's how those two measures are used.

Mr. Westhead: Great. Thank you very much.

I'm also wondering if you can help us understand how the ministry governs and influences the modernization of other departments and their business processes and the technologies that are involved.

Mr. Brisson: I can speak to that. I would use MyAlberta and the initiatives that are in place there as an example of how we work across government with the different business areas in identifying these opportunities for digital modernization. That includes more than just taking what you do today and putting it online. Rather, it's a transformation process that looks at the work you do today and how it could be delivered in a different way in the thinking of that citizen-first type of delivery. How would citizens like to access those services? That's a long-term process of analyzing how that work is done. We work with the departments on opportunities around modernizing those systems or those processes, and MyAlberta is one example where we have discussed several ones across government where that opportunity exists, and we have some active plans in play. We're just working with the ministries on how we will plan, project manage, and fund those projects going forward.

Mr. Westhead: Great. Thank you.

Speaking of funding those projects, what are the costs of those initiatives, and what successes and savings have been achieved through these efforts?

Mr. Brisson: The cost of those initiatives would vary depending on the initiative. I don't know that I can speak to those today as they're not actually a fully funded project, but I think the savings and successes vary by service and are realized in each of the ministries. These can include reduced processing times, improved access, greater convenience, and a number of other benefits that really are specific to the service that's being provided.

Ministries can also avoid the expense of developing their own e-commerce and digital identity platforms, which is very important. It's a high cost, and we don't want to have more duplication across government. By leveraging MyAlberta e-services and digital ID, we're able to reduce the number of systems doing the same thing across government using the same dollar. This will allow also the ministries to bring their services online in a more timely fashion to help citizens' growing expectations of services to be provided online to what they experience from the private sector today, which is what our goal is: whether I'm accessing private services or public services, I get them in a convenient way, in the way that I want to access them in the future.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you.

I'm not quite sure how much time might be left, but I'd like to turn it over to MLA Malkinson.

The Chair: Well, he's got one second, so he better be very much optimizing his time.

Mr. Malkinson: Yes.

The Chair: We have a few minutes left, and I would like to quickly go around the table and ask if any members have questions that were not answered or responses that were incomplete due to time. I would request no preambles, please, strictly your questions with a request for a response from the ministry. Starting with the opposition, do you have any questions that you would like to read into the record?

Mr. Gill: No. I'm good. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Moving on to Mr. Malkinson, do you have that burning question that you were looking to get in?

Mr. Malkinson: I think I can probably just ask it directly. I don't think I need to get a written response on it.

The Chair: Well, this is the written response portion.

Mr. Malkinson: Yeah. I'm good.

The Chair: You're good? All right.

No other government members? Okay.

Well, let's go to the phones. Is there anybody on the phones that would like to put a question forward to the ministry?

Hearing none, I'd like to thank the officials from the Ministry of Service Alberta for attending today and responding to the committee members' questions. We ask that any outstanding questions be responded to in writing within 30 days and forwarded to the committee clerk.

Are there any other items for discussion under other business? Okay. Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a number of motions I'd like to move with respect to the committee. My first motion is that

the Standing Committee on Public Accounts direct research services to undertake crossjurisdictional research into the accountability mechanisms of public accounts committees in other jurisdictions, including but not limited to Canada and its provinces, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

4:20

The Chair: Okay. We'll give a little bit of time for this to be handed out to everybody.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Chair, while it's being handed out, maybe I could just preface that this is following on some of our conversations earlier in camera today with respect to some of the functions and opportunities for the Public Accounts Committee to do better work and to follow some of the leads and practices of some other jurisdictions across Canada and around the world within the parliamentary system.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Let's give this a minute. I thank you for that preface. We're e-mailing it out to those on the phones so that they could see it. We'll give this another minute. Do all of the committee members on the phone have a copy of the motion?

Mr. Piquette: Yeah.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'll check my e-mail. Yeah, I got it. It's fine.

The Chair: Okay. Everybody on the phone has a copy; therefore, let's start the discussion on this motion. Is there anybody that would like to open discussion? Okay.

If there's no further discussion, let's call the question. All in favour? On the phones, all in favour? All against this motion? On the phones, against the motion? Okay. It appears that this motion has been defeated, Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: I'll go on to the next, then, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Gotfried has a second motion he'd like to put forward on the floor.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Chair, I'd like to move that

the Standing Committee on Public Accounts direct research services to draft a report pursuant to Standing Order 53(2) to endorse the report of the Auditor General of Alberta, May 2017, funding sustainable and cost-effective legal aid services and progress report on control systems of the office of the public guardian and trustee for circulation to committee members and that the chair and deputy chair be authorized to approve the final report.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Gotfried.

The e-mail has been sent out to those on the phone. Can we confirm that everybody on the phone has a copy of the e-mail?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah.

Mr. Piquette: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Gotfried, can you give us a . . .

Mr. Gotfried: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, this follows on some of our conversations earlier and I think positive responses from the Auditor General with respect to the activities of this committee, that we not only accept what we receive from the Auditor General and support his interaction directly with the ministries but that we take the opportunity as a committee to strengthen the words that are put forth by the Auditor General by providing this as a report and circulation to committee members and that we issue this as a final report from this committee to be tabled in the Legislature in addition to the Auditor General's specific reports that we have received.

I think we've heard again today that every opportunity that we can take to strengthen the messages, to refine the messages, and to focus in on some of the highest priority opportunities within it is something that will allow us to keep these ministries accountable going forward, and I hope that in the future we'll have an even better opportunity, as we will receive the October 2017 report tomorrow, to take some of the content of that and to further strengthen it as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gotfried.

Is there any further discussion? On the phones?

I'll call the question. All those for this motion, say aye. All those against? On the phone? Against? Okay. This motion has been defeated.

Mr. Gotfried: I'll move on to the next motion here. Mr. Chair, I'm a bit sad that we can't give some additional teeth to the hard work

done by the Auditor General's department. Again, I think it's an opportunity and a focus. I'll continue on. I'd like to move that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts direct research services to draft a report pursuant to Standing Order 53(2) to endorse the recommendations for the Ministry of Service Alberta found in the report of the Auditor General of Alberta, May 2017, and the report of the Auditor General of Alberta, October 2016, for circulation to committee members and that the chair and deputy chair be authorized to approve the final report.

Again, Mr. Chairman, this is meant to strengthen . . .

The Chair: Just a second. Sorry. Can we distribute this before we start debating it? Okay. For those on the phone, the motion has been e-mailed to you. Can we get confirmation from those on the phone that they've received the e-mail?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, this is very much following in line with the recommendations we made to produce a report in support of the very, very good work and strong work done by the Auditor General on the health files, on the transformation of the health services. This takes into account the opportunity for us to not only work in conjunction with but to support the good work and the hard work that has been done by the office of the Auditor General, for us to put some teeth into what we do here within this committee and to take that opportunity to strengthen the message that we give to the people of Alberta but also to the other members of the Legislature, which this committee serves. Again, I would hope that members of this committee would support this opportunity to strengthen the work that we do and to strengthen the message that we give.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Carson.

Mr. Carson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. What I'm about to say also goes back to the last motion that we just voted down, a very

similar motion overall. I just want to say that we do support fullheartedly the recommendations of the office of the Auditor General and do appreciate the work that he's doing. I think the reason that we came back to this, the report Better Healthcare for Albertans, is because the AG report didn't have any recommendations. That was an exceptional circumstance. I think that overall it's unnecessary for the LAO to go back and write a report on what the AG has put forward. I think that's what these debates have taken place for, and I think it's a little bit redundant. I mean, I would be happy to hear from Dr. Massolin or anyone else who might like to comment.

The Chair: Okay. Just one housekeeping – we need permission to go beyond 4:30 from the committee. We are looking at maybe five or 10 minutes. Is there anybody that is against extending? Dr. Turner.

Dr. Turner: Yeah. I'm against.

The Chair: Okay. Let's call the question on the motion that is on the floor. All in favour? All against? The motion is defeated. All right.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Chair, is that the official time up here? Do we have an official time?

Mrs. Sawchuk: It is now 4:30.

Mr. Gotfried: It is? Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. The committee next meets Tuesday, October 31, 2017, from 8:30 till 10 a.m. with the Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance.

I'll call for a motion to adjourn. Would a member move that the meeting be adjourned? We have lots of volunteers. Mr. Malkinson. Thank you. All in favour? Any opposed? It is carried. We are adjourned. Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 4:30 p.m.]

