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 [Mrs. Laing in the Chair]

### Designated Supply Subcommittee - Family and Social Services

Laing, Bonnie, Chairman  
 Barrett, Pam  
 Cao, Wayne  
 Cardinal, Mike

Johnson, LeRoy  
 Kryczka, Karen  
 Lougheed, Rob  
 MacDonald, Hugh

Massey, Don  
 Melchin, Greg  
 Shariff, Shiraz  
 Sloan, Linda

THE CHAIRMAN: I think we'll get started. I'd like to welcome everybody this morning to the designated supply subcommittee meeting for Family and Social Services estimates. The *Hansard* people have asked me to remind you that mikes in the centre here are ambient mikes, and they pick up a lot of back talk. No. The ones right down in the middle here. So be careful that what you're saying isn't recorded forever and ever in *Hansard*. Okay?

At the beginning of the meeting we have a procedural motion that we will put on the record. At this point, also, I'd like to just remind people that due to the notice of motion yesterday in the House, Mr. MacDonald will now be replacing Ms Carlson and Dr. Massey will replace Ms Olsen, so they will be members of the committee. I'll start with the required motion. This is a procedural motion that's required prior to the commencement of our meeting.

Be it resolved that the designated supply subcommittee on Family and Social Services allocate the four hours allotted to it pursuant to Standing Order 56(7)(b) as follows:

- (a) the minister responsible first addresses the subcommittee for a maximum of 20 minutes,
- (b) opposition subcommittee members then have one hour for questions and answers,
- (c) government subcommittee members then have one hour for questions and answers,
- (d) opposition subcommittee members then have one hour for questions and answers, with the third party New Democrats receiving a block of 12 minutes to be used in either opposition hour,
- (e) government subcommittee members have the remainder. In the event government subcommittee members do not exercise their right under this agreement to use this final hour, the chair shall recognize any members of the committee who have questions.

I would invite someone to move this motion please.

DR. OBERG: Can I have a point of clarification, please?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

DR. OBERG: The subcommittee is to meet for four hours. So far you have outlined four hours and 20 minutes. So does it stop at four hours, or does it stop at four hours and 20 minutes? Because there's 20 minutes for my introduction.

THE CHAIRMAN: It would be four hours, because what I'm calling the fourth hour is the remainder of the time.

DR. OBERG: Okay.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm just calling it the fourth hour.

MR. CARDINAL: Bonnie, on that motion, could I make it "up to four hours" rather than just four hours?

THE CHAIRMAN: You can.

MR. CARDINAL: It still leaves four hours.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. All right.

A seconder for the motion as amended? Mr. Shariff. All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

After the motion is carried then I would remind you that in order to conclude at a point prior to the four hours allotted under Standing Orders 56 and 57, unanimous consent will be required, and failure to obtain the unanimous consent for adjournment prior to four hours would be inconsistent with the undertaking of the House leaders in their agreement which is dated March 8, 1999. Okay. So if we wish to adjourn early, then we have to have a motion that has to be unanimous. All right? Any other questions about procedure?

Mr. Minister, then, it's your turn.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Bonnie, and thank you everyone for coming out so early on this morning. It's such a beautiful morning.

I have a few opening remarks, and then I'll ask Minister Calahasen to provide a few comments as well. We'll then entertain questions from the committee members.

The estimates for Family and Social Services begin on page 201 of the 1999-2000 Government and Lottery Fund Estimates. The business plan starts on page 157 of the government's Budget '99 document.

In '99-2000 Family and Social Services plans to increase operating and capital spending by over \$85 million to \$1.4 billion or a 6.2 percent increase. This increase will primarily benefit children, persons with disabilities, and continue to provide employment and training programs to enable Albertans to become independent. This budget targets dollars for those in need. It meets the needs of increased client growth as well as provides funding to make improvements in several important programs.

I'd like to point out some of the budget's highlights. On page 205 of your estimate book the supports for independence budget reflects our continued emphasis on helping people return to work or receive training. The continuing success of our welfare reforms has resulted in savings of approximately \$32 million, which has been reallocated to other priority areas. These savings allow the ministry to invest in such programs as AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, child welfare, and services to persons with developmental disabilities. As a result of this success, the average monthly caseload will be down from a 1998-99 budget of 36,000 to 33,000 for 1999-2000. At the same time, we've recognized the current housing pressures and have increased welfare shelter benefits for low-income families with children. This increase will help parents on welfare continue meeting the needs of their children.

The child health benefit program has a budget of \$12.8 million and has been expanded to fully fund health benefits for children in low-income families. The province now covers the full cost of

dental, optical, drug prescription, and ambulance bills for children in low-income families who are enrolled in the Alberta child health benefit program. This program helps on two levels. It supports low-income families who are striving to be independent, and it helps ensure Alberta's children grow up to be strong and healthy.

The budget for the assured income for the severely handicapped, our AISH program, will be increased to \$270 million, up about 18 percent from 1998-99. A number of changes to the AISH program are proposed. These changes include raising the monthly benefit from \$823 to \$855, increasing the income exemption from \$165 to \$200 per month, offering voluntary employment programs, extending medical benefits, and introducing a \$100,000 asset test, excluding house and car.

In addition, beginning April 1, 1999, the province will cover the cost of diabetic medical supplies for people who receive AISH. It will also cover the cost of blood glucose strips, lancets and penlets, insulin pump tubing, needles, syringes, and with doctor's authorization, blood monitoring devices.

Under services for children and families, on page 206, we have identified the 18 child and family services regional authorities that will assume full responsibility for the delivery of community-based services. An 11 percent increase in funding to these regional authorities, primarily reflecting caseload and cost per case increases in child welfare and handicapped children services, will result in a \$381 million budget. This budget may be further adjusted as regional authorities' business plans are finalized.

There will be an increase of \$3.4 million for new provincial projects for children to help to address the recommendations of the Task Force on Children Involved in Prostitution, as well as the fetal alcohol syndrome and Forever Homes initiatives.

On page 208, program 4.2, the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Board's budget will increase \$22.5 million to provide funding to persons with developmental disabilities provincial and community boards to cover caseload growth, cost pressures, and contracted agencies' staff salary increases. Overall funding will increase \$17.5 million to provide for staff wage increases in contracted agencies providing services on behalf of the ministry. Eleven million dollars provides for an immediate increase of 4.5 percent effective April 1, 1999. This budget increase also includes \$6.5 million to cover part of the cost of the 5 percent agency staff wage increases granted last year. This funding relates to agencies providing services to persons with developmental disabilities as well as child welfare and shelters. The family and community support services program budget will be increased by \$500,000 to help with the implementation of the new funding formula.

Overall, the 1999-2000 budget and business plan reflects our commitment to continue providing high quality social services to the people of Alberta. I would now like to ask Minister Calahasen to provide some opening remarks, but first I'll introduce the people that I'm here with. On my left is Maria David-Evans, the deputy minister of Family and Social Services. On her left is Duncan Campbell, the executive director for the Department of Family and Social Services. I would ask as the questions are being given that the page number be referenced with the question, please.

Over to Minister Calahasen.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Dr. Oberg. Before I go on, Madam Chairman, I'd like to introduce the individual who works with me, my chief executive officer, David Steeves. He's to my right. With that note I'd like to say before I go on a special thanks to all the people who worked on the redesign initiative across the province, the dedicated people who took their time to be able to go out and do the work that they did to ensure that we continued on

with the child and family services authorities. I've said it more than once or twice, that the 12,000 people who have been involved in the whole process worked very hard to see this come to fruition, and I was very pleased to see that we are at that level and that Dr. Oberg has taken that on as the service deliverer.

8:16

I'm also very pleased to say that the Calgary Rockyview child and family services authority has been up and running and operating successfully over the past year. The remaining 17 authorities will be up and running during the 1999-2000 fiscal year. The ministry and the authorities are currently working very closely to ensure a smooth transfer of responsibilities. Family and Social Services and the other partnering departments have been very, very helpful in the budgeting procedures. In summary, I'm anticipating a very exciting year with our new 18 community-based partners in full operation, delivering quality services to Albertans.

Madam Chairman, those are my opening comments, and if there are any questions relative to child and family services, remember I'm minister without, which means I have no money, but I will answer anything to do with what we have been up to in the last while relative to child and family services authorities.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. We'll start the first hour. Remember you have 20 minutes, but you can repeat. So you have 20 minutes at a time and can come back.

MRS. SLOAN: If I may, Madam Chairman, just to begin, to qualify procedural process, I was informed before the onset of the meeting this morning that the minister would not be answering questions but providing a written response. I just would like to know if that's still the case.

DR. OBERG: From what I understand, that agreement was not agreed to. Correct me if I'm wrong.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes, that was part of the agreement to adjourn early.

DR. OBERG: So I will be responding after you ask the questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: So he will respond, and then there's still that other hour at the end. Okay?

MRS. SLOAN: So the provision is that any questions that are not answered verbally will be provided in writing?

DR. OBERG: Right.

MRS. SLOAN: All right. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mrs. Sloan.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased this morning to be here as a representative of the Official Opposition, accompanied by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and Edmonton-Mill Woods, to provide the debate with respect to the estimates for Family and Social Services.

As all members are aware, we had requested a number of witnesses be present at the debate of the estimates this morning. That proviso was not afforded to us, and so we have incorporated the questions for those individuals - the Children's Advocate, provincial health officer, medical examiner, children's secretariat - in our questions.

The process that we will be using with respect to the estimates debates. I will begin by asking a number of principle and general questions. Not all of those questions will be referenced to page numbers because there are not current references in the business plan to those areas. Following that, my colleagues will be asking additional questions, including some specific ones on the business plan itself and the budget.

To begin, I would like to acknowledge what we view in the opposition as being some positive announcements in the area of Family and Social Services during the last fiscal year. We would commend the minister on his announcements with respect to the increase for AISH, the provision of diabetic supplies to AISH recipients. We would also like to recognize that it appears there is a recognition regional authorities may need additional funding and that there is a willingness to look at additional pressures and potentially additional resources if they are required. Finally, the announcement with respect to increased shelter for families is a significant one and one that was also needed. We would acknowledge that this morning also.

To move, then, to the general questions, I would like to begin by asking a number of questions relative to children's health. The attainment of healthy children should be one of the foremost goals of government. Our success in developing and supporting collective programs that strive to support the mental, physical, and social well-being of the province's children ultimately will underpin the degree to which our province will succeed economically and socially in the new millennium.

While we have seen the announcement of the joint children's initiative in this past fiscal year, we also would note that that initiative does not have a budget at this stage, and so it is with that recognition that we ask the following questions. What indicators of vulnerabilities of children will the ministry intend to track and publish in the next fiscal year? Referencing a current goal, 1.1 in the business plan, what developmental milestones does the ministry intend to track on an annual basis?

How will the UN convention on the rights of the child be integrated into the department's goals, performance measures, policies, legislation, and budgets? Who will assume the primary responsibility for that function within the department? Will it be the children's secretariat, the Children's Advocate, the Minister of Family and Social Services, the minister for children's services?

In the same vein, how will the inequities of current departmental policies be addressed to ensure all children are afforded fair and nonjudgmental support? As an example, the national child benefit now extends to low-income families, but the increased amount is clawed back from welfare families. Will this claw-back policy be eliminated in the next fiscal year?

Further, how will the department address the inequities in children's access to handicapped children's services and program unit funding? We had this week the announcement of the student health initiative, but that is contradictory to the policies in place currently, where the provision of program unit funding at preschool ages is contingent on both parents working.

How does the ministry intend to address individually or collectively the rising number of children living in poverty in this province? I would reference at this point a commitment to the UN declaration and the children's initiative. Will this mean that there will be more government support for programs meeting basic developmental needs of children - i.e., hot lunch programs, early intervention, head-start programs, speech and occupational therapy - at a preschool level?

Aside from fetal alcohol initiatives, what initiatives is the department taking to address higher incidences of infant mortality

and low birth weight, which are higher than the Canadian average? What has been done to establish the relationship between both of those health trends and the increasing number of families living in poverty in Alberta? Has the department been involved in the investigations of the infant deaths related to malnutrition that occurred in this province in the last year? If not, why? Further, has the department been involved in the investigation of the incidence of children being diagnosed with rickets in the past year? If not, why? Socioeconomic status is one of the most significant factors associated with low birth weight, and it would seem that while that acknowledged relationship exists, there should be a joint department commitment to try and address these appalling incidences.

Reference has been made in the Legislature recently to the utilization of the market-basket measure by the department. This is premature and misleading. Stats Canada recently indicated that while work on the development of this measure is progressing, it is too early to cite it as a true measure of poverty. That being said, is the department currently measuring the number of families living below the poverty line? Why was this not a published measure within the department business plan? What investigations or studies has the government performed to establish the relationship between increased poverty rates and the increased need for child welfare in Alberta? If none have been accomplished, why? If studies were done, why has the department not published them?

Referencing the publication of the Official Opposition, Vulnerable Children in Alberta, in 1996 the percentage of children living below LICO in Alberta was 20.7 percent, or 154,000 children. With respect to children on welfare, including both children who are living in families receiving social assistance and those receiving child welfare directly, the apprehension of children has jumped by over 40 percent since 1992. To what does the department attribute this? Has the department done any cost-benefit analysis of what increasing the base rate of assistance for welfare families would do to that increased apprehension? Does the department know what percentage of the child welfare caseload can be attributed to parents and guardians who are unwilling or unable to provide the basic necessities of life? Why are these not published as performance measures or aspects of the business plan? Will the province consider bringing back supplemental benefits for welfare recipients?

8:26

Moving to a separate topic. The 1997 statistics from Edmonton's Food Bank indicated that 53 percent of families using the food bank said that children's dietary needs were not being met. Has the government reviewed these statistics? If so, has any action been contemplated or taken to address the increased utilization of food banks by families and children on welfare or in low-income circumstances?

Thousands of children across Alberta participate in school lunch programs. Does the department plan to maintain the funding cap for the provision of these programs in the next fiscal year? I would also ask a question relative to this area. It would seem that a funding cap for the provision of food to children is a contradiction to the ministry's stated goal of supporting well-being and healthy development. Why is the need for and utilization of school lunch programs not a performance measure in this department's business plan?

Again, a new category of questions. What is the incidence of teenage mothers, pregnant or with infants, applying for social assistance? Why is this not a performance measure in the business plan? Will this be a targeted area under the joint children's initiative or other aspects of the department in the next year?

What correlation exists between child welfare, social assistance recipients, and the high incidence of youth suicides in the province?

Have we studied this factor? Do we have any breakdown by age group? What correlation or incidence exists between social assistance and child welfare recipients and mental illness? Have we studied this by age group? What is the incidence of deaths of minor children known to Family and Social Services in 1996-97, 1997-98? Why is this not a performance measure in the business plan?

Why has no public inquiry been called into the death of Jordan Quinney? When does the department intend to release the results of the departmental investigation conducted into the department's involvement with this child, and why is this not mentioned anywhere in the department's report this year?

How many children have been admitted to women's shelters in the past year? How many have been turned away? Why is this not a performance measure in the business plan?

How many children receiving services directly or indirectly from Family and Social Services are diagnosed and awaiting treatment for mental or physical disabilities? Given that the incidence of chronic illness, physical and developmental disabilities is roughly twice as high among children living in low-income or welfare families, as the 1997 study reported - it found that 64 percent of the children in care with child welfare suffered from one or more disabilities - has the department studied this correlation? Are the department's punitive and regressively low rates of social assistance not a causative and contributing factor to the high incidence of disabilities in children in Alberta? If you say no, I would like the rationale for that, and if you have studied it, I believe the report should be available to the citizens of this province.

What travel expense allowances has the department provided to families and children with disabilities to seek and maintain assistance both medically and psychologically and through occupational therapy or speech therapy? It is my understanding now that restraints have been placed on those types of provisions to families that are attempting to seek these services for the children. Has the department examined the impact of the day care operating allowance on the assessment and intervention-based function day cares provide to children with disabilities? This relates to the question in the House last week with respect to program unit funding and the 50 percent cuts to speech therapy.

With respect to the youth in Alberta, over 50 percent of adolescents under provincial protection in 1993 were under permanent guardianship. What is the percentage for '94-95, '95-96, '96-97, '97-98? What percentage of the child protection caseload are ages 16 and 17? What percentage of that is aboriginal? What are the issues and needs of vulnerable youth? Why are these issues and needs of vulnerable youth not explicitly addressed in the department's goals, strategies, and performance measures? How many youth known to Family and Social Services have attempted or committed suicide in the past five years? What percentage of that number is aboriginal? How many female youth known to Family and Social Services have been pregnant or given birth in the past five years? What percentage was aboriginal?

What number of children known to Family and Social Services have been involved in the young offender system? How many have been involved in drug and alcohol abuse, juvenile prostitution, criminal activity, and again, what percentage of these are aboriginal? How many youth known to Family and Social Services have dropped out of school?

Moving to, specifically, aboriginal children and youth, what is the incidence of aboriginal children in the care of child welfare by region? How do these rates compare with the rates for '95-96, '96-97, '97-98? These are not published anywhere within the business plan. Forty percent of Alberta's aboriginal population is under 15 years of age. How many aboriginal children have received or are

known to child welfare in the '95-96, '96-97, '97-98 fiscal years? Given that this indicator is mentioned in the goals and measures of the business plan, why are the numbers not published?

There is minuscule reference made within the ministry's business plan to aboriginal adoptions - issues, process, and plans - and that omission is in the face of the minister making the acknowledgment in the Assembly this year that that was in fact an area of concern the department was attempting to address. Why is reference to the report on aboriginal adoptions not included in the business plan? Why is the Child Welfare League of Canada report on adoptions in Alberta not referenced or included?

With respect to the establishment of the children's authorities, will the children's authorities be permitted to run budgetary deficits? How will the minister respond if authorities resort to capping services or capping the number of children to be served in order to stay within their fiscal budget targets? What will the ministry's position be re surplus retention funds held by agencies if deficits occur? How will the children's authorities be supported to address some of the macro issues I've raised within my general questions this morning? Will the authorities be expected to track and publish consistently measures of vulnerabilities of children? If so, which ones, and where will they be published? How will the children's authorities relate to or interact with the regional health authorities, school boards, the provincial medical officer and regional medical officers of health, and the Children's Advocate?

With respect to the Children's Advocate office I would ask whether or not the province has given any consideration to adopting an independent model for the Children's Advocate, as other provinces have done. If not, why? I would also ask why the annual report for the last fiscal year of the Children's Advocate office has not been included as a component of the ministry's business plan or referenced in any detail. Where are the issues identified to the minister by the Children's Advocate referenced in the business plan? I could not find any. What actions are being taken to address the issues raised? Is delaying the release of the Children's Advocate report congruent with the ministry's stated goals?

With respect to the Social Care Facilities Review Committee, why is the Social Care Facilities Review Committee annual report not a component of the business plan? Where are the investigations conducted by the Social Care Facilities Review Committee addressed by the ministry? Further, what was the impetus for a mandate change to this committee, and why is it not referenced in the business plan itself?

The Protection for Persons in Care Act is also a piece of legislation that the department has to conduct itself and operate within. There is no reference made to this act or any matters which may have been raised under the act relative to Family and Social Services. I would question why those are not included in the business plan. If any investigations were reported for the '96-97, '97-98 fiscal years, why are they not included?

8:36

THE CHAIRMAN: Your time is up.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much. I apologize if I missed some questions, but I can't write quite that fast. I will attempt to go over the questions that I managed to write down. The other issue that I will say is that any question I do not reference an answer to will be given to you in writing as long as it is consistent with budget estimates, which is what this is, budget estimate time period.

The first question had to do with indicators of vulnerability. As

you look at our business plan and our goals and measures, I will comment that our goals and measures have been updated significantly this year. We have added several different goals and measures.

With regard to specific indicators of vulnerability, one of the things that we look at is the "safety of children receiving child protection or child care services." We feel that this is an indicator of vulnerability. We also look at the satisfaction with our programs. One of the other issues, goal 2.3, is to "increase the proportion of single parent SFI clients who receive child maintenance payments," to ensure that that occurs. Again, a very important one on vulnerability is to "increase the proportion of children who move from permanent government care to adoptive homes," as well as such things as client satisfaction with what is occurring in the department.

The next question is on the UN convention on the rights of the child. As the hon. member knows, I'm sure, when this was initially debated in and around '91-92, we sent in a report that stated that all of the child and family services policies and practices conformed with the UN convention on the rights of the child, and we are still of that belief, that they are consistent. Also, the report that the Canadian government put out stated that the policies were consistent with the UN convention on the rights of the child.

The next question was on the inequities of current government programs, such as the child health benefit and the claw-back policy. As the hon. member may or may not know, the claw-back policy was an initial prerequisite of the program from the federal government, meaning that as we clawed-back the money from the welfare recipients and they subsequently gave the welfare recipients more money, that money that was clawed-back had to be put into children's programs. That was a prerequisite.

Unfortunately, the program was a little bit changed by some of the provinces. For example, Newfoundland, I believe, led the charge, and they did not do the claw-back. Unfortunately from their point of view, they did not have enough money to do such programs as the child health benefit and other programs that the claw-back money was to be used for. I believe that eight of the 10 provinces presently do claw back and use that money in other areas of children's programs.

There was some other mention about inequities throughout some of the comments. There was a reference to PUF funding. I must ensure that the hon. member knows that PUF funding is not included in this department, and therefore I will not be commenting on it. PUF funding is under the Department of Education exclusively.

Again the rise in the number of children. There has been a few comments about children living in poverty. Obviously, this department and this government does not want any children to live in poverty, and it is our goal to ensure that that doesn't happen.

One of the issues that was raised, though - and I think it is probably a significant issue when it comes to poverty - is exactly the measurement of poverty. The hon. member alluded to the market-basket measure and said that it was not an adequate measure of poverty as stated by Stats Canada. I guess I take a little exception to that, as Stats Canada is purely a statistical organization. They have stated time and time again that LICOs, which is low-income cutoff, is not a measure of poverty in Canada. That is a reference that anytime LICOs is used, it goes out with it. So the market-basket measure is something that the ministers across Canada have been working on as an attempt to better quantify and qualify the extent of poverty in this country.

The Prime Minister, as you know and as I've referenced in the Legislature, has come strongly on board for the market-basket measure. Indeed, the points that I was referencing in the Legislature were from HRDC data that had come out as preliminary studies on

the market-basket measure approach, which showed that Alberta had the lowest level of poverty in the country, which again would be consistent with our economy of the day.

A couple of other things that I will certainly look at. Infant death related to malnutrition: I don't have that data with me immediately, but I will certainly take a look and see what details are available.

The other one is rickets. I must caution the hon. member that there are numerous types of rickets out there, some of them being congenital rickets. So I do not know whether or not that occurred, whether it was a dietary diagnosis of rickets, which I assume she is commenting on, or whether it is a congenital form of rickets. I believe, if my medical studies are still there, that there are four types of rickets, three of them being congenital.

The increased incidence of low birth weight. Again, certainly low birth weight is a measure that has been correlated to poverty in this province and around the world. It's probably the only measure that has been consistently used to compare poverty around the world. That's partly because of practicality. It's one of the few things that are measured. It doesn't allow us to compare ourselves to, for example, the European Common Market. One of the issues with it, though, is that it is purely a correlate. It is something that we should be concerned about. There are a lot of different reasons for low birth weight, and I think that it needs to be noted that poverty is not the only issue that causes low birth weight babies. For those of you around here who've had a low birth weight baby, it does not automatically mean that you're in poverty.

I believe there was some question about - and again my writing isn't necessarily what it should be - the increase in poverty rates and the increasing rate of child welfare. This is a question that the Edmonton Social Planning Council, for example, has been stating for a long time as a direct correlate, as a direct measure. I would challenge that in that three years ago we saw child welfare rates increase at a rate of 16 percent. Two years ago it was 10 percent, and last year it was 6 percent. Of note, in Calgary, which is one of the areas where we have very good measurement data, the incidence of children on child welfare roles has actually decreased for the last three months. Another very important one is that in the northwest region the child welfare rates have also decreased. So I believe that this is inconsistent with the comments that poverty is becoming more and more rampant in Alberta. If there is a direct correlate, then these things should not be happening.

The percentage of children below LICO. Again, this is something that we're talking about when it comes to measuring poverty. I do not believe in LICO. I do not believe in a low-income cutoff. I've been on record numerous times as stating that. I believe that it is a purely statistical measure that is put out by Stats Canada, hence the reason I use the term "statistical." I believe a family of four is something like \$35,000 roughly.

8:46

What is not taken into consideration, which I feel is extremely important and an obvious thing that should be taken into consideration when you're looking at poverty, is the cost of living in the various provinces. When you take that into consideration, which the market-basket measure attempts to do, it shows that Alberta has the lowest percentage of poverty, the lowest level of people living below the market-basket measure of any province in Canada at roughly 9.2 percent. Nine point two percent is not a measure that I'm particularly proud of, and it would be much better if it were zero. Unfortunately there are people in poverty. I would just for the benefit of the members of this committee also remind them that for the fifth year in a row, Canada was the best place in the world to live, and when you have the lowest number of people in poverty, perhaps Alberta is the best place in Canada to live.

The apprehension of children has jumped. That is something that we have been trying to deal with. One of the issues has been the Forever Homes initiative, where we are attempting to place children that have been apprehended, especially those that have been apprehended on multiple bases and multiple times, in a more permanent setting. This is one of the initiatives that our department is carrying out, and it's one of the more exciting initiatives in our department. There was recently a conference held on Forever Homes that was extremely successful. We had approximately 200 people from around the province planning strategy on how to give more children Forever Homes.

There were also some comments about school lunch programs and the funding for school lunch programs. The Department of Family and Social Services does not fund school lunch programs. This is funded exclusively out of the Department of Education, so I won't be commenting more on that.

There was a little bit of mention about food bank usage. One thing that I must remind the members of this committee of is that food bank usage in Alberta dropped by 2.9 percent this year, the only province in Canada that had a drop in utilization of food banks.

Supplemental benefits for welfare recipients. I believe the question was: will we be bringing these back? The answer is no. The SFI program is intended as a program of last resort. It is intended to be there in sort of a trampoline effect. When you hit the bottom, it's intended to allow you to spring back up and hopefully get back into the workforce. People on SFI do have the ability to work. I think it would be considerably different if this province had an unemployment rate of 12 to 15 percent, but as we sit at an unemployment rate of roughly 5 to 6 percent, I believe that we must help these people get back into the workforce. This must be the primary thrust.

With regards to the upcoming year, I think we may well see a slight increase in people on SFI, especially in northern Alberta, as the oil economies tend to cool off. Hopefully with the price of oil yesterday being a little over \$15, the oil economies will come back, and these programs won't be shut down.

The incidence of teenage mothers applying for assistance. That is something that we do not record. Perhaps it would be an interesting statistic, and it is something that I will look at doing. Obviously teenage mothers are something that is not desirable in a province, and we will look and see exactly what we're doing. Single mothers, for example, do have the highest incidence of poverty, the lowest wages in the country.

Child welfare recipients and suicide. Again, this is not something that we measure. It is something that would certainly be interesting. I think that the attempt to draw a link between child welfare recipients and suicide is not valid. Suicide, unfortunately, knows no economic boundary. It knows no boundaries. It is something that is extremely regrettable in any society but especially in our society.

Social assistance and mental illness. Absolutely. There's certainly a correlation between people on social assistance and mental illness. One of the tragedies of mental illness is that often you tend to wander the streets. That's where a great number of the homeless actually are. They actually have mental illness issues, have issues related to their mental health. There are a significant number of people with mental illness on social assistance. I would suggest that a great majority of them are on the AISH program. I recently had the pleasure of sitting down with the Canadian Mental Health Association and Tony Hudson of another organization to discuss this. Certainly it is a concern. I would suggest that there is a correlation between the incidence of mental illness and the incidence of people on social assistance.

The question was raised about the Jordan Quinney issue. Where

the Jordan Quinney issue is right now is before the courts. As the hon. member knows, we will not be conducting an investigation while an investigation is being conducted before the courts. Depending on what comes out of that, there may well be a fatality inquiry, a fatality review, and depending on what comes out of those two reviews, there may well be an inquiry by our department.

How many children admitted to women's shelters? I believe we do not have that number. One of the issues we have been working on with women's shelters is actually to categorize - and first of all, I must say that to call them necessarily women's shelters is not accurate in this day and age. It's family violence shelters. We are looking at putting an end to family violence, and we're looking at helping those victims of family violence especially. As everyone here knows, children and both women and men are victims of family violence. However, we do not, unfortunately, have the ability to record the number of children. As a matter of fact, we are just in the process of changing the recording data so that we include the women that are victims of family violence as separate from those that are in it for shelter alone.

How many children awaiting suffer from mental illness? The unfortunate part about mental illness in children is that it's something that is often not recognized. Mental illness is certainly a concern. Depression, suicides, all these types of things are mental illness. Unfortunately, it is something that is not recognized probably as much as the incidence is out there. In order to get an actual figure on mental illness - first of all, I believe it would be misleading, as I believe it would be low. I think the actual incidence of children with mental illness is considerably higher than what a lot of the published data shows and is considerably higher than what we would have the ability to actually look at.

I think there is also a question about classification of mental illness. I would suggest that we are taking an important first step in mental illness when it comes to the fetal alcohol syndrome. I recently talked to a school principal in my jurisdiction who felt that 60 to 70 percent of the kids in the special-needs classrooms are actually suffering from fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol effect, if you go back and look into their history. Obviously that was one of the reasons why we have put in this critical element of our department.

Low birth weights in children with disabilities. Again it is not something that we directly correlate as it comes down to the definition of children with disabilities. Is it consequential to have the low birth weight numbers and then have children just with major disabilities or children with lesser disabilities? If you're attempting to tie this to poverty, which I'm assuming is what the question is about, I think it would be much more beneficial to use an accurate poverty measure, such as potentially the market-basket measure, and then correlate and actually see if there tend to be more children with disabilities in people living in poverty. I think the important thing, though, is that first of all we have to establish what poverty is. That's extremely important. Just as an aside, low birth weight is something that is measured in the Alberta children's initiative.

8:56

Travel allowances re handicapped children's services. That is something that I don't have the numbers for. It is not broken down in the budget, but we will certainly ascertain to get that for you.

The day care operating allowance and PUF funding. Again, PUF is not in this department. The day care operating allowance is something that was eliminated this year. I think the important thing about that is that we have moved from a universal, empirical operating allowance and have given it to the people who need it the most, which is what the child care subsidy program is all about. The

child care subsidy program is targeting the people with the lowest income to receive funding for day care. That was eliminated in this budget. A little over \$4 million extra was put back into day care, into the child care subsidy by eliminating the \$40 co-pay that each parent was requested to make.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister.  
Ms Calahasen.

DR. OBERG: Done already? Darn.

THE CHAIRMAN: Twenty minutes.  
Ms Calahasen.

MRS. SLOAN: Can I just ask a point of clarification, Madam Chairman?

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MRS. SLOAN: This hour is the opposition's hour, and I respect the fact that there's a dual ministry, but there is not a budgetary allocation to the minister of children's services. I'm wondering if she would like to just refrain until we actually complete our questions with respect to the children's authorities. Dr. Massey will be asking additional questions. Would that be agreeable?

DR. OBERG: What I could do, Madam Chairman, is that she can be included in my 20 minutes.

MRS. SLOAN: That would be great. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. That's agreeable? That's fine.  
Dr. Massey.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks very much, Madam Chairman. I wanted to start with some general comments in terms of the ministry and the place where I have experience with the ministry, and that's in my own constituency. I have to say at the outset that I've received nothing but the very best of help when we've tried to help constituents, working with the department and trying to get help for those who need assistance. So locally we've been very well served by the staff, and they bend over backwards to try to help us and to help our constituents.

That said, we live in a constituency that does have a lot of poverty. The community itself has taken on trying to do something about it, trying to empower people to help themselves. We've started a roundtable on poverty which tries to draw together the members of the community that can help people help themselves. One of the things that does, I think, is to call into question some of the statistics that are used, the statistics on food banks for instance. I didn't realize until the roundtable on poverty was convened that there were four food banks running in the constituency, and they don't report their operations to any central authority that I'm aware of. They run out of church basements, so they wouldn't be part of the larger reporting on poverty.

One of the other things the roundtable on poverty has done is give us a bit of an appreciation of what it's like to live in poverty, because we do have people living in poverty sit at that roundtable. I met with about 35 single mothers recently, most of them on social assistance. It really impresses upon you how debilitating, how ego destroying that kind of life can be. When I looked at the department's estimates and the business plan, it drove me to focus on the quality measures - I think one of the very first goals in the business plan talks about

quality - to raise in my mind questions about quality and how you measure quality. Are the measures that are in this business plan quality measures or measures that get at quality?

I know quality is a tough one, trying to define what is quality. But it seems to me that if I were God in France and I had the power, one of the things I would work my darnedest to do would be to try to make those people feel better about themselves. I just think it's an important quality measure, and I wonder if there isn't some way that that can be incorporated into the measures of the department. I know some of them are a difficult group to work with. Some of them make decisions that the rest of us wouldn't make, and they make those decisions again and again over their lives. But they're still citizens, they're still ours, they're still Albertans, and I worry when they walk around with the kind of feelings they have about themselves and about our community.

I looked at the performance measures, and I went back to the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General took great pains under the Executive Council review to make comments about business plans in all of the departments, not just Executive Council. They made a number of recommendations.

[Mr. Melchin in the chair]

First of all, I think the business plans are a great addition to the estimates. They're evolving. We haven't had that much experience or number of years with them, so they are evolving. But I think the Auditor General makes some good points and sets up some criteria for judging the performance measures. One of the things that he cautions against is the risk that performance measures will be used to window-dress the operations of a department, and he cautions about the kinds of surveys that are being taken, the kinds of questions that are being asked, to make sure that those questions are in the interests of the people being served and not a particular department. He further indicates that there are some ways that all of the business plans - and I think that includes this one - could be improved, although I think one thing that some of the other departments haven't done is provide the chart on pages 171 and 172. I think that's the kind of thing, where you have the actual statistics shown, that he's asking that departments start providing more of.

He talks in the report about the survey questions. It's interesting that if you look at the performance measures on pages 173 through 175, he asks who was surveyed, the source of the statistics, the validity, how readers are assured that the measures there are valid.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Chairman, could I just ask a very quick question? What report are you referencing on those page numbers? The Auditor General's report?

DR. MASSEY: No. These are the business plans. On pages 171 and 172, that was a chart I referred to.

DR. OBERG: As another point of reference, on our 171 and 172 I don't see a chart. Oh, okay. Sorry. Got it.

9:06

DR. MASSEY: Then going back to the measures that are here, the department has a number of measures yet to be developed. If you go back to the general indicators, I think, for instance, under 4.1, 4.3, 5.1, and 5.2, where there are measures still to be developed. I guess it's surprising that there aren't some measures there already, given the length of time we've been trying to deal with these problems. But even the measures that are there, if there was some indication of the reliability and the validity of the measures that are being used.

I've tried to go back, and I find it difficult to find the linkage between the general indicators and the overall goals and measures, and I'm not quite sure about the guiding principles.

[Mrs. Laing in the chair]

When you try to chart through and to sort of establish a track line, it's sometimes difficult. Again, I know that some of this is still being developed, and like other departments, it's difficult to measure quality. But I think in this department it's particularly important, given the kind of Albertans being dealt with, that those measures are in place and are measures people can have some confidence in.

I know the health initiative is not the department's. They're one of the partners, and it rests with Education. But I was trying to think through with a constituent who wants more speech therapy for her youngster - she's on social assistance - exactly how that would be achieved. Right now she works with the local school and receives some speech therapy under the Capital health authority agreement with the public school board. I came to the announcement the other day, and I have to admit I left unclear as to exactly how she would access more speech therapy for her youngster. So I'd appreciate it if you could just walk me through that mother appearing at our office and me trying to explain to her the process she would follow then to end up with additional services for her youngster.

I appreciate the attempts to add more resources, because there are a variety of models out there for things like speech therapy, and the one that's being used, at least in the Capital health authority area, I don't think is very satisfactory. We provide service up to the third grade level, and there's nothing after that because of lack of resources. All you have to do is move a little east to Elk Island, and there the school authority and the health authority are involved in jointly delivering the service, and it seems to be much more satisfactory, and that's why I was encouraged by the joint announcement. I guess I just need some assurance that it's going to work for people.

Because it's an opportunity with the minister here, I wanted to just comment about the handling of the AISH announcements. I don't think that, again, I ever felt as badly for some of my constituents as I did as they lived through those announcements. They are an extremely vulnerable group of people, and I had people coming to the office just to talk about it. Usually they come and want something done, some help with some problem, but there was just such an air of insecurity and uncertainly generated that they were just walking in and sitting down and trying to talk about it. It was frustrating for me, but it was really upsetting for them, and I wonder if there isn't some way of being able to handle those kinds of announcements so that kind of distress isn't generated in, as I said, a population that's really very vulnerable.

I have some specific questions about the business plans, and I'd like to ask some of those. They may be more appropriate for being answered later than immediately, but I would appreciate knowing. In terms of measurement, who's measuring the age-appropriate developmental milestones for the CFSAs, and because the market basket measure is not yet approved, what's the department going to do in the meantime to try to determine how many people are living in poverty? The minister spoke, talked a little bit about it, but it's an important concern.

Why has the department not used the number of aboriginal children under permanent guardianship as an indicator? Why is that being left out as a measure? Why are two of the three indicators for supporting personal capacity focused on employment rather than ability? This is related to the same type of employment initiatives found in the SFI program. This is page 164. I should give you the

page references. The first one was page 163.

At page 165 the department states that it's "Supporting the Voice of Vulnerable Albertans." If that's the case, why are only those children in receipt of child welfare services eligible to be heard by the Children's Advocate, and who do children go to when they need to be heard? That's page 165.

DR. OBERG: What page?

DR. MASSEY: 165.

Page 168, what is the business plan of the Public Guardian office in relation to the move to a regional delivery system? Will the system be based upon the 18 CFSAs already in place? Page 169, what comprises the ministry partnership council? Can you give us a little indication of what the purpose of the council is and who provides its budget? What is the new regional structure being developed? Is it related to the CFSAs, or is it another form of service? Can we have some information about the ministry's information technology strategic plan? I've heard the minister answer questions several times in the House about information technology. What is the overall plan? What's the new human resources strategic plan, who's going to carry the plan out, and what kind of staff component is it going to involve in working on that initiative? What will comprise the standards monitoring and evaluation group, and just exactly what will this group focus on?

I guess a more general question. What is Alberta's role in the national children's agenda, and what does the department expect to be a result of being part of that initiative? How are we going to benefit from being part of that initiative? In negotiations with the aboriginal community, what negotiations are being undertaken to co-ordinate the shared services to that community?

Those are some of the questions. Page 171, again, can you give us some idea of why, the rationale for developing a new approach to measuring the handicapped children's services caseload? Why is that changing? What kind of calculations or formula is being used to determine the increase in the AISH caseload? Again, the same question in terms of determining the decrease in the SFI caseload. How are those being computed?

9:16

What's happening to the welfare caseload? I guess one of the concerns is the focus on reducing that caseload. I think we'd all like to see people off social services, but in doing it, are we forcing some people into situations they shouldn't be forced into? And again, it goes back to: how are we handling them, how is that push to independence being managed, and is it managed really in the best interests of the recipient? Again, I go back to how many of them feel about themselves.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you, Dr. Massey. Your 20 minutes are up.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Now, this begins the government members' hour. Mr. Minister, did you want to do part of the response, or do you want to go right to the members' questions?

DR. OBERG: Whatever they would like. Do you want a response? Sure, I'd love to respond.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Melchin.



MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister, did I misunderstand you? Did you wish to do the response right now to Dr. Massey? You want to go right to their questions? All right. Fine. I thought I understood you. Sorry, it was my misunderstanding.

Go ahead, Mr. Melchin.

MR. MELCHIN: I thought we had this mental link of transferring, and you had already received all my questions.

DR. OBERG: It must've missed you and went to Maria instead.

MR. MELCHIN: I appreciate that. We'll see if we can download these as fast as a computer can.

I'd like to begin a little bit with talking about the new children and family services regional authorities. In your estimates, page 206-207, you have the budgets going out. Last year there was only the Calgary Rockyview child and family services authority operating, so you don't really have a lot of comparisons of all the other regional authorities. I'd like to know in your formula, now that you're going forward, what are the criteria you use in the formula for the allocation of the funds? I know the population is one, but certainly there are a number of other factors when you come into that allocation, and even the weighting of those factors, if you have that information available.

Now that there's been an organization for children's services under the regional authorities, I'd like to know the differences in the program deliveries. If you could just give me a little bit of at least the significant changes as to - is this just a structural change? I mean, it's certainly an organizational change, but give me a better appreciation of the differences in the program deliveries under the old versus what's now proposed going forward. In that regard, I would like to hear the experience, if you could, as to any feedback the Calgary Rockyview child and family services authority has provided as to their first year of implementation and whether that's helped in the redesign and going forward. There are 17 regions. Do those regions match the same boundaries as the regional health authorities? I can't recall how those were determined, whether they were just matched up with existing regional health authorities or not.

Also, when you get into the regional health authorities, what's the division of responsibilities between your department and those authorities? How are they accountable back? In what sense are they independent or not independent? I mean, what is that accountability issue that comes back to your own department in respect of what the performance measures are potentially? How are you going to measure their performance? What is it that you expect them to provide you as far as information or reporting, even the business plan? Are they required up front in a business plan to set and establish their goals: who and the number of people they're servicing and, obviously, the applicable budgets that go with it?

Secondly, I'd like to focus a little bit on your department itself. If you could just give me an approximation of the number of full-time equivalents last year and going forward the next three years. I guess that would have to apply to your own department and, for that matter, should include the child and family services authorities, if they were formerly under yours versus going out so that we do have comparables.

With respect to your information technology management, your systems that you're using to gather and correlate information, give me an appreciation of how up to date that system is: whether it's being modified, whether it's ancient architecture, whether it's state of the art, whether it's providing you with the kinds of systems you

need to get the information you need, especially now that you start rolling that out to, you know, be it regional authorities. What are the linkages so that you know the timeliness of the information?

I'll switch a little bit to supports for independence versus your AISH program. I'm just looking at 4.2.2, Assistance to Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board. Is there any overlap?

DR. OBERG: Sorry, Greg. What was the first one?

MR. MELCHIN: The first one was AISH, 2.3.3, when you have also the program for assistance to persons with developmental disabilities, 4.2.2. Is there any overlap as to some of the individuals being under both of the programs? If so, is that a significant number of people? How do the two programs actually intermesh or not, or are they totally distinct?

I'll end my questions there.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister.

DR. OBERG: Thanks, Madam Chairman. I believe I've got them down. Again, it will be a similar type of process as with the opposition questions: if I didn't write them down and don't happen to mention them, we'll get back to you with the answers.

First of all, the funding formula in child and family services authorities. This is one area where we have made a significant change in what we do. As the hon. member may or may not realize, up until this year, up until this coming year dollars were allocated on a caseload basis. So in essence what would occur is that we would get an estimated caseload and allocate dollars accordingly. As you can imagine, an estimated caseload is not as accurate as we would like. Caseloads tend to shift. As you look in the budgets of the past, what you will notice is that the budgets of this department have actually, in all fairness to my chief financial officer - he's not here now, so that's good. I can say whatever I want then. In all fairness to him, they have been essentially estimates.

We have been shifting money around as to where the need has occurred. Up until this year we have received more money from people going off SFI. This money has subsequently been shifted to children's services, as the caseload was rising there quicker than we thought and the caseload was lowering quicker than we thought in SFI. Consequently, this year is a huge step forward when it comes to the funding formula.

We have gone away from caseload numbers this year, and we've gone to a population-based formula. This was a formula that was arrived at by the regional authorities and essentially takes into consideration the number of children that are within a region. It also adds three variables: first of all, the number of aboriginal children; second of all, the number of single parents; and third of all, the number of low-income children. These are variables that have been shown to be appropriate in assessing any type of funding formula. In essence, these are some of the high-risk factors. I use the term "some" because obviously there are a lot of different high-risk factors. These are three that are readily accessible to us and readily measurable. Gee, I got them right.

9:26

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: Yeah. Memory management.

DR. OBERG: Maria is giving me the answers as I'm answering here.

As we did our studies of this, we researched the literature to find out what the proper variable is. In many of the studies, for example, it would show aboriginal children needing anywhere from two times to six times the amount of resources of the nonaboriginal children. What we in essence did with the child and family services authorities

is arrived at a number we all could live with. The interesting point about this whole process was that it was done prior to any budget allocation, which I think is very important, because it keeps the numbers true. People aren't saying: well, let's just fudge the aboriginal number a little bit so that my area gets more money; why don't we just do this, this, and this. We were working from ground zero as opposed to working backward from the number, which I think is quite appropriate.

The way it ended up is that low income is a three-times factor; single parents, a three-times factor; and aboriginal community, a five-times factor. The obvious question that comes from that is double-counting. Yes, we recognize double-counting, so for someone who is low income, single parent, and aboriginal, they actually do need 11 times the resources. This is something that we have taken into consideration with the funding formula. As with any funding formula, the first year has had a little bit of angst. Hence in the business plan, as I have stated in my opening comments, we are open to looking at readjusting some of these figures, because when you move from purely a caseload-funding formula to a population-based formula, there are people that get caught. We'll certainly take those into consideration, and we'll move on them.

The boundaries was another question. Two comments. First of all, the boundaries in the first 17 regions are consistent with the RHA boundaries. We felt that this was important. We felt it would just be administratively a nightmare if the boundaries were not coterminous. The exception, Greg, is region 18, which is the Métis settlements. The Métis settlements, I believe, are three different areas.

MS CALAHASEN: No. There are eight.

DR. OBERG: Eight different areas around the province. So they are not coterminous, and they are not a continuous boundary as well.

The responsibility to the department on accountability performance measures and expectations back. I'll first of all comment on the human resource side issue. As you know, Greg, we have looked at our department and over the past two years have been going through quite a major departmental restructuring. You probably haven't heard a lot about that because it's been going fairly smoothly. This is the year that we will be finished that. One of the very important aspects of the departmental reorganization is the standards and the monitoring. We will have people in our department whose responsibility will be not to deliver programs, which was what was occurring before, but instead to put down the standards and monitor what is occurring in the child and family services authorities boards area as well as the PDD boards, persons with developmental disabilities. So the departmental function has shifted from the service delivery component to standards and monitoring.

I think one issue that comes into everyone's mind when you mention authorities is a similarity between regional health authorities and child and family services authorities. I would put it to you that the major similarity is the word "authority." There are some very important differences that set these apart. Probably the most important difference is that the minister is ultimately accountable and retains that accountability. Despite what happens in the regions, as the Minister of Family and Social Services I am ultimately accountable through a direct system for what happens. I believe that is important. For example, I am a signatory on the CEO's contract. This puts that down to them that I am still accountable for what goes on, albeit I am a partner in accountability, as obviously they are accountable too, and they can't shift their accountability solely to me. I believe it is important to put that accountability down to them.

The performance measures are essentially the same performance

measures as the department's. We will be asking them in a very polite fashion to furnish us with the data. Under the agreement that is signed, it is their obligation to furnish us with any data we ask for.

Let's go to the FTEs. We don't have the full number of FTEs available for you right now, but we'll certainly get that for you, Greg. The other comment that I must make, though - you had commented about the child and family services authorities and whether or not they still remain employees of the department. The answer is yes. If you remember two years ago, rather than having all the child and family services employees fired and then rehired, we chose to second them over, so they are still in essence employees of this department despite the fact that they take their direction from the child and family services authorities. This is a very important factor when it comes to the shared accountability that this ministry takes with the child and family services authorities.

The other issue, just as a point of interest perhaps but it also plays into it: we have six shared service centres around the province. What these six centres do is public relations, human resources, information technology, and financial for these regions. For example, quite frankly, when we were setting up the 18 regions, with some of these regions having budgets in the area of \$2 million or \$3 million, we did not want a complete hierarchy of administration to be placed in each region. Therefore, we are strongly committed to the six-centre concept.

The other interesting thing of note, Greg, is that these are not just child and family services authorities shared service centres. They also work for the PDD boards, and they also work for the income and employment part of our department as well. We feel this is an innovative approach, but it is an approach to get away from each region setting up its own hierarchy, setting up its own isolation. We feel that the integration between regions is as important, if not more important, as the integration we have been talking about between departments. This is one of the ways that we've been doing it.

Information technology was another: how up to date? I would say that we are moderately up to date with the equipment. We have been working hard. We have had some problems with the IBM contract in having them deliver what we want. As you can imagine, computer technology, information technology is an absolutely essential component of this department. Especially as income assistance is made available, it's absolutely critical that our computers work, that they work on time, and as well, that they're ready for the Y2K issue. We have been working extremely hard to get that.

9:36

He made another comment: how up to date? CWIS, which is the child welfare information system, is probably the most up-to-date child welfare information system in North America. For example, if something happens this afternoon to a child in Athabasca, by first thing in the morning if not this afternoon I will have a full accounting of what occurred, what happened, what the details were, on my desk, and it will be circulated throughout the department. So the child welfare information system is an incredibly important system. It also contains background checks on people. It is a very confidential system.

The one comment that I would make on it, as I've been saying how wonderful this program is, is that it is contingent upon using it. We have had instances where people have not used the system, have not asked the question, and therefore, they did not get the answer back. Unfortunately, that still occurs to a mild degree.

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: First Nations even use it.

DR. OBERG: Yeah, First Nations are even using it. So it is a very good system.

Your comment about 2.3.3 and 4.2.2 on the overlap between AISH and PDD: absolutely. They're both programs for the disabled communities. Probably the easiest way to separate them out, Greg, is to state that the AISH program is an income-replacement program, although with the changes that we have announced, we are moving more into the employment side of things with that program as well. The PDD program is more a specific program that gives aid to the developmentally disabled people. For example, it helps them out on therapy and things like that. It is not a direct income-replacement program. So you could quite easily have someone on AISH still having programs through the PDD boards.

I think that's it.

THE CHAIRMAN: I wonder if Ms Calahasen has anything to add.

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Madam Chairman, I think my colleague has covered almost everything in terms of child and family services authorities. You asked about the difference between the new versus the old. In Calgary Rocky View their focus is on prevention and early intervention, a real strong focus in that area. They also are looking at how they can really deliver the services to the people and making sure that occurs at that level. That's the only addition that I think I would add in terms of my colleague, because he's answered almost everything relative to that.

I know that Rocky View has really worked hard on their business plan to reflect what they heard through the service plan. That service plan has identified that people are more concerned about prevention and wanting to work on preventative issues. So I commend Rocky View for making sure that they followed up on that service plan.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The next one is Ms Kryczka, followed by Mr. Cardinal, if we have time.

MS KRYCZKA: Well, I just want to make a quick comment to compliment the department on the business plan. There are a few things I just want to highlight that I really like. The statement under major strategies on interdepartmental initiatives and collaboration with other ministries and stakeholders: I can speak specifically to some work that I was doing and appreciate your assistance there, Lyle.

Work with the PDD boards I think is another one that's very important. Providing people with financial support but helping them move towards independence: I totally agree with that strategy.

Just a few questions on your budget items. On page 205, I'm looking at 2.2.6, employment initiatives. The first question is: why has the budget for this item fallen from \$39.3 million to \$27.4 million? Related to that: is the revised budget for employment initiatives adequate in light of the need to extend employment support to AISH and assured support clients under recently announced program changes? A further question: what areas of the employment initiatives in the '98-99 budget were reduced in '99-2000 to produce the \$16 million reduction?

On page 204, elements 1.0.1 and 1.0.2, could you explain why the minister's office, why these two are showing budget increases? Also, in reference again to page 204 but 1.0.8, standards, monitoring, and evaluation: why is the budget for this area increasing by \$500,000? Also, what programs and services will be provided by this unit?

Turning to page 218, Ministry Consolidated Income Statement, the '99-2000 estimate for revenue is \$47.9 million higher than the '98-99 forecast amount of \$406.5 million. Could you please tell us why the revenue is increasing here? Related to that: what is your future projection of revenue receipts, and will it continue, do you

think, to increase, or will it level off? Also, could you please tell us the categories under which the revenues are received?

Is it possible to ask a little question here related to my work in my constituency? It's related to the children's authority restructuring.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's up to the minister.

DR. OBERG: Absolutely.

MS KRYCZKA: I would just say, based on an experience I had at a meeting with an agency not too long ago, that if MLAs can assist with the agencies and the communication to these agencies with the restructuring of the children's services - and I relate to my area in particular - I'd be more than happy to work with the authority in that area. I know they certainly appreciate it when we attend the meetings. We're probably guilty of not attending enough, but if we can help at all in communicating about the restructuring with progress to date and plans for the future, I would like to be part of that.

Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: Who will speak?

MS CALAHASEN: I'll start first. I really appreciate the offer to help the restructuring process. I understand that as region 4 begins to move towards its business plan, there'll be some major changes relative to what's going to happen and who's going to deliver services. So what I will do is make sure that the region gets in touch with the MLAs so that you can be part of the process of communication. I think that's a very important offer. Thank you very much, Karen.

DR. OBERG: Thanks, Karen. Perhaps I'll go through some of your questions here.

Your first question was on 2.2.6: why has it fallen from \$39 million to \$27 million? The answer to that is that this reflects the current spending levels. To put it quite briefly, we did not spend \$39.3 million. This is one of the areas where we are adjusting back to a more realistic type of estimate; hence the new estimate is \$27.4 million.

The next question you had was: is the revised budget for employment initiatives adequate in light of the need to extend employment opportunities to AISH and to assured supports under recently announced program changes? We feel it is. We feel that there is enough money there to do it. I think, in all fairness, that for some of the issues, when it comes to AISH employability, we'll be flying by the seat of our pants a little bit. However, I still feel that it's extremely important that we offer these employability programs to people on AISH. I'll be commenting a little later to Dr. Massey's question, but I think it's extremely important that we allow these people the same chance that the rest of the people have in society. As you know, Karen, the present AISH program does not have anything for employability. We're hoping that this will extend, and I truly feel that the increase in the AISH will be more than enough to do that.

9:46

What areas of employment initiatives in the '98-99 budget were reduced to produce the \$16 million reduction? I'll get quite specific on this one, Karen. The Alberta development program is decreased by \$3 million, job core by \$3 million, ACE, or Alberta community employment, by \$7 million, employment skills by \$1 million, and other programs by \$2 million. I think the obvious question that falls

out from that is: what effect will this have? We feel that on the employment initiative side it will only have minimal effect. As with any budgeting process what we have to do, what we have to decide is: where is money best spent? We only get X number of dollars, and we have to decide where is the best place to put that. Consequently, we have shifted that money to other areas of the department such as the AISH program or AISH employment incentives, for example.

The next question that you had mentioned was: why is Pearl spending so much money? No, that wasn't it. On page 204 you asked why the minister's office and the minister without portfolio responsible for children's services are showing budget increases. What I'll do is let Pearl answer. With regards to my budget, in essence it is basically salary increases that have occurred in my office. I'll let Pearl comment on her office.

MS CALAHASEN: Ditto. Actually, it's salary increases that we're covering there.

DR. OBERG: You also talked about standards, monitoring, and evaluation, why it's increasing by \$500,000. The easiest response to that is that with the child and family services authorities, with the PDD boards, again this is taking on increasing importance in our department. Something that we are putting a lot of priority on is the standards and monitoring. As you know and as our experience as a government has sometimes shown, as you delegate responsibility downwards to another body, occasionally you lose the control in standards and monitoring. I feel that this cannot happen in this department, and consequently there is more money being spent on standards, monitoring, and evaluation by this department to ensure that the standards are there. Quite frankly, Karen, we just cannot have it where the standards in child welfare - for example, some of the legislated responsibilities - decrease, and I will not accept that as minister in this department.

The other issue: what services or programs will be provided by this unit? A couple of things. First of all, we are looking at implementing provincewide service standards. Some of these have already been put out. For example, the AACL standards and PDD boards were recently put out. We're looking at provincewide standards. I guess the question that arises from this is: are the standards going to be different? This is a question that, when I was working in health care, I often got. Are the standards going to be different around the province? The answer is no. There will be provincewide standards. There will be provincewide enforcement of these standards by the department, again a very critical component of this department as we move forward to delegating authority to these boards.

Your next question. On page 218 the revenue is close to \$50 million higher than the forecast of \$406 million. It's primarily due to the federal health and social transfers. We're hoping that these health and social transfers have gone up, and as indicated in the federal budget, they have increased. As you know, we have stated that they will go to health care, but there is some increase in those of us other fledglings who want to receive dollars too.

Future projections. We're suggesting that it's expected to level off by 2001-2002.

The health and social transfer payments. Despite the fact that the federal government said \$11 billion will be included, the \$11 billion has been used as a composite number of the amount that they will be spending over the next five years. So it's not an annualized basis. It's \$2 billion, \$2 billion, \$2.5 billion, \$2.5 billion, \$2.5 billion over the next five years. Albeit any money from the federal government is very much appreciated, the extent of this transfer is not as wonderful as \$11 billion, and it's not as wonderful as the great full-

page ads that I saw in the newspaper following the budget.

The categories under which they are received: federal transfers, 96.5 percent; fees and licences, and what we're looking at there are such things as daycare licensing, 0.2 percent; the refund of benefits paid is 3.3 percent.

I believe that's it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The next questioner is Mr. Cardinal.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. First of all I would like to commend both the ministers and staff for the fine job you're doing in the department. I guess you all know I do have a personal interest to see this department succeed, because I did have some input originally that I thought was quite challenging and different.

I have a few questions basically under program 3, but first of all I have to kind of just explain a bit why I have these particular two or three questions. It was mentioned here this morning that the child welfare caseload under program 3 has gone up approximately 40 percent. Some groups out there have tried to blame the welfare reforms for this increase in the caseload, and of course you know where I stand on that. I disagree with the issue that more welfare deals with poverty. It doesn't. It's been proven that only jobs, training, and the opportunity to become independent and providing the transitional supports will deal with poverty in the long run. In the past we've tried to deal with it by providing more social support dollars, and I think it's been around 30, 40 years with very little success in northern Alberta. Changes that our government has taken I think is the right direction, building a strong economy and dealing with issues like that.

There were three phases, of course, of the reform of the welfare system, which I'm going to get into, dealing with program 3 of child welfare because it all ties in. It's part of an overall reform package. The initial part was to deal with the supports for independence, which saw a reduction in the welfare caseload, I believe below 30,000 now. It was up to 96,000. But the plan was always there to redirect those dollars to high-needs areas like children's services, single people that can't work, elderly people that can't work. I think that's been reasonably successful, because I see where there are increases and better programs provided for those areas, including of course phase 2, which is the persons with disabilities. That's going very well, from what I understand.

The area I have a bit of a question with is in regard to program 3, and that's the children's services initiative. If I remember right, half of the caseload of children under provincial jurisdiction were First Nations children. Not to say that what you have out there isn't the right direction, but the original plan of the restructured children's services was supposed to see the transition of that 50 percent of the caseload of the First Nations children on and off the reserve over to the First Nations people. I believe that when I left in '96, already 22 or 23 of the 46 First Nations had agreements under delegated authorities to take over and deliver services. The plan was within two years to have all the caseloads of those children on and off the reserve delivered by the First Nations along with federal legislation and 100 percent federal dollars. The bands wanted that, and I think the province was generally supportive of that. I think it would have been the right move.

9:56

The second step of the plan then was to design the children's services on the provincial side based on the balance of the caseload. From all indications the caseload has gone up 40 percent, and that

one phase was not implemented. I've had questions asked by the First Nations, especially in my riding where the Bigstone band is ready to move forward with this initiative where the feds would fund it 100 percent. They would take over child welfare on and off the reserve. My question is: are there plans in the future to do this? The potential is there where we will design a children's services initiative out there. The bands will take over half of the caseload, and then you've got two structures out there. That is a potential danger. That is one question.

The second question is in relation to the service centres concept that were developed. That was done involving other departments also, and that concept was supposed to be utilized by other agencies out there, like Health, possibly Environmental Protection, and a number of other departments that are situated across rural Alberta. I'm not sure if that is happening. Is it possible for your department to give firm direction as to the utilization of those services? It's so easy for each program that moves forward to develop its own system, and if you're talking about streamlining, better quality of services, we need to make sure that the people that are running the services out there know that they have to use these services.

I guess those are two questions that I have.

DR. OBERG: Okay. Thanks, Mike. Perhaps I'll start with your aboriginal issues first. The interesting point is that up until about 1995-96 aboriginal children in child welfare were running right around 50 percent. We've now dropped down to 37 percent, so we are certainly making some strides there.

The other issue is when it comes to delegated authority of the bands. As you know, there are 46 bands presently in the province, and of these at the moment we now have 33 agreements to deliver on reserve child welfare services. I guess the point that I'm making when I use the term "on reserve" is that the federal government still refuses to recognize anything off reserve when it comes to their fiduciary responsibility to the natives. This was something that I negotiated in the social union issue, on the social union side, and I can tell you that the federal negotiators said: well, we aren't going to discuss that here now. As you know, there's only limited mention of aboriginals in the social union contract. They used the excuse that they were not sitting at the table and therefore that discussion could not take place.

I think something that was forgotten is that they do tend to vote in provincial elections, and as representatives I feel that we should have discussed some of these issues. I will let you know that it was the provincial/territorial consensus that the federal government live up to their fiduciary responsibilities both on and off reserve. I don't think there are very many native bands across the province that would argue with that point.

In your plan that started off on the child and family services authorities, absolutely that was what was intended. The only problem is the federal government has not yet come to the plate with federal dollars for aboriginals. But when you think about it, in all fairness, Mike, I think it's quite ludicrous to say that we will only pay for aboriginals that are on reserve. What is happening - and this is something that I don't need to tell you, but I will certainly reiterate - is that this has led to the ghettoization of many reserves because the federal government will only fund when people live on the reserves.

I'll use, as an example, I believe it is the Alexis reserve, which is between here and Whitecourt. In 1962, before the federal welfare payments to natives, there was essentially zero percent unemployment on that reserve. In 1962 and '63, when the federal programs came in, that went up to around 96 to 97 percent unemployment. What has currently happened is that the average education on that

reserve is something like grade 4 or grade 5 at this moment. In 1999 that is completely unacceptable, and it's completely unacceptable that the federal government will not live up to their fiduciary responsibilities when it comes to natives both on and off reserve. That's just one man's opinion.

The issue then becomes: if they ever live up to their responsibilities, what will happen to the child and family services authorities? I think, Mike, what will happen is that we will have to relook at the number of boards specifically, because quite frankly if we take a 37 percent decrease in the number of children who are on child welfare, I think we certainly have to look at whether or not 18 boards are needed. That's a bridge we'll cross when and if it occurs. If I may just comment, I think the Bigstone band in your region is moving forward in that direction, and we will certainly help them in any way possible to attempt to get the funding from the federal government.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister, a point of order has been called.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I understand that the rules of the Assembly and the rules governing parliamentary procedure apply to committees as they do in the Assembly. It is, I think, quite broadly known that references with respect to federal jurisdiction are not in order procedurally. Secondary to that, I don't believe there was any reference within the business plan about the federal government's responsibilities, whether they were being fulfilled or not fulfilled. So I'm wondering about the appropriateness of the statements being made by the minister in that respect this morning, given the fact that that was not raised as an issue within the department's business plan.

DR. OBERG: If I may respond to that, Madam Chairman. First of all, two things. The children's services authority is a responsibility of the provincial government both on and off reserve, and that is included in the funding for children's services. Second of all, when it comes to the fiduciary responsibilities of the federal government, it is something that we are working towards in child and family services. It is something that we strongly believe is there and that they are ignoring. So what we have is a situation where we are funding and we are servicing an area of child welfare services that we feel is not our responsibility, that we feel is a fiduciary responsibility of the federal government. The other issue is that the talks that were taking place on the social union had to deal with that issue.

I feel it's not a point of order, as what I was commenting on is something that is our responsibility, is something that is included in the business plan, and we were talking about the future direction of this. I believe I have already been asked numerous questions about what the future direction of this department is.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I would say that it's a disagreement among members. Carry on with your time, please.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The second question that was raised was about the shared service centres component and whether or not it will be utilized by other departments. I think that's an excellent idea. Obviously I cannot speak for my colleagues.

We are in the process now of getting the shared service centres up and running for the three components of our department. When they are up and running, when they are functioning in full capacity, if it is something that the other departments feel would be beneficial to them, then I certainly think we should go in that direction. I think the more administrative dollars that can be saved and the more economy of scale that can be achieved is nothing but positive. Again, is it possible to confirm the direction? This is something that

I as a minister feel extremely strongly about. I feel that it does save our department money, which in the long run allows more money to be distributed to programs.

One of the issues that perhaps you as MLAs will hear is that the child and family services authorities feel in many cases that they can do the job cheaper themselves. In all reality, there may be places in this province where they can do it cheaper. The part that they are forgetting is that the shared service centres are also working for the income and employment programs and the PDD programs. So despite the fact that there may be some small savings to the child and family services authorities, the overall savings to the department by the shared service centres component is quite dramatic, I believe in the area of \$6 million or \$7 million. This money is then money that can be reallocated to the child and family service authorities and the PDD boards for program delivery. I feel as a minister it's my responsibility to decrease administration dollars as much as possible.

10:06

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: All right. The next questioner is Mr. Shariff.

MR. SHARIFF: Madam Chairman, if I can ask, how many more minutes do we have?

THE CHAIRMAN: We have 11 minutes of this section.

MR. SHARIFF: I just want to begin by, first, complimenting the minister and his department for some wonderful inclusions in this new budget that has been put forward which were to benefit children and persons with disabilities and low-income parents, seniors, and others. In particular, I also want to commend the increase of 18 percent of overall budget towards the assured income for the severely handicapped. I think that was much needed, and we are moving in a very positive and right direction. I also want to comment on the \$22.5 million increase in funding for services to persons with developmental disabilities. It's a much-needed boost.

The \$3.4 million that was added to eliminate child prostitution and fetal alcohol syndrome is also an excellent inclusion in the budget. We're already starting to see some very positive results from the bill pertaining to child prostitution.

The additional money that has been given to the prevention of family violence program, half a million dollars, and additional funding for shelter benefits for families on welfare is also much appreciated. So I wanted to add my compliments on that inclusion.

I have a few questions, and I'm making reference to pages 214 and 215. I will begin with the Goals section. My question is on the indicators that have been identified. I'm curious to know how those are monitored, in particular with reference to the Auditor General's comments that were referenced by Dr. Massey. It's important that these indicators are measured appropriately, and if there is some additional information, that would help me.

The next question is in regards again to the Goals section - it's about the seventh bullet - where there is talk about increasing "the proportion of single parent SFI clients who receive child maintenance payments from non-custodial parents." That happens to be a goal. I'm wondering what additional resources are allocated to see to it that the noncustodial parents do end up meeting their obligations. How successful are we at getting them to accept their responsibilities?

Another aspect of the Goals section which is not listed here but which is certainly a point I have raised previously with the minister pertains to people on social assistance who are sponsored immigrants

into this country and whose sponsors are abandoning the responsibility of sponsorship. I'm wondering if the minister would have any stats as to how successful we have been in going after the sponsors to force the issue of complying with the 10-year sponsorship commitment they had made.

Then I go to the next section, which is Major Strategies. The first bullet is about "transfer of service delivery . . . to Child and Family Services Authorities," and I believe that's going to happen during 1999. That is my understanding. In looking at the budgets, I notice that there are amounts allocated for board development and governance. We don't have all these authorities having assumed responsibility, yet there has been a significant cost attached to board development. If we could have some understanding whether the rest of the 17 will assume responsibility this year or when it is projected to happen. It also raises another question for me: whether 18 is too large a number. My feedback is basically that maybe that number is too large and we need to really revisit this issue and try and make it into a practical size, maybe something like five, to deliver services in the province.

Then I go to the third bullet there, where the major strategy is identified as: "assist Albertans in international adoptions." Given the new position that was articulated yesterday in a press release that the Child Welfare Act will be amended with respect to private adoptions, my question to the minister is: could the minister give us some indication as to what those changes would be? As well, is there any information about the cost to the province, if any, for our involvement in private adoptions? I presume that if there is a cost, then that will be a savings. How will that be passed on to this field of adoption?

A strategy is also to "regionalize the delivery system of the Office of the Public Guardian." I'm curious to know what that regionalization process will include. I wasn't able to identify what costs were associated with that regionalization process, so that would certainly help.

Then I move on to the next page, which is page 215, where the second bullet is talking about increases to contracted agencies, that one and the fourth bullet. My understanding, in having talked to a number of people in both public- and private-sector agencies, is that the discrepancy in remuneration is significant. What happens is a lot of people move out of the profession, and as a result we lose out on experience they have gained in the workplace. So I'm wondering how much of an impact the \$17.5 million that is being allocated will have on retaining that experience.

I will probably leave it at that so that we can get some response, and then at the later hour which will be allocated to government members, I may have some additional questions.

Thank you.

MS CALAHASEN: Maybe I'll address the issue you talked about under Goals on page 214 relative to "achieving age-appropriate developmental milestones." That's also through what we call the Alberta children's initiative, and it's one of the outcomes as well as the measures that we have of the Alberta children's initiative. So when we're talking about how we're going to be able to do that, the measures that would be associated with that, we certainly have to make sure all the departments that have been involved in a co-operative manner come to the table relative to that with a report that would address those issues. So we're seeing that now starting to come together. I know Family and Social Services is one of the groups that have been involved, and it's one of the goals that we have identified.

Relative to the question of the 18 regions. When we first started and when I was first appointed as minister, one of the things I heard

across the province was that there were a number of questions actually. One was whether or not we were serious about carrying on and allowing the community to take control. A second was whether or not we had any intentions of changing the system as they had been told to plan it. That was a big issue out there. So when I came back, we had to be able to deal with that issue of what the numbers were. There were some numbers tossed around relative to: what would be the best method for us to be able to deal with it? The community at large indicated that they wanted to see this happen as they were starting so that they could continue to work in that vein. The coterminality with the RHAs was what they had planned for, and they continued to plan on that basis.

10:16

So when you're looking at the regions, that's the biggest basis of why we did that. As well, I'm sure if we had changed it, we probably would have had a revolt on our hands from the community at large or the 12,000 people who had been involved in the whole process, because we told them to dream based on those regions. We told them that we'd carry it out, and then we have to make that promise come to life. In my view, I think we listened to them, established them the way they are. But that'll always be a question. If we're serious about giving the community the authority to make sure they plan according to what their needs are with the amount of dollars that are available, we'll have to always look at that. Is 18 too large? Should we go smaller? I think we have to have the community input to be able to determine that. Then they'll let us know.

I think some factors will come into play. My colleague has been making sure that he works with the federal government on the aboriginal component. I think if the aboriginal people take over the areas once the feds come on board, we'll see that there may have to be a diminishing of regions as we move forward. When we look at the child welfare caseloads, when we started this, it was 50 percent of aboriginal children. We are now moving down to 37 percent through the agreements that Dr. Oberg has been working on. I think we'll see some factors come into play in terms of how we can better work with those systems so that the people will make that decision, and I think they'll come forward with some really great stuff.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

That concludes the hour for government members. Now we start with the opposition's second hour.

DR. OBERG: I have a question, Madam Chairman. I did not have the ability to respond to the last opposition member's questions and would like that ability first, please.

THE CHAIRMAN: Yes.

DR. OBERG: Thanks.

MRS. SLOAN: If we could, Madam Chairman, I would respectfully request the minister to provide those responses in writing, as he committed to at the onset.

DR. OBERG: If I may, Madam Chairman. That agreement was not agreed to by the opposition. The option and the ability for that to occur was given to the opposition; however, the opposition did not agree with that. So what I will be doing is responding for the next 20 minutes to the questions that have been laid out to us at the moment.

Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. All right.

DR. OBERG: Perhaps, Pearl, if you want to start off.

MS CALAHASEN: Sure. Actually I would love to. Thank you very much. There were a lot of good questions that came forward from the opposition members, and I want to be able to address those, because I know you want to have some answers relative to some of these. I know my colleague has given you some excellent answers as well, but I'd just add on to what he's indicated about some of the information he's provided.

Relative to children being healthy, there were questions on the measures and the outcomes attached to that. For your information, with the Alberta children's initiative we have the outcomes outlined as well as the goals, the outcomes and the measures attached to that. Relative to children being born healthy, if you look at the measures, percentage of low birth weight babies and infant and child mortality rates are the measures.

The age-appropriate language and social skills was another issue that you brought up. If you look at page 8 of the ACI, children are ready to learn when they start school, and the measures we're looking at are the proportion of children with age-appropriate language and social skills, which I think is a very important part when we're looking at how it is that we're going to deal with the whole issue of treating the child as a holistic individual. So when you look at those, when we're looking at anything to do with the goals, we have the outcomes as well as the measures attached to that. That is very, very important when we're looking at what it is that we want to achieve from the Alberta children's initiative.

There were a number of other issues that came forward. There were questions about children's mental health. Children's mental health is also one of the initiatives that we have identified in the Alberta children's initiative. When you look at children's mental health, the task force has been established by the Minister of Health, and we are involved in that respect. Family and Social Services, Justice, Community Development, Education, and ourselves are all involved in that whole process, so we can still look at that component of integration, which I think is a very important part when we're talking about the fracturing or the fragmented approach to dealing with kids. Now we're starting to work with them as a whole.

The other issue that came forward is hot lunch programs. It's not under Family and Social Services, but it is under the secretariat. We have early intervention programs that have been ongoing for the last three years and will continue. The determination of what happens will be based on the regional authorities that have been established, and region 10 will definitely be involved in Edmonton.

I'll just give you some examples of what kinds of hot lunch programs we've worked with under the early intervention program. I think it's important to realize that it's not only us; it's partnerships that have been formulated. Some of these have gone with Head Start programs. Some of them have gone on with schools. Some of them have gone on with other partners within a community.

Examples of some of the hot lunch programs we have in Edmonton. School/Community Links for Children was a specific hot lunch program, and that's at St. Michael school. Building Success in Grade School is also a hot lunch program, and that's at Prince Charles school. I'm sure some of you know where that is. Partners for Healthy Choices for Children is also a hot lunch program at Eastwood school. Helping Kids Succeed in School is another hot lunch program. These programs are through St. Francis of Assisi, St. Patrick, Norwood, Sacred Heart, and McCauley.

So when we're talking about those, it's the partnership that has to occur, but the community determines that. It's brought forward.

The early intervention people and specialists work on that aspect and make sure that there are linkages and that partners are involved, and with that I think we're serving kids in a very, very good way.

MRS. SLOAN: Just as a point of clarification, Madam Chairman, perhaps the minister could comment on the number of schools that require hot lunch programs in the Edmonton region but are not funded.

MS CALAHASEN: I don't have that information.

MRS. SLOAN: I believe there have been 25 assessed as requiring hot lunch programs, and we only currently have 10 schools in the region that are actually receiving it through partnership or departmental support.

THE CHAIRMAN: Excuse me. That's going a little further than just clarification.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you.

DR. OBERG: Thanks, Madam Chairman. What I will do is touch on some of the questions Mrs. Sloan has asked, and as I said earlier, if there are any questions relating to the budget that have not been answered by myself, then they will be supplied in written format at a later date.

There was a question about aboriginal adoptions. This is something that again, as I alluded to in the Legislature I believe it was in the November session, we do have to look at. The importance about aboriginal adoptions, though, is that we have to do this in conjunction with the bands, and we will be sitting down over the next while - actually we're starting an initiative with the bands coming up within the next month or two - to find the best way.

I think there's one specific issue when it comes to aboriginal adoptions that's incredibly important, and that was a court decision that occurred in Ontario within the last couple of weeks which enabled an aboriginal child to go to a nonaboriginal home. That is something we have to look at through our Justice department. It is something that potentially could change what we do with aboriginal adoptions. So we have to look at the repercussions of that decision, but everything being equal, what we have to do and what is a critical component in aboriginal adoptions is to sit down with the bands and come to a conclusion as to what is the best way to proceed with aboriginal adoptions and proceed with the Forever Homes initiative on the reserves.

A couple of other points. The hon. member talked about the children's authorities and deficits. In the agreement that will be signed by every children's authority - that is an agreement between myself and the children's authorities - there is a clause that specifies that the children's authorities cannot spend more than the funding they have been allocated. Effectively this means that they cannot run deficits.

The next obvious question, which was the question the hon. member asked, is capping services. We feel that every region has enough money to look after their mandated services. There are extras to be included in what they do, and those extras must be done above and beyond the services as mandated under the Child Welfare Act. We are hoping that with the early intervention programs, with the various other preventative programs that are in place in the communities, this will lead to essentially a recycling and decrease the number of mandated services that they need to provide and consequently allow more money for things like early intervention and prevention of these problems prior to the children getting into the welfare system. Again, this is quite important.

10:26

Another issue was the surplus retention funds. The boards will be allowed to keep their surpluses. This is something that I think is extremely important. We do have the ability, as needed, to claw back the surplus funds. The surplus funds must be designated for a use. For example, they cannot say: we're going to keep the surplus funds for a rainy day. They must be designated for a use, and this is in keeping and consistent with the Government Accountability Act.

Publish consistent standards. Again, I am anticipating that as these boards get up and rolling, everyone will be having a consistent standard so that we can effectively compare between regions as to what is happening, recognizing, of course, that in every region there are differences when it comes to demographics. There are regional differences, and this has to be taken into consideration with any standard document that is put out. I absolutely have no problems with publishing standards, with allowing the people of Alberta to know what is happening. It's something that this department feels strongly about. When you look at the performance indicators, you can see that.

Children's Advocate. The question was about the independent model. Madam Chairman, presently there are either six or seven - and correct me if I'm wrong. I can't remember if we were the seventh or the sixth jurisdiction in Canada that actually has children's advocates. There are four jurisdictions that do not. Presently three are independent and report to the Legislature. Three are members of the ministry. We are one that is a member of the ministry, and we have no plans to move to the independent model reporting to the Legislature.

The annual report. The question was raised as to why it hadn't been released. The answer to that is that I have not received a Children's Advocate report; 1996-97 was the last one I received. I believe it has not been done yet, so there has not been a delay in release. From the time I receive it, I am mandated legislatively to produce that in the Legislature I believe within 30 days or 60 days or something like that. We have brought this up with the Children's Advocate as we feel it is important. There may be some issues about changing the Children's Advocate at that time, but it's something that he has to look at.

I'll now move on to Dr. Massey's questions. One of the questions was the quality measures, and, Don, I couldn't agree with you more. Quality measures are the essence of what we have to do in this department. The problem with quality measures, something that I'm sure you're well aware of, is getting adequate measures that we can rely on. Obviously one person reporting on one thing versus another person reporting on one thing can be two completely different sets of measures. If the measures are not reliable, then although they are okay for public consumption, they really don't tell us an awful lot about how we can change in our department.

I'll draw your attention to the business plan, where some of the performance indicators specifically - and this is a move that we have made this year - are to increase the satisfaction of service recipients with the services they receive from SFI, AISH, PDD, and HCS programs. Vote 4.1 is that way; 3.3 is another one. We're certainly looking at attempting to get this quality measure. I think what you have to realize is that there are two specific components to income support programs. One of them is the budgeted amount, which is: are people happy or satisfied with the amount?

The other issue is the service component, because the service component, quite frankly, is something that's extremely important to us. Are the people in the offices providing a good service to the people that are receiving the income? That's something we are presently working on. As you know, Don, this is a burgeoning



science. It's something that is in its infancy as it's coming out, and again I will not use any performance indicators that can't be replicated and that can't be dependably called upon to make decisions in this department.

The Auditor General was talking about performance measures and window dressing. I couldn't agree with you more. When it comes to an overall business plan and overall performance indicators, quite frankly it would be extremely easy for a minister to put down only good performance indicators, only good performance measures that show that we are doing extremely well. I think you know as well as I know that that is not an effective way to run a department. There has to be room for improvement on these issues.

Probably the best issue I can draw your attention to is goal 3.2. Goal 3.2 is to "increase the proportion of children who move from permanent government care to adoptive homes." As you can see, the number is appalling. Four percent was the actual in '97-98. Projected '98-99 is 4 percent, and the target is 6 percent, which realistically is something I am absolutely not proud of.

This is the first year this measure has been put in, and as we went through and did the performance measures, quite frankly the question was asked of me: why on earth would you want to put that measure in? Well, the reason I want to put that measure in is because we have to have something we can base it on to improve this department. That is something that I feel is an incredibly important area. It's incredibly important when it comes to keeping with our Forever Homes concept. I fully realize that 4 percent is an appallingly low number, and it's not something I'm proud of, but by putting it in the performance indicators, it focuses the attention of the department on it. It focuses their attention on actually doing something to make an effort to change that number.

So in general I think your comments on commenting on what the Auditor General has said are extremely valid. I have tried to eliminate that from the performance indicators as we have looked at and changed them this year, and I think you will see some of these changes within it. Hopefully next year, as more of the performance indicators are developed, there will be even more that are like that.

The reliability of the measures and the performance indicators. [interjection] Yeah, perhaps I have addressed that one.

The next one was speech therapy. This was a specific example that you had given me, Don, on how the school health program will work. First of all, as you know, there has been \$25.6 million of new money put into the program. What we are also committed to, which wasn't made completely clear at the press conference, is that no one of the partners can spend less money in school health. That was one of the things that I personally insisted upon in that program. Quite frankly, you cannot have it where you have \$25.6 million going in and the RHA, for example, saying: well, if we've got all that money going in, we'll just pull our money out. The agreement has to be that the board of education, Social Services, and the RHAs will continue to fund to the same levels that they are. Otherwise, what you're doing with the \$25.6 million is just replacing funds. We wanted new money. We wanted a new program.

Your comments about the integration and co-ordination of these programs are extremely valid. One of the things we recognized is that, for example, my department would look after the person from the time he gets up until 8:30 in the morning. Education would then take over at 8:30 in the morning and go until 3:30 in the afternoon. Then it would be back to my department from 3:30 in the afternoon until bedtime.

These are some of the issues that we hope will be looked at when it comes to the school health program. As you know, the way the money is being allocated is first of all on a consistent basis. So it has to do with the number of children that actually need these benefits, that need the school health program.

The second is, it is not done on a first come, first served basis. For example, say Calgary has a wonderful program and Brooks doesn't have quite as wonderful a program; Calgary cannot access the money that Brooks was supposed to access. So that money will be there until they come up with a program that meets the criteria according to the Department of Education.

10:36

That's generically what the program is about. How we are hoping it will function is that it will be much more user-friendly - is probably the key term - than it has been in the past. Quite frankly, the school health issue has been something that has been on the burner. I was a school trustee - five or six or 18 years ago, I can't remember which - and that was an issue at the time. The issues were: should the health care system come into the school and pay for the speech pathologist in the school? We're hoping this will clarify. We have to leave it open to the boards. We have to give them some amount of flexibility to bring the program to us and give us the issues on the program and how it will work.

The next question, Don - and I'm glad you asked it - is about the AISH announcements and the angst it caused. That is something that, again - you voiced it perfectly. One of the reasons we did not go out - and this was a conscious decision - and say we were changing the program until we had all the details of the program ready for announcement was exactly what happened.

Unfortunately, there was a document leaked. The document was a preliminary document. The document was also something that unfortunately the press could not read. Obviously they interpreted it wrong. It caused just a massive amount of angst in a very vulnerable community. That vulnerable community is the handicapped and disabled community. It's something that personally, I guess, as minister, I apologized for. It's something that certainly wasn't intended, and I think the repercussions of that, hopefully, have been ameliorated. Yeah, that's probably the best word. But unfortunately, as well, that whole process, the vulnerability of that group of people was used for political expediency. And I'm not talking purely Liberal versus Conservative versus New Democrat. I'm talking about political expediency in that whole world, in the world of the disabled, and it was extremely unfortunate. It was something that I personally lost an awful lot of sleep about. I knew what we were trying to do. I knew the program that we were bringing in, and unfortunately the media started reporting on what reporters had said and it just spun completely out of control.

THE CHAIRMAN: Time. Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.  
Mrs. Sloan.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'd like to move now to the detailed component of our analysis with respect to the ministry's business plan and budget.

Just referencing page 177, the revenue component, the revenue received by the department from the federal government, I'm wondering if the ministry could provide for us, please, a breakdown with respect to the revenue received from the government of Canada, particularly under the category of other revenue and also under the category of premiums, fees and licences.

With respect to, then, ministry support services under program 1, the minister's office and the minister without portfolio's office, we would request the salary increases that have been referenced previously be provided, broken down by position, and with the designation as to whether those increases are performance based or they are being made to the core remuneration.

Just a general question: with respect to staffing within the

department, it would be of interest to know - this is not currently provided in detail in the business plan - the number of positions, the category and classifications, the wage rates, the component of staff that are salaried and those that are by contract . . .

DR. OBERG: Excuse me. If I could get you just to repeat that question, please.

MRS. SLOAN: It'll be in the record for you.

And the percentage that is actually front line and the percentage that is management.

With respect to the standard policy committee on community services, we're also wondering why the increase in this area and if there have been additional responsibilities added to that area.

With respect to 1.0.7, social policy and strategy. This is a new area. An 18.8 percent increase is being provided. We would ask what additional responsibilities this area will assume. How many staffing components will be created? Will the research include projects that address issues like income disparity, some of the issues that have caused this government some angst in recent weeks? Will that research apply to departmental policies, or will it extend to the authorities and their policies also?

With respect to 1.0.8, standards, monitoring, and evaluation, a 500 percent increase in this area. We would ask what additional responsibilities will be included under this area and with this expenditure, and will this area be completing monitoring and evaluation for all the 18 authorities or only departmentally?

Information technology has been referenced in previous questions, a 19.9 percent increase. We know that this has been a matter which was raised last year in the supplemental estimates. How much of this increase is attributed to Y2K? How much is general maintenance? There is a corresponding decrease of 66 percent in the capital investment area. What is that attributed to?

With respect to 1.0.12, freedom of information, why is there is a projected increase of 7.7 percent in this area? The business plan doesn't offer any FOIP breakdown requests. How many were dealt with last year? What is the breakdown of the type of request and the category of the person asking for the information? How many of the requests did the department deny? How many of the requests went to the FOIP commissioner for resolution? How many were upheld or denied by the FOIP commissioner? That information, I think, is of interest. It's not provided currently.

In the income support to individuals and families there's a 34 percent increase in the operating expense for the area. We question what these resources will provide, and will it be directed towards frontline services? We ask why the 88 percent decrease in funding to the capital investment in this component and what the impact of that will be for frontline staff and services.

In terms of program delivery, what additional resources are required to justify the 2.8 percent increase in this area, and again, will that mean that additional staff will be hired for the front line?

Supplement to earnings, 2.2.3: how many clients are expected to be cut off the caseload in order to realize this anticipated savings, and how many staff will be laid off, if any, by that decrease?

In 2.2.4, employment and training support, how many clients are expected to be cut off the caseload in order to realize the savings in this area? Again, will staff be laid off, or will they be transferred to other positions?

In 2.2.6, employment initiatives, why is there a decrease of 30 percent in this area? With the focus on employment and ability and the efforts this department is making to employ clients, why would this area decrease?

In 2.2.7, shelters for homeless adults, what additional resources

will be provided by the increase in this area? How many new beds will it translate into, and will this include any additional beds for emergency shelter placements for women and children?

In 2.2.8, child health benefits, we would question how many SFI recipients will be clawed back to realize the increase in this area and how many clients are expected to be served with the increase. We would also question what happened to the surplus announced in this program. Was it rolled over, and if so, was it rolled over into this specific area or other program areas?

With respect to 2.3.1 and 2.3.2, widows' pension, what forecasting method is the department using to determine that there will be a decrease in this program? How many clients does this remove from the caseload, and will this again mean frontline staff layoffs?

Under AISH we would question what the breakdown of the increase for AISH recipients will be, what the minister is forecasting as the number of clients to be receiving benefits in the next fiscal year, and if there is any indication the ministry has as to what the numbers will be for the next three years. It is interesting that were no caseload numbers included in this business plan as to the numbers served. Specifically, that's of interest, given the recent announcements and developments in this area.

In 2.3.4, assured support clients, we would question: why are clients of the assured support program being provided with less of an increase than AISH recipients? How many of these clients are anticipated to be on the caseload for the next three years? Again, we would question why the number of clients in this category area is not included.

#### 10:46

Under services for children and families, 3.1, program support, this area has increased. We would question what resources will be provided, and how much of this will be used for frontline services and staff?

Under 3.1.2, the Child and Family Services Secretariat, there's a huge increase in this area. We are not afforded or provided in the business plan the additional responsibilities that will be assumed to justify the increase. We would appreciate a breakdown of how these resources will be used, both with respect to the secretariat's relationship with the authorities and in relation to frontline staff. Also, we would ask whether or not any new staff positions will be incorporated into this announcement and what the positions and qualifications of those new positions would be, if any.

Also in this area, the secretariat's role with the new funding for the school health benefits. That was not made clear in the announcements of this week. That would be appreciated.

Under 3.2.1, protection of children involved with prostitution, additional funding is identified in this area. We would ask whether any additional supports will be provided to child welfare workers who are dealing with this initiative, and again, we would ask what numbers of children are anticipated to be assisted by this program over the next three years.

With respect to the fetal alcohol initiative, again, no numbers are provided as to what the anticipated need for services will be this year or in subsequent years. We would ask what specific programs are going to be run in the 18 regions by this area. I guess we would also question why the funding for this program is being provided for by lotteries. I would make the observation that it could be interpreted that this is exploiting one addiction to treat another and that fetal alcohol initiative is completely funded by lotteries, and that, to me, seems to be somewhat of a contradiction.

On 3.2.4, Forever Homes, we have had numerous correspondence on this matter with the minister. We are still not clear on what programs will be designed for this initiative, how many clients will

receive services, what the definition of a Forever Home actually is, and what the staffing complement of that program will be.

Under 3.3.4, this has been referenced in previous questions. The Calgary Rockyview child and family services authority is receiving approximately 2 percent less funding compared to last year's estimates. Why is that? We would also ask why the funding for handicapped children's services for the region has been decreased by 2.5 percent, and how many clients does this translate into?

We have been made aware, as well, in the Calgary region that three long-term contracts offering services and advocacy to foster families have been terminated by the new authority. We question the rationale and judgment of that occurring, and we're wondering whether the minister had any knowledge of that and whether he had provided any counsel to the authority on the wisdom of eliminating those types of service providers, particularly when that is an area that is in crisis and in need of support.

Under 4.1, services to persons with developmental disabilities, just a policy question. We're wondering whether the minister's policy with respect to motions of the board still having to be approved by him is still in effect. We would ask when the board will, in fact, be autonomous. There has been an increase in this area by 33.6 percent, but again no clarification as to what those resources will provide for, how many clients will be served, and what additional staff will be hired and in what positions and whether they'll be frontline or administrative positions.

Under 5, advocacy and guardianship, the Children's Advocate, this is an area that has been given an increase. Again, we would ask how many staff this will mean in a frontline capacity or administrative capacity. We would ask what portion of the new staff's time will be spent on negotiations and liaison with the new authorities. Will the Children's Advocate specifically be receiving an increase in salary with this increase? How many children are anticipated to be served in addition by virtue of this increase in funding?

Under 5.2, the office of the Public Guardian, what additional resources will be provided for by this increase? Will there be an increase in staffing, again administratively or in a frontline capacity? How many clients is the department anticipating may be served by this increase in funding? The department appears to be projecting a decrease in overall staffing when the overall budget is increased, and we would ask the general question with respect to manpower: what areas of staff are anticipated to decrease and for what reasons?

Now I would like to just reference a couple of comments made previously. Both the minister and the minister for children's services referenced a decline in the number of aboriginal children that are being provided services under child welfare. I believe a number of 37 percent was utilized. I'm not aware that that's a published figure anywhere. In fact, the only figures I have found with respect to the number of aboriginal children in care by child welfare were the department's own figures. When they were last published, to my knowledge we had an incidence of up to 64 percent of aboriginal children in care in region 16. So I would respectfully request a regional breakdown of the percentage of aboriginal children that are receiving services from child welfare. If the department does wish to reference their old figure, they will find it within the Vulnerable Children report released by the Official Opposition.

Just to reference back to the Children's Advocate position. In the '96-97 annual report - and it is regretful we do not have more recent reports from this office. I guess referencing the budget and the business plan, it seems odd to me that the minister would give this office an increase when there are two annual reports that have not been provided by that office. I would think the minister would want to provide some public justification as to why that is the case. Given this government's preoccupation with performance measures and

budget targets, it seems that that would be an essential component of receiving budget allocation from the ministry. It is abdication, I believe, of the spirit of the Child Welfare Act that that particular office has not provided an annual report for two years.

That being said, we know that the current Children's Advocate has deemed that the system advocacy that was previously assumed by children's advocates and included both by Mr. Walter and Dr. LaFrance in their annual reports has been gradually eroded under his tenure. The quarterly system reports which used to be provided to the department, my understanding is, are no longer compiled by the advocate. If issues arise, I have been informed by Mr. Rechner directly that he deals with these matters directly with the minister, but it's not my understanding that there's any record.

So I would raise the question: how well are the minister and his department protecting him from liability if he has no record of any of these system issues being raised to him? At least in the capacity the previous advocates fulfilled, there was documented evidence that these issues had been raised and that the department was taking action. If that is not occurring in a documented form at this stage, I seriously think it is a high liability risk for this department.

10:56

So referencing the 1996-97 report of the Children's Advocate, there were a number of system issues that were raised. Those issues, to my knowledge, have not been addressed in the business plan. That's unfortunate, and I would question why, the rationale in that respect.

I'd just like to quickly reference in my final remarks the report of the Chief Medical Examiner. Now, we know that this office has also not completed an annual report since 1995, and the justification for that by the office's own record is that it is because of budget cuts. But if you look at the 1995 statistics, there are a number of deaths of children that are recorded by the medical examiner. He does not categorize the child deaths as being known to the Department of Family and Social Services; however, in 1995 there was one case of a child death by child battery which I think would be an example of the type of thing that might want to be investigated.

THE CHAIRMAN: Excuse me. I don't believe the minister was minister at that point in time, so he could not answer to that.

DR. OBERG: The budget for 1999-2000 is what we're now debating, Madam Chairman.

MRS. SLOAN: If there was a medical examiner report for this last fiscal year, I would be happy to reference that, but the unfortunate reality is that we don't have one because the office is not afforded the funding to do one.

DR. OBERG: The office is not under this department, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, it is not.

MRS. SLOAN: No. I'm referencing child deaths, and I will focus back on that.

My point is: even if the ministry were alive to the issue that I'm attempting to raise, the issue of abuse, neglect, and deaths of children - and I will reference back to the minister's comments about how he has attempted in the business plan to not window-dress his performance measures - I would question how that attempt to not window-dress performance measures is applied to the performance measure that reads, "percentage of children who stay free from abuse or neglect while receiving child protection," goal 3.1.

I have repetitively raised to this ministry that I think it is an abdication of their responsibility that they do not publish the number of children who have been abused or neglected while in care and the number of children who have died, yet again we see a business plan that ignores that reality. We know that there has been at least one death of a child known to Family and Social Services in the last year. It would seem to me that that would be of tremendous assistance to the department if they were to not only publish but address the development of their services to that point. It does seem to be, Madam Chairman, in direct contradiction to what the minister alluded to earlier, that he's not trying to window-dress his performance measures, but in that respect I think goal 3.1 is a contradiction to that.

I thank you very much for the time.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr. Minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I guess I'll do a couple of things here. I'll finish off Dr. Massey's questions, and I'll mention a few of the ones that Mrs. Sloan has just asked.

First of all, I would comment that throughout the last 20 minutes there have been points made about referencing the actual numbers of children in care, numbers of aboriginals. I would draw the hon. members' attention to pages 171 and 172. The question was about the percentage of children receiving services who are aboriginal. About midway down on page 172 you see the numbers 37.6 percent in '96-97 and 37.2 percent in '97-98. So, Madam Chairman, there were actually several points made in the last statement about the number of children in care, the number of aboriginals, a lot of numbers, caseloads in SFI. I would put it to you that all those numbers are in the general indicators, and it's unfortunate that the hon. member didn't notice those.

There's also the AISH caseload, which is a monthly average, which was a question that was asked. I'd like the record to read that these numbers are actually in there as opposed to not being in there as previously, so it will be recorded in *Hansard*.

Another point that I wanted to mention along the same lines is that there was an issue about the handicapped children's services being decreased in Calgary. That isn't true. Handicapped children's services has increased. Page 232 shows that handicapped children's services in Calgary has increased to 9,228,000, so these are some of the things to look at.

Going back, then, I believe I am on Dr. Massey's question, the issue of the Public Guardian. If you just give me a couple of seconds, I'll find that for you. The Public Guardian office has been changed significantly since we moved to the PDD boards. The Public Guardian has now become responsible to the PDD boards as well as to myself. In all fairness, this is one area of my department where, realistically, there have been a lot of issues about not being that - again, I'll use the term - user friendly. What we are attempting to do with this - and I think what you have to remember is that this is a long-established office - is put it down to the PDD authorities and make it much more user friendly so that the client satisfaction is much better with the PDD boards. We recognize that this is an issue and are taking steps towards that.

A comment was on the Ministry Partnership Council, of which my deputy minister is the chair. Again, with our child and family services authorities being the number one area where we're attempting to integrate between departments, the obvious place where this needs to occur is that the deputy ministers need to sit down and talk to each other about what is occurring. [interjection] Sorry; I was at the wrong one. The questions are just kind of going over my head here right now.

What this is is a council with the CEOs of the various authorities: the 18 child and family services authorities and the seven PDD authorities, six and a provincial board. This is a council that I feel is important. It's a council where the deputy minister sits down with the CEOs and looks over any administrative policies and the administrative problems that are occurring in those regions in that world. As you know, the boards should not necessarily be involved in day-to-day administrative issues, yet these issues do come up. It's critical that we have the relationship between our administration in the department and the administration that is occurring out in the regions.

Information technology plan: I believe you were referencing some of the Y2K issues and what exactly was going on. I've got a number here for you. We've spent \$7 million this year to date on Y2K issues. We have another \$4 million budgeted. Facetiously speaking, I have told my deputy minister that if the cheques don't go out on January 1, her cheque doesn't go out either. So it is directly on her shoulders that this occurs. I'm being only slightly facetious when I say this because I feel that this is important. Quite frankly, I feel that if we do not have the Y2K problem fixed - I won't say 100 percent because there are some areas of our department that are less of a priority than such elements as having the income programs put out - we will have let down the public of Alberta in doing our job.

We've had plenty of notice of this issue, and it will be occurring. The other thing just on that point. We presently have two backup systems that are in place to ensure that doesn't happen. So I guess she really does like her paycheck.

11:06

The human resources plan. Basically, with this department one of the issues has always been and will continue to be caseload. The human resources plan is not to downsize the number of people involved in it. Obviously we do have a fairly high turnover when it comes to social work. I believe we're something like 10 or 11 percent in turnover, which is pretty average across the country. It's something that is an unfortunate element of social work. It's a very difficult job, and a lot of people, quite frankly, get burned out very quickly in the whole social work side of things. So from a human resources point of view, we're attempting to be extremely proactive in what we do.

Actually one of the things we will be developing is working with the universities to ensure that more people go into social work, but another issue which I think is incredibly important is that social workers for some reason have been looked upon in a negative sense. The whole social work profession for some reason has been looked upon as being almost like an enforcement profession, and I take some responsibility in that, being that we are probably the main employer of social workers in the province. I think we need to work with the social work programs to increase the standing of social workers in the province. It's a very honourable profession. They do a great job, and quite frankly, it's something they don't always get credit for. [interjection] Well, they don't get the credit they should, and I think we have to elevate the status of social workers so that more people will go into it and more people will recognize what exactly their job is and how it's getting done and the good job they're doing.

The next question is on the standards monitoring and evaluation system. Again, I've touched on a large part of that in answering some of the other questions. This is an incredibly important part of this department. We're moving in this direction, especially as we move towards the formation of the boards, standards and monitoring, ensuring that no one is falling through the cracks. Ensuring that the minimum level of standards is being met is one of the main tasks of

the department per se as opposed to the authorities.

The national children's agenda, Alberta's role in it, was the next question that was asked. Being the lead province this year - we are the lead province of social service ministries around the country - we are taking quite a major role in the national children's agenda. What will be occurring is the social services ministers along with health care and education ministers will be working on the national children's agenda report. The national children's agenda will then go to the social policy ministers, of which I am a member, and will be approved and sent on.

The national children's agenda is a huge push by the federal government, and I'll just reiterate some of the discussions that we've had over the national children's agenda. We have to ensure, first of all, that the federal government through the partnership in the national children's agenda isn't telling us that we must spend more and more and more money. The danger on the national children's agenda is that we raise incredible expectations by it. One of the issues that I negotiated on the social union is that the federal government can no longer tell us what should and should not happen in areas of social policy, because it is not their jurisdiction.

However, in saying that, I think there are a lot of positives in the . . .

MRS. SLOAN: Point of order, Madam Chairman. I believe we dealt with this issue earlier, and there was a ruling made. The minister seems to be intent on provoking another discussion about the federal jurisdiction. Social policy is a matter that is of concern to all citizens, whether they vote federally or provincially, and with due respect to the hon. minister, I think his statement about there not being a role for different levels of government to play in the area of social policy really underpins our rights of citizenship in this country and how those rights are applied through all levels of government.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister.

DR. OBERG: Yes. Thank you. If I can respond, a couple of things. First of all, the question was asked about the national children's agenda. That was the question asked by Dr. Massey. The national children's agenda is a federal program in conjunction with all other provinces. The other thing that I would remind the hon. member of is a thing that we have in Canada called the Constitution. The Constitution states that social policy is the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces. I guess you could call me out of order for quoting the Constitution, but I'm not sure how that would look if a minister in the government of Alberta cannot quote from the Constitution of Canada.

THE CHAIRMAN: No point of order. He was just answering Dr. Massey's question.

DR. OBERG: Okay. On the national children's agenda. Again we're in the process of finishing that up. We will be having a meeting hopefully in Regina within the next two or three weeks. It's attempting to be set up to look at what may be the final draft of the national children's agenda, and it will then be published and brought out. That's where we're at with that. I think it's important. I think there are some things we have to be careful with on it, though, quite frankly.

Negotiations with the aboriginal communities on shared services. Is that what the question was?

DR. MASSEY: Yes.

DR. OBERG: What we do at the moment with the aboriginal communities is information technology. We share this service with them. I think that only makes common sense, especially when it comes to things like CWIS, the child welfare information system. I think that if you have two or three different systems - and I believe in last year's estimate I was asked this exact question - it's just not practical. Obviously, a perpetrator can quite easily move from one area to the other, and if they happen to be in one information system and not the other, the potential is there, you know, for nasty things to occur. That's where the negotiations are with them, and that's essentially how we work with the aboriginal communities.

With the aboriginal communities as well, as I'd mentioned earlier, 33 out of 46 have agreements on delegation of authority with the provincial government. We feel that this is a step in the right direction, especially as the native bands are becoming much more sophisticated in delivery of services and are willing to take on what they feel is their responsibility. We will only continue to help that. We will not certainly step in their way.

There's a question on the AISH caseload, and I believe the question was: what is the increase we are budgeting for? I will get that for you. The 1998-99 forecast - obviously we do not have the final numbers yet - is 23,070. The 1999-2000 projected is 24,600, so we're projecting an increase of very close to 1,600. About 1,530 is what has been projected for in '99-2000.

The decrease in the SFI caseload. Again, as you look back over the past four to five years, what we've seen is the caseload decrease, from roughly 94,000 down to around 33,000. Obviously we would like to see it continue to decrease. I don't think we can rationally expect that. As you know, last year we projected 36,000. We came in at probably 33,500 to 34,000, perhaps bordering down to 33,000. We are projecting 33,000. We are hoping that it will go down more, but all things considered, I think it would be extremely foolish of us to forecast it at anything less than that. I think it would be akin to, you know, fudging the price of oil. I think we have to do what's appropriate, and I feel that 33,000 is an appropriate number. If we get better than that, then so much the better. Money will be freed up, and it will be put into other programs.

What is happening in SFI caseloads was the next question. I'm sure you realize SFI caseloads tend to fluctuate with the economy. As more people become unemployed, as the oil patch tends to go down - especially in northern Alberta is where we see this - the SFI caseload will increase. We're hoping that with the price of oil being up around \$15 a barrel yesterday, we'll see the oil industry come back, and subsequently the employment rate will continue to be up and the SFI caseload will go down. Again, this is very much looking into the future as to what will occur. We've used our best possible estimates on past practices, on past numbers in determining these numbers.

11:16

Your next question was: are we forcing people into situations, and how is it being managed? There are two components to that. First of all, we feel philosophically that people who can work should be working. We feel that people who can hold down a job when there are jobs available - and there are jobs available now - should be out there working and that we as a government and we as the taxpayers of Alberta should not be sending them money when there is a job down the street and quite frankly the person doesn't want to go down and apply for the job. So that is one way, in all fairness, that you possibly could say that, yes, we are forcing people into some situations. We feel that it is incredibly important for them to get back into the workforce. You had asked a question earlier and there were some comments about self-esteem, things like that, and you rightly commented that a person's self-esteem goes up dramatically

when they're out in the workforce, and that's what we're trying to do.

How is it being managed? Again, I hopefully say that it is being managed with a great deal of empathy yet also with a forceful hand in that there are some people, quite frankly, that have situations when they need to be on SFI, and for those 33,000 people that occurs. For people that have the capability to work - and again I reference the example of the Alexis band, which I'm not specifically alluding to here. But when people can go out and get work, we feel that we should not be paying them to stay at home.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Now we start the government members' second portion, and we have Mr. Johnson.

MR. SHARIFF: Madam Chairman, I guess the minister hadn't finished responding to the questions that I'd raised, so I'm wondering whether he can complete those before you call on Mr. Johnson. Or can he get additional time to respond to my questions after the next question?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, it's up to the minister. He determines that.

DR. OBERG: Sure. If that's what you'd like. If you'll just give me two seconds to find what they were. Okay. I believe one question that you had was: are 18 regions too many? Pearl has answered that.

You had a question about contracted agencies and international adoptions. Contracted agencies, as you know, Shiraz, is an area that has been, in my opinion and I'm sure your opinion too, underfunded in the past. There has been upwards of a 40 to 50 percent difference in doing the same job between a contracted agency and the provincial government. I guess through partly by ease in a budget cycle, these people have been the ones that have shared quite a brunt of cuts over the past 12 years. Excluding my term as minister, there has been something like 11 years of status quo and essentially one year of a mild increase.

What we are budgeting this year - as you know, we budgeted a 5 percent increase straight across the board for the contracted agencies. We're adding another 4 and a half percent this year, so this will bring the total for the contracted agency workers to 9 and a half percent. We recognize that they are still below the standard, but we also recognize that we cannot go up to the level in one year. It's just not financially viable. I have had numerous discussions with the contracted agencies about this and explained this to them. They would love us to move up in three years to complete wage equity. That would take about \$75 million, recognizing that to date we will have spent \$37 million over three years. So we're about halfway there, to put it mildly. It's something that is a priority of this government, but unfortunately there are fiscal realities as well.

Another question that you had asked was about the sponsored immigrants and the abandoned partnerships. That certainly is an issue. It's an issue that we have to discuss with the federal government as the federal government obviously is the government responsible for immigration. One of the issues is that when these sponsored immigrants are abandoned by their sponsor, they do come onto our welfare rolls. We're attempting to negotiate with the federal government on that to hopefully stop that from happening. Quite frankly, if you say you have a responsibility for eight or nine or 10 years, then you must keep that up, and there must be some way to enforce that. At the moment the federal government is not putting in anything to enforce that.

A question was about noncustodial parents and what resources we use to attempt to get the resources that are in the maintenance

enforcement agreements, what we do for that. The majority of the maintenance enforcement agreements, as you know, are through the Department of Justice. We do have someone there in welfare, and in fact some of the legislation that will be coming forward enables us to do that a little bit better.

A very interesting question - and I'm not sure Pearl answered it - was about board development and administration.

MS CALAHASEN: No, I didn't.

DR. OBERG: First of all, on board development, I think in all fairness that's something we have to work a little bit harder on. Some of the boards have been having some issues that quite frankly are common to all boards, and they're common to boards whether they're regional health authorities, whether they're, you know, boards of the local sports arena. There are some basic philosophies that have to be told to these boards, such as that they cannot get into the day-to-day running of the organization. They cannot get into the administration. That is not their job. Their job is to govern, and their job is to set policy. I think I'm speaking perhaps a little bit out of turn here, but it's something we do have to ensure they become aware of.

The administration. Again a very good question. The administration of the child and family services authorities is capped, and I don't know how many people realize that. The larger authorities will be capped at a level of \$850,000. So it is an absolute cap, and in referencing a question that the Minister of Education commented on, this will not be going up when the amount of the total budget goes up. It is not a percentage; it is an absolute amount. It ranges from \$350,000 to \$850,000.

I think that's it.

MR. SHARIFF: There was a question on international adoptions.

DR. OBERG: Oh, right. Sorry. It's here.

International adoptions. Again, there is one issue - and I apologize for alluding to the federal government on this, but the federal government has changed some rules when it comes to international adoptions. Such things as health assessments, criminal checks: these types of things are not necessary anymore. I as the chair of the ministers of social services have sent a letter to Minister Robillard on behalf of all the social services ministers across Canada in an attempt to have her change that in the upcoming legislation. Quite frankly, these are important checks that we must do, and putting it down to the provinces to do after the fact is not really that good. So that is something we have issued.

If there's any way at all that we can help people on international adoptions, we certainly do not have any problems in helping them. We have to recognize our authority, and our authority is health, things like that.

I'm out of breath.

11:26

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr. Johnson.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. In the introductory remarks by the ministers, I heard one of them say that these are exciting times in social services. After listening to the questions and the answers for the last two or three hours here, I think I have certainly gained a new sense of excitement from what you've said in terms of not only the new programs you have instituted but also the renewing of old programs, which is most encouraging to hear.

I think the thing that's most encouraging to me is not only the programs but the direction you're going, and I want to commend you for the clear direction you seem to have as you talk about these programs. I want to just mention a few things that I've gleaned from the conversation this morning. First of all, I sense that you are really working with rather than working for your stakeholders and the various clients, and I want to commend you for that.

In particular I refer to the comments from my colleague for Calgary-McCall here when he was talking about the contracted agencies and the discrepancy in wages between them and our own employees. As you know, Mr. Minister, you've had letters from my constituency, and I have met with you on occasion, and I want to thank you very much for the 4.5 percent increase there and the 5 percent last year. I want to also ask you to continue to address that problem, because it continues to be a problem. But I do thank you for the \$17.5 million that has been put into this area. It's very much appreciated by those from my constituency; that's for sure.

The second point that I'd like to mention in terms of the directions I see you're going, I guess, can be summed up in one word, and that's partnerships, partnerships with municipalities in particular. I had occasion to serve on a city council previous to my work here, also on FCSS, and I know how important it is that we continue to work with those that are closer to those clients and closer to the people that need the service. So I want to commend you for the direction you're going, from service delivery here in Edmonton to service delivery out, shall we say, in the field.

In that regard I heard one of the ministers say that they're working towards more integration of services even amongst the children's authorities in the province, and I was glad to hear that, because it's another example of partnership and working together. When I heard about the health program - I commend you for working with other departments as well. I think that's a very good direction that you're going in.

As we look at the redesign of children and family service authorities, I see a decentralization taking place, and that's another direction that I really like. I think the best decisions are made closest to the people that are most affected. So that direction is very encouraging for me, and I want to commend you. We're going to be watching that whole development with much interest, you can be sure, in the next few years as it plays itself out.

In the area of retraining of those that are on AISH and other social dependency programs, I commend you for that development. You talked about self-esteem in your comments, so important, and I think that's one of the consequences that will come as a result of you trying to get more of these people into the workforce and training them as such. So let me commend you on that as well.

One of the ministers talked about the emphasis on prevention and intervention. So often I think we put money into programs that will alleviate symptoms rather than causes, and in terms of directions here I commend you for putting money into programs that are going to alleviate the causes rather than the symptoms.

I think of the fetal alcohol syndrome program in particular - that's a very good development - the Forever Homes initiative, the children involved in prostitution, and the special health needs for children in schools, as I've already mentioned. Those are some of the new programs that I want to commend you for in terms of your direction.

Now, of course all of this takes dollars and money, and as I look at your budget on page 204 under ministry support services, I see that there's been a reduction of about \$1.5 million in the program for this year as compared to the 1998-99 figures. I wonder: can you please explain the reason for this decrease? There's a decrease from \$31 million to about \$29.7 million. So that's one question I would have.

Another question on the same page, 204. It may have been asked by one of the members on the other side. There were so many questions coming so quickly, I couldn't follow all of them, but I'll just mention it again if it has been mentioned. That's in relation to 1.0.7, social policy. Can you explain why the estimate for this particular element, social policy and strategy, has been increased by approximately \$380,000 from the 1998-99 budget?

Also on page 205, the next page, can you explain why the 1999-2000 budget for element 2.1.1, program support, shows an increase of \$5.5 million? Also on the same page, why has the 1999-2000 estimated capital investment budget in support element 2.1.1 decreased by \$8 million?

Finally, I know that you have made reference to the Y2K initiatives in your comments, but maybe more specifically, how much was spent on Y2K initiatives in 1998-99, and how much more will actually be spent in 1999-2000?

Thank you very much.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, LeRoy, and thank you for those kind words as well. There are two comments especially that I'd like to comment on. First of all was the working together and the integration component. No offence intended to Pearl, but I think that's one of her four pillars. I think it's the most important pillar. I'm not sure what she thinks about it, but I think the integration component, the working together component of all the departments, is absolutely critical in making this initiative a success, and I think taking it the next step as well, to work between the regions, is also something that's extremely important.

The other comment that I would just like to suggest a couple of things on is what I'll call the proactive side of this department. One of the criticisms I personally have had with government in general is that government in general tends to be reactive. We tend to budget from year to year. We tend to live within that budget from year to year, and we have been a little scared, perhaps is the best term, to put out money in the front end to see benefits down the road. The unfortunate part when it comes to the social sciences is that that is what has to occur if you actually want to change anything, if you want to break the cycle. You do not see the benefits of programs within one year. I think the fetal alcohol syndrome program and the child prostitution program are two programs that do that.

We quite realistically know that fetal alcohol syndrome children are not necessarily going to benefit over the next two or next three or next four years. However, the question becomes: just because we won't see any benefit in two or three or four years, should we do it? I think the answer is categorically yes. I think that as information is coming in, it's showing that fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effect is much more a problem than we actually originally anticipated, and indeed I'm giving my personal bias only but it's my personal bias as a medical doctor. I believe that a lot of our ADD issues, attention deficit disorder issues, are going to end up being related to fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal alcohol effect. If we actually do a retroactive study on that, we will see a correlation between those two. So I think it's incredibly important to get that message out. It's incredibly important to tell people that you cannot drink during pregnancy.

**11:36**

Again, in bringing this initiative forward, I've had numerous discussions with breweries. I've had numerous discussions with distillers. Breweries and distillers, in their infinite wisdom, say: "Yeah, we agree with you, but the evidence is not conclusive as to whether or not you can drink in pregnancy, you know, that one or two drinks a day doesn't really hurt anyone. That's what the

evidence is." They're right. That is what the current evidence is, but the issue becomes: when you can't recognize fetal alcohol effect by external characteristics, then fetal alcohol effect becomes more of a behavioural syndrome as opposed to a physical syndrome. How can you absolutely say that one or two drinks does not affect the child? So that's why the issue that we have taken is that you cannot drink in pregnancy, that you cannot drink any amount in pregnancy. That's also the message that has been adopted by the two other prairie provinces, which are our partners, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

I'll just take this point to tell people that May 4 to May 7 there will be a fetal alcohol syndrome conference in Calgary. It will be the first in the prairie provinces, but we're hoping that it will be something that will continue. What I anticipate happening is that next year Manitoba will have it; the year after that Saskatchewan will have it. So it's an element. Again, the working together issue is not only on the microlevel between regions. It's not only between departments. It's also between provinces. It's also between governments, federal and provincial. So those are some things I just wanted to comment on.

You made some specific comments on page 204, section 1.0.7, which was the social policy and strategy. You questioned: why the increase? I guess there are a couple of things. First of all, it's up \$380,000. One of the things that is occurring is that we're seeing a lot more court cases regarding things that have happened a long time ago. There are a lot more court cases in the whole social sciences sector. We're anticipating increasing external legal costs when it comes to this. So that's one of the reasons.

On the social policy and strategy side, another thing that I'll mention is that we are the lead ministry across Canada this year, and there are expenses that are related to that. I think it's money well spent. I think it's a benefit to be the lead ministry, and that is one of the rationales as well.

Another question that you asked was: page 205, element 2.1.1, program support, shows an increase of \$5.5 million. What this is from is essentially IT costs. It's IT in preparing for Y2K; it's also the Imagis system, the operating cost for the new government financing system. One of the good things about being in this government is that we tend to standardize things. One of the bad things is that often they're not standardized towards their major client, which is us. We are the biggest users of this system. We have had some glitches with it, and it has caused some increased costs. So that's where that money is going as well as to the Y2K problem. We had mentioned the Y2K, and I believe that I've talked to a great extent on it.

I think that's it.

MS CALAHASEN: Could I make some comments on the redesign? I think it's a really important one. The redesign was actually the brainchild of our colleague who's sitting at the table, Mike Cardinal. He really put together a wonderful plan to ensure that the community was able to take control. Then, of course, Mr. Day and I became the carriers of that, and now it's Dr. Oberg and I who have been able to carry it to, I think, completion. But it's a wonderful thing because it's not only the ministers but also our colleagues who have bought into the program of the community taking control, and the community is the one that's now at that stage of being able to identify that and come forward and be there to support it.

I know that our colleagues certainly have pushed to make sure that not only the redesign occurs but that the four pillars of what the redesign was all about have continued into the children's secretariat. I think that when Dr. Oberg talks about the four pillars, integration is one of the four. Intervening early is definitely one of the other

pillars which I think is a very important part, and that's where he's talking about his FAS, a very wonderful program.

But when we're talking about integration, LeRoy, it's probably the best thing that could happen when you're talking about fragmented services that kids suffer and that families suffer from, and that's an area that we're making sure occurs at the regional level as well as the provincial level and, of course, my colleague on the national level, which I think has really worked quite well. But you have to commend the people who have been on that program for the last four years, the 12,000 people who have been involved as well as the members who have been working very diligently in that respect.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Rob Lougheed, please.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thanks, Madam Chairman. Just one comment before I have a couple of questions here. During the PDD board, in going around the province I did some work with the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, I've overlapped with some of those people involved with that board, and in many areas of the province I heard some very positive things about the board and their work, the organizational structure, and comments that have come back. They're pleased with their funding, they're accomplishing some very good things within the community, and I think that board seems to be a real model to follow. I'm really, really impressed with what I'm hearing about it.

Some questions from over on page 209, the advocacy guardianship program there. Maybe a little bit of clarification and elaboration about what the program is, if you would, please. There was an increase from about \$4.7 million to \$5.4 million for that program. What do you anticipate will be accomplished with that? How many children - and I think maybe I did hear that question being asked already; I don't think I heard an answer yet - are involved in that program?

Over on the next page, page 210, FCSS is talked about. I do have opportunity in Fort Saskatchewan to have quite a few discussions with that group, and they're very involved and busy in the community. There's a half a million dollar increase to that funding, I notice. If you could comment on that a bit. Are all municipalities involved in this program, or is it optional? How does that work? If not all of them, how many municipalities in total are involved?

That's all the questions I really have for you right now.

DR. OBERG: Thanks, Rob. I'll go through a couple of the issues. I'll start with the FCSS program, as realistically I haven't mentioned it that much. As well, it's an extremely important program. One of the issues that looks exclusively at the \$500,000 and why the increase: as we looked at FCSS, unfortunately FCSS is a program that has not changed much in its per capita funding, and what has subsequently happened is that as the population of Alberta, which is extremely mobile, has moved around in communities, we have some communities that are receiving roughly \$14 per capita for FCSS programs, and we have other communities that are up as high as \$40 per capita. That just does not make a lot of sense, and it's not something that I can justify.

A year ago we put together a committee with FCSS to try and make some funding recommendations. As you know, last year we put in \$5 million towards decreasing this inequity issue. They felt that FCSS boards should not be decreased significantly, and I think that only makes sense. When you have an FCSS board in a small community that's functioning on \$45 or \$40 per capita, I think it's unreasonable of us to assume that they are going to take a huge cut down to \$15. I think that would devastate a lot of their programs on the economies of scale in their programs, and I think there are some issues there.



11:46

What this \$500,000 does is move towards creating equity between municipalities when it comes to these programs. We're not there yet. We'll take a considerable amount of more money to get there. I think the other issue that we have to deal with is: what happens to the people that are way out of line? A few of these programs deal with very small communities, so even though we're talking \$40 or \$45 per capita, the absolute dollar amount is very small. So these are some of the issues that we're grappling with. We put \$500,000 in this year, which has enabled new municipalities to come onstream, so we'll see how that works out.

Your question about the number of municipalities. Presently there are 271 municipalities participating in FCSS, which is a tremendous amount. There are three that are presently wanting to come on.

I think I'll use this time to comment a little bit on the FCSS issue, and I think there's one incredibly important issue. When I talk about the 271 municipalities, as you can assume, there are some municipalities that are quite small that are receiving FCSS money. I think a very good example is what has occurred in southern Alberta where Barons-Eureka-Warner have joined FCSS units all across southern Alberta to receive more money to create an economy of scale in what they do, and I must commend the board at Barons-Eureka-Warner for doing that. I would like to see other municipalities do that, where rather than receiving a very small amount of dollars, if they joined with the two or three municipalities that are 10 or 15 miles away to provide programs, I think that money would go a lot further. I think there's more economy of scale, and I think that would be beneficial for everyone. There are also Métis settlements involved in FCSS as well.

Your other question was on the advocacy and guardianship issue. Essentially, as you alluded to, there are two components to this program. The first one is the Children's Advocate, and the second one is the Public Guardian. The Children's Advocate's responsibility is to represent and protect the rights and interests and viewpoints of individual children who receive services from the child welfare system. They are obligated to investigate if there is an issue, if there's a complaint that is raised. Although the Children's Advocate does report to me as a member of this department, we're attempting to keep it at arm's length so that they can objectively determine what is wrong with the system. I think that's important. I think all of us who are close to the system tend to look beyond things and not necessarily see some of the smaller things that are happening.

I think the Children's Advocate is incredibly important, and it's something that we have increased the dollars quite significantly on. We are increasing the amount of staff. We're basically increasing them \$400,000 out of a \$2 million budget. It's close to 20 percent they're being increased this year. That's due partly to the need, but it is there to hire more staff.

Your other question was the number of children served. That is on page 172 of your book. The number of children served by the Children's Advocate was 2,519, our forecast in 1998-99. Our actual in '97-98 was 2,485, and our projected is 3,071. So we projected about a 500 increase in caseload; hence that is where the extra money is going in that department.

For the Public Guardian we're projecting a caseload of 2,149 for 1998-99, 2,174 for '99-2000. Just as a way of comparing, the number that are under private guardian are 9,600 forecast this year, and we also oversee those out of this office. So we're dealing with, realistically, a little over 11,000 people in the Public Guardian's office. Not all of them are directly as a guardian; however, they are there.

I believe that those questions have been answered. Did I miss one?

THE CHAIRMAN: We have time for maybe one quick question. Anyone on the government side, first? Shiraz.

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm looking at the collaborative efforts that have been put together with various ministries and would like to get your comments on how it impacts the social services department and the benefits in dealing with people in need. Particularly I'm looking at, for example, Community Development and how it has invested money in the senior citizens area that does have an impact for seniors, Advanced Education in literacy and investments in children's education, as well as Municipal Affairs in social housing meeting the needs of Albertans. So if you can comment on the impact these programs have had on your department.

DR. OBERG: I certainly can. First of all, as a general comment, Shiraz, I think we all realize that to draw specific silos in the social sciences field is extremely difficult. In areas such as transportation you can say that the transportation department looks after roads, but when it comes to individuals, every individual is different, and by virtue of the fact that we have different departments, we have to have some department in charge of specific things. I think there is a significant amount of overlap, and one of the challenges - and I've already alluded to it with Pearl - is on the integration side of this. There are things that perhaps my department should be doing but another department is doing. I think what we have to remember is that if the service is ultimately being provided, who administers the service is really of no consequence.

For example, Municipal Affairs is leading the Homelessness Task Force. Perhaps someone could say that it would be better off in my department, and certainly that discussion has been held. But the bottom line is that just by putting it in a different department, it is not going to change at all the benefits that go to the people. We are working closely with Municipal Affairs on the homeless issues, on the homeless shelters, attempting to get more shelter for these people. As you know, this is a very complex issue. However, it's one we're also working on with the municipalities, so this is a good example of where we all have to work together towards an outcome. The NGOs, or nongovernmental organizations, the business communities: we have to encourage these people to take responsibility for what's happening as well.

Advanced education is a very important part of my department. That may sound a little bit strange, and don't tell Clint I said that it was a part of my department. But essentially what is happening is that advanced education and social services are co-operating on the employment side of things. Advanced education in its career development component is the department that does the employability factors, the employability issues. We feel that we cannot do it. We can certainly identify who needs it, which is perhaps our task, and I think that's the right task. However, I believe it's the task of Advanced Education and Career Development to do the career development side of things, to build on the employability element of people who come under my department. Hence we tend to work extremely closely. As a matter of fact, we have a contract with them, I believe of about \$4 million, for them to look after some of the services on the employability side, because it makes more sense for them to look after it in conjunction with their other programs. So that's, you know, a critical component.

As we're moving ahead - and I've made this comment already - on the AISH program, a lot of the employability programs will be

included in Advanced Education and Career Development. We should not in this government be lining up duplicate systems within duplicate departments. That's something that we absolutely have to stay away from, and it's something that, as this gets fleshed out, will hopefully come under advanced education. We may be funding it - that's not really an issue - but they would be the ones that are delivering it. Hopefully if there's some other recommendation that comes out, if there's some other way we can do that, then that will certainly be looked at.

With regards to Community Development, obviously Community Development looks after the seniors' programs. What we are attempting to do - as people move from SFI, as people move from AISH, they tend to move to the seniors programs, whether or not it's the OAP or anything like that. There has to be that co-ordination so that when a person on AISH, for example, reaches 65 and goes into the OAP system, goes into the seniors' services system, they cannot fall through the cracks. One has to blend perfectly into the other one, and those are some of the issues we look at with that department.

#### 11:56

As I alluded to on school health, it's something that we will be working on very closely with Education. Indeed, we may actually be transferring some of our money to the school boards, something that has never been heard of before in government. Again, it just makes more sense for the school boards to be the co-ordinating body and indeed perhaps the administrative body for this initiative.

Health care. There have not been any questions specifically on medication, but between Health and Social Services that is a part where we are inextricably tied, when it comes to medication. We presently use the medication list that Alberta Health uses, with the exception of one drug. That one drug is called Zyban, which is an anti-smoking drug. It was one that I felt was important to put on our formulary. It is presently on our formulary and is not on the Health formulary.

Overall, although we may not be doing a job that is 100 percent being integrated, it's certainly something that we're moving towards. Another obvious partner, of course, is AADAC, through the fetal alcohol syndrome initiative. AADAC is the one who houses the money, and they will be doing a lot of their programs on that initiative.

MS CALAHASEN: The secretariat is involved too.

DR. OBERG: Also with the secretariat.

MS CALAHASEN: As with glue.

DR. OBERG: Sure. So these are some things that we're certainly moving towards. We're not completely there yet, but it is a goal of this department to become more integrated with the other departments.

THE CHAIRMAN: All right. We have one last quick one here. As you know, this is part of the government members' time. Then we'll have to have our motion to close.

MRS. SLOAN: Madam Chairman, just prior to the motion to close, I don't have a question, but I do have a point of privilege to raise. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, Greg.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'd like to ask my question to the minister, the minister, with his creative suggestion, of family and social services, advanced education, and career development. That's quite a tongueful.

MS CALAHASEN: He's developing his own ministry.

MR. MELCHIN: Good luck.

I'd like to just expand, actually, on one of my earlier questions and your answer. In the redesign of the formula for children's services, coming from case mix funding to a formula, what happens under this if one of the regions has a high caseload, substantially higher than projected in one year, and another one might have maybe substantially lower? Do you have the flexibility of moving those budget dollars back and forth to where the need is really addressed? Or is it assessment so that one region then would go into a deficit position and another one might retain a surplus? When you've gone to the formula, what's going to happen to the management of the people that come in, as to being able to provide the services that are required in any one given year?

If time permits, I certainly would just have you maybe quickly, if you wouldn't mind - there is discussion of prevention, the focus on prevention. Does that mean there's been a reallocation, I guess, of the program or, maybe just in dedication of thought, of the delivery of kinds of programs? So when you say that, yes, we want to deal with prevention, does that mean that it's additional kinds of things we're doing? Or is it just really a re-emphasis of existing programs?

DR. OBERG: Thanks, Greg. First of all, your question about the case mix funding. This is something that I alluded to earlier. First of all, in the agreements that are signed with the child and family services authorities, they will not have the ability to deficit fund. That is a clear agreement that they will have to sign. The second this is that they will be able to carry over surpluses, providing the surplus is designated as keeping consistent with, I believe, the Government Accountability Act. So as long as it is consistent with that . . .

MRS. DAVID-EVANS: They have to be able to approve it.

DR. OBERG: Right; and it has to have prior ministerial approval in order to carry over a surplus.

One of the issues you brought up - and it's certainly an issue that we will be monitoring and dealing with - is what happens if we see a huge increase in a caseload or, conversely, a decrease in a caseload in an area from what is budgeted. Anytime you move from an actual case amount funding to a population-based funding, you are hoping, in the first year especially, that it will work out well. We have provided an 11 percent increase in budgeting this year. We are seeing caseloads starting to come down. We are hoping that the child and family services authorities will find efficiencies, being closer to the community, that they will find better ways to do things, that they will find more effective ways to do things. We recognize that this may not occur in the first year, and consequently there was an 11 percent increase in funding for that. Certainly that is something we have to keep a close eye on.

I have instructed the authorities that they must be monitoring their caseloads, that they must be looking at their financials monthly, that they must keep on top of things, because it is a department where, if you don't know what's happening in the department, the spending can get out of control extremely quickly. I have warned them about that.

I also have a fair amount of faith in the CEOs. The majority of the CEOs are not new CEOs. The majority of them have been in this

department or other departments across Canada in the past, so I'm sure they have the knowledge to ensure that they will come in on their projected budgets. I think anytime we move from - and I mentioned this earlier as well - a flexible form of funding to a more rigid form of funding, it's something that we have to monitor extremely carefully and ensure that it occurs.

The second thing that you asked me about was the focus on prevention. Prevention is something that - quite frankly, if we're going to change what happens in child welfare, there has to be prevention occur. The child welfare system, the child and family services system, is mandated to do certain things. Under the Child Welfare Act there are certain things they must do. They must keep children safe. If the children are not safe, they must have the ability to apprehend the children and put them in a location where they are safe. That is their first and foremost responsibility under the Child Welfare Act. If they are able to do that cost-effectively, if they are able to do that with savings, then they have the ability - and I certainly encourage them, as does Pearl - to look at prevention, to look at how we can stop this cycle of children coming into the child welfare system. How can we stop it? What is the best way to stop it?

To try different things is the whole key to the early intervention program. The early intervention program is not just another pot of cash that people can access. It's there for one reason and one reason only, and that is to look at new ways of doing things. If these new ways work, if these new ways are effective, then you can spread the information around to the rest of the province so they can emulate what is occurring in that specific region, what they have done, in order to prevent the caseload in child welfare.

I, quite frankly, would absolutely love it if the caseload in child welfare were zero, because that would imply that everyone is being looked after in Alberta in a healthy manner. Unfortunately, I don't think that will ever occur, but we still have to work on it, and we have to focus on prevention. We have to put as much - and I'm not talking necessarily resources, although that certainly plays into it - effort as we can into stopping some of these problems. Resources are something that certainly does play into it. However, I think we have to discover where to put these resources.

Fetal alcohol syndrome is a very good example of that. As little as three or four years ago, there was very little known about fetal alcohol syndrome, but it's something that we are now seeing and that teachers are telling us is a huge, huge problem. Quite frankly, as a government it's our responsibility to make this more known to pregnant women. It's our responsibility to ensure that physicians know how to deal with it, that physicians know how to treat fetal alcohol syndrome. So that's what we're moving towards.

How much time do I have?

12:06

THE CHAIRMAN: We're out of time. Thank you.

DR. OBERG: We're out of time? Can I just give a couple of quick comments?

THE CHAIRMAN: Quick.

DR. OBERG: Quick. Thank you very much. It's been a delight. Thank you for all your questions. We will certainly get back with written answers on anything related to the budget that has not been answered.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. I'd like to also thank the minister and his staff for coming and Diane from the Clerk's office for her assistance and the *Hansard* team for being here and all the members who participated this morning.

Now, could you state your point of privilege. We will take it as notice, and then we'll have the closing motion.

MRS. SLOAN: My point of privilege is not to be confused with a question of privilege. I would just like to acknowledge the presence and assistance of Line Porfon, my assistant and researcher, who has provided invaluable assistance with respect to the briefing this morning.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much.

Mr. Melchin, please.

MR. MELCHIN: Madam Chairman, I'd like to move that under Standing Order 56(8)(b) the designated supply subcommittee on Family and Social Services conclude discussion on the 1999-2000 estimates of the Department of Family and Social Services and rise and report.

THE CHAIRMAN: All in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: All right. Would someone move we adjourn, please? I guess that was it; right?

AN HON. MEMBER: Those who aren't in favour.

THE CHAIRMAN: Oh, sorry. Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. The motion carries.

Would someone move we adjourn?

MR. SHARIFF: I so move.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Again, thank you, everyone, for your participation.

[The committee adjourned at 12:07 p.m.]

