

Title: Estimates of Children's Services, Monday, March 20, 2000

Date: 00/03/20

8:01 a.m.

[Mr. Melchin in the chair]

Designated Supply Subcommittee – Children's Services

Melchin, Greg, Chairman
Cao, Wayne
Cardinal, Mike
Johnson, LeRoy

Kryczka, Karen
Laing, Bonnie
Lougheed, Rob
MacDonald, Hugh

Massey, Don
Paul, Pamela
Shariff, Shiraz
Sloan, Linda

THE CHAIRMAN: Our time appointed is here. I'd like to welcome committee members. As far as procedure, we're here this morning for the designated supply subcommittee on Children's Services. We welcome the minister here with us and the members who were asked to be part of this committee.

I'd like to first put forward a motion for each of the members. We've actually discussed this amongst the various parties, and we will require, certainly, at some stage consent of the parties to approve this motion for the rules and procedures for this meeting this morning. I'd like to read it into the record to begin with. It says:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Orders 56 and 57 the designated supply subcommittee on Children's Services allocate the time for its consideration and debate of the 2000-2001 estimates of the Department of Children's Services as follows:

- (1) The time allocated for the subcommittee will be a maximum of three hours.
- (2) The minister responsible first addresses the subcommittee for a maximum of 20 minutes.
- (3) Official Opposition subcommittee members then have a maximum of two hours for questions and answers. Those members may allocate the time for questions among themselves as they see fit.
- (4) The independent Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs then has a maximum of 15 minutes for questions and answers.
- (5) Government subcommittee members have the remainder.

Be it further resolved that in the event government subcommittee members do not exercise their right to utilize the remaining time, the chair shall call for a motion to conclude discussion of the estimates and to rise and report.

Do we have any questions? I'd like to entertain, then, a motion to accept this resolution, if someone would like to so move. Okay; the Member for Calgary-West. Are we all agreed? Any opposed? Thank you.

Then pursuant to that resolution, we will turn the time over to the Minister of Children's Services for a maximum of 20 minutes for her opening comments.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to begin by introducing the staff that are with me today, asking and begging your indulgence that although we have a lot of staff present here this morning, this is a new ministry, in fact, carved out of the previous family and social services, and this becomes an opportunity for staff to hear what other people have to say about the ministry and to reflect on what they have provided you in earlier packages relative to the ministry itself. We supplemented – and I hope you found it useful – the supplementary sheets that explain and express the programs that are delivered in the ministry beyond what is in the business plan.

I'm accompanied by the deputy minister, Paula Tyler; Keray Henke, who is assistant deputy minister in charge of strategic planning and administrative support, and if I could direct your attention, I'll just introduce them as they sit: Darren Hedley, working in finance; Murray Finnerty, assistant deputy minister who is

working in terms of accountability performance measures and the executive director with the partnerships and linkages that are part of the ministry; my assistant, Elan Gough. Bill Meade is here, very kindly, as the CEO from Calgary, who will be able to assist with any of the questions you might have about what is actually going on in the street in terms of the actual CFSAs; and Bill Rice from communications. Right behind Darren is Tim Moorhouse, who is better known as Mr. FCSS in the province, and Lynn Groves-Hautmann, who handles the things with handicapped children's service, and Bryan Kelly, who is assisting in the very important work of the caseload review. I think that's all my staff, and I welcome Lynn to the proceedings as well today.

If I may, coming to the speaking notes, I'll welcome every member here. I am going to attempt to be brief in order to maximize the opportunity for everybody to ask questions. We will also do our very best to get those answers back within one week, and what we can get back within one week, we will certainly so do. If it isn't to your satisfaction a proper response, then we'll follow through.

The department in the business plan is highlighted. The child and family service authorities who essentially deliver our businesses. FCSS, that's \$38 million worth of our \$532 million, delivers, as you know, in a partnership with municipalities and First Nations and with us – of course, at least in the most part funded by the federal government of Canada.

The three divisions I highlighted in the introduction. Partnership and innovation: through that we're looking not only at the research but at the integration that we have with other ministries, with health, with education, with intergovernmental relations, also with housing and community development and other ministries that are very important partners to us. That's the whole ACI initiative that's contained therein. Our accountability in provincial services: the best practices performance management, which is something for us to not only evolve and develop but to improve upon; our provincial programs; and of course family and community support programs. Then in our strategy and support services we have really our essential administrative arm: our finance, legal, human resources, and the responsibility for strategic planning.

Provincial programs that are delivered predominately by the department include adoption services. Many of you will be familiar with the fact that we keep records of children that have been under our care in the government for a hundred years, and that's part of the postadoption registry. The day care staff qualifications and a lot of the training arm. The Alberta children's initiative, again, is part of the linkages with other ministries and family and community support services. A lot of the programs there that are generated at the local level are supplemented. I'll use the illustration of the after school child care last year in Edmonton. When we have other pressing needs, then we try and involve ourselves to supplement those resources, and in that particular case, we did so in partnership with Human Resources and Employment. Our role in the department is allocating funding and resources, establishing policies for and with the authorities, and monitoring the authorities themselves and their performance. Our budget, as I've said already, is \$537 million this year, and it includes \$485 million for children and families and \$38 million for family and community support services.

Through the 18 authorities we assess local needs, establish priorities, and plan for the region, ensuring that family and children have reasonable access to quality services, that they follow provincial standards, and we monitor and assess those services. Those services are delivered by staff. You'll note in your briefings that there are over 2,000 staff that are direct employees through the child and family service authorities, and there are also contract workers that work through contract to the authorities. There are over 3,000 of those people. You'll note further in information that you may have received either in the business plan of Human Resources or in the manner in which we have delivered information to you that there were increased dollars for contract staff to permit at least a 5 percent flexibility in funding of those staff.

We have a significant provision of services at the local level. Handicapped children's services is one of the biggest ones. You've read an awful lot recently about how Albertans, North Americans, and people all over the world are concerned about the incidence of handicapped children. In Alberta we have 70 children who cost between \$45,000 and \$70,000. In fact, speaking to one authority we have spent over \$200,000 transferring this child back and forth to get programs that are very individually tailored in Colorado. So there are some very huge costs attributable to some of our caseload.

If I can reflect back, some of you will be very well aware that we had to go for supplementary estimates for two reasons. Number one, we had not forecast the number of children that we would actually serve. We served 12,922 children at the end of December of '99, and that's well over what we had ever anticipated.

8:11

The second thing is that much of the income for child welfare cases had rested within the income supports for families, and defining and reorganizing to have that income available has taken some work not only in adjusting our forecast but making sure there's enough to look after at least 200 more cases than we had in October, when I was first talking to Treasury about what we had. If you look at the children that are in care in their homes, about 61 children are receiving care in their homes, which was something that many of the government members had cited to me was an important thing to do. We also have children that are taken care of in group homes and foster homes, and we have an important responsibility in supplementing, on average, \$323 per day care family that has assistance so that they can work with their budget and also have proper support for children. We also supplement families through family day homes, and those are through contracts. I believe there are 80 contracts with the child and family service authorities in the province, predominantly in the major urban settings. So there are a number of ways we are augmenting services that children receive at the local level, and those are part of the driving cost.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I think it's astonishing that this year there are no predictions for increasing the child population in Alberta. In fact, our rate of growth in caseload isn't as rapid as it was three years ago. Nonetheless, the cases are becoming increasingly more complex.

When you look at cases that are cited therein, they're almost too horrible to speak of, multiple partners, some absolutely ghastly things about children. About a third of those that we have in care have some alcohol-related defect who don't even learn from bad past experiences, like the child who was raped after getting into a white van who said: well, I guess I've learned my lesson; I shouldn't go into white vans. That was a very serious thing for her. We have to start earlier, start now, and build those bridges for children and families in the very first stages of development, from zero to six. That is increasingly what was discussed at the forum and in the task force for children at risk. That is increasingly our emphasis because of our overwhelming awareness of the gaps that exist when parents

don't know how to parent or when 25 year olds that are going on mentally 15 have increasing numbers of children because they want somebody to love and to love them back. So that is, in fact, the very real challenge that we have.

Totally CFSAs received \$370.8 million for managing their own caseloads. The authority budget is a very complex formula that was worked out in consultation with all the authorities, with all the providers coming together at a table and looking at the things that really impact the rising costs of dealing with children. They determined that the right factors were the number of children in the region, the number of children in single-parent families, the number of children in low-income families, the number of children in very low-income families, and the number of aboriginal children.

I've talked about First Nations, an important element, of course, with the CFSA boards, with representation equaling the number of both aboriginal and nonaboriginal. Thirty-seven of those First Nations groups deliver their own child welfare services, and eight use the local authorities and exclusively contract there. I'm very sensitive to the fact that by putting our executive director, Nancy Reynolds, in charge of these contracts, as we review and negotiate contracts with First Nations groups, we are increasingly being prompted by them to allow them to be total masters of their own destiny in the delivery of children's services within their boundaries and sometimes beyond. Many of them want to have relationships with other large urban CFSAs in order to take care of children that are off site so that those children never lose the cultural and spiritual influence of the original First Nations body.

Looking at our child welfare caseload, it is difficult and more complex to manage. The critical issues have seen us rise from 8,000 to 11,000 cases between '93-94 and '98-99. I've talked about the number of children that we have within our ministry. Many of these children with multiple needs have fetal alcohol syndrome, mental health concerns, behavioural issues, and physical disabilities, and naturally we don't do all of the service to children ourselves. We have at least 1,000 children that have been part of the PDD board's mission in the past that will be managed through the child and family services authorities. The Mental Health Board received \$5 million last fall to work on the crisis management for children with mental health concerns. So a great part of what we do, not only with the FCSS and CFSAs, is managing programs for children and families with other partners.

We have needs for highly specialized treatment and a vast array of services from professionals. If I may, when you have noticed that you have clinical psychologists and other professionals who want a 50 percent upwards adjustment of their fees, it becomes very hard for local authorities to manage, and they are really challenged on those contracts. But I'm very confident that with the work we have by Bill Meade and other CEOs in this province, they will be extremely accountable and they will be much better monitored in the future than we've ever been able to do it in the past.

We have provided, in our review of caseload growth, terms of reference and other information and recent press releases to you. I just draw your attention to the fact that on March 16, Youth Connections links young Albertans to greater employment opportunities as part of our partnership with Clint Dunford, and the task force that was announced by the Minister of Justice on the 17th related to ways that we can work better with family court. These are all things that will impact our community-based delivery, and hopefully we'll get a lot of information from that.

One of the things I mentioned earlier was early support and prevention. Two years ago for programs for early intervention we provided about \$2 million. Last year it was \$18.5 million, and this year, in this coming year's budget, it is \$21.5 million. So it is a re-emphasis of what we see as significant to do in our funding of local authorities.

Some may ask me about the Youth Secretariat. Gary Severtson,

simply put, is in charge of reviewing all the youth needs throughout Alberta, and he's doing an excellent job of going about Alberta and talking with adolescents about ways and means by which we can serve their mental health issues and their transition to adulthood in a better fashion. Mr. Chairman, just like we do not kick out our 18 year olds and say good-bye, farewell, you cannot expect foster families and children who are still in need of family support to part, so we have significant numbers of extensions, which are actually increasing the costs as our child welfare caseload ages. I think that's an important element to remember when you're looking at our business plan.

Our task force will be reporting very soon; that's the Task Force for Children at Risk. Taber released some preliminary results from this past year, as you saw just last week. About \$750,000 is identified in this budget, and it is not what our MLA task force is spending. It has been spent on other initiatives to support the community of Taber in their request to learn more about aftermath protocol and to provide programs and counseling and special services for those children.

I've commented about the Alberta children's initiative. I would ask every one of you later to become a crusader to get people to stop drinking. Our fetal alcohol initiative is delivered through the 18 committees at the local level, committees that partner various providers, but I'm not convinced that we're going far enough yet in actually telling people what the impact of alcohol is on pregnant women.

The Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, family violence, and protection of the victims by removing the perpetrator, which was done in our legislation last year, is also administered here. We looked after last year about 4,900 women in shelters and over 6,000 children.

8:21

In conclusion – and I hope I'm still within my time frame – why invest in our children in Alberta? I'd say this: quite simply because somebody else isn't. I look at the fact that on Saturday night, attending a concert with singer Michael Burgess, I'm the only one there with a grandchild. It's because I can't bear the thought of him leaving; he's moving. But I looked around the audience, and people were surprised to see a child. We don't do what your parents and mine did. We don't go places as families the way we did. We don't do those kinds of things in society. It is not this government's fault. It's nobody's fault here, but it is a societal change that has seen us lever to babysitters and to other providers the kinds of things our parents used to do.

As long as society tolerates that type of approach, then we must do something, because if one of those children happened to grow up and lead a very at-risk existence and end up in the court system – and many of those who do end up in courts have a background of FAS or FAE or some other horrible negligent or sexual risk – if they happen to harm one of our children that have grown up in a different environment, then we'll only have ourselves to blame.

I'm here to answer your questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Minister Evans. We'll turn the time over to the Official Opposition subcommittee members for two hours. You'll have the time as you see fit, be it to rotate amongst yourselves as to how much time you want to take for questions. You could also have the opportunity for more of an open dialogue with the minister or for written questions, purely at your discretion.

From Edmonton-Riverview, Linda Sloan.

MRS. SLOAN: Good morning, everyone. My thanks to the minister and the members of the ministry for being here this morning.

To begin, I'd like to provide some positive statements with respect

to the activities of the ministry over the last year. We have certainly seen an increase in the willingness of the minister and the ministry to provide information to us on critical issues relative to Children's Services and the provision of supports and programs for vulnerable children in this province, and we'd like to acknowledge that on the record. I think it's also important to indicate that with respect to vulnerable children and the developmental needs of children in this province in the critical period from birth to six years of age, personally I view those particular initiatives as nonpartisan initiatives and have endeavoured, with the receptivity of the minister, to provide support for those children for whom we have not succeeded in making interventions in those critical years and now have to cope with the aftermath, through providing services in child welfare and in the programs for disabilities.

I would also like to indicate on the record that the Official Opposition would like to see the government succeed in their efforts to review child welfare and the Children's Advocate's office, and we would also like to see this province have the lowest child welfare caseload in the country, not through initiatives that callously reduce the caseload but through meaningful initiatives that actually make the development of children and our family environments more healthy. So that is the philosophy Mr. Chairman, with which we are approaching these estimates this morning.

We recognize, though, that there is, as there always is, a political ideology that takes precedence, runs the machine if you will, and we recognize those challenges as they exist for this ministry. We see the increased degree of funding that is in this year's budget from lottery estimates. We see the increased allocation from the federal government.

As I sat in the Health and Wellness estimates last Friday and reviewed the increasing millions of dollars that we put into high-tech procedures in this province with no accompanying statistics about the survival rate or quality of life for those particular recipients, I think we would be well served if we put an equal amount of money into the development of children. That is a goal that I think we could commit ourselves to working together to achieve.

My questions this morning are going to be provided under some particular theme areas, and it's our intention, Mr. Chairman, to approach our two hours in 20-minute intervals. I will not be taking my full 20. I'd like to have the minister respond to the first two theme areas of questions, and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods will proceed from there.

My first category of questions relates to the Social Care Facilities Review Committee, and I would like to ask the following questions. I could not find – and perhaps it was my own omission – where the funding allocation for this committee is in the budget. I'm wondering if it has been transferred or encompassed under another budget area. The minister is familiar, as am I, with some of the occurrences relative to this committee and its function in the last year, and I would like to ask the minister or deputy minister to explain how this committee was not fully apprized of its statutory mandate relative to investigations.

That reality came clear in the last – well, it actually arose through a complaint submitted in 1998 relative to the death of Mr. Wayne Oles. The committee was not informed of the complaint with regards to the death of this man or the subsequent request that it be investigated, and it is my understanding they were not fully aware that they had a statutory responsibility to investigate complaints. In the midst of that complaint being filed and that death occurring, a mandate change for this committee was instituted by the ministry which in essence breached the statute. It said that the mandate of the committee would now be to conduct reviews of the facilities, and that was the theme that was encompassed in the annual report tabled in the Legislature in November last year.

I would cite specifically from that report, and this is the report that's circulated to the public. The committee visits funded social care facilities in Alberta at least once every two years. These include group homes, vocational rehab centres, foster homes, day cares, family day homes, children's social care facilities, and women's shelters. The committee receives complaints and conducts investigations about the standards of care, treatment, and accommodations.

The reality is, however, Mr. Minister, that there are no regulations about how these investigations will occur, and I don't believe that they should be occurring or conducted on the basis of one case, but rather there should be a formalized process that is in regulations to guide it.

There is no incorporation in the performance measures of the ministry anything relative to the Social Care Facilities Review Committee: how many investigations they have conducted, how many complaints they've received, how many investigations were conducted by the ministry itself that perhaps in fact should have been conducted by this committee. I would ask whether or not there was any conscious or by omission directing of incidents requiring investigations away from this committee into the perhaps more controlled environment of the ministry itself. Accompanying that, how many investigations relative to incidents in social care facilities were done internally by the ministry in the last three years? I would also ask: what initiatives will be undertaken and what budget allocated to train and educate the committee re its investigative function and to put the necessary human resources in place to allow those investigations to occur? I would also ask if the ministry is prepared to make publicly available a policy and procedure manual for this committee like is accessible for the Citizens' Appeal Panel decision processes.

8:31

My second category of questions this morning is relative to deaths in care. Consecutively since assuming the responsibilities as critic for family and social services and now the Children's Services ministry, I have asked this government: how many children have died in care during the past fiscal year? These are not statistics that are annually published. If they are tracked, they are not publicly available. We also acknowledge and are aware that the medical examiner's report has not been published or available since 1994, and the reasons given when that was initially asked was because the funding allocations had not been there to permit them to publish an annual report on an annual basis.

In 1997 Minister Oberg released after a number of questions in the House an informal statement relative to deaths of children either known or in the care of child welfare up to 1997, and it was 52. We've had nothing, really, since that time to indicate what the number is today. This remains an issue that is not a performance measure. In fact the performance measure, as it's cited, is the "percentage of children who stay free from abuse or neglect while receiving child protection services." That, again, is a further step away from accountability, in my mind. Previously what the ministry tracked, at least had made available in '97, were deaths while a child was known or in the care of child welfare. So if they had received services in the last fiscal year and then had subsequently died, that death was included in those numbers. According to this measure, you're looking at only tracking those "who stay free from abuse or neglect" – no mention of deaths – "while receiving child protection services."

I would raise in this category of questions that we have seen for those children that have died an extensive delay in public inquiries in this province relative to their deaths, and I've raised Jordan Quinney as an example. Acknowledging the importance of the justice proceedings, is it not also equally important that there be

some public investigation and accountability relative to the government's role and responsibility for these children while in care?

We've had one further reported death just in the early part of this year in Red Deer in a foster home. We've also been made aware that perhaps there was at least one other death that occurred in the latter part of last year that was not publicly reported. We would urge the government to make those statistics available. I think they are a measure. While not a positive measure they do assist in determining whether or not our interventions are being successful and to a great degree can guide the ministry and their authorities in the development of programs and interventions in the future.

I've raised in previous estimates the Grove inquiry, which was undertaken in B.C. in 1995 after the death of a child that was receiving care from child welfare. We've not seen that kind of substantive investigation. In that child's death they looked at every contact that had been made by the department with that child and family throughout the last, I believe it was, year or two years of his life. I would like to urge the government to try and make that something that is incorporated in the coming year's business plan and budget.

With those two groups of questions, Mr. Chairman, I would be most interested in hearing the minister's reply.

MS EVANS: Thank you for your opening statements and the acknowledgment of the work the staff are doing in the ministry to be open and accountable and as transparent as possible in the delivery of services to children.

I think, as usual, the member of Her Majesty's opposition has highlighted two areas of interest which are of deep concern to this government. First of all, I fully acknowledge the issues that have been brought before the government through her intervention of providing a notice and laying some question and complaint, and the endorsement of the Ombudsman that in fact the complaint was a valid complaint, I believe, was a letter that highlighted that there should be some review of this in the procedural sense.

I'm not going to be able to give full detail of that except to say that the Social Care Facilities Review Committee, although not highlighted within this – at the very first stages, while we were building the business plan, we were not sure what the final home would be for the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. Noting that the dollars for the committee rest with us – there's a reference to the review process on page 47 in the business plan, but the dollars for it come under our corporate administration. I believe that overall it's about \$100,000 – is that correct? – to manage the whole committee, for the work that they do. That committee is still returning to me some response to the questions that have been raised and the concerns that have been identified by the Ombudsman.

I'd like to supplement that by just another acknowledgment, and perhaps it's illuminating to people here. You would be aware from reading recent newspaper articles that the present residence for group home inspections is also with this ministry. So the deputies from the various departments have been meeting to review those standards as well. I think that the points that have been made about having a proper manual, about having it as publicly accountable and transparent as the child welfare review panel are well made. I think that's the ultimate goal with the group home review, and some of those things that have been highlighted with it are not unlike some of the issues that may well have been raised with the Social Care Facilities Review Committee.

I was very satisfied when I released their report earlier in this present year, the year 2000, that the committee itself believed that there was much to be done both in the review of how staff are trained and how facilities are attended to, but I would ask the chair's

indulgence and that of others here to provide more detailed information to that perhaps in response.

The second point I wanted to comment on is about deaths in care. I've actually looked at what our neighbours to the west have been doing, as has been highlighted here by the hon. member's question, what they do in British Columbia in very detailed investigations. They investigate in British Columbia not simply the death of children that are in care but the death of every child. There may well be merit because there could well be questions about the deaths of children that occur in this province. So through our review process, not only the review of the Children's Advocate but through the other work that the review committees are doing and even in our caseload review, I think it behooves us to take a look at whether we are doing this as prudently and learning as much as we can from that type of review.

I know there's no mention of deaths in the plan. To the hon. member I would highlight that one of the chief tasks of our assistant deputy minister on performance measures will be in fact to make sure that the performance measures more meaningfully focus on those things that can be primary indicators. I respect what you've said on performance measures on two counts: reviewing and reducing the child welfare caseload not because of poor practices but because the need simply no longer exists for some children. In terms of deaths of children in care, where we can learn from and do this better and abbreviate the process yet still have it thoroughly done, I think we would serve everyone well. I have spoken to families of children who have died while in care, and I know they would concur with that particular perspective. It leaves a shadow hanging for too long.

On the public accountability aspect I do agree, Mr. Chairman, with my officials. Later we will talk about an update on the release of those figures of deaths of children in care and provide what we can about our intent of when the next release will be relative to those.

8:41

One final point I would make on that. I have spoken directly with social workers who have been attending to families where a child has died in care. It is a most painful circumstance for them as well, so when we release those figures, we will try and be sure that we are releasing them with the thought that we will learn from that rather than affixing blame or attempting to punish anybody. I know that that would be the member's intent.

So further information to come, and the department is making note.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Dr. Massey.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, Madam Minister. We all, at least most of us, come to the department through experiences in our constituency offices. I suspect that most often we don't hear from the people when things are going well, and we end up with those cases where things aren't going that well, but we've been well served in the office when we've called your department for help, and I appreciate that very much.

I wanted to ask some general questions, if I could. The Children's Forum. I went through and looked at a number of recommendations in the Children's Forum that would affect Learning; for instance, the recommendations on class size and the recommendations for early programs for young children. Who in the ministry is responsible for making sure that those things happen when they are really the responsibility of another ministry in terms of financing? [interjection] I'd rather have a conversation, if that's all right.

MS EVANS: If I may. The forum report in its entirety has gone to the deputies and the other ministers, and they will be responding in kind. Our package responding to the forum report will highlight what the Minister of Learning will bring back relative to class size, relative to things like school lunches, et cetera. That's how it will be done.

DR. MASSEY: So they won't fall through the cracks?

MS EVANS: No. In fact, that commitment has been made by Mrs. Klein and the volunteer committee as well as by our Premier that we would not allow them to fall through the cracks. Our ministry plays a co-ordinating role there.

If I may respond to something you might be asking. We have expended \$244,000 on the forum, and the amount I believe I gave you earlier, hon. member, was about a \$300,000, maybe \$309,000 expenditure for the forum. I'm just responding to you now that so far \$244,000 has been expended, and more bills are still coming in. It's relative to the printing and dissemination of the reports too. So you will hear both on the forum and on the task force hopefully later in the month of April, not that much later either. I'm hoping to have both of those reports out with at least our intent, what we would be doing with programs like the class size.

DR. MASSEY: Okay. It's going to be interesting to see what is actually done, because as you know from your previous life, it's very expensive when you start reducing those class sizes.

MS EVANS: Well, if they went to the extent that they implied within the report, hon. member, our building branch would be very busy. It would be 24-hours-a-day school.

DR. MASSEY: That's right. We wouldn't have to worry about the utilization formula. It would no longer be a problem for schools.

May I ask about staff? There's a reference on page 57 where it looks at the "percentage of front-line staff with greater than one year of experience." Can you talk a little bit about staff and how easy it is or not to secure qualified staff? Associated with that, are there problems with government salaries and agency salaries, a difference in those that there was when we were talking to Clint Dunford about social services.

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member has asked an excellent question. Absolutely there are problems. There are problems even with the student health initiative grabbing staff from our child and family services authorities, because school boards and regional health authorities pay more than our department currently does, or they seem to be able to afford to pay more.

Now, with our most recent settlement we will be coming up there, but there are also differences between staff that make it more attractive for staff to work with other parts of government even though their grid placement – and I've checked this very carefully – can seemingly describe similar duties. The contract agencies have been spending less. That's a bit of a blanket statement, acknowledging that there are various contracts, but there's about a 5 percent adjustment in the budget this year to hopefully help those contractors pay more.

I think we still have some work to do with day care situations, because since we removed that operational grant to day care, day cares have not been paying their staff as much. Now, by putting the benefits from the national child benefit directly to the low-income family, we have removed that situation. So when you're talking about staff with one year of experience, up in the north we have a hard time because people want to attract staff, that we train so very

well, from other areas, even other provinces. I think it's part of the supply and demand.

To that end I will be meeting with members of the board of governors and the presidents of universities and colleges about the middle of April and talking about two things. First, about the staff training itself, so that we teach staff to train others, for trainers to train others, to recognize that the most important thing a child who's robbed of hope needs is to get some hope back and to build some of that hope within themselves. Counselors' training, social workers' training is an important element so that they feel capable of coping. The second thing is to make sure that in the articulation of the two- and four-year program we're recognizing that the two-year program was always intended to serve those far reaches of the province where we couldn't get four-year qualified staff. Members of the association of registered workers did accept that there could be a qualification differential yet still exist on the same grid, recognizing that there was a need for somebody with some degree of qualification.

So there are a number of issues in short, Mr. Chairman, that surround the overall staffing issue. At the very outset, when I first took over this ministry, my thought was that I had to find placements for children who needed care. My first mission, I believe, is to find ways of giving people the tools so that they can find placements for children in care, and this whole performance area is one of the parts that we will be intensely focusing on in the caseload review. That will be able to tell us just exactly what burdens are borne by staff, and it will tell us other things, how we can help those staff workers work better.

If I may just add to that point. I'm very satisfied that this government provided computers and some of the software and hardware that would go along with making the jobs of people in the field much easier, but the training that has to still be done to help – even the use of transcribers would often help social workers to do their work and have the flexibility in the management of their own caseload. I just wanted to point out that we're well aware of some of those issues that surround the staffing element, and when I do meet with child and family service authorities, they kindly arrange for me to meet with staff so that I can understand from the front lines what they're actually facing.

I may have gone on too long. I'm sorry.

DR. MASSEY: It just seems that stability for those workers who are working with families that are in such distress is really crucial, that they stay with them for a long period of time to get to know them and to help them solve their problems.

I have to confess that I'm not quite clear on the sorting out with the department of human resources. Has separating out the support for families caused any difficulty in trying to serve children, having the money in that human resources budget? It goes to a question I was able to ask in the human resources estimates, and that was on the support level for families: how was it determined how much families would receive each month? That seems to be so crucial and related to what happens to children.

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member has highlighted and profiled something I intend to take to agenda and priorities and to Treasury, and that is: how are we through the various ministries supporting those that are very low income or low income? We have through Community Development a housing rent supplement, for example. We have a number of programs for children in need. We have foster care programs. We have support for single-income families. But overall I don't think we have as clear a picture as I think would be useful for this government in defining the levels of support.

8:51

On the separation of the two ministries I'm not believing that we reduced or missed a beat in terms of the actual care that's provided for families. I haven't received that type of complaint, although it is true that people have profiled poverty. Where we're doing a lot of work with the Youth Secretariat and Gary Severtson's work is focusing on children in need and the support they get when they are over 18 and making that transition to adulthood. That's one area where we're working very hard with Human Resources and Employment.

I have to tell you that even when I was Minister of Municipal Affairs, it astounded me that when you met with some of the single-income families and very low-income families in Calgary, for example, they may not even be aware that their rent is supplemented through rent supplement to their landlord. In the articulation of any of these programs I think it's not to try and illustrate that we're spending more but to illustrate where the needs are greatest and where we could actually fill the gap with a more positive result. So I don't think it's exclusive to our ministry that we're looking at some of these potentials for dropping the ball.

DR. MASSEY: It's not your ministry but the support for those families that need assistance. I was surprised – and I guess I should have followed it up – that there is no real rationale for setting those levels of support, that there isn't a basket of costs that are looked at. At least, the minister seemed to indicate that it was sort of a political balancing act in terms of how much you could give without having people become upset, and I guess that upset me too.

MS EVANS: I heard last year several times, as we did in the House here, about LICO versus the MBM system of measuring the support that's required for a family. I don't know who will ever resolve the scale, but I think the important thing in Alberta is to make sure that we have the dollar support so that families don't go hungry. The bottom line for me is that if the family has the children fed but the mother not, that's not a successful program either. So we will work on that, and in responding more in-depth to your question, I will ask the Minister of Human Resources and Employment to help me in my written response to you.

DR. MASSEY: My question is more of a general question, and you may not even want to answer it. Does it in any way concern you where the money comes from for this department for education, for instance from lotteries, and the growing dependence upon that source of funding?

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, it is a philosophical question that I have asked myself a number of times. I know the revenue source is \$1.4 million within this budget, and I suppose that I'd have to say that as politicians we kid ourselves if we gather revenue in and pretend that it's not going into one pot. It is all going into one pot. I think the most important thing is: are we assuring that needs should always be provided for with that \$1.4 million? I believe they should be. I actually believe there might be some way that in the future we could work with the Ministry of Gaming to see if any of the programs that relate to addictions, to FAS/FAE could be very targeted with the dollars from that, because there is an element of education of people at the local level in the community-based programs. Just like the credit counseling services provided through the Minister of Government Services, it seems like there is a direct cause and effect or underlying tenets.

So, yes, if it was going to be threatened by it being pulled away, I think it would be tragic, but I can assure you that the dollars there would not be threatened. It would have to come from yet another

revenue source. Mr. Chairman, I am saying that to some degree when we do gather revenues, when we do use them for provincial programs, they do become part of the general revenue fund no matter how we might want to describe it to ourselves.

DR. MASSEY: Okay. That's fine for now.

THE CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Gold Bar, I guess. You can actually allocate the time amongst yourselves back and forth as you wish.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, hon. minister and everyone.

I have a number of questions at this time and specifically in regards to the regions or authorities. I see we have roughly the same number of authorities as we do regional health authorities in this province. I'm curious, as to whenever the department was set up, how these authorities were also determined. For the hon. minister's convenience, on page 83 of estimates is the list of course.

My first question would be: why is there consistently a decrease in the funding within 12 of the 18 child and family services authorities for day cares? How much of this can be attributed to the decrease in the operating allowance?

My next question would be: to what does the department attribute the variance of increased funding in the areas of child welfare for the different regions? Why is the Sun Country child and family services authority forecast to receive a 20 percent or better increase in funding for child welfare? This would lead one to question how many additional children this is anticipated to assist?

Then we go down to southeast Alberta. Why is Southeast Alberta child and family services authority forecast to receive an over 28 percent increase in funding for child welfare? Why does this region require a 17 percent increase in funding for other program costs, and what are these other costs?

Calgary Rocky View now. Why is Calgary Rocky View forecast to receive over a 30 percent increase, a large increase, in funding for child welfare? How many additional clients will be served by this money, and how many additional staff will be hired and in what positions? Why does Calgary Rocky View require an additional close to 20 percent, I believe, for other program costs, and what are these additional program costs?

Why is the Diamond Willow authority forecast to receive a 20 percent increase in funding for child welfare. Again, how many additional children is this anticipated to assist?

The Ribstone authority. Why is it now forecast to receive an over 27 percent increase in funding for child welfare? How many additional children is this anticipated to assist? Why is this region needing an additional 15 percent for other program costs, and what are these additional costs?

Now, over to West Yellowhead. Why is the West Yellowhead authority also receiving close to 12 percent less funding for day care?

The Keystone authority. Why is the Keystone authority receiving also close to 14 percent less for day care?

Now, the Ma'Mōwe Capital region is forecast to receive close to a 30 percent increase in funding for child welfare. I'm curious. How many additional children here are to be assisted with this increase? Why does this region need an additional over 17 percent in other program costs?

Now the next one. Why is the Sakaw authority forecasted to receive a 20 percent increase in funding for child welfare? How many additional children is this anticipated to assist?

I see the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca here. I'm glad he is here.

9:01

MR. CARDINAL: Your Cree's not too bad.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay.

Now, the next authority down the list for me is the Sakaigun. They are forecasted to receive 12 percent less funding for their day care, as well.

Why is region 13 forecasted to receive a 30 percent increase in funding for child welfare, and how many additional children is this anticipated to assist? Why does this region receive an additional 18 percent in other program costs, and what are these additional costs?

Now region 14. Why is region 14 forecasted to receive a 14 percent increase in funding for child welfare? Again, how many additional children is this anticipated to assist? Why does this region receive 7 percent less for day care?

Why is the Awasak authority forecasted to receive a 14 percent increase in funding for child welfare, and how many additional children are going to be helped with this initiative? Why does this region receive 8 percent less for day care?

The Silver Birch authority. Why is the Silver Birch authority forecasted to receive a 16 percent increase in funding for child welfare? How many additional children is this anticipated to assist? Why does this region receive 6 percent less for day care?

There's one more authority here. Why is the Neegan authority forecasted to receive 11 percent less funding for day care? Where is the difference going to be made up there?

The last one on the list is the Métis settlements. Why is the Métis settlements authority forecasted to receive a 43 percent increase in funding for child welfare? Again, how much of this money that will be provided will result in frontline assistance? How many additional children is this anticipated to assist? Why does this region receive that amount of funds?

I'm also curious about the ministry income statement that has been provided. We look at the revenue, and in one section it is mentioned – I find it ironic that in internal government transfers so much of this money is funded through lotteries. I'd think there would be problems in some families certainly with the income earners having difficulty with gambling. The transfers from the federal government are a significant portion of the total funding. However, I see that in one income statement it's just mentioned as internal government transfers, and then in another one, which I do not have before me, lottery money is mentioned. Is that just an oversight, or is that part of the communications plan? I would be curious to know that.

I'm going to have some more questions, I believe, later on, but I would be very interested in the measure of low-income cutoff. Now, other people dismiss this as an entirely inappropriate measure of poverty or poverty-related conditions. How does this new department feel about the use of the low-income cutoff as an accurate measure to determine what is needed for people who have very little or very modest incomes? Is it a family of four? Is the benchmark going to be a \$35,000 income or what? Now with this new department, what exactly can we expect with LICO, or low-income cutoff?

The increased incidence of low birth weight children in the province. I can see from the performance measures, which have yet to be expanded – and that's understandable. What are we going to do about this problem?

The money that is being allocated. I see at the back we're looking at full-time equivalents. There's a significant number of new employees that are going to be in the department. Is the ministry concerned about recruiting staff, particularly about recruiting staff to areas of the province where traditionally it's been difficult to get people to work, in the far north and in some of the rural areas? I think the staff and the professional services that they will provide are

needed. What is the department at this time doing to ensure that they can recruit people to remote locations if they're needed?

At this time I will end my questioning and turn it over to one of my hon. colleagues. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Would you like a response first from the minister?

MR. MacDONALD: If she would like to, sure, but I can certainly wait until after my colleagues are done questioning.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's your choice.

MS EVANS: It's at the pleasure of the opposition. What's your preference? I could give some preliminary responses, and some more detail would be provided later. But I'd certainly have some responses.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. That's good.

MS EVANS: I'll make it very brief. Many of the questions the hon. member has asked are questions I had myself. In fact, if I could just reflect back to last year, the 18 authorities got together and from estimates calculated budgetary funds assigned to each of the 18 authorities. All 18 agreed to vote on where the placement of those funds would be. So in actual fact Calgary and Edmonton received less in that adjustment and in that work that was done by the 18 authorities. The predictions, quite simply put, had not forecast as accurately as they could have the placement need for all the children. We overestimated some of the aboriginal needs, and we have not targeted them as well as they might be in some areas. We have also seen an adjustment based on the formula I talked about earlier, with the single parent, the low income, and the very low income adjusted to the actual needs.

We've also had huge growth in caseload in some particular areas. Sometimes children are fostered outside an authority, and this is one of the new wrinkles, Mr. Chairman, that's giving a lot of angst not only to the authorities but to our staff as they try to sort out the interauthority protocol of dealing with those children that are fostered somewhere else.

If I could just make one observation in response to the day care issue, Medicine Hat found to its astonishment that it had many more children who needed day care subsidy than they actually had subsidies assigned for. It is a policy of government to provide those subsidies, so we provide them. We just make those adjustments. We've tried to work the adjustments this year so that it's more clear who gets what within the context of the programs they are delivering to each.

9:11

If I may on the staff recruitment thank you for your comment and observation. It's something that we have to work on, that we are working on. My earlier remarks about the work we're doing with the training institutions hopefully will help us in making sure that we cover some of the circumstances.

I wanted to just comment on your low-income cutoff acknowledgment. As you know even our hon. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, has questioned the use of this measure across Canada. It is a measure that has been challenged both for the elements it contains and the lack of recognition of some. There's no regional variance allowed in there, so it becomes problematic. It does reflect a judgment, too, of what it takes to live in our society, and it's different within some parts of Canada. So in a sense what we try to do with the authorities is balance those costs. We have a modest contingency. For example, if a far northern group needs additional

support, they can get that by appealing to the ministry for additional dollars to be transferred for something like transportation for sparsity and distance and so on. So we have some modest capacity to help with that.

The other thing we have to always be very cognizant of – and the authorities themselves at the community base agreed with this formula because they recognize that while they may have a distance problem there, some of the children that are resident predominantly are fetal alcohol children and are probably in this community. Although I'm not saying they're not elsewhere, there's a good congregation of them here that it costs more to deliver the service to. You've probably heard me speak about estimates for a million dollars for a lifetime and some as high as \$1.5 million if they're affected by FAS/FAE.

Mr. Chairman, can I assure you that on the very specifics of the adjustments both in child population and why we have done certain things to adjust those funding formulas as well as other references that have been made by the hon. member, we will get that detailed information back to you right away, but as you leave, just know that most of the time the general answer is adjustments in real population as opposed to projected population.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. The next categories of my questions will relate to the goals and performance measures, children's authorities, and liability contingencies. With due respect to the minister, the goals and key performance measures contained within the business plan this year are simply not good enough. They really provide us with no information. The majority of them talk about targets, projections but give no actual statistics. The other reality is that these performance measures have changed from last year's budget, so there is no consistent tracking relative to the performance of the ministry or the welfare of our children.

I highlighted the performance measure around children who stay free from abuse and neglect earlier. I would just point out a couple of others that strike me. Again, percentage of aboriginal children receiving services from aboriginal service providers: there are no statistics there under Estimated, Projected, or Target.

We see as another example: proportion of children under guardianship who are adopted or in long-term family arrangements. Again, no statistics. Estimated, Projected, and Target are either not available or to be announced, if my copy is correct.

We're not looking for political ammunition in this, but we have to have some consistent ruler, if you will, to guide our priorities, our allocations, our programs, not only from the ministry's perspective but from the frontline perspective. Perhaps, Mr. Chairman, it's not so much a question as just a magnification that this particular area in the business plan, I believe, is one of the weakest, and I know that the staff are capable of providing more transparent, accountable measures and statistics, and I would encourage them to do so.

MS EVANS: Briefly, I am encouraged by your comment rather than dismayed, because I, too, believe that the support from all parties needs to reinforce the performance measures, and that's the capacity that we've built in now. Reverend Lang perhaps said it best when he said that Albertans like to sweep their child care problems under the carpet somewhere and not illuminate them, and the blessing of this ministry is that we will be illuminating them. If you noticed, we have structured the goals of the ministry to be very carefully child, family, community so that we can start building our core businesses, and the performance measures will adjust to reflect that. So your points are well made about the statistics.

When I have searched for longitudinal analysis of what we have for statistics, certainly it's not as easy to track as vital statistics, but on our Task Force on Children at Risk we have recognized that need, and without revealing much of what will come out in the publishing of that task force, that is one thing we have recommended. We really believe through all the partnering ministries that we have to have clearer data as a baseline but not so abstract, random as just suggesting something but giving more concrete examples of both what the need is and how we can target improving on that need.

If I look at the aboriginal one, it's our hope that by building the capacity within the aboriginal community either on the Métis settlements or within the 18 authorities and the various agreements – as I noted, we have eight that still contract services – we'll have much happier children in the First Nations communities. We will be working on those, and that is a very strong target of our performance measures and accountability section of the department. So thank you.

MRS. SLOAN: As a further example, perhaps, of a measure that the government might wish to explore, I'd just like to reference the indicators that were utilized in *No Safeguards: A Profile of Urban Poverty in Alberta*, that was prepared by Community Services Consulting Ltd. for the Inter City Forum on Social Policy, an extremely detailed and useful report. I would cite page 7 of that report. What they found was that there were approximately 96,000 children aged zero to 14 years living in poverty in selected communities.

In Calgary, almost one in four children this age lives in poverty. In Edmonton, the number is closer to one in three, or 40,400 children. Despite their smaller populations, the percentages of poor children in Lethbridge, Red Deer and Medicine Hat are comparable to Calgary's. There are 3,200 poor children [alone] under age 15 in Red Deer. Wetaskiwin stands out among the smallest municipalities with a child poverty rate of 29%.

And they show the distribution on that particular page.

What analysis has the department done on these statistics relative to the accompanying caseload statistics for that children's authority? I'm pointing it out not really for a response this morning but as an area, Mr. Chairman, where clearly there is some correlation between the two.

I would also reference in that same report the analysis of poor families. They talk about the distribution of poor families, both where there's one earner and two earners, and cite again some of the highest areas as being Lethbridge, Red Deer, et cetera.

Relative to performance measures and goals it would seem to me in the future that what we might want to try and do is look at some of these social indicators, if you will, accompanied by the indicators of infant mortality rate, infant low birth weight, teenage pregnancies, which regions have the highest incidence of those. Clearly we know that some of the northern regions do have that and subsequently have a need for an increased reliance on child welfare.

9:21

Now, we can continue to expend the dollars that are required to provide the services at the back end, if you will, for support for child welfare, but what are we doing about the addressing the root causes of those indicators? There is no mention of poverty or low birth weight or teenage pregnancies in the key performance measures and goals. These were questions and areas that were touched on in last year's estimates, and if I recall correctly, the minister actually committed at that time that there would be some investigation into looking at those particular areas. That was Minister Oberg at that point in time. I won't take the time to actually reference that, but that commitment was made in the estimates last year.

I'd like to move now to further questions relative to the children's

authorities, and one particular area that we have noted with a high degree of scrutiny is the discrepancy between allocations for board governance between these authorities. Just to cite some examples, Sun Country receives \$597,000 for board governance and core administration. We see that Windsong, in contrast, receives \$360,000. Calgary Rocky View, up in the high end, receives \$850,000. Why does that large discrepancy exist? I can see to some degree that administration costs would be greater because the population being served is greater, but for strictly board governance why is there such a discrepancy in that particular area?

There is not an overt mention of funding identified for standards, evaluation, and monitoring in the authority budgets or in the general ministry budget, and that is an area that is of the utmost importance as these authorities begin their existence. I would cite from the Auditor General's 1998-99 report, page 175, recommendation 34:

It is recommended that the Department of Children's Services require the business plans of Child and Family Services Authorities . . . to incorporate relevant measures and strategies to improve the overall accountability and effectiveness of the CFSAs.

He further cites that "some business plans lack the elements that are critical to accountability and effectiveness."

Some of the submitted plans were lacking in areas that are critical to the overall accountability and effectiveness of [the authorities]. Handbook III had required the identification of significant trends and issues in each region, as well as proposed solutions to deal with these issues. This requirement was not adequately covered by six of the regions. By not adequately identifying trends and issues, there is a risk that the strategies these regions developed were not based on the specific needs of the region. Eight regions had not completed the process of defining measurable indicators.

Again, it's the same point. We don't have leadership at the provincial level, and subsequently at the authority level the appointed authorities are not providing true or measurable indicators to guide them.

In order for the CFSAs to measure their progress, relevant performance measures are needed that, in the future, can be compared to previous years' statistics and targets.

Again, my exact point. He goes on to say that "the foundations of the redesign of services for children and families ("the four pillars") were not reflected adequately in the performance measures."

I would cite, then, on pages 176, 177, and 178, the specific mention made by the Auditor General to the Calgary Rocky View authority and the deficit accounting systems and recommendations.

The Calgary Rocky View Child and Family Services Authority and the Department of Children's Services maintain accounting systems that can be relied upon for the preparation of accurate financial control information.

Simply, Madam Minister, what I am asking for this morning is an update on the initiatives that the ministry has undertaken to address those recommendations from the Auditor General.

My third area of questions relates to liabilities. There is no information in the business plan about legal suits brought forward against the ministry. They have never been encompassed in the business plan, and I believe the public has an entitlement to know that information. So I would ask how many legal suits have in fact been filed against the previous ministry of family and social services or the current Ministry of Children's Services in the past year or in previous years, if that information is available.

Where does the ministry account for the funding both for legal representation costs and damages in these particular suits? Again, that's not a specific item in the budget itself.

I would ask what the annual expenditure for legal representation and damages has been from 1993 to current. Again, because of the restructuring of this particular department area, I believe this is relevant information. It's also an indication of the measure of success or failure of the department to fulfill their responsibilities.

Respecting confidentiality, of course, I would also ask for the nature of the legal suits brought against, as I've referenced previously, family and social services or Children's Services with the identifiable information removed.

Those conclude my questions in this category, Mr. Chairman, and I would invite the minister, if she's willing, to respond.

MS EVANS: With more detail later I'd just indicate that in the caseload review and in our review in the department of performance measures and the poverty issues and the root causes and the circumstances around certain critical issues raised by the intercity forum group, we will be doing that analysis and providing the hon. member information for what we have to date.

I'd like to just comment on the category budgets for board governance. They were defined as small, medium, and large. The nine small boards were given \$360,000; the medium, \$597,000; and the two large ones were given \$850,000. It was an early estimate of budgeting requirements for those bodies.

If I may, in addressing the Auditor General's particular recommendations, we have not only started as a department to reorganize, to structure ourselves so that the business planning of Children's Services is on more solid ground and built on solid rationale, but I have met with department officials and the Auditor General to ensure that the issues that have been raised by the CEOs and CFSAs in the moneys that are assigned to them have been addressed. As we noted earlier by other hon. members' questions, why certain groups got certain amounts was raised but also: was it addressing the priorities of needs that were given? In the formation of the CFSAs some of the manner in which the budgets were given money and the tracking systems may have not properly accounted for those costs during the period of the annual review, but we have sorted that out. We have outcomes expected this year in the way we've developed procedures that will be more rigorous and appropriate management information to the authorities from government.

9:31

Mr. Chairman, most of you may be aware that we've had six shared-service modules providing financial and other information support to the authorities, to the PDD boards, and supporting Human Resources as well as Children's Services and also Health through the PDD boards. These six modules provide communication officers that they share and financial people that they've shared. The authorities, in fact I think Calgary Rocky View initially at the first meeting, raised the fact that they required a much more focused attention than that, and through the assistant deputy minister here in charge of strategic planning and financial management I am assured that they will be getting that and more timely information. Over the next year I'm quite confident that the Auditor General will be happier than he was in the past about the outcomes and the accountability, and it's something that I, too, am concerned about.

On the liabilities and the question about where they are disclosed. They are in the annual report and become notes in the financial statements. If I may focus for a moment – and I'll have to provide more information later of a detailed nature or at least generic detail to the hon. member. We have \$61 million outstanding in our present lawsuits. To tell you what they address, it would be better for me to just refer to getting some type of disclosure that is appropriate, as you've described, not disclosing detail that could not be revealed. Many of these relate to some cases that have been outstanding for some considerable period of time and to residential lodging for foster children in the past. I have provided direction to the department right from the outset on coming to the department that we must manage and deal with these in as human and financially responsible a way as possible.

There is considerable work going on with the Minister of Justice on these cases and some considerable review taken. I think his view like mine, is to accelerate the resolution so that long-standing issues that have been held between government and these families and particularly those individuals won't continue to be a sore in their situation. We will be providing more detail on that. That liability, as I said, currently exists in the annual reports, and perhaps later we could provide you the explanation of where it's been in the last two annual reports, if we could, just so you're able to see. I don't think there's been significant growth in that. It has been historic.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. I wonder if I could ask a couple of questions about day cares. The information you gave us in the little blue binder was really very useful. Thank you. It was very easy to access and readable. It indicates that there's a 32 percent vacancy rate in day cares, and I wondered why that is so. That seems like an awfully high vacancy rate for a service that I thought was in high demand.

MS EVANS: In part I think the answer comes to the 80 contracts that are held with family day homes, where families prefer to place their children into day cares rather than to place them into a family day home so that they can be looked after in a different measure. The contracts are held by the authorities with the providers, and the day homes are inspected and monitored in much the same way as the day cares would be. Also, I think that from my more recent months of experience on day cares, families have wanted other choices, and when we moved to provide the dollars to the people with low income wanting the subsidy, they wanted to have other choices provided to them.

Did you have some more specific things?

DR. MASSEY: I didn't understand that from what you had provided here. It said that there were 559 day care centres, and it goes on to say: with a 32 percent vacancy rate. Then it talks about day care homes, 2000 family day homes.

MS EVANS: I'm sorry. My deputy has drawn to my attention that I should have said family day homes as opposed to family day care homes. Okay? It's a different program.

DR. MASSEY: So that isn't the vacancy rate?

MS EVANS: No.

DR. MASSEY: So the question still remains: why would there be such a high vacancy rate in the day care centres?

MS EVANS: May I make that to my deputy, Mr. Chairman? Would that be all right?

THE CHAIRMAN: It would have to be a short one.

MS TYLER: As you know, the day care system in Alberta is largely run by for-profit organizations who will set up shop and be licensed by us and then provide the spaces. When we gather the statistics, we ask them what their capacity is versus who they currently have, with regard to children, and that's where we get our information. We have historically in Alberta had a fairly robust day care situation as compared to other parts of the country because, I think, we do have the private-sector involvement in it. What we can do is provide a little more information about what day cares are telling us about their rates and also over time, but consistently there has been a day care vacancy rate of approximately that amount in the province as

operators set up shop and then adjust their capacity based on demand.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. If I might follow up on the day care homes, it indicates that they're inspected twice a year.

MS EVANS: As a minimum. Usually day cares receive four inspections annually. The response I gave to an hon. colleague in the House last week was relative to the computerized compliance management system. If a day care gets more frequent questions, they get more frequent, even monthly inspections that are not announced inspections but where the licensing officers go out from the authorities and inspect them. We keep a close eye on those that have shown previous problems, and that is a strong part of the due diligence expected of the CFSAs.

DR. MASSEY: I'm more interested in the family day homes. The day cares are really quite public in many ways. There's a lot of traffic in and out, but it seems to me that the family day homes are much more closed in terms of perhaps the youngsters. Twice a year seems to be – you know, I go back to my experience in ethnography and how long it takes to really find out what's going on inside a social setting. I wonder how secure you feel about those inspections.

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, I have asked this question of other authorities. There is a monthly inspection of those types of homes, and often in the community, for example in Mill Woods, there is the supplement of people who have been providing, in what I would call nonprofit organizations, other kinds of partnerships with parents and with providers to make sure that they go in and provide children extra training and provide the parents some assistance.

Mr. Chairman, I think that we are reasonably satisfied that we're doing well, but again, in the review of performance measures we will discuss this one with child and family service authorities. I intended to raise that at this next meeting of the authorities, given the nature of the recent incident that was here. I am not saying that all day care homes and authorities are experiencing problems, but I think the public has questions about inspections in family day homes, and it will come under that scrutiny and discussion as well.

DR. MASSEY: Just a technical question. Is there a requirement that day cares have an outdoor space?

MS EVANS: Yes. I'm told yes. All that I've visited have had it, so I guess they've met that.

DR. MASSEY: May I ask about the health initiative and your involvement? What has been the ministry's involvement in that health initiative?

MS EVANS: In the student health initiative?

DR. MASSEY: Yes.

9:41

MS EVANS: Predominantly, Mr. Chairman, the \$26.5 million spent at the local level is voted between the partners at the local level. It is interesting that sometimes the partners don't always agree what the process should be or whose vote should matter most, especially as the student health initiative has been in the schools.

As I go back to the ones that have had the greatest difficulty adjusting to this more democratic form of assigning funds, I think it has generally been felt that the positive is that it's building some networks and relationships between the partnering providers. If we look at the placement of local CFSAs providers, like a social worker

or somebody who is providing service in a neighbourhood of a larger community like Edmonton, for example, it enables the school to have the social worker in there and sometimes in places where the hon. member would be familiar with vacancy rates. The Minister of Infrastructure has assured that we can use those without penalty to the school board to place a local social worker to work with the counselors and the administration in the school and with the health authority to make sure that there's a network that secures the provision of service to the student. It is that intent.

In its first year or so it has not been without some growing pains as people develop those relationships, but I have noted that sometimes it has been easier in smaller communities where they've actually known those providers and have already begun to work quite well and have not allowed themselves to be run by some rule and regulation of confidentiality but have learned of the practicality of dealing with the student.

I hope this initiative actually builds in a stronger partnership with the mental health providers and the mental health support teams in Alberta, because I think then we could help avoid some of the crises that I've seen where there are health needs that aren't always recognized because the child is walking and talking.

DR. MASSEY: I'm still trying to get a handle on what's happening with that money. Can you give me an example of a project? I looked, for instance, at the agreement between the school districts and the regional health authority in the city in terms of speech therapy, where it was very limited in the amount of resources. In fact, they give speech therapy up to third grade, and then there's nothing beyond that. I know some parents have an interest in that initiative in terms of preschool funding. Have you examples of projects that have actually been undertaken through the initiative?

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, I would be pleased to ask the Ministry of Learning to help me with that, because what the member has highlighted is an actual one that in this district and in the capital region has not worked to its advantage because of the lack of speech therapists. We are in a grave shortage situation in having the speech pathologists here, and that has mitigated against the most desired results in the student health initiative.

More specific examples or other examples of where it's working well. I couldn't give you a really good one. I know of some, but I don't know how successfully they're operating, and I'd hesitate to mention one for the record and not do it appropriately. I think that ultimately the crisis in speech pathology and the lack of speech pathologists is separate and distinct from some of the successes that relate to the student health initiative. I will try and respond in written form to both: how we're managing the speech pathology needs of students in those situations, particularly in this region, and also where some of those student health initiatives are working particularly well.

DR. MASSEY: I'm being a little slow this morning, Madam Minister. I'm still not quite sure how your department is involved in the initiatives.

MS EVANS: We vote. They actually sit there and vote in some communities. They agree with their own process, and sometimes my own authorities come back to me and say that they lost the vote, that health and education voted together at the local level. At the local level the children's authority is almost the new boy on the street.

If I may mention it, I think ultimately children's authorities on the community basis will get increasing respect, but still they are new when you look at health and education and municipal councils. It is not that children's services haven't been at local authority levels, but

they have not been recognized at the local level as decision-makers or priority-setters, because they have been delivered by the province. With the local community-based organizations it's our hope that they will come up in profile, will be recognized, and will be seen as a valued member.

In two places, both Calgary and Edmonton, you can see that work with the justice system through the community centres, work done by the police, both Chief Silverberg and Acting Chief Bob Wasylyshen, there are plans that are very much inclusive and, I think, will net really desired results. Today in most of them they vote, and some of them just make contributions. If the hon. member has some citing of where it's not working well, particularly I'd like to follow up on those because we do want to see the partnerships and the integration work.

DR. MASSEY: No. I think it was just from the perspective of trying to understand how the health initiative is working and the input.

Could I return to the question I asked before? I don't think the minister understood the perspective about the reliance on the use of lottery funding. A group of parents in Calgary indicated that they would not, for instance, work casinos or run bingos for school funding. Their objection was that it makes a difference where the money comes from, and the bishop of Calgary admonished parents in that city in terms of fund-raising through those kinds of activities. That was the root of my question: does it make a difference where the money comes from?

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, the member has highlighted something that I was unaware of and had not acknowledged in the manner in which we receive funds and disperse funds in this budget. So I will do some checking on that, but I have not yet had that raised by the authorities. I would assume that part of it would be a policy from the financial perspective. I believe the hon. member would be familiar with the fact that lottery funds in the past were just acknowledged in a different fashion in revenue, and now that they're being ascribed to each ministry, it raises some question about philosophy, that had not been previously discussed. So perhaps I can talk with you later about what my most appropriate response might have been.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks.

THE CHAIRMAN: You may do that at your leisure.
Mr. MacDonald.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few additional questions at this time for the hon. minister. The first one deals with a difficult situation. I find some of the most difficult files I have doing constituency work are regarding this issue, and that's PGO status. I do not see an indication here of the proportion of children who move from PGO status to adoption, but many people, far too many, come to the office and have a great deal of difficulty with this process. I'm wondering how the department is dealing with this. It's an emotional issue on all sides, and since we have had this restructuring, I wonder what's going to be done to improve this.

That's also important whenever we talk about the child welfare caseload review that's going on. I understand this will be completed and it's a review of factors that lead to the rising child welfare caseloads. When will this be completed?

MS EVANS: August. The report should be to me hopefully before August, but it's pretty detailed, so at least by August.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. Fair enough.

Now, in the ministry goals and measures and strategies on page 52

of the business plan, there is a strategy on line 1.2.2:

Work in partnership to educate and increase awareness of service providers and public on the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution legislation at the local level.

My question here would be: in partnership with whom? There has been noted success, particularly in Calgary and Edmonton, of course. There's been a decrease in the number of child prostitutes on the streets, but there are people who are telling me that they have now moved indoors. Out of sight, out of mind. I would strongly object to that, if it's true.

The massage centres are now places of operation, and I don't believe they are being effectively policed. You have to be 18 years or older to be employed there. My next question would be: are there plans to work with police forces across the province to monitor these establishments on a regular basis to ensure that this is not going on? If these places are turning into what is termed in the Calgary media as the mattress centres, then this is not a step in the right direction. It has just been passing this horrible practice from one level to another.

9:51

The performance measure here: I understand the baseline is to be established. But the percentage of children leaving prostitution: when will that be set up, and will there be any indication in there of what I spoke about here? You know, the child prostitutes are off the street, but they've just sort of moved behind closed doors.

I have at this time also a few more questions, if I could direct them to the minister. The incidence of teenage mothers applying for assistance. I see in part of your document on estimates that the rate of teenage pregnancies has gone down slightly. What is the number of teenage mothers applying for assistance?

Children in need, particularly teenagers, and suicide rates. What studies and what numbers can you provide to us on that horrible statistic?

When women enter a shelter, is there an accurate tracking made of the number of children who are admitted at the same time with the mother?

My next question would be: how many children suffering from mental illness are awaiting treatment? Is there a backlog here? I understand there is, but correct me, please, if I'm wrong.

I think those are all the questions I have at the moment, Mr. Chairman.

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, I have spoken to police in both Calgary and Edmonton. I have met with the Street Teams and also with police that are working on community services. They tell me that it is really a myth that they don't know where the trick pads are. They say you only have to look at the needles and syringes and the condoms outside the doors and you can find them, wherever they are, whether they're massage parlours or not. They even track traffic statistics in this city to know where the cars circle the block. The police here said that although some prostitutes and pimps would like to say that it's just moved it off the street and got it somewhere that's less obvious, they tell me: don't kid yourself; we know exactly where they are.

They have also been very satisfied that the legislation is working. Although it does not satisfy many children who feel, when apprehended, that they don't want their parents to know what they're doing, in actual fact most of the parents do know what they're doing. I've had a little bit of experience talking with them. Also, Street Teams in Calgary feel that our biggest need is transition housing or places to take them out of the cities or away from what I would describe as the near occasion of sin, if I may, so that they don't fall back into old habits, that their pimps aren't available to pick them up again, that they haven't tracked that.

Catholic Social Services is one of our best partners in this city and also, obviously, the local police through Justice and other social agencies that provide us counseling and support. We try to match the needs of the child with the strengths of the counselor. We're doing a lot with AADAC on the substance abuse part of it, because that becomes part of where we provide the child more service and they can be protected and removed from their addiction, most being addicted. In fact, Mr Chairman, apparently the record of addictions is very high among these children.

The question about PGO status and the questions the hon. member asked. One of the problems we have in improving the rate of adoptions is that many of these children are older, they have behavioural problems, or they are over 12 years of age and do not give legal consent to being adopted.

I might just say, too, that in terms of your questions on teenage moms, that would usually be under Human Resources and Employment. As it affects the child, we will try and follow up with that question, responding as well with some information on suicide rate.

Children in need are children that receive a supplement to other income or other financial support, and they are not like foster children, who receive a graduating scale. There is some discretion to provide them support through the child-in-need program, and we do work with HR and E on that.

We have over 4,900 women and over 6,000 children that have been in shelters this year, and we are tracking that. What we have not in the past tracked and does not show up on the statistics we gather is whether or not, when they have found the shelter to be full, they have taken advantage of the other placement that has been provided for them. I am assured by the Minister of Human Resources and Employment and by our department officials that we never, ever turn a mother or a mother and children away from providing them some type of facility with our partnerships. So there is some work to be done on those stats.

There has to be work done on the stats on PCHIP, because both Calgary and Edmonton, where the programs predominate, track those statistics differently through the police. The Calgary police chief told me recently: just tell us how you want us to track them, and we'll do that.

How many children are awaiting treatment and what the backlog is in terms of mental health? I couldn't provide that for you, but I will consult with the other ministry to see if we can provide more detail on that. Perhaps through our own department we have some statistics.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Chairman, I have one more question at this time, please. I believe it would be on line 2.2.4, corporate adoption services. I see a 25 percent decrease in the budget from one year to the next. The first question I have related to that: is this because of a reduction in user fees?

MS EVANS: It's co-ordination and matching of the adoption services as well as the rate paid the agency. It reflects the child welfare support. Perhaps Keray Henke could complete that one. I know from program 2 on page 54 that that's your reference point. Keray.

MR. HENKE: Yes. That's not in fact a decrease year over year; that's a reallocation. We've moved the actual budgeting responsibility for that from line 2.2.4 up to 2.1.1. So it's part of program support services now under the reorganized ministry.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. Now, specifically I have some questions for the hon. minister related to international adoptions. It certainly

is recognized that we are a signatory to international agreements, but the fees I have encountered are extremely high. When you consider that with the international agreements we have signed, we have agreed to do a case study of the homes where children who are to be adopted from foreign countries – that's understandable, but the majority of the people we are studying are new Canadians. Their disposable income I think is better used getting set up in this country, whether it's improving their education or purchasing their home or furniture or whatever. These fees are simply prohibitive. I think it would be an excellent idea to recognize that these fees are high and could be adjusted.

10:01

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, if I may. The overall intake of immigration and the federal policies on this have had ministers from all across Canada talking. There is proper placement of children but also things like making sure that their health needs have been respected, and of course we have involvement with the other agencies exclusive of government.

Rather than have you go through too much detail, I'd rather provide for you some more detailed information that relates both to the carving out of federal responsibility and to what this province does with international adoptions. I think you'll see that we are not the ones that are making it prohibitive for the families. Could we provide that for the member?

MR. MacDONALD: Well, I'm certainly quite willing to hear what the department has to say, but I have looked at this. I realize the federal government has a role in it, but the department has a role in it as well, and the department sets these fees. Where the family goes to have these assessments done – it could be Catholic Social Services; it could be any number of organizations. If we are interested in the reunification of families, whether it be extended family or not, this cost is quite high. I believe it can be in excess of \$900 for a home assessment.

MS EVANS: But, Mr. Chairman, we do not set the fees. We will approve the adoption, but the role for our department is not to establish the fees.

MR. MacDONALD: So the private assessment agencies set the fees.

MS EVANS: They do the assessment and set the fees accordingly. That's what I'm given to understand. Would somebody else like to add to that?

MR. MacDONALD: Okay.

MS EVANS: If you'd like to provide us with some case specific to something that you are worried about with the high cost or some inordinately high costs, perhaps we could review that. This would be the first notice I've had of anybody being concerned about the high cost of fees, although we have certainly discussed among the ministers the concerns about the protocol and the costs associated with international adoptions. We'd follow up with that, hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Before the privatization became stylish in this province, I'm told that the fees were very, very modest whenever they were provided by the government.

MS EVANS: They were done by the department, and now they are levered out.

MR. MacDONALD: With respect to the department, this may have

come before your watch – I can't recall – but department officials have been very gracious and have been very timely with the responses to my constituency of five when I have requested information from them.

MS EVANS: Thank you.

MR. MacDONALD: Yeah. You bet.

The length of time for these assessments is another question that I have because some people are very anxious to reunite their families in this country.

Thank you for that. I won't take up any more of the committee's time with that issue.

MS EVANS: Thank you.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Chairman, we have another block of questions, and we're wondering if the minister would refrain from responding for the remaining 15 minutes just so we may get these on the record?

MS EVANS: Agreed.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: There are 15 minutes remaining.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. The next set of questions arises from the children's summit proceedings and report. You provided to us this morning an outline of expenses received to date and the estimate of total expenditures for that process. While we applauded the government in the release of this report and its comprehensiveness, we have not seen any written commitments or publicized commitments as to where the government is going with respect to the implementation of the report. I think that was certainly a weakness that was identified when the report was released. We're wondering when the action plan or implementation plan might be released by the department.

We would ask that question in the context that if we're planning to have such a proceeding on an annual basis, it would only seem appropriate that we'd be able to demonstrate that we've moved somewhere towards implementing the last year's report before we conduct the next summit. So it's a concern of ours, and we'd like to encourage the ministry to put something forward in terms of commitments relative to the implementation of these recommendations as soon as possible.

There were many areas that were aptly highlighted in the summit report and in the recommendations made by participants, but one particular area that I would like to highlight this morning is the area of aboriginal children and their needs. There were a number of specific recommendations that were highlighted in the children's summit report that spoke about placing "the focus on the Aboriginal pillar" and that

government and community work together to promote greater education and awareness toward . . . building on the strengths and relationships of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities . . .

and the desire to have a "cross-ministry approach to address issues faced by Aboriginal children and youth."

Again, the performance measures don't give us much to go on with respect to the services provided or the needs of aboriginal children, but it was in the supplemental information that you provided to us prior to this morning's estimates. You did outline as of December '99 the child welfare caseload by racial origin. It would appear from the statistics you've provided that the aboriginal need component has decreased somewhat. I believe we were over 50 percent of the caseload at one time that required child welfare

services. I would ask what you attribute the decrease to. Are you convinced that in fact this decrease has been a true decrease in need, or is it that through regionalization or through other causes these children are just not able to access the services they require in the same manner?

We also know that there is a high degree of disability in the aboriginal population that has placed accompanying needs on the child welfare system and on disability programs. We would ask for a breakdown or a cross-referencing of those figures for the last fiscal year at least. If they're available for other years, that would also be preferable.

We would like to have more details relative to where the ministry is currently at with respect to their negotiations with the bands in terms of the delivery of services, staffing, and the adoption process. We believe – and we haven't received any information to the contrary – that there still remains a very large list of children who are waiting for adoption in the aboriginal sector that have been approved for adoption but have not been able to achieve the consent of the bands to have those adoptions occur. Is the fact that that adoption list continues to grow and the wait for those children continues to grow truly in the best interests of those children? I would suggest that it is not.

I recognize the political difficulties in the area and the desire the government has to correspondingly strengthen relationships with the aboriginal sectors; however, these children will not wait. They are going to grow and develop whatever dysfunctions result from their having to wait for a strong and nurturing environment. They're not something that can be delayed because of government inaction or band inaction. So we would ask for more specific information relative to the status of those waiting lists and where the government is going in addressing that in short order.

10:11

Children's mental health. This was an area as well that was mentioned last year. It's been mentioned correspondingly in the ministry of health's estimates. I was highly critical of the minister not providing more priority to the area of children's mental health needs. Again, it's an area where waiting lists in this province continue to grow even for those children with the most critical mental health needs, where they are at risk of injuring themselves or others because of their mental state.

We recognize that we have the joint children's initiative. We recognize that we have the students' health initiative. That is not making an impact for these children or the families of these children at the frontline level. So we are asking for more detailed responses to this ministry's commitment to lobby for challenge and work towards a greater commitment and allocation for those particular children in the children's services area.

I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods has some further questions that he would like to ask. Just in conclusion, I'd like to acknowledge Line Porfon's assistance in the preparation of questions for the estimates debates this year and give my thanks to her for her support and also thank my colleagues from Edmonton-Gold Bar and Edmonton-Mill Woods for assisting me in preparing for the debates this morning.

Thank you.

DR. MASSEY: I'm not sure how we are for time, but I just have a couple of questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: You still have nine minutes.

DR. MASSEY: Great.

I wanted to ask, if I could, Madam Minister, about the women's shelters. What kind of research capability is there within the

ministry? For instance, if a woman has been in a shelter and moves to second-stage housing, is there tracking of those people to see what happens to them, to see if things are done that will help them not be in the same situation again?

MS EVANS: Just briefly, Mr. Chairman. I could consult with my colleague the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, who would be part of that, I believe. There is some work done, but I can't tell you whether it's definitive or whether it's consistent across Alberta.

Would you provide, Paula?

MS TYLER: Just a comment to that, and that would be that one of the challenges we have is that unless women want to be tracked, it's difficult to track them. Indeed, these services are voluntary. We do have a tracking in place. Follow-up women's shelters do provide follow-up for people who leave, but sometimes even they lose track of them as well as they move into other lives and sometimes other parts of the province. Any woman that is in significant danger as she is in our system is tracked very, very closely for sure. We can get some more for you.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks. It seems like such a hard problem to deal with, and I just wonder what we're learning in terms of trying to help.

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, I think one of the ways we are learning is through the removal of perpetrators of violence so that women don't have to leave home with their children. I think that will start showing some positive effect, but it is a problem.

It's also a problem for the women that leave home and never approach a shelter but find some other alternative accommodations. I think we have recognized that, and I believe we have a modest increase to the funding for shelters this year of about a million plus dollars to that section, so we are trying to recognize our partnership with the local level. But some of the nonprofits and even some of the communities like Slave Lake are looking for options for managing the issue. The visibility at the local level is significant, and that's one place that some of the First Nations people have certainly offered their shelters, saying that there's absolutely nobody that's going to get into them and try and challenge them relative to the placement of women in need.

So we are looking at this. I think we have more work this year, though, on that one.

DR. MASSEY: If I can just follow up in terms of the rural centres. There are only eight of them?

MS EVANS: Yes, that's correct.

DR. MASSEY: How well do they work in a rural area? It seems that visibility is . . .

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, people do tell me about that, the difficulty in the rural area, not only because of visibility but because they know that even the staff are very recognizable in the community. So they have talked about other things; for example, having homes where they would just take moms on an individual basis, harbour them in shelter, sort of safe houses that are refuges for just one or two.

I think the police there will tell you that in some communities they are incarcerated in sort of separate parts of their facility that would normally be held for incarceration purposes; in other words, not a jail, but it certainly is a safe part of the jail. I've heard people talk

about that as an option, but at present we have not too many statistics of people going there.

Some of the First Nations placements are actually very solid and well-established placements, but I think here is part of where our partnership can work to help with those that need the help in that capacity.

DR. MASSEY: A final question is on the funding and the negotiations for funding the shelters. We hear: shelter under threat of closure. How is that negotiation handled?

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, where I've had those questions before, it has been somebody who has felt that comments by a CEO may have been intended to threaten their long-term funding. When we've investigated, that has never been proven to be the case or found to be the case. Some have absolutely ideal circumstances, but when you see a headline, you think there's something there that has been done. We haven't found anything to substantiate that. We have been aware, though, that CEOs who've gone out and who've worked on behalf of their board to evaluate programming have encountered programs that they'd like to improve, not specifically in shelters but some of the other counseling programs in communities, and then sometimes this question evolves. But I've been personally assured on every one I've inquired about, and I've had no evidence that any shelter funding has been cut back. Quite the contrary.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks.

MRS. SLOAN: Just a couple of quick questions in our remaining time. We saw a number of the children's authorities this year run deficits, and we're wondering if it's the ministry's plan in the next fiscal year to fund the deficits or to start to establish the budgetary process so we fund on the basis of what resources are required rather than underfunding and then covering the deficits at some later time.

Specifically in the program 1 area the increases relative to the ministers, 1.0.1 and 1.0.2, are perhaps close to the largest increases with a 39.5 percent and 52 percent increase in those two areas for this fiscal year. If it's possible, would the minister provide a breakdown of the additional costs relative to staff positions, responsibilities, and the justifications for those allocations being made?

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, the ministry was compared to the previous minister without portfolio, who had a budget of just over a million dollars. This is more like the human resources ministry. It is agreeing that the weight goes with the full ministry. We'd be pleased to provide more on both that and the establishment of the deputy's office. Previously the position was called the David Steeves position. He was not identified as either an ADM or DM or director of the Children's Secretariat.

I think it's somewhat unfortunate that we had to base our new ministry on the assumption that it was patterned after the secretariat rather than the ministry of social services. That reference point has caught us in this budget situation of looking like we have been spending with gay abandon. It's not that case at all. We will provide that in our summary to you.

10:21

MRS. SLOAN: One further area I would just identify in contrast. The Children's Advocate's office budget is only increasing by 1 percent, and this has been an area where I have voiced long-standing concerns about the ability of that office to truly be able to fully fulfill its advocacy role. I'm cognizant of the minister's review in progress for that office and am supportive, as you know, of expanding that role, not only with respect to children's needs in the area of child

welfare but across a number of ministries, I think, as I referenced earlier.

We see as one example children's mental health needs being largely unrepresented and not a priority. I think it is something where an independent office or a well-funded office of the Children's Advocate could be able to identify some of those critical areas and perhaps conduct research to help us further understand some of the correlation between issues like poverty and the need for child welfare, the utilization of women's shelters, the accompanying relationship between low birth weights, teenage pregnancies, family poverty, and the reliance on government programs.

So that budget and the 1 percent increase in the budget, given the increase in the caseload, is not respectful of the additional demands and requirements that office must fulfill.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to thank the Official Opposition and subcommittee members and the minister for their questions through this period of time. Pursuant to our resolution at the beginning of the meeting, we'd turn the time to any government members for questions, and I believe Mr. Cardinal, that you have a question.

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah, I just have a quick comment and a question for the minister in relation to aboriginal children in care. As most of you are aware, I was involved in the original restructuring of family and social services, which included child welfare and persons with disabilities. Of course, one of the phases I was involved in was the original design of children's services, but as a lot of you are aware, I was not involved in the implementation of the process. It is, I would have to say, a bit different from what the original plan was, not to say that it doesn't work. You know, it's a bit different.

The area that I want to mention is in relation to aboriginal children. Earlier today there was mention of poverty on reserves, poverty and the number of children in care in Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, Lethbridge, in the major centres across Alberta.

I've always said that children are not the problem. It's the families that have problems at home that create problems for children, and I want to make sure that's on the record, that we don't forget that. When it comes to aboriginal children, because close to 40 percent of children in care are aboriginal children, until we deal with the issue of poverty on the reserves and some of the remote communities in northern Alberta, we have a long road ahead of us, a major challenge in getting children in stable homes and families being self-sufficient and independent.

The issue of federal responsibility. I don't know if colleagues would want to hear that, but I'm sure you will. It will be in the record of *Hansard* anyway. Originally, when the program was designed, one of the first phases that was supposed to happen was to have the First Nations – and there were 45 First Nations bands who wanted to take over child welfare on and off the reserve and wanted federal legislation and federal dollars. They felt at the time – and they still feel the same way – that they are under federal jurisdiction and federal responsibility. Therefore, the legislation should be provided by the federal government, including dollars to administer child welfare programs on and off the reserve.

When you look at the caseload, you know, a high percentage of the caseload are First Nations, so that is where I'm leaning my question. I believe 37 of the 46 bands now have delegated authority. I know that the bands want to go the next step, and that's to take over fully the administration of their children on and off the reserve with, again, federal funding. I just wonder, Madam Minister, what steps are being taken to review this again and ensure that the federal government is brought in and takes the responsibility of federal legislation and federal dollars on and off the reserve? That is what the First Nations want.

Now, if that were to happen, what you would have to do, then, is look at some restructuring of the existing system we've developed. The original plan was to do that first, which would have taken close to half the caseload right off the bat within the first two or three years with the federal system. Now you have this design in place that looks after all – you know, they haven't taken over fully. I just wondered what steps are being taken to pursue that further with the federal government and the First Nations? It's a major one.

MS EVANS: Thank you for the question. Many of the First Nations groups, as the hon. member is no doubt aware, are taking their issues directly. Even through the month of April I think there are about three dates set for them to meet in Ottawa on behalf of this issue and other issues.

In the appointment of Nancy Reynolds as executive director and working with the aboriginal agreements, she has contacted the various chiefs and tribal councils and has been engaged in meeting with them, trying to determine exactly what our status is with those particular First Nations bodies in the delivery of services and where the agreements cannot be fulfilled.

One of the challenges – yet I think it's an opportunity that's being worked on – is the agreements between the CFSAs and the arrangements that they're working on with the First Nations groups so those children that are off reserve aren't lost to the reserve forever. When you hear the First Nations people speak with such passion about having their children continue to be a part of their culture and a part of their spiritual community in a very meaningful sense, you recognize that we don't do justice to those children if we don't provide some of that type of approach. The hon. member has done a considerable amount as an MLA to bring these issues forward to me.

The other thing that we have had is a review of our staffing. As the hon. members have noted from the briefing sheets, there are 200 additional staff applied in this year's budget not only to relieve caseload, review circumstances, and assist the CFSAs but in part at least to address some of the needs aboriginal people have in terms of making sure we have people in the department, through the Children's Advocate, and at the local level who can deal and who are familiar with the issues of aboriginal people. I think that sensitivity is something where we're building some capacity in consultation with the associate minister in charge of Aboriginal Affairs, and as we get through the aboriginal policy and as we reflect on what we were told in our meeting recently with the Métis Nation as well, who are people that want us to be sensitive to their needs beyond the scope of the First Nations agreements – I think that's a very definite thrust of what Nancy Reynolds and her staff working under her direction there are providing. I'm very satisfied with the relationships beginning to build.

One more point to the hon. member. As he is so well aware, it is important to build the relationship first before you are actually able to effect some agreement, but I think we're moving closer to that. We have not been an intervenor, but we've provided support to those First Nations bodies that are speaking to the federal government about their concerns relative to the manner in which they receive funding and the funding levels that they receive from the federal government. It is different through different agreements.

10:31

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

MS KR YCZKA: I have two points, and I'm glad to have the opportunity to express them this morning. On page 9, family violence prevention, my question was whether this is related to a particular act or legislation and the year on which that occurred. I notice that obviously it's for women and children and to provide

safety from abuse. My question – and it is related to a motion of mine that's coming up – would be: what about seniors? Was there ever any intent to address seniors? I guess I have a few concerns if there was.

You know, abused seniors could be male or female. This looks like it's mothers and children. There is a model that exists. It's a really new model in Calgary for seniors. It is the Rotary house for abused seniors through Kerby Centre. My premise, after doing some work in social housing, is that at this point in time anyway it's not really seen necessarily as a good step. Seniors don't really want to be integrated with younger families, although certainly I think that in the future social housing is something we certainly need to look at just in general but also perhaps in this area. So I'd just throw that out.

On page 7, early intervention programs. I guess this is something that just came out as we were going through this this morning. I just want to make a point that there is a citywide program in Calgary that's housed out of Ernest Manning high school, and it's for very high-risk teens and their babies. From the age range you talk about, from zero to 18 years, I think you have it at both ends of the spectrum. It's an excellent program. It's accepted within the school. It's run basically by Catholic Social Services, but it certainly is an interagency program. They have, like I say, an ongoing funding problem. I guess I have two questions related to that. How do you identify future EIP programs you might fund, for instance? To me this is a program that exists now, that doesn't have to be created. It seems to me it satisfies the goal of the department. I'd just ask whether the minister would review the mandate of this program for consideration of funding support.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just on the first issue, family violence prevention. As the hon. member would be aware, the Member for Calgary-Currie last year in June in Calgary announced the government's legislation for removing the perpetrator in the circumstance of family violence, and that has been one of the initiatives that I identified, in commenting to the member of the opposition, as something that we hope will begin to benefit our shelter statistics.

If I may reflect on what is happening in many communities, the FCSS, which is responsible for many of the local priorities and needs of communities, has worked on a lot of programs, not only in support of the counseling services for people with family violence but in support of programs like FLIP in Wetaskiwin, where people who perpetrate violence are given extra support and understanding and opportunities to learn and listen together in sharing circles. They are predominantly native men. There are programs similar to this that receive funding through family and community support services throughout Alberta. So I think that both through the child and family service authority and through its municipal partner, funded in part by our government, there are programs that are evolving to help families that have problems with family violence and the need for protection both of children and families.

The member has also brought my attention to the fact that in the Ministry of Children's Services there is a bit of an anomaly in that we are more than children's services. We are the families and the seniors and also the moms and children, and we are any range of family programs that are delivered through the FCSS boards with the \$38 million that's expended in Alberta. Many of those programs are directed to children, but many of them are, quite appropriately, directed to other things, everything from support for after-school child care to specific training programs that help people who want to work on local volunteer boards.

Not being familiar with the program from Ernest Manning high school but looking at the Calgary Learning Centre, that I have

personally visited, and the information that is disseminated from them, what we've asked the child and family service authorities and their boards to do, in co-operation with the Ministry of Learning or the ministry of health, is to review those programs and find out where those program dollars can best be expended, what the need is and where the programs are demonstrating the best performance results and outcomes. As much as the department in establishing the ministry is trying to get those things in order, so too are the local board members and the local CEOs attempting to do their best with that. We don't attempt to judge those from the department's perspective except to monitor, evaluating their business plans and also, with the agencies, providing support to the child and family service authority in the delivery of the programs that are working well.

Many of the Head Start programs in this city are supported through dollars that are gained from local groups that are given priority from the child and family service authority. In terms of certain early interventionist strategies I believe that we could provide our intent through the CFSA to you relative to where the dollars may be coming from next year, if they will be coming there at all.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Cao.

MR. CAO: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few comments. The first one is in my involvement with the United Nations club in Calgary. They have the culture of peace proclamation for the year 2000, and it's sort of with regard to violence resolution, resolving that in the community, and talking about moving and starting school, you know, through that. So my comment or question: do we have any participation in or sort of knowledge about that?

Number two is regarding the school system. The school system to me is where most of our children sort of go through. Do you have any programs besides the health initiatives? Do you have any programs or ideas where Children's Services could dovetail somehow and work closely with the school system?

The next question. I work in my constituency. There are a lot of community associations in my riding, and I found that they could be very good places. First of all, they know the neighbourhood and they know the families in need, with problems. So is there any focus on, say, utilizing that structure somehow? In fact, there is something there already called family resource centres in some communities, and they're doing work. I know that they have some city involvement, but I sense that the province has not tapped into their strength to be of service there.

10:41

Probably my last question here is regarding the demography in Calgary, to be specific. I know there are a lot of new Canadians. When new Canadians come to live here, they may have some cultural and language difficulties. I attended some citizenship ceremonies, and I realize that if we can promote the information about family and social services, about prevention, that the rules about living here are like this, then probably it's helpful to get that population to understand about living here. So that's my comment and a few ideas.

MS EVANS: Just a few brief comments. In terms of the first program you mentioned – I think it was a program of the United Nations against violence – we don't believe that our department has any affiliation with that particular one, at least not that we're aware of.

If I may, you asked about any other programs that we could be involved in. One of the other programs that you might know has

been a big struggle for us in Calgary is the conductive education provided in Renfrew school, which is unproven in terms of both the assessment of the Canadian Physiotherapists' Association and some of the health strategy groups. The evaluation of that program will start to set a platform for policy development that I think would help the department frame where it will explore additional kinds of alternative strategies with parent support so that we can do things in the proper fashion but make sure that we limit any further risk to the child. You couldn't visit that school, like I have – and I'm sure you have too – and see those children with cerebral palsy getting that special attention and not believe that that must at least be a good program.

Through handicapped children's services, respite care, through interventionist strategies with some programs, through all of those and through our local delivery system of the child and family service authority there are other programs. Essentially, when the ministry was set up, the first intent was to make this more of a co-ordinating role when they looked at the Department of Children's Services in the past and that the services would be provided as community-based services really, to some degree autonomous from government. When the issues arose with the court challenge on successor rights with our staff, it was deemed that that was not going to happen. There are very strong ties. The ministry is tied to each child and family service authority just like a parent is tied to a child, with the accountability built within that.

To a large degree those authorities have felt that we have done a bit of a U-turn on them. They were originally going to be able to hire all their own staff, but today the way that it is structured, it is still a partnership arrangement, with the parent, being the department, having more the role of CFSA monitoring and the local groups having more the role of determining priorities and needs and doing the monitoring on that basis.

The family resource centres and the clusters that are being explored by the Calgary and Rocky View family service authority please me a great deal. I think there's a lot of work being done to try and get the action on the street where people live that need it. There are community centres like the McCauley centre in Calgary, that I visited, where a number of community programs similar to the Norwood centre here are attempting and endeavouring to support families and children.

If I could have one wish, it would be that every sweatshop environment in Alberta that houses employers who in fact may push too strongly on their employees or keep them away from families for extended periods of time would come forward and provide more support for those families and those children in the work that they do. Many of these families travel outside the city limits for long, extended trips away from the children every day. The care of the child in the new immigrant families that are being affected by that has left them without some of the tools that they really desperately need.

So I have been hoping to talk with the Minister of Economic Development about how we can prompt programs so the employers will feel a need to come in and support those new immigrants who are giving such strong support to Canada and their families through an entirely different workforce environment.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr. Johnson.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a comment I'd like to make regarding the Alberta children's initiative. I want to say that you're doing wonderful things there, that the department is doing great things. In my constituency particularly the student health initiative is going very well. The partners are working together very

well, and I really do like this concept of partners getting together and working in a community for greater efficiency. When people work together, when groups work together, I think a lot more can be accomplished. So that program is going very well in my constituency. Also the FAS program: I think wonderful things have been done in that area.

I'm very happy, then, to see the different departments working together, but I noticed that in your briefing you mentioned that Municipal Affairs and Infrastructure are the latest partners in this initiative, and that was news to me. What are they doing in this initiative? How are they involved?

MS EVANS: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, if I can look at when we first started doing our business plan, Municipal Affairs housed housing, so that was one part of it. But currently municipalities still receive some of their funding for transportation needs through the unconditional funding that is assigned to each municipality and supports, in part, transportation for disabled and others. It's a bit of an anomaly in the funding. Community Development now, of course, have taken the housing. You mentioned another one. Which other ministry?

MR. JOHNSON: Infrastructure.

MS EVANS: Infrastructure now is our very important partner – how could I forget? – that helps us with facilities for the local CFSAs. Many of them have chosen to provide their own, either through certain nonprofit or even church basement arrangements, which may not be ideal in the future but at least gives them a starting point in very small communities by practically offering space without large expenditure. For others vacated stores are accessed, but the Infrastructure ministry does go out and try and inspect and determine what places would be safest and what accesses would be most appropriate for the child and family services authority. As the redeployment of provincial buildings has taken place, some have found different assignments there as well, but we are not facility rich. If anything, we are facility stretched right now to try and make ends meet with those.

My hope is that while we're seeing a leveling off or even a modest decline – I believe Red Deer will have a 1 percent decline of children's population this year as an example. Maybe those schools could become places for additional cluster involvement.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I'd like, on behalf of all the subcommittee members, to express my appreciation to the Hon. Iris Evans, Minister of Children's Services, and to all of those in her department for the tremendous work they've done and for the assistance in answering the questions today.

Pursuant to our motion passed at the beginning of the meeting, I'd like to entertain a motion to adjourn from Shiraz.

MR. SHARIFF: I move that pursuant to Standing Orders 56 and 57 the designated supply subcommittee on Children's Services now conclude its considerations and debate on the 2000-2001 estimates of the Department of Children's Services prior to the conclusion of the four-hour period allocated and rise and report.

THE CHAIRMAN: All agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any opposed?

MRS. SLOAN: Opposed.

THE CHAIRMAN: We need unanimous consent to actually adjourn prior to that.

MRS. SLOAN: I wasn't aware of that, but I would say, Mr. Chairman, that because of the needs in this particular area it causes me some discomfort to not exhaust our time relative to the questions this morning. I understood that the government members were going to be asking questions until the time had expired. In fact, I can also say for the record that this process did occur at Health and Wellness estimates on Friday. There was not unanimous consent, but the committee still adjourned.

10:51

THE CHAIRMAN: I would say, actually, that we have had a motion

placed forward for which we did have unanimous consent at the beginning of the meeting which set the established rules for today. In that respect, I would say that we are able to adjourn because we did have unanimous consent earlier on the motion that we would allocate two hours to the Official Opposition subcommittee members and the remainder to government subcommittee members. On that basis, are we agreed to adjourn?

Agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10:52 a.m.]

