



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, March 28, 2022

Day 16

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
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Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, March 28, 2022

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 9 Public's Right to Know Act

[Debate adjourned: Mr. Madu speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

I see the hon. Member for the wonderful riding of Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. As I had the opportunity to review some of the work that we see within it, I think that on paper it looks reasonable. But, like much of other pieces of legislation that we've seen come forward from this government, it's often light on details, and at the end of the day we have to wait for further consultation and regulations to come forward to truly see what this government has in mind for the legislation itself.

When we look at what's before us, specifically before the regulations have been developed and some of the final ideas have been completed, the fact is that within the legislation I think that it does very little to address the priorities of Albertans. In the same breath, it does little to address the key justice issues that Albertans have and the concerns that they brought forward to myself and my colleagues over the last few years with this government in place.

One of the main issues that we continue to hear about – and we raised our concerns at the time the legislation was brought forward regarding changes to the victims of crime fund, a fund that was put in place to support, as the name suggests, victims of crime. Unfortunately, at the time of that debate we saw this government moving to divert the majority of the funds, 60 per cent of the funds from that program, that very important program, into other programs or other parts of the ministry or in the department. That continues to be a concern, something that we aren't seeing addressed through Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act.

Further, we saw through this budget, if I am correct, a further cut to the victims of crime fund by approximately 12 per cent. We continue to ask as a caucus and myself as a representative of those in my community who may be trying to access funds like the victims of crime fund: why are we going down this path, and why, when we have the opportunity to fix problems that this government has made, aren't we instead having conversations about that, or why aren't we seeing opportunities to fix that in Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act?

While I think that the principle of this legislation is reasonable and we can get into further what this might actually mean for the responsibilities of the department and the minister, I think that at the end of the day – and we've actually heard the minister quite clearly explain – this doesn't necessarily change a lot of the opportunities that the minister has to provide this potentially critical information in the first place, that in many cases there were opportunities to do this already.

Instead of addressing the priorities of Albertans, we see a government that's more concerned with passing legislation that the

minister himself admits isn't necessarily needed. I know or I believe that this was a platform commitment from the UCP, so I can appreciate that they are working as fast as they can to move forward on those platform commitments that they had. The fact is that while we are going through that process, we should be ensuring that while we are reflecting on opportunities to strengthen the justice system and strengthen the transparency within the justice system and within the ministry even, we are actually taking those opportunities and making sure we are doing the best that we can when those opportunities are before us.

I think it's quite clear, from some of the discussions that we've seen and looking to even some of the opportunities that we have in the opposition with Bill 204 and that we have as a House, that this legislation doesn't necessarily ensure that specific data that Albertans are very clear should be recorded and reported – it is quite lacking, and we have opportunities in the House.

Again, a perfect example is Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act, to ensure that things like race-based data are being collected and reported on to ensure that we are able to, in the case of systemic problems, do our best to combat those types of things. While I can appreciate that with Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act, that may be, in principle, what the government is trying to accomplish, I still do have concerns, based on the vagueness, I suppose, of the legislation before us, that we are going to ensure that that is indeed the case, transparency in recording and reporting of these types of incidents, that it is done to the best of our ability.

Again, when we look at Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act, and the idea of collecting data within the justice system related to race-based data and also providing a framework that requires public bodies to collect that important data and evaluate it, I think that in Bill 204 it's quite clear what the objectives are and how we get there, a road map to ensure that we are bringing forward more transparency. I think that is somewhat unlike what we're seeing in Bill 9. Again, we see in Bill 204 an opportunity for an Anti-Racism Advisory Council that can make recommendations based on that data collected. We don't see any such thing in Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act.

When we take a moment to just quickly review what we saw in the UCP platform regarding this act and potentially the idea of why it may have come forward, we see that they want to enact the Public's Right to Know Act, of course, which will require annual reporting, by judicial district, on a wide number of measurements. It lists those: numbers of crimes committed by a person on bail, on probation, on parole. The list goes on. I think, first of all, that we see some of this data already being highlighted and collected by the government and Statistics Canada, specifically regarding the crime severity index, potentially, and other aspects of the system as well.

Again, when we have the minister saying, you know, that it's quite likely we would have been able to do a lot of this work that is being proposed by the legislation already, all the details aren't clearly laid out in the bill in terms of what specific outcomes they're expecting or any mention of an advisory council or, potentially, additional funding to ensure that this data collection is done correctly, again looking at specifically what data is going to be collected and how it's going to be used. While it is reasonable to support this in principle, I think that there is more work that should be done regarding this legislation and ensuring that we are taking the time to be as transparent as possible through the process or ensuring that, at the end of the process, transparency is going to be increased.

You know, we've seen other decisions by this government or conversations that they've brought forward specific to justice, the Justice department and the system, and one that continues to be a concern for my colleagues and colleagues from municipalities

across the province, whether we're talking specifically to the Alberta Municipalities organization or Rural Municipalities of Alberta, is that they've all been very clear on this continued talking point from the UCP government that they do not support the idea of an Alberta police force, that it will take important resources out of those communities, that it potentially could lead to less transparency compared to what we have now. Those have been clearly laid out by, again, municipalities across the province, but we continue to hear from the minister, from the Premier, from this government that they are still interested in pushing ahead down that path. I think it clearly shows that there is a disconnect between the UCP's priorities and the priorities of everyday Albertans, the priorities of this government and the priorities of municipal leadership across this province.

7:40

I think it's reasonable to say, again, when we look at the decisions to divert funds and further cut them from programs like the victims of crime fund, this government, while it has had ample opportunity to correct some of these mistakes that they've made already, hasn't taken those opportunities, and it's deeply frustrating to myself and to my constituents and to many Albertans across the province, especially those who are actually trying to access these programs.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 9. I think that, in principle, it's reasonable to see a reason to support this. I think that it would have done us well to see more details about exactly what data is going to be collected, how it's going to be collected, potentially what kind of extra funding we might see to ensure that it's collected on a systematic basis, to ensure that the data is, you know, equitable across the board, and to ensure that communities have ample funding to do the work that the government may be asking them to do through the regulatory process.

With that, I look forward to hearing more discussions on this. I think that, again, as we talk about our caucus's proposal around Bill 204 and the importance of collecting data such as race-based data, with what we're seeing here from the government, I think that there are some similarities. I hope that when the vote on Bill 204 comes up, the UCP government recognizes those similarities and opportunities to do what's right for all Albertans in that instance.

With that, I'll take my seat, Mr. Speaker, but I appreciate the opportunity. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate, always, the opportunity to speak in this House about matters before us. You know, I take my role here in the House as opposition critic very seriously and read each of the bills and read supportive information that's made available to me, and I'll quite frequently do a fair amount of research myself on each of the bills. But, you know, I've commented a number of times in the House here that the bills that we're seeing in the House repeatedly are bills without substance, and here we are yet again with another bill.

I know that in the fall session I made comments that we had a significant number of bills that were only four pages long, and in this case the bill is only three pages long. Again, as I have sought to make comments to this government, I sort of wonder why it is that they proceed with bills with such little substance to them when they clearly have decided to open up a file and look at a particular topic. Why don't they actually spend some time working with

members of the community to talk about how you might make the bill robust, make the bill effective, and so on?

But I've finally come to the conclusion that the UCP government has taken the position that their supporters can count but they can't read. As a result, they are able to say that they have, you know, produced X number of bills, some number that sounds good, in this House and that they have filled some X percentage of their campaign promises, hoping, of course, that nobody looks beyond those simple numbers and actually looks at: "Well, what did they do? Did they actually do something that's going to make our life better or not?"

Frequently we're finding ourselves with these bills that, you know, surely were written in just a few minutes – I previously joked about it being written on the back of a napkin – and here I am in exactly the same place again.

Just as with some of the bills in the fall, I have some serious concerns that yet again this legislation is simply putting into legislation practices which are just normal governance practices that would be expected of any minister anyways, and I don't know why they feel the need to constantly legislate their own minister's behaviour. I guess it's a lack of trust that their minister will actually engage in due diligence and follow standard governance procedures if they don't have it in legislation forcing them to do it. I'm just not quite sure, you know, what's going on here other than simply a chance to bolster their numbers so that they can have easy talking points that make it sound like they're engaged in something when they're not.

Let's just take a look at this bill for a second. Of course, you know, as I've said before, it's not the size of the bill but what you do with it. I read through this bill, as you all can if you happen to have 15 or 20 seconds, and . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called. The Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically comments meant to create disorder in this Chamber. This is the second time that member has used what I believe is a phallic reference in this Chamber regarding it's not the size of the bill but how you use it. He did it back in October of last year in the last session. At that point it was certainly more overt. At this point in time I think it's quite ridiculous that that member thinks that such a joke is suitable in this Chamber and worthy of the time of members of this Chamber. Frankly, the members of Edmonton-Rutherford did not elect him to come here and make jokes of such a nature. I would encourage that member to retract, apologize, and let's not try to use a bad joke again in this Chamber.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen to respond.

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, this is just another attempt by our friends over on the other side of the House to distract the member while doing his interjection here in the House. He is providing ample information and opinion regarding not only the people that he represents but, of course, all Albertans, and he's simply, you know, adding to the debate. With all due respect, I don't believe this is a point of order at all.

The Acting Speaker: I also don't find this to be a point of order. I also didn't see that the comments that were made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had really in any way decreased the decorum in the room. I think that now is the time for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to continue with the call.

Debate Continued

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to get back to what I was saying. I just every once in a while like to provoke the government to stand up so I know that that they're actually listening to what's going on in the House. It's nice to have evidence every once in a while.

Let's take an actual look at this bill and take a look at: what does this bill do? How's that? Does it do anything at all? I can tell you that this bill, by its own description, does only two things. One, it says that you can prepare a report, and two, it says that you can let people read it. That's it. That's what this bill does. It doesn't tell us anything about which particular data is in this bill, you know, what the requirements are for the construction of the bill. It doesn't say who has to be consulted, who has to be involved. It doesn't have to say what mechanisms of data collection or data analysis are to be used. It doesn't describe categories or chapters or sections that must be included in the bill in order for it to be a complete bill and to meet the requirements of this. It simply says that you can actually write a report.

Now, the minister himself has agreed that the minister can write reports now. In fact, we would hope that the minister actually engages in writing reports in order to be able to describe what it is that their ministry is doing. It doesn't actually provide them with any significant support or direction in terms of what is to be done.

7:50

The second part of this, of course, is that section 5 talks about actually letting people read the report, which actually I'm finding myself wanting to support because, of course, we're in this House with this odd situation that the murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls report that came from Ottawa three years ago was supposed to have led to the creation of a report and so on, and here we are three years later with the report not being issued to the citizens of the province of Alberta. We still haven't read the report. I don't even know if there is one. I've been told there is one, but I have no evidence that there is one because they haven't shared it with anybody.

So what we actually have is legislation that does reflect the problem with the government; that is, if you don't write it down that you have to create a report and then in the next section say, "Oh, you must let people read the report," apparently it doesn't happen. Apparently, the Minister of Indigenous Relations doesn't have this kind of requirement on him, so, you know, I guess I have to be supportive here. I have to be supportive because it's quite evident that indeed, unless they are directed by legislation, ministers of this House will not actually let people read a report that is being paid for by the citizens of Alberta. What an odd situation we're in. The whole point of this is the Public's Right to Know Act, and we actually have a government that is choosing not to let the public know unless they're forced into it by their legislation. What an odd situation that we are in here.

I certainly wish that this government had taken the time to expand this report, to give us some understanding and details as to why it is that a minister needs this level of direction in order to function competently in their job, why it is that without this kind of direction a minister can, like the Minister of Indigenous Relations, ignore the province of Alberta and not issue a report and not share the report

with people. It's really odd that we're finding ourselves in this position.

I guess I'm going to end up voting in favour of this in the hopes that maybe we could even include this piece of legislation in all government legislation, that if you actually do any work, could you please let some of us know about it so that we can actually see whether or not, you know, it's something that was worth all the time and energy that was put into it?

You know, here we are with this very thin piece of work yet again, a piece of work that suggests that something that should normally be done be done but doesn't give any direction, doesn't give any circumstance, doesn't give any context, doesn't give any timelines, doesn't give any depth, doesn't give any categorization of the information, doesn't give any suggestion about who needs to be consulted or what kind of source of information needs to be sought in order to do this. It doesn't give any sense at all about how that data will be analyzed, what mechanisms will be used to turn that data into some kind of policy. It doesn't give any kind of direction on, you know, how the mechanisms from the data collection will then lead to somehow informing the public. How will the public know? Where will it be reported? Who will get a copy? Will it be every citizen in the province who will have access to it? Will it be only specialized groups that will have access to it?

Really, this report has done very, very little. We have such a very small piece of effort here, as we have so many times. I think we're over 12 bills now that are four pages or less long, and when you consider that actually two of the pages are about, you know, table of contents and so on, that really means that there's only, like, one page of actual information, at least better than the one bill that actually, literally had only one line in it.

But here we are. We find ourselves again with a government that has done the least that it can possibly do in order to say that they did something because they want to tell people that they did something. Of course, they will report widely, I'm sure, that they put out this great bill called the Public's Right to Know Act, and unless people are taking the time to actually delve into the act, they will just assume that the government actually did achieve something, some progress in terms of the citizens' right to know.

It's a shame because, you know, I'm always trying to look for times when I could support the government and the work that they're doing. I really want to be able to do that. It's always the first thing. What can I support in this bill? What can I be happy about? Yet here again I find myself only supporting it, I guess, ironically, because I actually do want to see a report, so it's really nice to have legislation that would allow a report to occur.

What this government is not doing, of course, is that they're not actually delving into the problem at hand. They're not looking at the issue of crime. They're not looking at the causes and the mechanisms of crime. They're not looking at the mechanisms of discovering crime, responding to crime, preventing future crimes, somehow rehabilitating those people that commit those crimes, the reintroduction of those people back into society in a way that would be positive and beneficial to society. These are all things that I would have loved to have seen the government do. I probably could have jumped up and said: I found something I support you on. I'm really looking forward to the opportunity to be able to do that with vigour.

As I've said so many times in this House, the government's work is so much less than it could have been. They like to talk about the possibility of doing work rather than actually doing the work itself. They like to have the appearance of being in motion rather than actually being in motion, and that's frustrating. It's frustrating for the people in the province of Alberta, who actually expect their government to achieve things, to get to a place where they can

celebrate some of the government actions, but indeed they cannot because the government has not chosen to put some meat on the bones. In this case, I'm not even sure that I can say that the bones are there. It doesn't even ask you to do various things in order to be able to put this report together. At this point we have maybe some nascent cells, I guess, available here that hopefully one day will grow into something that will be recognizable and useful to the people of the province of Alberta.

You know, I would have really enjoyed a bill that spent some time looking at important crime issues in terms of crime and response to criminals and rehabilitation of criminals and moving us toward a safer and less violent society. I certainly would have loved all of that. I would have loved if they had, for example, gone back to the victims of crime fund, which they pilfered last year, and returned that money to the victims of crime and actually developed programs to assist people who have been victims of crime and enabled them to benefit from the dollars that come in through the criminal system and are put into the victims of crime fund but have been shuffled out by this government over the last year, which is a real shame.

I can certainly tell you that in my conversations with people in the Indigenous community about the things that could have been done regarding the murdered and missing Indigenous women report, that apparently is out there but nobody has seen, they certainly would have loved to have seen some of that money in a bill like this, for example, being put forward to actually help people who have been victims of crime. It would be really nice to know that the government, rather than reducing the number of court support workers for Indigenous women, which they have over the last year, were instead helping them.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's an honour to rise here tonight. We live in a world where information is easier than ever to access. The Internet has made it as simple as three clicks for someone to learn in depth about a recently passed government policy or a matter of seconds if they want to know who their local elected official is in order to report a problem. Albertans used to spend long hours doing their own research, looking up specific topics if they wanted to learn about Alberta's justice system, for example, but now they can do that all from a phone. That's why I feel that Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act, fits in well with today's standards of information.

8:00

Crime is a topic many discuss over the dinner table or while watching the news, and they take crime into consideration when deciding where to purchase a home or spend their time. It factors into many very important decisions Albertans need to make for their families. Bill 9 will be a great tool for Albertans to make educated decisions in their daily life. The ability to access a provincial database with crime stats is a great tool in their tool kit as they make decisions for their family.

While Stats Canada does have this information readily available to the public, having a provincial database gives this government the flexibility to highlight statistics that tend to be the most concerning for people such as data about violent and serious crimes. The public has a right to know how crime is affecting their community, and this legislation would uphold that right by requiring the provincial government to report the stat annually, at a minimum, through a report in the Legislature and by publishing the

information on the government of Alberta website. This would give Albertans the option to access the information for whatever purpose they need, whether to learn about a local area that they live in or for interested stakeholders around the province.

Some people ask: now, how does this line up with the government's red tape reduction initiatives? Well, Mr. Speaker, people have a right to know how crime is affecting their community, and this bill would reduce red tape by making it easier for them to find statistics about crime. It's all about ease of access. Having a place for the public to simply click and read would be an enormous help down the road as this government includes more crime stats into the database. Making this information available to the public will also be a great help for local leaders looking to respond to concerns from residents or to help them make educated decisions for better outcomes in their local communities.

I hope my colleagues agree that Bill 9 will aid the government's plan for increased public access to information, and I look forward to seeing what other kinds of statistics could be added to this database in the future. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. I've read through the bill, and, you know, it does some things that, in my understanding, the minister is already eligible to do. When it comes to writing reports about his ministry, I think that that's something that is well within his ability. We don't need legislation for that.

I see under section 2:

The purposes of this Act are

- (a) to increase transparency and accountability with respect to the criminal justice system in Alberta,
- (b) to help Albertans better understand the criminal justice system in Alberta, and
- (c) to ensure Albertans have information about the safety of their communities.

Well, when I look at what this government has done and their track record on crime, I would argue that what's happening, unfortunately, is that the harshest way that individuals are learning about the criminal justice system is from being victims of crime.

I can speak first-hand to what it means to be able to support someone who is the victim of crime. I was a volunteer with the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton for many years, and throughout my time there I would have to say that this was probably one of the most difficult experiences for the victim in the sense that a lot of their needs came from needing support through the criminal justice system.

When someone is sexually assaulted and they are able to find the strength to, first of all, report the assault and then go through the horrific experience of the examination of a sexual assault, where you're literally being poked and prodded and scraped and swabbed and questioned and questioned and questioned and reviolated, and then find the strength and courage to go forward and to start the process of the criminal justice system, it's very daunting to have to sit in a courtroom and sometimes speak directly to your aggressor. There are many cases where what police call the bad guy decides to self-represent, so they're the ones who are questioning the victim. I can tell you that through that process it was very humbling to see the incredible amount of strength that these individuals were able to muster to get through this process.

So when I see a piece of legislation that talks about helping Albertans better understand the criminal justice system, I could say

that anybody who's been a victim of crime and been part of that criminal justice system knows full well what that entails. The way to get through it, Mr. Speaker, is to provide supports to the victims of crime fund, and what we saw this government do was drastically reduce that program.

They reduced the time allowed for a victim to make a claim. It used to be two years that a victim had the opportunity to file a claim. I can tell you, through my work in social work over the years, that two years doesn't seem long enough for someone to get the strength to come forward and file a report. This government reduced that time period. That is a huge detriment to so many in the province that are eligible for support, that deserve support. But because of decisions that this government did when they were looking at the victims of crime fund, they reduced their eligibility simply by reducing the timeline of two years. I believe that it's now 45 days, which is absolutely unacceptable.

The other piece of this legislation: "to ensure Albertans have information about the safety of their communities." While I think it's important to be able to educate people about their communities, I also think it's important to provide supports and services to help reduce those criminal activities. It's not just about educating what's going on around you; it's about making sure that people that have been impacted are adequately supported, and we're looking at reasons why people are entering the criminal justice system in the first place.

When we look at people that are abnormally or highly impacted by involvement in the criminal justice system, when we look at Indigenous communities, when we look at racialized communities, we know that there's a higher number of those individuals that are being harassed by police, that are being charged by police, that are entering the criminal justice system and are getting extremely difficult sentences that aren't equivalent to the general population. I think this legislation is talking about all of these wonderful things, about education, but we're not looking at some of the bigger picture things that need to happen.

When this government had the ability to look at the victims of crime fund, not only did they reduce the timeline for the ability for someone to make a claim, but they also took part of the funding and allocated it to policing and, I believe, to hire lawyers that would assist, which is also important, but it shouldn't be at the cost of victims. I think that when we hear from victims and we hear from advocates, they've been pretty clear about what is needed to address crime in the province, and it's supporting victims.

So it's not just about an education campaign about how your community is safe, but we need to support the communities where we live, and that's more than just doing a report on the criminal behaviour in your community. I question what types of things are going to be subject to public release. We know that currently there are offenders in the system that do warrant a public release. When an offender is being released and they're deemed high risk, a notice goes out, and the community is informed that so-and-so, with this description, was charged with, was sentenced to, and is still a risk to the community. We have that information. We know when these individuals are being released.

What are the criteria that are going to be reported in the community? What is the consideration for individuals that perhaps couldn't afford a great defence team? We hear of cases where people are wrongly accused, they're wrongly confined, and then through appeal they're able to overturn the ruling because they were actually not guilty.

8:10

I'm curious about what criteria are being put in place when we are releasing these reports and this information to communities in

an attempt to keep them safe. Who's providing this sort of resource and information to the ministry to determine this list? I know that it was very controversial when it was determined that the high-risk offenders' information would be published. There were advocates on both sides talking about the impacts of that information being released.

I think it's very important to talk about more than just information sharing. We need to talk about support and services. I can tell you that when someone is being released, in my experience with supporting victims, typically that victim would be phoned, and they would be advised: your offender is being released into the community. And that immediately triggers stress. If a victim has any sort of PTSD, all of that could come rushing back to that individual, and what supports are in place for that? What is the consequence of providing all of this information to a community in an attempt to keep them safe if we're not supporting the victims that put this bad guy in the criminal justice system in the first place? Has that been considered?

When we are talking about informing the public, what is the consequence to those that have been impacted by that individual? I can tell you that when I've been working in the realm of social work, any time there was a bail hearing, any time there was an appeal for release or a parole board hearing, the victims were notified that their offender has asked for this to happen, and just the simple knowledge that that person is asking to be released was a trigger, and it created incredible amounts of stress for that individual and their loved ones, who saw the individual go through it, whether it was their co-workers, their children, their spouse, their parents. It has a huge impact when we talk about these things.

When we're talking about making sure that Albertans are safe under the Public's Right to Know Act, what supports are being put in place for those that have been impacted? This is a big piece that's missing, and it's a big piece that we have continued to see this government cut. Having significant cuts to the victims of crime fund is incredibly detrimental. It has ripple effects as well. It has an impact on the access to mental health supports. It has impacts on the health care system, social services. There is an impact when people aren't getting their mental health needs met, and when it's because they were a victim of crime, they deserve compensation and supports, and to reduce that doesn't mean that they're not going to still attempt to get those services and reports; it means that they're going to go to other systems to do it.

What does that look like? Well, it could be a call to Children's Services because the school has called in saying that, you know, child A hasn't come to school in two months. When we follow up with the parents, we find out that perhaps their offender has been released, and mom is traumatized and can't get out of bed and has nobody to call, no supports, no services. Is that child at risk? That's what would have to be determined. Could it have been prevented if they had a worker that they could call through the victims of crime fund, to say: this is what's happening for me? Perhaps.

When we look at ways to truly support Albertans when it comes to crime, we need to look at more than just information sharing. I think it's an important component of it, but it absolutely is not the only piece that actually helps Albertans. We don't see anything in this legislation that actually addresses the key justice issues.

We've heard about concerns from racialized communities, about police harassment. We on this side of the House have listened, have worked with those communities to come up with ideas that would help address their concerns. None of that is mentioned in this piece of legislation. These are people that are being wrongly targeted by a policing system that was sent there to protect them. Why isn't that in this legislation? Why aren't we talking about things that we could be doing to better support Albertan communities?

The legislation says: to educate communities about their safety. Well, I think that educating communities about safety goes both ways. We need to work with our individuals that are working in the police forces and work with communities and have a collaborative approach about what the needs are rather than just publishing names of offenders that are going to be living in your community. Again I go back to: what is this offender list? Who's being reported? What criteria are being put in place to have these crimes published? You know, I've worked with people that have been charged, have been in the corrections system, and they, too, have a story. They, too, have an experience that perhaps would be completely missed in just a publication of their name, their address, and the crime that they were committed for. That puts those individuals at risk, too, if we're not using some significant criteria to make sure that this person is at risk of reoffending.

I have worked with colleagues that work on that unit that monitors high-risk offenders, and they are very diligent in making sure that that individual knows that they are there. That individual that's been released: they know that they're a high-risk offender. The police know that they're a high-risk offender, and their job is to make sure that that person continues to be monitored.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Calgary-South East has risen.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. If passed, this bill would be the first legislation of its kind in Canada and would require the provincial government to report crime data annually, to make that information publicly accessible. In addition to the annual reporting requirement, which enhances transparency, additional accountability is added through the requirement to table a report in the Legislature, making these statistics part of the official public record.

Bill 9 will bring consistency in timing and a more user-friendly approach to crime statistics for Albertans. This will help my constituents and Albertans broadly to better understand what is going on in their communities. While Alberta already obtains police-based crime data from Stats Canada, this legislation enables the minister to enter into information-sharing agreements with the federal government, other provinces and territories, municipalities, and police services. This collaboration and improved access to crime data will help policy-makers at various levels to make evidence-based decisions that will hopefully lead to better outcomes and safer communities.

While there may be some costs for the technology used to report these metrics and possibly for staff to collect and publish this information, it's expected that these costs can be covered within the ministry's existing budget. In my view, these minor costs will be significantly outweighed by the benefit of providing Albertans and their families with easier access to valuable public safety related information.

I'm looking forward to supporting Bill 9, and I would encourage the hon. members here to do so as well. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's hard not to grow increasingly more and more frustrated with this government as they bring in pieces of legislation that ultimately state that the minister can do what the minister already has the privilege of doing in this House when there are so many more matters that need to be addressed when it comes, in this case specifically, to our justice system.

Mr. Speaker, I think that one of the gravest and most heinous of the realities that we live in here in the province of Alberta is the fact that, especially, Indigenous people are overrepresented in our prison systems, of course, at the provincial level and at the federal level. When you start looking at the numbers, you see that Indigenous men, for example, make up 23 per cent of the prison population, and then when you look at Indigenous women, it's actually 27 per cent whereas overall in the population Indigenous people across the entire country are closer to between 3 and 4 per cent. How does this make any sense? How does this make any sense, that we have so many Indigenous people overrepresented in the justice system?

8:20

You'd think that this is an opportunity for this government to address this particular issue. They say that they're doing as much as they possibly can in order to – and I would say that it's lip service, Mr. Speaker. When I go out into the communities and I hear what people have to say, they feel like this government is just paying lip service to the whole issue of the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It's a shame because, you know, especially the Minister of Indigenous Relations likes to get up in this House and say that he's doing everything possible to actually address the calls to action when it comes to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but what he's been able to do is next to nothing. Absolutely next to nothing.

The reality is that that's not the only concern when it comes to our judicial system, which I think is the most grave of all, though, because, I mean, it has to do with the relationship that exists between Albertans, Canadians, and Indigenous peoples. You have to ask yourself: okay; well, what's the root of the problem? Like, a lot of the time the fact that Indigenous people had to go through the whole residential school system and the trauma of having to go through that and the intergenerational trauma that is then passed on to children, grandchildren: this is something that's very real. It's studied. It's well quantified in research by academics and professionals that actually deal with this. We could be seeing a bill that could actually address these issues; instead, we see this bill, Bill 9, here in the House, which, like I was saying at the beginning, Mr. Speaker, really just amounts to providing the minister with duties that the ministry should already be dealing with.

We also have the fact that last year this very government decided that they wanted to raid the victims of crime fund and use monies from that particular program for other means, which we see absolutely nothing about. They have not demonstrated in any feasible way that they're actually addressing issues related to actually helping families. I'll remind members of the House that Alberta has 73 victims' services organizations. Seventy-three victims' services organizations. When this whole issue actually came out regarding this move, which is intended – like, this victims of crime fund is intended to aid the victims of crime and actually put people and put families first.

So here we have another irony, Mr. Speaker. This government gets up time and time again, and it's like they like to put families first, put people and families first. But here's a very concrete – a very concrete – example of how, instead of putting people and families first, they actually went in and they actually raided this particular fund and, in the end, had 73 organizations throughout the entire province calling their bluff on the fact that they like to put people and families first when it comes to this particular issue.

Those 73 victims' services organizations came out very diligently in order to tell this government – you know, just last week I was telling members on the other side that they say that they like to listen to Albertans, that they like to listen to stakeholders, and

that they're doing what stakeholders and Albertans want, but again, Mr. Speaker, I put forward the argument that they only like to listen to Albertans and stakeholders that actually agree with their political ideology. And I remind them that they're here to represent more than just those who agree with their political ideology. Here we have an example of 73 victims' services organizations that were completely against what this government presented in this House, and they have done nothing to rectify that – nothing to rectify it – not for the people who were actually victims of crime or the organizations that actually help the families and the people that actually go through that crime here in the province of Alberta.

We've discussed the fact that we have a severe and damning problem with systemic racism inside of our judicial system, our justice system as a whole, the fact that, as I was stating, Indigenous people are overrepresented in the justice system, and then on top of that we have a government who, when it comes to the issue of attacks on Black Muslim women here in the province of Alberta, has also done next to nothing. Now, don't get me wrong, Mr. Speaker. I think it's very important that places of worship should be protected, and it's great that a grant has been provided so that, you know, the boards of directors can actually put up surveillance cameras and things like that in order to deter people from marking places of worship of all kinds – it doesn't matter which religion – with profanity and racist symbols and the like. That's fine. It's good. But the specific question before the House last year was the increasing number of attacks on Black Muslim women in the province of Alberta, and we have yet to see any action from this government to address that specific issue.

The Minister of Justice could have used this opportunity to present a bill to this House that would actually address that particular issue. That's why, when people hear what this government has to say, all they can think of is: it's nothing but lip service. They say that they're doing something to address racism here in the province of Alberta, but when it comes to the actual concrete problems that Albertans are facing, they actually are doing absolutely nothing to address it. You know, it's concerning that over nine Black Muslim hijabis were actually attacked here in the province of Alberta. Perhaps people remember how I was impacted by that when the whole issue of the London family happened and that it was important for us to address this head-on. That's why I find it frustrating. I find it frustrating to be inside of this Legislature and realize that this government is doing nothing to actually address that particular issue, because these are real people in communities all around Alberta.

You know, like, the bill here – I'll read out of section 2(c). It says here: "to ensure Albertans have information about the safety of their communities."

8:30

How does this particular bill address the fact that Black Muslim hijabis walking through their communities are actually going to be able to do so safely? And not just them, Mr. Speaker; anybody that actually dresses in a diverse way. We have lots of Albertans that choose to dress in a diverse way when they're out doing their business, and because of that, they're targeted inside of their own communities.

You know, I was at an event a couple of weekends ago with the Hoyo women's collective. They were doing their celebration of International Women's Day. One of the Somali members of the community who's a Black Muslim hijabi got up and was talking about the fact that how cowardly – how cowardly – it is that an individual would run up on a grandmother from the community and attack that grandmother from behind. So then it begs the question,

because they were looking at me and they were looking at all the other politicians in the room that day, and they were saying: what are you doing to address this? This bill could have been something to address that. The Minister of Justice could have done something to present in this very House a real issue Albertans have been facing for decades, I would say, since we started having more immigration of Muslims to the province of Alberta that actually wear hijab and especially Black Muslim women, no matter what communities that they're coming from. It's a shame. Again I tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I'm frustrated.

We've taken this opportunity to actually present Bill 204, the private member's bill, which would actually collect race-based data, and we've heard nothing but lip service from members on the other side when it comes to this particular private member's bill. I'd like to add, Mr. Speaker, that every private member's bill that has been presented by this side of the House has been absolutely squashed. They don't even let us debate it.

So the level of frustration continues to grow and grow and grow, because there is no political will on the other side of this House to actually debate the matters that Albertans are really concerned about. Or is this government trying to tell me that Black Muslim women don't matter? I wouldn't put that on them, Mr. Speaker, because I don't believe in shaming people, but this is a real issue. This is a real issue that needs to be addressed, and it could have been done by the Minister of Justice with this particular bill, but again we see nothing but platitudes and lip service.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier I heard a couple of speeches from the government side as well. Colleagues on that side presented this bill as groundbreaking and something that has never happened in the history of any Legislature and how Alberta will be first and all those things.

However, I didn't see much in this legislation. When we were going through law school, there used to be an assignment – I think my colleague from Calgary-Cross may remember that – where you have to draft a piece of legislation based on given facts and some instructions. For the most part, instructions will be that you will pick up the facts that are of a substantive nature and you will leave them in the body of the act, and if there are things of an administrative nature that need to be figured out, like kind of day-to-day functioning of that program or that legislative scheme, those things may be left for regulations.

In this one, essentially, they have left everything not only to the regulation but to the discretion of the minister. The main clause of the bill reads that "the Minister shall prepare a report respecting data and information . . . that the Minister considers necessary or advisable to carry out the purposes of this Act." The whole act is based on three broad statements of purposes that can be interpreted, I guess will be interpreted, by different people differently and can be interpreted in many, many different ways. Based on those three purposes of the act, the minister has unfettered discretion to include whatever he deems fit.

I think that kind of bill even in a law school assignment for law school assignment purposes will get a failing grade. It has no substantive provision, no certainty, nothing. It's the worst example of a skeleton legislation, and here we listen to government colleagues say that it's groundbreaking legislation and that nobody has ever done it. No wonder nobody has done it, because there is nothing in this legislation at all. We don't know what information will be collected. We don't know what criteria the minister will use

to collect that information. We have no information whatsoever when we think of this legislation.

Even the UCP's platform, where that commitment was made, page 65, is more specific than this piece of legislation. That at least says that the right to know act "will require annual reporting, by judicial district" – not by the minister – "on a wide number of measurements" and lists "the number of crimes committed by persons on bail, probation, parole, subject to a deportation order for criminality, or previously removed for criminality." A lot of dog whistle in there, too, but at least there are some specific details that you can see from that platform, that: okay; that's what they are committing. There is nothing in this piece of legislation that you can say that that's what's happening there. I suspect the prime motive for bringing forward this legislation is that they can check a box, that, oh, there was a promise made in the platform, so we have fulfilled it. It does not give the public any more information that they already don't have. It does not give the minister any more authority that the minister does not have.

All of these reports – for instance, the Calgary Police Service quarterly publish on serious violent crimes, on basically everything that goes on in the city. Stats Canada publishes those. The city of Edmonton publishes those. Saying that we will put that together in one report: that doesn't help. What will really help is if government steps up and takes steps to address those issues, to address those problems.

8:40

Instead, what we have seen from this government in the last three years is that in every budget they have butchered the Justice budget. They have butchered services that the Justice department provides. None of that speaks to the priorities of Albertans that we talk to. I represent a very diverse riding. I have people from many different cultural, ethnic, religious backgrounds, people of many different talents. I think the issues facing them – if government would act to do something about that, that would actually help people.

For instance, my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie talked at length about attacks on racialized, hijab-wearing women. There are people in my riding who are fearful of going out, getting onto the C-Train just because of who they are. That should be the focus of this government. Those individuals, those Albertans, have a right to know that they can be who they are. That's the responsibility of the state, to make sure that they are safe. As was mentioned, yes, there was a grant given to religious, faith-based organizations – good on the government – but many of these attacks were at bus stops, at shopping centres, at parking lots. Many of them were even on the streets and on the roads. We have not heard a thing about what government is doing to address that one, and those people have a right to know what their government is doing about it.

There was a report, after almost three years of consultation, presented by Alberta's first Anti-Racism Advisory Council: 48 recommendations, almost 11 recommendations relating to the justice system, including collection of race-based data. To this date this government has not said a word about that report. Those on the receiving end of systemic racism, those on the receiving end of racism, those on the receiving end of hate-motivated crimes: they have the right to know why this government is so quiet, so silent on that report. Those are the kinds of issues that my constituents share with me.

As stated here, "to increase transparency and accountability with respect to the criminal justice system": if they really want to increase transparency and accountability, there are many things that they already know and will still refuse to share. Just reporting on those numbers also doesn't resolve anything.

For instance, due to the Jordan decision from the Supreme Court of Canada, some reoffences must be prosecuted within 18 months, and indictable offences must be prosecuted within 30 months. There are thousands of cases that are at risk of being thrown out because they're already at that threshold, at the 18-month threshold, at the 30-month threshold. And, yes, I understand that applications need to be made – they won't be automatically thrown out – but instead of doing this stunt, I think government should be putting forward a solid plan of how they will address those delays so that people who have been wronged can get justice from their justice system. Again, we don't see anything on that from this government.

Then the victims of crime fund: not only that those Albertans who are victims of crime are not seeing their cases moved through the justice system; government also raided the victims of crime fund. Since June 2020 they have diverted 60 per cent of the fund on other initiatives, which are not supporting victims of crimes. Just year over year, from last year to this year, there was a 12 per cent reduction in supports for victims of crimes. I think those victims also need to know why it's a priority for the government to check a box from their platform but not their issues.

Why is government failing on a basic and fundamental responsibility of making sure that all Albertans, all citizens are able to feel safe in their communities, and that whenever they are wronged, there is a system in place that will help them with that, be their justice system, be their supports from the victims of crime fund and other services? But those services, those funds: they're on the chopping block. Albertans are getting less because of this government's policies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. They're very instructive, I think, the comments that the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall had framed up in regard to this bill. The well of knowledge that I draw from in regard to justice issues is much less deep than perhaps some other people in this room, but I also, I think, can offer a perspective as to just asking for clarification on this Bill 9, to perhaps seek a more clear understanding of what the Justice minister is intending and the government is intending with this bill, and then for us to make sure that it is substantive and is meeting the public interest, and, of course, I think all bills must pass that test in order to be relevant.

8:50

I guess the first question that I have – because, of course, this bill seems to be seeking to require the Minister of Justice to publish an annual report with data and information relating to the justice system, specifically disclosing information about parole and people up on charges and so forth. So I'm just curious to know if the minister, in fact, can do that now, right? Can the Minister of Justice in fact publish a report on individuals on bail or parole, as was discussed before, or what specifically has to change that is blocking the Minister of Justice now from being able to do that? Because, of course, the first test of the salience of a bill is, you know: does it make a certain action stronger?

The second question I have for the minister and for the government in general is, you know, why the minister is choosing in this bill not to specify which data should be included or disclosed in an annual report for the public. As was mentioned here before – and definitely I have an interest in this issue as well – you know: to

what degree is data collected around race-based crime and/or arrests by the police, and how can we use that sort of data to improve the justice system for all, right? Of course, the justice system isn't just to seek to protect the public from crime, but it's also to ensure that justice is served for someone who might be charged or arrested as well.

I know in this world of algorithms and so forth that we can create tremendous sort of narrowing of probabilities down as to where and when certain crimes might be taking place and a certain geographical location and other uses for data like that. But, you know, I'm also concerned about the converse version of that, Mr. Speaker, which is to presume that you conduct justice using an algorithm as your basis for focusing, deploying forces in certain neighbourhoods, having certain programs for different racialized groups in our society, and so forth.

You know, data is an unbelievably powerful tool that we have, and it's only getting exponentially more so over these last few years and into these next few years, especially. So we really want to make sure that this Bill 9 is addressing that and respects both the integrity of data that we're collecting and what kind of data we are collecting and how we disclose that data as well. It's not just a matter of saying: let's open up the books and let's all see what's there. It's a question of: what is the minister going to choose to disclose and how and under what circumstances, and framing that data as well for the public's knowledge, to know more.

Another question I have – again, I guess it's related to that, Mr. Speaker – is with Bill 9 as it's written, and I'm sure the minister can clarify this for me, right? Like, under Bill 9 what would stop the minister from picking and choosing which data they choose to disclose, right? You know, all information has a certain meaning, and of course if you can craft certain details that you put together, then you're creating a story, right? It's very important, especially in the service of justice – right? – that we act through legislation to depoliticize the execution of justice at every turn, really. I'm just concerned, again, if the minister has carte blanche discretion as to which data he or she might be disclosing and then creating a narrative around that that maybe doesn't necessarily correspond to reality or making our communities safer or the execution of justice for people who might be charged to be the very highest quality possible.

The last question I have as well is, you know, again around the minister supporting the collection of race-based data, which we have, I think, an interest in and, I think, a common interest. I've heard the former Minister of Justice talk about this, and I've heard other members over the last few years speaking about this as well. You know, we actually, coincidentally, Mr. Speaker, have a bill before the House right now, Bill 204, which would seek to in fact create a framework for us to move forward, to compel our various police forces and the criminal justice system to give us that sort of information. So I could see a marriage between this Bill 9 and the disclosure information and then, of course, with Bill 204, the opening up of what sort of data we can in fact have and then making much more informed decisions about our justice system, to in fact make it more just. That's the best word you can use to describe the justice system if possible.

Those are some of the questions that I had. I know that, you know, there are a lot of challenges around the justice system here in the province. I mean, these are challenges that just didn't appear overnight. I certainly watched these things in opposition before and then when we were in government, and now, in 2022, we see some of those same things, but they've just been exponentially, in some cases, more of a problem. Certain issues around the timely execution of justice – right? – having people go to trial in a timely

manner: that problem has just exacerbated itself here in Alberta over the last number of years.

I know that we can use COVID as an excuse, and it certainly was a material issue around booking court dates and so forth; however, you know, here we are now, and we're not out of the pandemic by any means, but we're trying to work for a long-term solution because, I mean, justice still needs to be served, right? If you have a person that is up on trial and doesn't get a date in a timely way, then that affects the execution of justice in a profound way.

One thing that we can talk about more, Mr. Speaker, is increasing capacity in our courts, increasing capacity to have trials being called in a timely way. I mean, I think that's something that all of us could agree on that needs work. You know, there's nothing worse than perhaps making an arrest and putting up charges and then losing that charge because the courts are tied up and there's no room to have a trial. That works both ways as well, for the accused and the general public and the police system. It's just frustrating all the way around. So these are some of the issues that I think we need to talk about in regard to justice.

Again, you know, I was just being honest to suggest that I don't have the same degree of understanding or experience in the justice system as some of our learned colleagues have here, but those are some of the questions that I have.

With that, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, could I adjourn debate? Thank you.

9:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 10 Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has risen.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. This is a very emotional day for me personally. I'm honoured to have brought this piece of legislation forward, but before I get started, there are many people that need to be thanked for helping this, including the Associate Minister of Status of Women and the former and now standing ministers of Health. It took a lot of work on everybody's part to bring this together. It's been seven years of my life that I've been working on this. When you come from an amazing culture like I come from, it's incredible when you get to work with those groups of people from various cultures to help bring forward a piece of legislation that actually protects women and girls.

Around 11 years ago we started doing some work around honour beatings, honour killings, child marriage, FGM, human trafficking, and many other things. As you know, we recently just did a release on human trafficking and the task force and their information that they're bringing forward, another very proud moment, for sure. It takes an entire group of people to have a piece of legislation like this come forward. It's complicated and it's difficult.

I would just also like to tell everyone in here that some of the stuff I'm going to talk about today could be fairly triggering. I just want to let you know that there's some fairly strong language, and there may be some uncomfortable language for folks, but I think it's very important for people to understand why this is happening.

One of the things that we were asked when we were talking about legislation coming forward regarding female genital mutilation was: what's happening at the federal level, but where could we start here in this province? One of the questions that comes up over and

over again is: does it actually happen here? Yes, in fact, it does. The actual act is not carried out here, as far as we know, but we have something called the cutting season where little girls are sent to other countries to have this procedure occur for lots and lots of different reasons. The whole point of this legislation is not in any way to go after cultural rationalities, but it's to prevent violence against women that is perpetuated as a result of what people would deem as culture.

Just so you know, female genital mutilation happens on every continent in the world other than the most northern continent. You know, though, it happens everywhere else in the world. In fact, some of the biggest situations that are happening are in the United States right now because their federal legislation did not align with their state legislation. This came to my attention a few years ago in the United States, and it really started the process as to what needed to happen in our province. To everyone in here who is debating this legislation, even to be able to bring it to the floor is such a huge privilege. We will be the first Legislature in Canada to pass legislation like this, in line with many other countries, but even the United States is having issues with passing state legislation. Even 24 countries in Africa have passed this legislation. There has been no legislation in Asia we can see as of yet; however, we are seeing this happen in Africa.

There have been a lot of questions around culture as well, Mr. Speaker. We did not lead this legislation. This is not us as a Legislature or people of Alberta imposing our values on other cultures. We've been very blessed to have been led by many, many other groups and cultures that are helping us to understand what our part is in this globally, because it is a global issue. When we're talking about human trafficking, in particular about children, we have to just go that extra step to understand what we're responsible for. What's particularly special about this legislation: it's professional legislation that helps to define for our wonderful doctors in this province what they're able to do. I just wanted to start off with that, by expressing how proud I am.

There are decades – 250 million women right now are suffering. This could be happening to a little girl somewhere in the world. But, more than that, Mr. Speaker, 250 million women have either undergone or are suffering from the very, very severe effects of female genital mutilation. In a country like Canada, when we say that we protect women and girls, we protect women and girls, end of story. There cannot be pieces of definitions that either do or don't. You either do or you don't. This is one of those important things that we need to do within our province and within our country to start the conversation. And I mean that, because a lot of people don't know, and it's such a worthy discussion. What it does is that it leads to other layers of legislation to protect vulnerable peoples. Any time we can do that, I believe we are on the right side of history.

Female genital mutilation is a practice that has absolutely no health benefits, nor is it medically necessary, and instead it, in many ways, causes a great deal of harm to the health. There are four types of FGM. This is where it gets a little tricky, so I apologize for the language, but I think it's very important that we use the language and that we honour that and that we honour the people that are going to be doing this.

I think I'm supposed to move second reading. I'm sorry if I didn't do that. Thank you. I got so into my conversation. May I keep speaking after that? Okay. Excellent. Thank you. Sorry.

We have four types. The first one is called a clitoridectomy. This is a partial or total removal of the external part of the clitoris and prepuce, which is the hood of the clitoris.

Excision: partial or total removal of external parts of the clitoris, labia minora, with or without the removal of the labia majora.

Infibulation: narrowing of the vaginal opening, with the creation of a covering seal by cutting and repositioning the labia minora and/or removal of all the external clitoris pieces.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

Other procedures to the genitalia of women or girls for nonmedical purposes include pricking, piercing, incising, scraping, or cauterization. If that didn't make you a little bit nervous, congratulations to you. Every time I read it, it makes me more anxious, more upset, more concerned, and more committed than ever to making sure that all levels of domestic violence, sexual assault, and sexual violence are ended. We know that we can't always end these things, but we have an absolute responsibility as a culture, as a group of people, and as families in this province and in this country and globally to make sure we're doing the very best by our girls and our women and anybody who is vulnerable.

Some of the complications, as you can well imagine, that come from this are urinary tract problems; painful urination; vaginal problems, including massive infections; menstrual problems; and, of course, pain during intercourse. But the biggest problem is that we have the death of women and babies, thousands and thousands and thousands of them. Women have to be reopened in order to deliver babies quite often, as you can imagine – in rural areas it's very, very difficult to do – and then are quite often forced to be sewn up again after the fact.

One of the things that we learned – we did a very, very, very, very intense consultation, Madam Speaker: hundreds and hundreds of groups and organizations not just here in Alberta but across Canada and across the globe.

I also want to thank one particular woman, Giselle Portenier, who did the movie *In the Name of Your Daughter*. If you haven't had a chance to see that, it's imperative that you do. The first 10 minutes are extremely difficult to watch, but it gives an idea of what happens and the cultural practices. In Africa there are many, many groups, both women- and men-led, in the 24 states that have legislation against this, that are leading the discussions around this to help people understand that there are other ways to show coming of age but, more importantly, that girls are valued and are beautiful the way they are. This is because the way girls are put together is considered impure in some places but also because they believe that it's reducing promiscuity and makes a girl more valuable.

9:10

Kenya, in fact, right now has some of the strongest legislation in the African diaspora but are having very, very serious concerns with girls being cut and then being paraded out into the main squares and being showered with gifts and money as a result of their sacrifice to help uphold their villages. You can understand from that perspective – we can't go into this with a stigma because we don't understand where these cultures are coming from, but in Canada, in Alberta we absolutely have the ability to make these changes. In fact, I would suggest that it takes courage to do it. It's going to take the courage of this entire Legislature to be able to make sure that we're able to pass legislation that helps.

I was talking to you about the childbirth complications. Eighteen per cent of children that are born to an FGM victim or survivor are alive but need to be resuscitated. Those are significantly higher statistics than the average. Quite often they're ending up having to be born through a C-section because of the trauma to the baby. Five per cent are stillborn or die, and there's a clear link between those born alive and resuscitation and then stillborn in FGM. There's some very, very solid evidence to show that these are obviously not in the best interest of the woman or the child. But then again we also have a lot of folks who've survived and babies again we

survived, and we have a tremendous amount of posttraumatic stress and depression and anxiety. This legislation is very thorough in that it provides supports, services, and potentially reconstruction as well for any woman that has been impacted.

I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Andrea Hunter, who is a reconstruction plastic surgeon, who's actually going to be working here in Alberta, who's hopefully going to be able to help us, because one of the biggest problems we had is that when we were speaking to doctors, they didn't know how to approach this discussion, as you can well imagine. This gives them the ability to not only be able to have discussion to educate and elevate discussion around women but also to be able to have criminal influences as well should a family not follow that direction or should a doctor be participating in any way, whether that's, you know, facilitating the surgery happening, helping to organize. Like, there are a lot of things that we can prevent and at least help that discussion happen. I would challenge every other Legislature across Canada to get their own version of this legislation going.

You have to also understand from the aspect of the girls and women who've already been through this. For the girls who are going through this, there is such an immense amount of stigma and low self-esteem. Many of them actually miss their regular physical appointments because they're afraid of being seen that they've been altered and then how to answer those questions. It's very, very, very difficult. Again, if you don't think that it's happening here and our doctors aren't seeing it, let me tell you that they are.

Over the course of the last two and a half years I've met hundreds and hundreds of women, both here and across Canada, that have told me their stories of survival, of intimidation, of stigma, of the many, many things that put us into a situation where we believe that this is okay, that an abuse of a little girl like this would be okay. Again, we have the opportunity to educate and really elevate the discussion so that we can help that education piece of it and help families to make healthy decisions here in Alberta. A lot of folks think that it's really just tradition, and it's not. This is a cultural practice that is in every single faith on every continent except for Antarctica, every single one.

I think that it's important that we go over some of the misconceptions as well, Madam Speaker. We hear all the time that it only happens in Africa or other diasporas. That's false. It's practised on every continent pretty much. Even in Europe right now the numbers stand at about a million girls that have been impacted, and that's because they're doing some data collection. We're hoping also, based on this legislation, that data will be able to be collected. We understand how important this data is, but it's also about wanting to share that data. The doctors now will have – it's mandatory for them to report if they see this, so at the very least there is information about what is going on so that should a case come forward, where abuse needs to be brought forward, we're able to do that. There are misconceptions that it only happens to adult women. The majority of girls who underwent female genital mutilation are under the age of five. Cutters claim that there are health benefits.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I don't mean to point fingers because, again, I'm not trying to impose what I believe on other cultures or coming from other countries. Having said that, though, it's passed down from grandma to grandma to grandma – that happens in these countries where they're cut – so you can imagine trying to change the perception and the discussions around that and how important that discussion is. We have the idea that there's been this long-standing tradition, that there are health benefits, but it actually stems from the idea that

female genitals are dirty, and in order to be clean and not promiscuous, they must be cut.

I was going to say, too, that, like, I think one of the biggest problems that we noticed throughout this and what I learned in these discussions is that it's very, very difficult to have a lawsuit come forward. There have been very few lawsuits that have even come forward. In Michigan the court case was brought forward after state legislation was just recently passed, and they were still not able to get justice for these little girls because it was considered vindictive to go back after the same case again. In whatever way it was handled, it was not being seen as a day of justice for the girls between the ages of nine and 14 that were cut in the United States. It was seen as an act of desperation for lawmakers to come forward with this new legislation, so they couldn't even retroactively go after the doctors that were doing this practice.

I think the most difficult part of that read was that they were saying they were just doing a little cut, a little nick. Well, we're talking about a very tiny and significant part of a woman's body, and anything that happens in there is going to have long-term results. Again, the hope is – we're going to be having some meetings with some of the Senators in the United States, too, about their decisions, and the governors, around what's going on because I think globally we just really need to come together on this discussion.

In the Health Professions Act a couple of the things that we're going to be dealing with specifically, so that folks understand this legislation – please, if you have any questions about this at all or anything outside of, like, what we discuss in here, I would be, like, more than honoured to help out and discuss this. It's really important. If there's anything that I can do to help or people that you know that may need to have a conversation about this, like, please feel free to reach out to me any time. I'm certainly not the expert by any stretch, but we'll get people connected to the right people.

This is what has been said in the laws, in the existing laws, and how we'll be strengthening those laws with the permission of the House. The procurement or performance of FGM by a regulated health professional in Alberta is prohibited, and "a person who has been convicted of a criminal offence related to the procurement or performance of [FGM] is not eligible for registration as a regulated member under [the Health Professions Act]." The proposed amendments make reporting conduct related to female genital mutilation to law enforcement mandatory.

The proposed amendments will also require health profession regulatory colleges to adopt standards of practice relating to FGM and cutting. The standards of practice will address things like education related to the prevention and prohibition of FGM, Mr. Speaker, obviously, supporting victims, securing and providing further supports that may be necessary to protect a child at risk, and how to manage the resulting physical and psychological trauma to support a victim. This would mean potentially even supporting surgical procedures to help the FGM survivor to either have a natural birth or subsequent repair post that. So it's fairly substantive and, I think, a very, very good jumping-off point.

I think that as we go through the process, we'll probably hear back from a lot of docs and, through the physicians' and doctors' help, understand how that's going. I think it'll be very profound in understanding what kind of data we're dealing with in our province, especially, I mean, as Alberta is opening up and we see the opportunities, the amazing opportunities in our province right now. We want to attract as many people as we can from all over the world to come to this beautiful province and live here and contribute to the immense and beautiful fabric that is Alberta. We will be able to stand just a little bit taller knowing that we have legislation that

protects women and girls in this way and that is a layered type of protection that goes on top of the other protections that have come not just from this government but governments before us as well.

9:20

I often say this, that our society is only as good as our humanity, and that's why these discussions are so important, because it's not about a bad group or a good group or bad practice or good practice or bad people or good people. It's not about that. It's about evolving and taking seriously the things that we say in our country and in our province and truly, truly believing in the power of good legislation to be able to come forward to protect our women and girls.

Thank you so much.

The Speaker: I appreciate the remarks of the hon. member. I'm not sure – the chair may have missed it at the beginning – whether or not you actually said “I move second reading” or “I'm pleased to move second reading” or something to the effect.

Mrs. Aheer: I was a little late, but, yes, I did. Thank goodness our whip was on it.

The Speaker: Excellent. Excellent.

Are there others? The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start off this evening by thanking the Member for Strathmore-Chestermere, or Chestermere-Strathmore . . .

Mrs. Aheer: It works both ways.

Ms Issik: . . . for all of the amazing work and dedication that she has done on this cause. She has put countless hours into this. She's put her heart and soul into this for the sole reason of protecting women and girls, and I know that I am not alone amongst Albertans for being grateful for her efforts. It's been truly remarkable to watch her dedication to this issue.

You know, the one thing about this legislation that's amazing is that it actually takes a proactive approach to addressing female genital mutilation. Although we're not aware of health professionals in this province who offer this procedure, if even one woman or one girl experienced it in this province, it would be one too many. Under this legislation any health professionals convicted of performing or facilitating female genital mutilation or cutting would have their permit to practise and their registration cancelled in this province. Additionally, health professionals convicted of this crime in other jurisdictions would not be allowed to practise or register in this province. That's what makes this different. That's what makes this legislation different.

Also, it would be prohibited that a complaint alleging procurement or provision of FGM go to the alternative complaints process. Again, very important. It makes it mandatory to report any conduct related to FGM to law enforcement. Again, unique in this country and, I think, actually unique probably in almost all of North America, except for maybe Michigan. That's why this legislation is so important.

It's one of the greatest tools we've got to combat any form of gender-based violence because it promotes awareness and it promotes education. Bringing this practice to light is incredibly important. It needs to come out of the shadows. One of the important ways that that will happen is by the health profession, by the regulatory body, the college adopting standards of practice related to FGM. That's something that doesn't exist currently, and it is needed. The college would have, if this legislation is passed, a

year from the date that the legislation comes into force to develop and implement the new standards of practice. Naturally, the content and nature of these standards of practice would differ depending on the types of services offered by each profession; however, they may focus on elements such as training related to prevention of FGM or securing supports to protect a child at risk.

The Member for Chestermere-Strathmore did outline some of the other pieces around reconstruction and other sorts of practices that would support women and girls that have been through this. The standards would encompass managing treatment, recovery, and, as I mentioned before, supports for women. Alberta's government would work closely with all of the regulatory colleges to ensure the standards of practice adequately address prevention of the act and provide the support for survivors that I mentioned.

I want to note that although this practice is sometimes called female circumcision, it is in no way comparable to male circumcision, nor is it a religious practice. Female genital mutilation can cause serious, long-term health problems in the women who have experienced it, and those have been enumerated here tonight. It can cause complications with childbirth and menstruation. It can lead to harmful infections and even death. For many women around the world female genital mutilation means a lifetime of pain and fear, and I am proud that Alberta is being a leader in standing up against this practice.

This initiative is in complete alignment with this government's broader effort to protect vulnerable women and girls from sexual violence. If this legislation passes, we will be the first provincial jurisdiction in Canada to introduce legislation addressing this. I encourage all members of this Assembly to support this bill so we can help ensure that no woman in Alberta has to experience this horrific crime.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise this evening to speak to Bill 10, the Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. I'd like to start by thanking both members that have spoken to this in second reading. I think the passion that the member brings for this is incredible, and it's really heartfelt. I think, you know, that by identifying this topic and by starting with it being a trigger for many is a huge starting point, where I would like to start the discussion when we're talking about this.

I think that when we talk about legislation that has such a profound impact on women and girls, there are so many elements that we need to consider when we're making these decisions and we're going through something that is such a profound topic, that has such an impact on those that are impacted by genital cutting and those that are working with the women that have been impacted. It's both ways when we're talking about this practice. When I have done some research about this practice – you know, I come from a children's services background, and this is a conversation that we have as professionals, about the impacts on our young women and girls.

It has to start with education, and it has to start with a general understanding of what this means and what's happening in the province. Even if the procedure didn't happen in the province, when our physicians and health care providers are working with these young women, they need to understand what the next steps are and what happens after that.

I appreciate this legislation. It talks about, in depth, the criminal component of it when the practice happens in the province, but oftentimes we know that this happens out of province and these

women are here, and we need to know that when we're going forward with this legislation – and, you know, I've heard the associate minister talk about next steps and practice – we need to really ensure that we get it right, that we're looking at ways that not just support the young women and the girls but that support the health care providers that are providing service to these young women, because it is traumatic, and it does have an impact, and there needs to be an understanding, I would even argue, at an entry-of-education level, so in postsecondary, when we're talking to nurses, when we're talking to social workers, when we're talking to physicians, obstetricians. It should be part of the curriculum of what we're talking about.

It should be a conversation that everybody in the health care profession is comfortable having, because it can be a conversation that people automatically have an assumption of what that means. We've heard in this House that it is not a spiritual practice, so having that understanding that sometimes it's bigger than the why. It's: "How do we support this individual? What do they need? What are that individual's beliefs about it? What does it say about them?" and really, really working hard to try not to stigmatize the young women, because there are values that we hold and judgments that we hold. As a social worker coming to people with the most neutral understanding – and no judgment comes from a place of education, right? So if we're talking about the standards that are going to follow this piece of legislation, I think going even further than just educating our current health care professionals, looking at those that are entering the field and the practice and having those conversations about how we can support women.

9:30

Having a really open conversation about the supports that women can access: it's something that I learned through working at Terra, which is a school for pregnant and parenting teens. Some young women would find themselves pregnant and not know what services and supports and resources were available. They didn't have people in their family that they could trust. So how do we educate the broader public about services and resources and information if their home isn't a safe place to access that information, if their community of origin isn't a safe place to access that information? How do we get the message out there that women can access safe information, health care? It's so important to be able to do that.

I appreciate the criminalization piece of it. My understanding is that it's already in the Criminal Code. That education component is just so essential. We need to look at ways that we can, you know, understand genital cutting in a bigger scope. We need to include many professions, midwives. We heard the member talk about the importance of childbirth in that and that women experience alternative ways of childbirth. They might have a midwife. They might have a doula. It's not just perhaps a physician that is working with these women, so having that understanding on that level as well. I would also suggest that social workers be included in that because we typically have social workers in place in hospitals, whether they come in through the emergency room, whether they're dealing with children through the CAP Centre at the U of A, so having just a multidiverse understanding of the impacts of this and being able to genuinely really support those that are working with the women.

One of the things that I wish I saw in this bill was more talk about the women and girls. I know that it talks about the prosecution and the criminal piece, but for a piece of legislation that says Protecting Women and Girls, some sort of reference to being able to support the women and the girls and that that next step is coming, to talk about the importance of understanding that there is trauma affiliated

with this and that the government is looking to genuinely support those women and girls. I truly hope that that's the intention. I've heard you both say that. I would like to see that that's something that's happening.

It's something also to understand that it might not necessarily be done through health care providers. Solely focusing on health care providers, I think, would be part of that education piece for the general community, but they might not have gone to their doctor for this procedure. It might have gone through someone in the community. There are other ways. Just because it wasn't a health care provider doesn't mean it's not a criminal act, and there's still trauma affiliated with that. I see the associate minister nodding. I appreciate that.

I think that, with that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and continue to listen to the debate. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has risen.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support Bill 10, Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022, and it's dealing with female genital mutilation. This is a rather uncomfortable and difficult topic to actually contemplate and speak about, particularly as a male, so I'd like to thank the very strong women that spoke previous to me on this, on both sides of the aisle, that they took the very courageous stand to bring this incredibly sensitive and generally unknown topic to our attention to address it for so many women and girls.

As I was contemplating speaking about this, I asked myself the question: how does one begin to describe female genital mutilation? Words like "unconscionable," "heinous," "dangerous," "painful," "brutal" all come to mind. Particularly in the western world, this type of practice is virtually unthinkable. What about from my perspective as the father of four daughters? How horrific to consider it even remotely happening to one of my children. Therefore, should not every woman and girl in Alberta have that same care and protection that Bill 10 would offer them and do just that?

Female genital mutilation is a dangerous practice, Mr. Speaker. According to the Criminal Code of Canada this practice carries a charge of aggravated assault. This is something that we can never have practised in Alberta. One thing I'm glad that this act takes into consideration is that anyone convicted of female genital mutilation in another jurisdiction would not be allowed to practise medicine here in Alberta. I don't think it should be allowed to be practised anywhere, but I'm very glad that within our jurisdiction we are taking steps to prevent it.

My colleague from Chestermere-Strathmore pointed out last week that, if passed, this bill would make Alberta the first jurisdiction to directly address this horrible practice. As I said before, as a father of four daughters I'm proud that Alberta is the first province to act, and I'm very hopeful that other provinces will follow suit. Mr. Speaker, this is not a partisan issue. Even if you're not the parent of daughters, I would imagine everyone in this Chamber has a niece, a cousin, a close friend, a relative of some sort that they would not be able to imagine being subjected to this crime.

I know I've mentioned my daughters throughout the speech, and I will continue to because of this piece of legislation, that is intended to make our province a safer place for them and others just like them to live and prosper. Mr. Speaker, I was shocked to learn that according to statistics that the government brought to our attention when the bill was tabled, there are estimated to be 200 million women and girls world-wide who have undergone female genital mutilation or cutting and that are still alive today. Two

hundred million. I cannot get over that number. That is – what? – 20 times the population of Canada or more. It crosses at least 30 countries. What is even more disturbing is that something like 3 million girls are estimated to be at risk of undergoing this illegal practice every year. Three million girls. This cannot happen. It's unacceptable. I wish we could protect women and girls around the world, but we can't. That's not our jurisdiction. But we do have the authority and the obligation to do that right here in Alberta, in each and every one of our hometowns, to make them a safe place, a safe haven for women from around the world to come and live and prosper.

As the Minister of Health stated last week, these changes make it even more clear that any health professional performing FTM or cutting will never practise in Alberta again. I don't like that we have to make this clear, but based on the evidence that has been shared in this House, there is, clearly and unfortunately, a need to do so.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I am compelled to rise and support this bill. As members of this Chamber have pointed out, girls and women undergoing any type of FGM procedure can face lifetime health problems, not only the obvious physical effects and trauma but devastating psychological problems as well that can arise from being subjected to this barbaric practice. I believe everyone in this Chamber would agree that wanting to protect the women and girls in their lives – their daughters, their nieces, their cousins, their friends, all the women and girls in their communities – is paramount. We here in Alberta have the opportunity to set the path for other provinces and territories to follow to protect women and girls. I appreciate that this bill states that if a medical practitioner is convicted of this crime, their practice permit and registration are cancelled immediately. At this point a crime has been committed, and there is no need for a regulatory hearing. What there is a need for is the guilty party's swift removal from the profession so that they can never be in a position to harm a girl or a woman again.

9:40

In closing, Mr. Speaker, while I'm happy to speak in support of this bill as a member of this Assembly, I know that as a loving father there is nothing I wouldn't do to ensure their safety. I believe that this amendment to the Health Professions Act is important for women and girls in Alberta and will be a great tool to make sure that anyone practising FGM will never ever be in the position to do so again.

Thank you again to the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore and the Associate Minister of Status of Women for their incredible work to bring this forward. From me, from my community, from my community with many members from around the world, and from the father of four daughters, thank you, through you, Mr. Speaker, to them and to the members opposite for speaking in support of this bill. I would ask that everyone else would also rise and support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this although I must admit I'm a little loath, as an older male, to say too much, because I certainly think other people know much more about the topic and have put much more energy into making sure that they've got this right.

I guess I want to start my speech by thanking the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for the work that she has done on this bill and, you know, I think, for the many years even prior to introducing

this bill into the House, on this topic. Of course, it is one which is very serious and one that I think needs to be addressed.

Many of you will know that I have many years of experience working in the area of sexual assault, and of course this type of topic certainly came up a number of times in my time as an instructor of social work. I also did receive a number of papers from students about this topic and learned much about it. Listening to the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, I thought, was refreshing in terms of how direct the conversation was, how specific the use of clear language about what was being said. I think that is something that really needs to be done more often in this House, so I certainly commend not only their work but their words tonight on this important subject.

I do think that this bill is in line with, you know, a real trend. As I say, students have been writing papers about this in my classes for a number of years. I know that in Alberta the college of physicians back in 1994 began the process of ensuring that none of their members participated in this type of activity, and of course the federal government also made female genital mutilation illegal in May 1997. So, I mean, this has been a topic that has been in the public consciousness for a period of time, and certainly I want to support the people who are doing the work to make sure this is moving forward and doing it right.

I know that it's a difficult topic to talk about. First of all, the natural anguish you feel when you hear about the actual activities that take place make it difficult to speak to. But you also realize that it does take place in the world, and, like when I was dealing with child sexual abuse, you know, sometimes it was hard to bring up the subject to talk about with people. You're trying not to turn people away from an important topic, yet you need to address the topic with sincerity and depth and not make sort of side references to what it is but actually speak directly to the actual things, and I think the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore did that very well.

I know it's very difficult. People around the world practise this because for some reason they believe there is a reason to do this, certainly not any reason that we in this House would share. But we also, then, understand that the work is complicated. It's complicated because you want to find a way to invite people to understand why we are moving forward with these kinds of bills to stop this from happening, to help them to understand this new perspective, knowing that it will be difficult for many people to understand that perspective, particularly, as the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore said, as this is something that has happened generation after generation after generation in families. We're inviting them into a place that they have no experience, and as such it can be very, very difficult.

Finding that way to move forward takes nuance and a delicacy on some levels, and I appreciate that the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore and, of course, the associate minister for women have tried to walk what can be a difficult line and, I think, have done so somewhat successfully. I certainly don't have any complaints. I would love to find ways to be supportive about the work as it moves forward and really look forward to the work that needs to go around this kind of legislation to ensure that people who have been involved are somehow given the supports to make the transition, to make the move. I look forward to hearing about, you know, the budget items that will be supporting this, the types of services that will be available – I know some of that has been spoken to already this evening – but not just the services that are available but the process by which we will ensure that this kind of activity really ceases to exist in this country.

I guess I'll end my comments here just saying thank you to everyone who is helping to move this along. If there's some way

that we in the opposition can help to ensure the success of stopping genital mutilation in this country and indeed around the world, then certainly we, too, wish to stand and be counted.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to applaud the incredible work done by the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore on this bill. I know that she's been working on it for a number of years. It's something that she's very passionate about and something that there's a lot of misunderstanding and misinformation about as well. One of the points that I really wanted to get on the record – and the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore spoke to it as well as the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs – was that this is not a religious practice, and I cannot stress that enough. On this particular issue I myself and others in the community have heard misinformation and it being repeated and repeated that this is actually a religious practice. Of course, it's not. I really want to thank the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for making that very important point.

It's unfortunate, because it so happens that sometimes people do mistake a cultural practice for a religious one, and then people tend to just keep propagating that misinformation in the community. On this particular issue I think it's something that is really important, that if you ever hear that piece of misinformation, you correct it immediately, please, as I have tried to do many times, no matter what community I'm visiting with, if I happen to hear that piece of misinformation.

If the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore wouldn't mind, I would welcome an interjection from her simply because I'm really eager to know a little bit more about the groups that she actually consulted with on this particular issue, so at this time I cede to her if she wouldn't mind speaking a little bit to that.

Mrs. Aheer: May I?

The Speaker: A reverse interjection.

Mrs. Aheer: I know. I would be happy to. Thank you so much. It was such a robust consultation. Thank you to the member, through you, Mr. Speaker. It was a real labour of love, actually, over the years because, like I was mentioning earlier, we shouldn't be leading this discussion. The diasporas where it's very, very obvious are where those interactions need to happen. One thing that I'd love to share with you is that I met with Rhobi. She is a leader in ending FGM in Kenya, and she, a bunch of the girls from the movie *In the Name of Your Daughter*, and I, had a Zoom call together. Rhobi herself, the one young girl, is one of the young girls who was able to escape female genital mutilation and ended up going back to her family, but her family had said that, no, this is going to happen. So she ended up staying on at the shelter . . . [Mrs. Aheer's speaking time expired] Sorry. I can talk about it later.

9:50

Member Loyola: No, and I thank you for that, hon. member. It's important for me, and especially when it comes to this matter – and, of course, unlike some of the debates that happen inside this House, this is not a political, partisan one. I think that for the most part we agree on most aspects of the bill. There is one particular issue that I'm a little bit concerned about, of course, that I'm interested in knowing from the minister. How do you think that this particular bill will actually help the women and girls that you're seeking to protect? You mentioned that health professionals may get access to,

for example, supports and things like that, but through careful reading of the bill itself I didn't actually see how women and girls will be supported.

Mrs. Aheer: May I?

Member Loyola: Please go ahead.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much. The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs brought this up as well. A big chunk of any changes in intervention and how we proceed has to happen with education and empowerment. I don't think that the women who have survived this procedure or are going through it or anything are well served by an automatic jump into justice in terms of criminality until we've had an opportunity to actually talk with the families. Of course, if a family is trying to send their child away and is facilitating that or a doctor is facilitating that, that automatically leads to criminality. However, there are many, many opportunities, Mr. Speaker, for us to intervene previous to that with the doctors and physicians having knowledge to be able to intercept. The biggest problem that we've had in the past, at least from my consultations, was the difficulty in understanding how to bring up the conversation and have it, because they didn't understand if it was religious or if it was cultural practices or how to bring up that conversation.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much for that, hon. member. As we move forward, I think that it's really important that we identify those particular aspects of the bill because, at the end of the day, it is the women and girls that have experienced this incredibly horrendous – and I am at a loss for words to actually describe this practice, as some of us have already stated in this House. And, of course, it's really important that we don't continue the stigmatization on this particular issue. I think that although it's something that we find horrendous and unacceptable, at the same time we need to proceed with caution, especially with those communities that, again, are confusing a cultural practice for a religious one, as you pointed out, Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

I think it's really important as well that as we continue debate, we speak specifically to the supports that health professionals are going to get. I know that I'm going to do my due diligence and actually reach out to health professionals that I know of myself and ask them what they think about the bill, not because I'm, you know, trying to create any kind of angst or discord but just to do my due diligence with reaching out to them as well.

Once again I want to thank the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for all the incredibly hard work that she's done with this, the Associate Minister of Status of Women, as well, for bringing this piece of legislation into the House. I look forward to learning more as we continue the debate. With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 5

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022

[Debate adjourned March 22: Ms Goehring speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has some time remaining should she choose to use it. The hon. member.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 5, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022. When I was speaking to this the last time, I was talking about the importance of PTSD being included in this. One of the things that I

mentioned as a concern was the government's position on removing access to workers to claim PTSD as part of their work impact.

Part of this legislation that I think is so important is that it expands those that we need to protect on our Alberta roadways. I know that when I was doing my consultation for PTSD Awareness Day, you know, I spoke to those that provide a response to motor vehicle collisions or any sort of involvement, whether it's a tow truck or an emergency response vehicle, and the trauma that those individuals face is quite significant.

So when we're talking about traffic safety and we're expanding those that we need to slow down for when we're passing on our roadways, I would encourage this government to look at the other component of this and the trauma that we're saying in Bill 5 is a reason for their safety, that we need to make sure that we are slowing down not just for emergency vehicles but for roadside assistant responders and such. We need to take that same argument and apply it to the mental health services that we provide those individuals. It's confusing to me why under Bill 5 we talk about the importance of their safety, their physical safety, yet we don't talk about it in other realms of legislation. We don't look at why their emotional safety is just as important. I think that it's incredible that we're continuing to acknowledge worker safety, and this piece of legislation does that.

It opens up the Traffic Safety Act. One of the questions that I did have when we were discussing this, that I haven't received a response to, was: how many lanes are being impacted when we are required to slow down? Currently the legislation indicates that it's the immediate lane where you have to slow down. So I'm curious if there been some consideration in expanding how many lanes would be impacted so that all lanes of traffic are required to slow down. Often what happens is that you see emergency vehicles or a tow truck on the side of the road. In that first lane people slow down, but then the other lanes of traffic are going 110 down the highway.

Mr. Eggen: A hundred and 10?

Ms Goehring: A hundred and 10 is the law.

But it doesn't impact the entire roadway. So there are subsequent actions that could impact or enhance this piece of legislation. I think that exploring how many lanes are impacted by this piece of legislation would be great.

I think the other piece is ensuring that there's a strong educational component to this, to understand and to educate those that are driving about what the rules are. I know one of the things that I went through when my kids were doing their driver's test is that that was really the only time that as a driver I sat and reread all of the rules. I would argue that that's probably most drivers; they do the test, they have their licence, and then they're probably not being updated on current laws. I think it's important that when we look at safety, education be a huge component of that, so making sure that there's a big push to educate Alberta drivers about what it means to keep our workers safe on our roadways.

10:00

I know AMA is a wonderful organization that does some great education campaigns. I can think of one of their commercials that they had done encouraging roadside safety, and it started with what looked like some sort of carnival happening on the side of the road with lights and all these sounds. It then changed the scene to show that it was emergency responders. It wasn't something that was fun and exciting happening; it was a safety concern, and they were doing their job. So the message from that commercial was to make sure that people slow down and that important work is happening

on the side of the highway. It's not something that workers or drivers should dismiss.

I think that we become complacent when we see emergency vehicles and we just kind of do the status quo. So now that that is changing, we need to make sure that Albertans are aware so that we can keep workers safe. We need to make sure that we're all slowing down when we're seeing vehicles pulled over on the side doing work. That ensures the safety of all the motorists that are responding as well as those that are doing the work.

If education is rolling out, I think a clear message needs to happen. I worked with a gentleman who was working with the city of Edmonton and addressing the response times of Edmonton fire. They were trying to determine what was causing the delay in responses, and loud and clear it was people not merging properly to let the emergency vehicles through. They had determined that, especially in the downtown core, simply hearing sirens didn't alert a driver to pull over to allow the emergency vehicle to proceed. I mean, that's something that you learn as a driver immediately, what the response is when you see lights coming at you, what you're supposed to do, and people just simply weren't doing it. So one of the things that the city of Edmonton tried to do was change the siren sound of the fire trucks. That was something that they were hoping would have an impact to alert drivers that something is happening, because they were used to hearing sirens, but they weren't responding in the way that they were supposed to.

I know that as drivers sometimes we go on automatic – you go on your route home; you kind of tune everything out – but that's when accidents happen, and that's when, unfortunately, emergency responders aren't able to do the job that they need to do to keep us safe. When we're talking about Bill 5, it's something that I can obviously support because it makes sure that anybody that's going to work: we're going to try and ensure they get home safely.

I'm looking forward to continued discussion and continued debate about this, and I hope that some more information can be provided about some clarity about the lanes specifically, if it's expanding to more than the immediate lane and, if not, if that's possibly something that could be considered. It's something that I know I've heard when I'm speaking with members, that specifically emergency roadside assistance would like to see, because it's difficult when traffic is still continuing to go the 110 kilometres while they're trying to get someone home safely.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for giving me time to finish my remarks on Bill 5, and I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Speaker: On second reading of Bill 5, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall-Bhullar.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. I rise to speak in favour of Bill 5, and I think it's an important piece of legislation. Speaking of Bhullar-McCall, it reminds me of our friend and colleague Manmeet Singh Bhullar, whose life was cut short in a tragic accident on the roadside while he was stopped to help a fellow motorist. This piece of legislation will make sure that those who are passing by highway maintenance workers, emergency workers, first responders, tow truck operators, or even any Albertan who is stopped on the side to help somebody – they need to slow down, and that will save lives.

I'm glad to see that there is a mention of an educational component to this legislation as well. That education campaign, I hope, will get the message out far and wide to make sure that not only these people are aware of this legislation, that people are aware of these changes but that people are aware of what they need to do when they see flashing lamps, when they see highway workers, when they see emergency vehicles. As my colleague from

Edmonton-Castle Downs mentioned – I think it’s true for most of us – we only read about these rules when we first go for the written test, and after that I don’t think there is a way of kind of continued development, for lack of a better word. When I read about this educational component, I hope that it’s more substantive and it reaches far and wide to all Albertans.

The second thing I will briefly comment about. When the minister was speaking at second reading, she said that some in opposition may suggest higher fines, new fines and referred to them as cash cows. I think that it was not the opposition who coined this term; it was the then UCP sitting in opposition, who used to rage against those cash cows and higher fines, but I think that changed when they got into power and power got into their heads.

The third thing. I think it’s important that when we are talking about making roads safe, we also talk about and make sure that roads are open. That’s the only, I guess, functional utility of roads, that they’re open for traffic, that they’re open for transportation. If they’re not open and there are no vehicles on it, I don’t think that then we need these laws.

What we saw during the illegal Coutts blockade: many of our roads were closed for many days, weeks, almost 21 days. When we asked the minister at the estimates about not taking steps to cancel their licences or taking some other steps, the minister shared – and I’m paraphrasing – that she didn’t have those legal authorities. While this traffic act is now open, that is an opportunity to make these roads really safe and make these roads safe from those illegal blockades and send a strong message to those who were blocking our roads, to those who were damaging our economy, to those who were sitting illegally on our economic corridors and making roads almost unavailable for fellow Albertans. I think that was the opportunity to send a strong message, even to those who were cheering them on and even participated in those blockades. I think that’s the opportunity that this government missed while they had this piece of legislation opened already.

10:10

I hope that at the committee stage the minister will be open to suggestions, amendments that will ensure that roads are safe, that will ensure that roads are not only safe but that they are open as well and that those who would try to blockade them illegally, those who would cheer on those kinds of illegal blockades – that the government and the minister will have the legal authority and the power that the government and the minister need to dispel those illegal blockades. With that, I thank the minister again for bringing forward this legislation, and I hope that at the committee stage the minister will be open to making roads even more safe for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to rise here tonight and speak to Bill 5. Road and highway safety is a top priority for this government, as it should be. Every day thousands of Albertans get in their cars and head to work, school, or to their kids’ hockey games at the local leisure centre. Their safety remains paramount thanks to road enhancements, for example, highways 11, 19, and 15 twinning projects.

Now, those safety concerns have been addressed for our first responders as well. Every day they put themselves at risk while saving the lives of car crash victims and other calls for service along

our province’s very busy highways. Thanks to the current protection under the Traffic Safety Act they don’t have the added anxiety of drivers speeding past them as they perform life-saving duties. Thankfully, tow truck drivers are protected under the current provisions. Most of the time they are the ones on the side of the road after emergency crews pack up and are most at risk of being hit by a passing motorist.

Mr. Speaker, these current protections shouldn’t just include tow truck drivers and emergency crews. Roadside workers face the same if not more dangers since they work on the side of the road each and every day. The overwhelming majority of Albertans feel the exact same way. Last year this government heard from over 15,000 survey respondents, with 92 per cent of them supporting all drivers giving one lane of space when passing a roadside worker vehicle when its lights are flashing, and 60 per cent felt that the current passing laws were inadequate. These proposed changes as part of Bill 5 will offer similar protection to those workers along with snowplow operators. As much as I hate to admit it, most of our year involves the threat of icy and snowy roads like it is outside right now, and those operators are up very early in the morning, working until late in the afternoon to make sure that roads are clear for the safety of everyone else. We should make sure that they are safe while doing so.

The same can be said for roadside workers, who for some time spend all their day controlling traffic and standing on their feet for long periods of time. These are the people most at risk when doing their job, and we as a government need to do our job to make sure that they can get home safely once they are done. Alberta drivers must be aware of just how dangerous it can be on the sides of highways and that they pose a tremendous danger to these workers. Roadside workers in a high-risk environment deserve the best protection to ensure that they can go home safely to their families at the end of their shift.

Now, I’m thankful that in my riding I can speak with the Minister of Transportation on issues like this as many of my constituents travel and work along provincial highways like 628, highway 16, Yellowhead, and 779 daily. Their safety is critical, and these changes help provide them with extra security, knowing drivers will have to slow down on both sides of the highway. With these updated changes coming out next year, education will play a big part, and I look forward to this government’s plan to update the public ahead of the enforcement date next March. Safety of this province’s roadside workers and snowplow operators has always been and continues to be extremely important, and Bill 5 does a great job of reflecting that perfectly.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate. The hon. the Minister of Transportation to close debate.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move to close debate on Bill 5.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that we adjourn the sitting for tonight until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:16 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 9	Public's Right to Know Act	455
Bill 10	Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022	463
Bill 5	Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022	469

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