



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Children's Services
Consideration of Main Estimates

Thursday, April 19, 2018
9 a.m.

Transcript No. 29-4-10

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

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP), Chair
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP), Deputy Chair

Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (NDP)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (NDP)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (NDP)
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (NDP)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (AP)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (NDP)
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UCP)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (NDP)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP)*
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UCP)

* substitution for Barb Miller

Also in Attendance

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (UCP)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)

Support Staff

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

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participant

Ministry of Children's Services
Hon. Danielle Larivee, Minister

9 a.m. Thursday, April 19, 2018

[Ms Goehring in the chair]

**Ministry of Children's Services
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Good morning. I'd like to call this meeting to order and welcome everyone. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Children's Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2019.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials that are joining you today at the table. I'm Nicole Goehring, MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs and chair of this committee. We'll start to my right.

Mr. Smith: Mark Smith, MLA, Drayton Valley-Devon, vice-chair.

Mr. Orr: Ron Orr, Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Aheer: Leela Aheer, Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mr. Ellis: Mike Ellis, Calgary-West.

Mr. Clark: Good morning. Greg Clark, MLA, Calgary-Elbow.

Ms Larivee: Good morning. I'm Danielle Larivee, Minister of Children's Services and MLA for Lesser Slave Lake. To my left is Charlene Wong, executive director of corporate finance and our department's SFO. To my right is Deputy Minister Darlene Bouwsema, and to her right is Rae-Ann Lajeunesse, assistant deputy minister of our child intervention division.

Mr. Horne: Good morning. Trevor Horne, MLA for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Ms Luff: Robyn Luff, MLA for Calgary-East.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

Ms McKittrick: Bonjour. Annie McKittrick, Sherwood Park.

Mr. Shepherd: Good morning. David Shepherd, Edmonton-Centre.

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

Mr. Westhead: Cameron Westhead, MLA for Banff-Cochrane. I'm substituting for MLA Barb Miller.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like everyone to note that the microphones are being operated by *Hansard* and that the committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. Please set your phone and other devices to silent for the duration of this meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates, including the speaking rotation. As provided for in Standing Order 59.01(6), the rotation is as follows. The minister or member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf may make opening remarks not to exceed 10 minutes. For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes members of the third party, if any, and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent members and the minister may speak.

For the next 20 minutes private members of the government caucus and the minister may speak. For the time remaining, we will follow the same rotation just outlined to the extent possible; however, the speaking times are reduced to five minutes, as set out in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).

Members wishing to participate must be present during the appropriate portion of the meeting. Members may speak more than once; however, speaking times for the first rotation are limited to 10 minutes at any one time. A minister and a member may combine their time for a total of 20 minutes. For the rotations that follow, with speaking times of up to five minutes, a minister and a member may combine their speaking time for a total of 10 minutes.

Discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not the speaking time has been combined. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. If members have any questions regarding the speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or speak directly with either the chair or committee clerk about the process.

A total of three hours has been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Children's Services. With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone oppose having the five-minute break? Thank you.

Committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may participate; however, only a committee member or an official substitute may introduce an amendment during a committee's review of the estimates.

Ministry officials may be present and at the direction of the minister may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery area. Ministry officials are reminded to introduce themselves prior to responding to a question or questions. Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery should not approach the table. Members' staff may be present and seated along the committee room wall. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and the committee will adjourn. The scheduled end time of today's meeting is 12 p.m.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run.

Any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled by the minister in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

The vote on the estimates and any amendments is deferred until consideration of all ministry estimates has concluded and will occur in Committee of Supply today, April 19, 2018.

Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are moved. The original is to be deposited with the committee clerk, and 20 copies of the amendment must be provided at the meeting for the committee members and the staff.

I would now like to invite the Minister of Children's Services to begin with her opening remarks. You have 10 minutes.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning. I'm here today to present my ministry's 2018-2021 business plan and 2018-2019 estimates. First I'd like to introduce the senior officials who are with me here today. You've already been introduced to Deputy

Minister Darlene Bouwsema and Assistant Deputy Minister Rae-Ann Lajeunesse. We also have Mark Hattori, assistant deputy minister of the family and community resiliency division; Gloria Iatridis, assistant deputy minister of the policy, innovation, and indigenous connections division; Dawn White, executive director of human resources; Chi Loo, assistant deputy minister of corporate services; and you've been introduced to Charlene Wong, who is executive director of corporate finance and our SFO.

I'll start with the business plan this morning. The Ministry of Children's Services was created a little over a year ago to address the real-life issues facing Alberta's children and families. Our government recognized the need for dedicated, continuous supports for children and families in an increasingly diverse province and that all children and families in Alberta, regardless of where they live, deserve opportunities to thrive within strong and supportive communities. The outcomes and key strategies identified in the business plan align with the strategic direction of the government and ministry priorities. As our economy begins to recover, our government remains committed to building stronger, more inclusive communities that have the right supports to ensure that children and youth have opportunities to thrive and reach their full potential.

Before I go much further, I want to acknowledge that we could not meet our government's commitment without the ongoing commitment of the staff of Children's Services, staff who honour the commitment every day and work hard to make life better for children and youth and their families in Alberta.

In Alberta we see significant growth in the number of children and youth. That growth directly impacts many of the front-line services and supports that Children's Services provides to children and families. The reality is that the demand for some of our programs increases as we help families get back on their feet and overcome the stresses associated with challenging economic times even while the economy is recovering. We are doing this because investing in children and families now provides strong social and economic returns in the future. Every child, regardless of whose care they are in, deserves to grow up in a safe, loving, nurturing environment. In order to have the best future for our children, we need to invest in the opportunities that allow them to thrive.

My department's 2018 budget includes an increased investment of \$144 million in Children's Services over 2017, for a total voted operating budget of \$1.3 billion. In most cases funding increases are targeted to address caseload growth that is driven by a growing number of kids and by the costs of supporting children who have more complex needs. We are maintaining child care subsidies and continuing to invest in early learning and child care centres while supporting programs like home visitation and other early intervention and prevention initiatives. We will continue to invest in and work with indigenous partners and communities. Our intent is to continue to build relationships and improve the lives of children and families in Alberta as we work together in the spirit of reconciliation.

We've increased funding for child intervention services by \$57.8 million, for total funding of \$820 million. This will ensure that vulnerable children and youth have access to supports and services when they need them. It will also ensure that our staff have the tools and supports that they need to provide the exemplary service children and families in Alberta rely on. This increase includes \$44.5 million for caseload growth. This is funding to help real people, real children in real families that we need to support to make sure that they have the best possible outcomes.

The current budget reflects our need to invest in and to support the people who are out there every day working to make a difference in the lives of Albertans. This funding will help us

implement new training initiatives for child intervention staff and caregivers. Training will include cultural awareness and trauma-informed approaches so that staff are better able to support children and families. The funding will also enhance assessment tools and other supports for kinship caregivers so that extended family members are able to care for children who cannot remain with their parents.

9:10

Under the child intervention budget line we've set aside funding to support collaboration with First Nations to define the role of the band designate. We are also able to provide an initial \$1.9 million in basic maintenance funding for foster and kinship caregivers and those with a supports for permanency agreement. This funding recognizes increasing costs for the remarkable individuals who open up their hearts and their homes to children who need the most. Child intervention also includes some additional funding for contracted agencies to maintain the level of services Albertans receive under our various child intervention programs.

I would like to speak briefly about the work our government will be doing to implement recommendations from the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. The panel has presented a set of recommendations that will offer a road map to a province where families are further supported in caring for their children and youth, where families can access the supports they need in ways that are reflective and respectful of their culture, and where services are available to indigenous people regardless of living on- or off-reserve.

We've already begun working with families and communities, agency partners, and, most importantly, with First Nations and other indigenous peoples to cocreate a public action plan for these recommendations. The cocreated action plan will be released at the end of June, and indigenous leaders have made it clear that they want to work with the province on community-led solutions that work for them, and our government has listened. Following the cocreation of the public action plan I will be in a much better position to understand the scope of the work required as well as the cost and budget implications for the ministry. At that time I plan to return to Treasury Board to seek the appropriate supports for the plan's implementation.

A couple of months ago I attended an emergency meeting in Ottawa to address many of the issues I've just mentioned. Many of us at that meeting were looking for a firm commitment from the federal government to equitably fund on-reserve services and to develop new, indigenous-led approaches to the ways that services are delivered. The good news is that in its 2018 budget the federal government committed to begin addressing this on-reserve service disparity for child intervention. While this is good news and I'm encouraged, I also know that this is not just about dollars; it is about outcomes for kids and families. We will take every opportunity to work with the federal government, First Nations, and indigenous leaders to resolve this pressing issue while we continue to cocreate, respond to, and implement the panel's recommendations.

Access to affordable, quality child care continues to be a very real concern for many families in Alberta and a priority for our government. The reality is that the cost of quality child care, which for some families can be as much as a second mortgage, has been ignored for far too long in this province. In a province that is as rich and prosperous as Alberta, the fact that affordable child care remains out of reach for many families is shameful. I think it really shows all Albertans where everyday families fit on the previous government's priority list. It was true then and it's true now that the Conservatives were only focused on making things easier for their rich friends and insiders while ordinary people were left further and

further behind. The Conservatives have even called investments in affordable child care a waste of money. I can tell you that from the families I've talked to over the last three years that that is the farthest thing from reality.

While some are only focused on themselves, our government is focused on making life more affordable for everyday Albertans and their families and ensuring that this time we're building a recovery built to last. That's why Budget 2018 allocates an increase of \$71.9 million for child care, with total funding of \$392.7 million. This includes \$45.6 million in federal transfers to support the expansion of the early learning and child care pilot to improve access through up to 78 new, quality, affordable child care centres in communities across the province. I look forward to announcing the locations of the second round of centres in the very near future.

While we continue to work on the expansion of the ELCC, our centre pilot, as the number of children and families in Alberta grows so does the need for child care. In addition to funding for ELCC centres there is a \$6.1 million increase to maintain stable subsidy thresholds and subsidy rates and an additional \$19.4 million to address the increase in the number of programs participating in accreditation. This increase also addresses wage top-ups for child development practitioners working in front-line positions who have the higher educational credentials that support high-quality early learning environments for children and families.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

For the hour that follows, I would like to invite the members of the Official Opposition and the minister to speak. Mrs. Aheer, are you wanting the timer set for 20-minute intervals so you're aware of time, or would you prefer to let the hour flow?

Mrs. Aheer: That would be lovely. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to share their time with the minister's time. A reminder that discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of if you're combining your time or not.

Are you wanting to combine your time with the minister?

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Chair. If that's all right with you, Minister?

Ms Larivee: Absolutely.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much. Through you, Chair, I'll just do my opening remarks. Thank you. Thank you so much, Minister and to your staff and for everybody being here. We're very grateful for this opportunity to speak with you about these very, very important issues. I just wanted to say that investment in building family and community capacity to care for children and youth is actually built on the strength of the communities. We hope to help build First Nation communities by using their strengths, their beliefs, their values, and their customs. For new Canadians we help to build healthy communities with their strengths. This takes time and understanding and helping communities create environments that are healthy so that those environments help shape the development of the children that we're trying to protect.

Unhealthy parent, family environments and social disadvantages can be turned around through early intervention – there's much data on that – and this means making sure that all the families from all backgrounds actually have access to those services that they need so that barriers to information are not the driver that leads to worse outcomes. This means that we have a responsibility to inspire communities to participate in the well-being of their neighbours and their citizens, that cultural differences are something that we appreciate, not something that we misunderstand.

We also have a responsibility to make sure that we are clear – really clear – about the protection of our children and our youth. Our main objective is the safety and well-being of that child and their family. We have to be clear in our objectives that we will stand up for our young Albertans and that they are a priority because they're our future. This can't be done with words. It takes action. We are losing kids while we sit here right now, and we need to do and must do better. We must put action to our words from the panel, or we will fail these children in crisis.

With that, I'd like to start my questions. Thank you so much. I'd like to speak first about the child intervention panel, Minister. These questions that I'm going to be asking you will all sort of be referred back to the key strategies 3.1 to about 3.4 of the business plan, on page 26. I wanted to ask. When we're talking about the child intervention panel, there's not a whole lot about it in the business plan, and the one spot where it is mentioned, it notes that the panel calls for significant changes. So shouldn't we see it discussed at more length than just noted in passing? I don't know if you want to . . .

Ms Larivee: Yeah. I'm certainly happy to speak to that.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you.

Ms Larivee: As I referred to in my opening remarks, certainly, you know, we're really excited to be able to move forward with the recommendations that came from the panel. Again, I'm very thankful to all the people who were members of that panel and for the time and energy they put in to making sure that those recommendations were exceptional and really rooted in what they heard from people across the province.

Obviously, there needs to be some decisions made in terms of what implementation looks like in moving forward on those recommendations, and that action plan that's going to come out of that needs to be developed, codeveloped primarily with our indigenous partners. I mean, when we talk about the fact that 70 per cent of children who are in care are indigenous, really we need to make sure that we're working with representatives of the community that are associated with those young people, those children and youth. You know, we've already begun some extensive engagement on that. I was in Big Stone on Monday and out at Paul band on Tuesday, and we'll continue to do that. I'm looking forward to ensuring that there's a really robust opportunity for them to help us guide that action plan.

That action plan, you know, I expect, will have those short-, medium-, and long-term goals as to what needs to happen within child intervention and broadly across the government of Alberta going forward to help achieve the objectives of the recommendations. At this point, what that action plan is going to look like hasn't been defined. In terms of what the budgetary implications are of that, we can't ascertain it until we've had that opportunity to have the conversations and figure out what's going to happen first and what the priorities are going to be and what the implementation steps look like. I look forward to bringing more information on that forward after that plan is released in June.

9:20

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Minister.

I just have a couple of questions with respect to that because you'd mentioned that it was a road map and having access. I would assume that some structure needs to be put in place in order to go forward with the road map, in order to be able to understand how you're going to structure that in order to be able to have an action plan. Like, these are all part of the process. I really appreciate that. I can't even imagine – you know, you're dealing with a lot of

different people and personalities and all that. It's part of the beautiful process, I suppose, of what you do.

Having said that, I think my questions are going to be more around the access piece. I mean, I only had the privilege of being part of the panel for I think it was the last six or seven meetings, so I kind of came in on a firehose. Having said that, though, the access piece is a huge part that was very, very much brought forward by First Nations, by other groups. This has been our downfall. Can you explain a little bit more about how that piece – I imagine you're structuring some aspects around access. Can you explain and detail that a little bit more?

Ms Larivee: Can you just explain to me, because, obviously, Children's Services is really complex, specifically what you're talking about when you mean "access"? Just clarify that.

Mrs. Aheer: Yes. With regard to the intervention panel you had said in your opening comments that the panel was a road map and that you want to make sure that you're providing access to people that . . .

Ms Larivee: Oh, in terms of participating in the process?

Mrs. Aheer: In terms of participating. Now, that's what I was asking you, talking about participating. Also, I would assume that that access to participation is also going to lead to how people are going to access the supports. Maybe on both levels you could give us some explanations on that.

Ms Larivee: Absolutely. Like I said, I want the action plan to be codeveloped. You know, we're doing a number of engagement sessions across the province in terms of having, for anybody who was involved with the panel across the province, an opportunity to come forward and help drive what that's going to look like. We're doing some larger open sessions in Calgary and Edmonton and Lethbridge and Grande Prairie, inviting, again, the people who previously had been involved to help define that action plan. Again, we're also doing some meeting with First Nation leadership as well. Just next week I'll be meeting with Treaty 8.

Beyond that, as part of the process we have created six action teams. Within the recommendations there are a number of themes that pull them all together. Each of those things will be represented by a team. It's going to figure out together how to drive that forward, and those teams are going to be co-chaired by a band designate as well as someone within the ministry to make sure that that perspective is involved in every single aspect. The intention is not just that those teams would be disbanded after the action plan is created, but we would continue to have a process in which that engagement would happen to oversee the implementation and to make sure that we're on track and to re-evaluate if changes need to be made along the way. It's intended to be an ongoing, long-term interaction right across the board.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Thank you for explaining that. Thank you for the clarity.

The recommendations stemming from phase 2 of the panel were quietly released. It was just after the government's budget, and it appears that the ministry – it feels to those of us who are sort of on the outside looking in that they wouldn't just forget about it and move on. We want to understand: how is it that the government's panel was different from panels before if it's not adequately reflected in the business plan and the government didn't want to issue a press release on the completion?

Ms Larivee: I mean, I think you brought forward a point right away as to why the action plan was a bigger focus for us than the release

of the recommendations. There have been many recommendations over the years. You know, I can say very clearly that 30 years ago I think we knew most of what we could say now in terms of what needed to happen, and those recommendations were put on a shelf over and over and over again, which is not a very positive reflection of the previous government and their willingness to move forward on this issue. In my mind, I think a lot of our stakeholders didn't want to hear just that we made recommendations that were going to sit somewhere. It was about what was going to make a difference in terms of our action going forward.

We certainly shared the recommendations broadly with those people who were involved in the panel and interested in seeing their comments reflected in the recommendations, but what matters most to me is that we actually move forward and implement and take action on those recommendations, and that, to me, is something worth celebrating. That's something we're shouting from the rooftops. Again, I'm really thankful for the work of the panel, that, you know, it was more about moving forward with the action plan and showcasing how the recommendations in the action plan are going to feed into one another.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you for that.

The concern that I have: I understand the action plan, and I can understand wanting to shout that from the rooftops, but the way that it came into the public wasn't like that at all, especially given the impact of the Serenity case, how people were interested. People were invested in a different way than they've been in a long, long time. There's such an opportunity here for education and for people to understand, for them to have faith that the government is actually making strong changes towards making sure things like that don't happen again. I think it was a huge lost opportunity. Personally, I appreciate the fact about the action plan. Like I said, as a person that was so privileged to participate in the panel, I think that Albertans, the average Albertans looking on, feel like they were not properly informed about what was going on and that they were not given the appropriate information. Hopefully, in June, with the action plans and other things coming forward, that will be remedied.

The council for quality assurance was formed in 2012 based on a recommendation from a similar panel. I believe that was Manmeet Bhullar, actually, who brought that forward in 2011. The council was disbanded this month, which I find concerning. We do have the Child and Youth Advocate taking on more responsibilities because of a recommendation from the latest panel. That's in reference to the purpose of the CQA. Can you talk about that for just a moment? Why was that disbanded?

Ms Larivee: Sure. You know, as you mentioned, you came in at the later stages of the panel, but if we go back to phase 1 of the panel, one of the primary themes was concern around duplication and also the fact that responsibilities were divided among a number of different individuals and groups, which somehow sometimes left a question as to who was truly accountable for making sure that things were moving forward. With that, the decision to wind down came as a direct result of the recommendations that came out of the panel in the first phase.

One of the primary responsibilities and mandates of the OCYA was investigation of child deaths. Certainly, the panel did a lot of work in terms of shifting that responsibility to the Child and Youth Advocate to ensure that there was one person, as opposed to a number of organizations, who was responsible for looking at child death in the province. It certainly didn't make sense to duplicate that.

Also, there obviously were other things that the CQA focused on in terms of ensuring quality assurance in other areas besides child

death. There have been a number of internal quality assurance work pieces that have been put in place, which the CQA support staff will continue to provide support to. Certainly, having heard about what is going to be happening in terms of internal quality assurance, the members of the council were quite reassured and felt quite positive that the framework that they had created around service quality assessment would be utilized internally going forward, so I'm really thankful to them for the work that they've done on that.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Minister. I imagine so.

I guess where my concern comes from – I'm referencing an article by Paula Simons on May 31, 2017, with respect to the Child and Youth Advocate. Specifically, we have "extraordinarily strict privacy provisions" is what she talks about here and that the Child and Youth Advocate now is taking on all of that responsibility, is given a 75-day turnaround, and has nothing within his ability to compel other ministries to report back to him about pieces of information. He has actually said that it was insufficient. He can't make any public identifying of information about the child, but the media can. Even in 2014, you know, the media was allowed to publish the names of the children who had passed in care. It's kind of ironic. With Bill 18 passing, I mean, there's an opportunity. I'm just going to read from what Paula Simons says.

The goal would be to have a Child and Youth Advocate report take the place of many fatality reviews, and not "duplicate" efforts.

So it's just what you were saying.

The consequence? Fewer public inquiries in open courtrooms. More names kept secret. And fewer people held accountable.

Would you mind responding to that?

9:30

Ms Larivee: Absolutely. I think one of the areas where both ourselves and the previous government, who put the legislation into place, can agree is that we need to be really careful when it comes to protecting the privacy of children and families because of the long-term implications for families. When we're talking about the situation, this child often continues to live in their community and, you know, really has to deal with whatever comes out of their story, their very private story about intimate moments of their lives, when they are the innocent one in the situation being shared. You know, sometimes in cases of child death – I mean, obviously, that is different; however, they often have siblings and for the same reasons need to be protected.

You know, there are very strong reasons as to why the privacy provisions are in place, but certainly one of the important recommendations that came out of the first phase of the panel was the importance of having that singular opportunity for both accountability and investigation so that it wasn't dispersed over a number of organizations. I'm certainly proud of the work we did in shifting that to the Child and Youth Advocate and looking forward to seeing the recommendations as we go forward.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Minister.

Yeah. I was speaking more towards, like, the child death review. I would assume, especially with the processes coming forward, that you'd want to empower the child advocate, and empowering the child advocate actually holds the system accountable. As Paula Simons says, and this is where I'm concerned, you don't want to be exploiting the weaknesses of the child advocate office. They only have seven investigators out of the people that are in their office. That's maybe my next question. Has that increased for that advocate office? That investigation piece is huge. I mean, this is something that we found out as we went forward in this process. Sorry. Go ahead.

Ms Larivee: You know, we're not necessarily in Children's Services responsible for the budget for the office, but certainly the committee that is did support an increased budget in order to staff up that office to assist them in responding to that. It was obviously important that they have all the support and capacity that they did to ensure that they have the support they need. In fact, approximately \$750,000 was provided in bridge funding last year to support the advocate's office to prepare for the expanded mandate, just to give them some capacity to help them be prepared for taking that on.

Mrs. Aheer: And how has the response been? You obviously work with the advocate. How is the response coming from the advocate and their team? This is tremendous. They're having to report on every single person now. They're at a limit of 75 days to get this done and have no absolute way to compel ministries to give them information. So how has their response been to all of this?

Ms Larivee: Certainly, I do have a close relationship with the advocate and continue to be thankful for the work that he does in terms of advocating for children. He says that he's ready.

I did want to clarify something as well based on a previous question that you had raised, and that was to say that he actually does in the bill have the power that he needs to compel information from almost anybody, definitely across the government of Alberta. I'm not sure if there was a misunderstanding there, but Bill 18 very explicitly gives full authority for them to access information.

Mrs. Aheer: If I could respond to that.

The Chair: I would just like to briefly interrupt and remind members and the minister that we're here today to discuss the estimates. If you could please keep your comments and questions to the estimates and bring them back to the budget.

Mrs. Aheer: Absolutely. You betcha. This is through the business plan and the strategic context.

The Chair: Thank you. Just point it out while you're asking the question.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much. I appreciate that.

I just wanted to respond to that if you don't mind, Minister. It says that the legislation requires all government departments to respond to his recommendations within 75 days, but nothing in the law says that they have to accept or act on those recommendations. That is a very important piece of that. I'm just going to clarify that that's my understanding of that bill. The only vehicle that he has to compel the government to act is public pressure. And in 75 days – I mean, that's why I'm asking you if you feel that he is saying that he feels it's sufficient. It's not in the business plan. That's why we're asking these questions. We feel it's relevant to this ministry. This is what I understand, and this is what's been reported on. I'm not sure if you can clarify that.

Ms Larivee: Certainly, I don't think there's been any concern. I mean, in terms of the advocate, there's always accountability to respond to the recommendations. Obviously, he has the ability to report to the Legislature on his reviews and on the progress on that, so it would be quite public that there was not a response there if that was a barrier to that. There's certainly plenty of opportunity for him to compel people to share . . . [A timer sounded]

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Oh, my goodness, that goes so fast. Thank you.

Okay. I understand that the advocate's budget is determined by the Legislative Offices Committee, and the CQA was costing your ministry close to a million dollars per year. Is that correct? Or are those funds being directed elsewhere now?

Ms Larivee: Certainly, the CQA was supported by staff within the ministry primarily.

Mrs. Aheer: Within your ministry, Minister?

Ms Larivee: Within my ministry.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Sorry. Thank you.

Ms Larivee: Those staff would just be continuing to support existing internal quality assurance work. Like I said, we will be moving forward with the framework in terms of the service quality assessment that CQA had developed, and that work will be done internally. The funds will be redirected to ensuring we engage very clearly with families to make sure that we're including their perspective going forward.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much.

Okay. Last year in estimates you indicated that the cost of the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention would be absorbed in-house under line items 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3. Did all those costs fit within the existing budget? I mean, you did so many visits to First Nations, and phase 2 was of course extended by a couple of months. Can you give us some . . .

Ms Larivee: I can just say yes.

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, all the costs fit within the existing budget, including all that?

Ms Larivee: Yes, all the costs fit within the existing budget. Yes.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Did any of the panel costs fall under line item 1, ministry support services?

Ms Larivee: No. In terms of ministry support services those are designed to support myself and my team, I suppose, other than my travel, which, you know, I think is pretty minimal.

Mrs. Aheer: No kidding. Okay. Thank you so much.

Okay. One of the panel's recommendations was a reiteration of the recommendation issued in the past to fully implement Jordan's principle. Being that First Nations children come first and jurisdictional disputes between the federal and provincial governments about who pays for services come after, what has been the holdup in implementing this principle?

Ms Larivee: You know, I actually don't think there's a holdup in implementing the principle. In fact, across the country I think that Alberta is well known for having jumped right in and most of the time just funded it and has been living that principle for a long time. We have the lowest number of cases coming forward on this because the province has just stepped up to the plate on that for many years in terms of help.

Having said that, there is work to be done to make sure that we're really clear on what the relationship is between the federal government and Alberta's First Nations and ourselves. I'm really thankful to be working with them in a trilateral process to make sure that those cases that do come forward are addressed in a way that everybody is really happy with and as promptly as possible. Again, there's always more work to do, but I'm really proud, I think, of

having lived the principle for the last few years and just supporting those children and families who need that.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. Again, I just wanted to also speak about when you were in Ottawa. One of the, I think, larger things that needs to happen here – this is something that we've heard, and I'm sort of loosely quoting from another article that I had read. The fact is that DFNAs are having difficulty getting funding from the federal government for things like braces, all of those kinds of things. How is your government working with the federal government to make sure that they're chipping in where they need to? Of course, as you know, if a child is in foster care, they can get these things, but if they're on-reserve and they're applying to the federal government for these things, they're not able to access that. Can you chime in a little bit about that?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. I mean, I think we're all quite ashamed of the lack of support for our First Nations people in this country. That has been in place for a very long time. You know, we're starting, like I mentioned in my notes, to be optimistic that our current federal government is taking some action to step up. They've certainly said the right words, and they've put money in their budget. But, again, the process of making sure that that gets to the children and families is where the action is really going to take place. We do sit at a trilateral table with the federal government in terms of that.

9:40

We've certainly advocated very strongly for them to make up for the differential in terms of service provision on- and off-reserve. We believe very strongly that it shouldn't matter where you live in Alberta; you have access to the same level of services. That's what we've pushed with them in terms of doing that, not just to fund child intervention but to address the root causes as well. I think we all know that issues such as housing, addressing historical trauma, you know, just generally the impact of poverty and the need for poverty reduction strategies on-reserve are some key reasons as to why children end up as part of our system in the first place. So that's certainly a lot of the conversation that we've been having with the federal government.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Minister.

Another one of the phase 2 recommendations is: "End the disparity in child protection and early intervention services for First Nations children living on-reserve in Alberta by . . . advocating for funding equity from the federal government." So just what we were talking about. In the absence of that federal funding for equity and child protection, you were mentioning something earlier – maybe you can clarify this, this disparity with provincial funding. Can you tell us a little bit about what you've done so far to advocate for this funding equity? I mean, we were just talking about it briefly here. How does this compare with other provincial governments and what they're doing?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. Certainly, you know, I met with Minister Philpott when she was still in the role. I met with Minister Bennett before she was in the role, Minister Philpott now. I went to the meeting in Ottawa and certainly, more importantly, worked and had relationships and conversations with our First Nation partners across this province to talk about working with them in order to ask Ottawa for what they need as well. Again, I'm cautiously optimistic. They do have funds allocated in their budget to address this disparity or start addressing that disparity. But I certainly want to work with our First Nation partners across the province to figure out what that might look like for our Alberta communities and then

advocate with them to the federal government in order to address those needs and provide those community-based solutions.

Mrs. Aheer: When you were having your discussions with some of the First Nation leaders and whatnot, what were some of the things that they were suggesting? How are they asking you to advocate on their behalf at the federal level?

Ms Larivee: Well, actually, what I've heard more is that they don't want me just to advocate directly to the federal government but to work with them to develop a plan to come up with an idea as to what it would really look like to address that disparity here in Alberta and then to share that with Ottawa as a group. So that's the ongoing work that's going to be, you know, part of the work we're doing with the action plan. Through the action plan we've created an idea of what that might look like in our province by working with our First Nation leaders to figure out what that might look like.

Having said that, there are some specific examples of work that's been ongoing with First Nations on that. The Big Stone First Nation has a coming-home project that they're doing in which they're developing a reunification home, and we're partnering with them on that but also advocating to the federal government to help fund that, and the federal government has stepped up and provided some funding in that situation. We're hoping to see that ongoing.

The Treaty 8 organization has developed an urban office here in Edmonton to help address the fact that a number of children in Treaty 8 are apprehended in the Edmonton region and is looking at figuring out how we can work together to provide services to those children who are apprehended off-reserve but are clearly members of their nations and also figuring out how to best provide early intervention work to those families and to families on-reserve.

There's more, but I've been having those conversations, you know, quite extensively over the last year and am really starting to see some of that work come to fruition and excited to do even more as we go forward.

Mrs. Aheer: We're really looking forward to seeing actions back this. Especially with discussions with First Nations, obviously they have to be at the forefront and be the driver of this. Again, the language is there. We're just not seeing action items being put forward as to how that's going to happen. That's more what I was asking, at that federal level. We can talk about it. I'll have more questions about that later.

I have to say, like, during the recommendations of phase 1 we were curious. Instead of a committee like PAC to follow up with government on the Child and Youth Advocate's recommendation, there's an audit advisory committee that instead vets the advocate's reports. Has this committee been established? Do you have a line item for that in your budget as to where that's going to be? How are we going to find out about that?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. Certainly, that is going to be working with the Child and Youth Advocate in terms of that. We are still working with the Child and Youth Advocate in terms of moving forward with that and looking forward to seeing that put in place.

Mrs. Aheer: No date as of yet or any information as to when that's going to be coming forward?

Ms Larivee: Not at this time, no.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. This is with regard to the general business plan as well. In last year's business plan you had two key strategies relating to children's mental health. In key strategy 1.3 on page 23 you had listed there: "Partner with Alberta Health to improve the

addictions and mental health system, paying specific attention to children and youth." Then in key strategy 1.4 on page 23 you had: "Develop and implement the Children's Services Addiction and Mental Health Framework." This year neither of those key strategies are in your business plan, and according to statistics from Alberta Health Services the success rate for mental health services for children has steadily fallen under this government.

In 2016-17 fiscal quarter 3 year-to-date update: 81 per cent of children offered mental health treatment were offered an appointment within 30 days – that was 2016-17 – with 73 per cent receiving treatment within 30 days. Based on data from 2017-18 fiscal quarter 3 year-to-date update, we're at 74 per cent of children offered mental health treatment are offered an appointment within 30 days. That's gone down to 67 per cent receiving treatment. This is really troubling, and obviously our key priorities – I mean, it reflects on everything else that we've just been talking about. Can you explain why those key priorities are not brought into your new business plan when the work was clearly not finished and the metrics of children's health supports continue to fall?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. Certainly, you know, obviously, with us having co-chaired the mental health review for the province along with Dr. David Swann, I very much understand the importance of ensuring that our children have the support that they need in order to be mentally happy and healthy and have that psychological health and well-being. I'm really thankful for the work that Health is doing in terms of implementing the valuing mental health plan, but certainly a large portion of that falls within their scope.

You will see that there's key strategy 2.6: "Develop and implement strategies to increase wellbeing and resiliency of children and families, including developing a Suicide Prevention Plan with community-driven, Indigenous approaches to address youth suicide."

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry, Minister. That's related to the mental health framework? Sorry, through the chair.

Ms Larivee: Yeah. Absolutely. Increasing the well-being and resiliency of children would be – you know, there are many opportunities for that, whether it be the trauma-informed care perspective, making sure that they have access to mental health. Having reorganized the department, we've moved forward with that.

Mrs. Aheer: Is that going to be addressing the concerns of children being able to get in for services? That was more what my question was about.

Ms Larivee: Yeah. You know, certainly, I can work with the Ministry of Health in terms of meeting their mandate and their services for that. I'm really excited to continue to work with Alberta Health in terms of that, not just in terms of increasing the access for routine appointments but trying to work together in figuring out how to provide support for those very complex cases, which has been a gap for a while.

We do offer mental health grants in terms of supporting access to mental health specialists for assessment and brief intervention for children, youth, and families involved with Children's Services to hire clinical specialists to give child intervention staff and caregivers access to expert clinical and medical consultation and help staff to understand the psychiatric treatment plans and the use of psychotropic medications, which is really important to their care. We also, through that, support a best-practice site in Calgary to increase mental health services for children and youth involved

with Children's Services. The total amount of funding in 2018-19 for that is \$2.24 million.

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry, Minister, did I misunderstand? Did you say grants at the beginning of that? Those are grants?

9:50

Ms Larivee: Yeah. We do a lot of work with community agencies and organizations in terms of ensuring that they can help us with providing exceptional care for children. We have a number of fantastic partners in that across the province.

Mrs. Aheer: How are you reconciling – I mean, we've got lots of new Canadians. We've got lots of people that might not know how to access this, especially with the grants. What is your outreach into these communities, some of these newer folks that are coming in, to make sure that they have access to these? I mean, along with our First Nations other groups that we're concerned about are – of course, seniors don't fit into this – you know, people on fixed incomes, new Canadians, families, special needs, lots of these different things. How are you making sure that that outreach is going, those grants are going . . .

Ms Larivee: This is specifically for children who are part of the child intervention system. I mean, they certainly are supported by the caseworkers, who are doing exceptional work in moving forward with the child intervention practice framework. Certainly, that model really provides the opportunity to wrap around families and provide the supports and connect them with the resources that they need. The full intention of that strategy is to provide them with the connections and the resources they need to be a healthy family so that they can stay together. Absolutely, you know, we would be connecting them with whatever resources they need as soon as they become a part of the intervention system.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Minister. In your key strategy 2.6 on page 25 you were talking about developing a suicide prevention plan that's community driven – I think that's an excellent idea – and specifically indigenous approaches to address suicide. Obviously, that's related to your mental health framework. In terms of your metrics how are you going to be watching that? I mean, this is such a complex issue, and I understand that. How are you going to be able to frame that to see what your metrics are going to be? Along with that, if you could speak to the rate of youth suicide in our indigenous and nonindigenous populations comparatively, I'd be very grateful for that information.

Ms Larivee: Yeah. I think we're all very aware of what a significant issue youth suicide is, particularly within our indigenous communities. That's where we see, again, the impact of historical trauma and the importance of moving forward broadly with a trauma-informed perspective throughout all the services we provide. We're certainly taking action in developing that youth suicide prevention strategy. We very much believe that it needs to be community driven and that work needs to happen with our indigenous partners. That work is ongoing along with Health. We expect to have that released this fall and are looking forward to being able to put that in place. I'm sure that when that is released, we'll be able to answer your questions as to what the plan is going to look like.

I mean, I can't speak to all of the population. Obviously, Health has a huge perspective on that. But in terms of children in care, you know, we're really focused on identifying the very best and promising practices related to youth suicide prevention and ensuring that they have the support they need to be resilient and to

recover from all the trauma that they've, sadly, had to endure in their relatively short lives.

Mrs. Aheer: I mean, youth suicide in particular, where we're dealing with complex issues right across the board: that's why I was asking that question. That rate, especially amongst children in care, I think is a very important number that we need to understand, especially between indigenous and nonindigenous, because we are dealing with different, complex issues and different situations. I think it would be just imperative to understand the cultural perspectives, all of those, so that with your plan of prevention being community driven the community is aware of numbers and trends and things like that, to be able to actually help implement it. It's just a suggestion. I don't know if you can provide that for me later, but I think that that's a very important piece of the puzzle that needs to be understood.

Ms Larivee: Yeah. I mean, I can say, with deaths of children in care, that each year there are between one and four on average. Four would be the higher end of children in care. In order to differentiate that based on race – it's such a small number that I don't think that it would be necessarily representative. But what we do know across the province is that indigenous youth suicide is an incredible challenge and something we take seriously. We shouldn't be losing any child to suicide. We don't want our kids to be hopeless and helpless.

Mrs. Aheer: No. I mean, this is about prevention, right?

Ms Larivee: Yeah.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. Truly. Okay.

On page 22 of your business plan you reference the GBA plus and centres of responsibility. I'm assuming that your ministry has created a centre of responsibility, and if so, have you used that GBA plus lens to impact your recent policies?

Ms Larivee: Thanks. Yeah. We absolutely have, and gender-based analysis is incredibly important to make sure that we're developing services that are responsive to meet the needs of all genders and not just primarily that which historically has been oftentimes the male perspective. Certainly, we apply that lens within the ministry, well, within the department to ensure that we have that perspective included. [A timer sounded]

Mrs. Aheer: My goodness gracious.

Okay. How many FTEs are dedicated to this work? I'm assuming that they work through the Ministry of Status of Women, through GBA plus.

Ms Larivee: Certainly, in terms of on the ground we work to make sure that front-line staff include a perspective in the work that they do, but certainly within the ministry we have had staff who have been trained in order to provide that lens in terms of policy work. It's been that staff who were currently in place just provided the opportunity to utilize that lens within policy development.

Mrs. Aheer: Is that included in one of your line items in your budget?

Ms Larivee: Again, it was staff who were currently in place within the ministry.

Mrs. Aheer: So nothing has increased there? Because I know at Status of Women . . .

Ms Larivee: It would just be under training.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. On page 25 of the business plan, performance measure 2(b), you state that you implemented the 48-hour target for Jordan's principle in 2017, which is why this data set is marked not applicable for this year, and I know we're only looking at 10 months here. Would you be able to share any of those preliminary results from the last 10 months?

Ms Larivee: I mean, again, I think we have been still working with the federal government and the consortium to make sure that we have the MOU in place to make sure we're all really clear on what success looks like on that and the process, and that is being primarily led by the consortium and the federal government. But I don't have any specific numbers for you at this point in time, other than to say that as a province we've been exceptional in terms of stepping up and just doing what we need to do. I mean, the principle is to say that, you know, you shouldn't argue over who's financially responsible. So we come across it initially; we step up to the plate. There were about 200 cases in Alberta over that time period, and all have been addressed. Sorry, it would be two years.

Mrs. Aheer: In two years.

Ms Larivee: Over two years.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. So that's been successful, then. That would be what success would look like, I am assuming.

Ms Larivee: That is what success looks like.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. I was just going to ask you: well, what do you mean by that? Okay. Thank you.

Ms Larivee: There's always more work to do. You know, that relationship is ongoing and developing.

Mrs. Aheer: Of course. Yeah.

Ms Larivee: We want to do better.

Mrs. Aheer: Yes. That's why I was asking. It was mostly out of curiosity to see how that's all . . .

Okay. Then page 27 of the business plan, performance indicator 3(b). We have seen a small increase in the percentage of indigenous children in foster/kinship care who are placed with indigenous families, but it's still only at 43 per cent. What is the ministry doing to recruit indigenous foster families and help support cultural ties for indigenous children in the child intervention system?

Ms Larivee: You know, that's a fantastic question. I think over time we've really come to understand how important it is for children to be placed, you know, in a familiar environment.

Mrs. Aheer: Absolutely.

Ms Larivee: It reduces the trauma, you know, whether it be with family that they feel connected to or at least in the community that they're from. So we have an incredible focus on kinship care and community-based care and maintaining those relationships. There is a process within the framework that our caseworkers work in, in which they utilize family finding and aggressively work with the family to find a family who would be willing and able to take that child in. There are substantial challenges in terms of many of those families also dealing with some of the challenges that families deal with. I think a lot of the work that we're talking about around root causes and helping with community well-being will have a huge impact with that.

Having said that, we have moved forward and updated our assessment of kinship families to be reflective and to help with success in that. We're working with families in providing additional support to them, both financial as well as in terms of training and support as well, to make sure that once we've identified them and they're willing to step up, we have the support for that family to ensure success of that kinship placement.

10:00

Mrs. Aheer: Minister, how does that process work? It's so complicated: you know, on-reserve, off-reserve, all of these kinds of things. How does that work in order to inspire that particular community in any aspect to come around and put in those supports for those kids? We are dealing with a lot of complex issues, a lot of different family dynamics. Again, the Serenity case was extremely telling about families that may not be prepared or in any way capable, really, for lack of a better word, to be able to take on not only new family members but the stresses that come along with those kinds of things. The reason I'm asking is because I appreciate everything that you're saying. In terms of action what does that look like? How does that process work, that outreach, and what are you seeing? Are you seeing the communities starting – I mean, every community is going to be different, every family is different, so that's a really broad question, but if you could respond to that.

Ms Larivee: Yeah. I mean, obviously, the Serenity case is somewhat dated at this point, so those changes have happened in previous years in terms of making sure that that assessment is more thorough or that contact with the families is more thorough to ensure that they have the support they need in terms of that. But I think one of the things you brought up is how motivated the communities are, and they are. They are incredibly motivated. It's very troubling to them to feel that they are losing the kids out of their communities and that those children are losing their culture, so I expect that there will be more and more work that comes out of the panel's recommendations, that were very strong, in supporting kinship care and the action plan in terms of that.

Again, every community is a bit different in terms of what their capacity is to support that, but it's a key priority for both us and the communities in terms of getting that right. I think that primarily what I've heard most from the communities is just making sure that those families have the supports, so we are taking action on that and moving forward to make sure they have that, but we do need to work with the communities in order to ensure that we find those families and find those individuals in the first place. There's, again, still more work to be done, and I'll be excited about what comes with the action plan on that.

Mrs. Aheer: I look forward to seeing what those supports actually look like. It'll be nice to see some sort of outline, like, from the suggestions, of course, on-nation, to see what it is that they're suggesting, better solutions to these problems.

On page 25 of the business plan under Performance Measures under Development you state that Red Deer, Calgary, and Edmonton are cities piloting mentorship programs. Would you mind speaking to the programs and what they look like and the approximate costs associated with them, and where are they in your budget?

Ms Larivee: Thank you. I mean, I can speak to the fact that we know that mentorship opportunities are incredibly important to help, you know, someone who maybe has some more personal resources in terms of having developed resilience themselves to be able to support youth who are at risk or who've been in the care of Children's Services and increase those positive mentoring

opportunities. That certainly falls under 4.2, youth in transition. The Alberta mentoring partnership program is part of that. Again, we're really excited to continue to support that. The total funding for mentoring grants comes to \$688,166 in terms of moving forward with that, but certainly we support mentoring broadly across the ministry. For example, when we provide the advancing futures bursaries to you, that comes with a mentoring relationship.

Mrs. Aheer: That's awesome.

Ms Larivee: Trying to make your way through school is really hard, so it's somebody who can help them through that process and encourage them and help them stay on track with their education as well.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. That's great. Thank you so much.

On page 26 of the business plan, performance measure 3(a), we know that child intervention is incredibly complicated, and the less that children are cycled in and out of the system, the better. Given that the ministry is focused on providing wraparound supports and keeping families together, how is the ministry ensuring that after the file is closed, that family continues to receive necessary supports and not land back into the system?

Ms Larivee: That's a great question. In wrapping around that family, you know, the caseworker isn't necessarily providing all of the supports. They're connecting that family to all of the community resources that are put in place. They don't, you know, back out of an agreement with that family or a family enhancement agreement until they know that they've connected with the supports, that they're doing well and have the supports ongoing. Obviously, a lot of our families have very complex needs and long-term challenges that led to them being part of the system in the first place. Sometimes all of those challenges crop up again. More and more, with having practised with the child intervention practice framework, when those families are struggling, they just come back and they say: hey, I need a bit more help again. It's that relationship base that is so important in creating that trusting relationship. Again, you don't back out until you're sure that that family has the supports and is going to be on track. If they fall back off the track a little later, then in having established that relationship in the first place, they feel comfortable coming back.

Mrs. Aheer: Is there a portion of the budget that's dedicated to that specifically in these line items?

Ms Larivee: Again, that would just be through family enhancement agreements and the work that we provide with those wraparound services for families. It's just the way that our caseworkers practise. It's providing all those supports, linking those connections. Again, once files come to a close, we consider that we've followed up with them enough and that they're on an even keel. We don't, you know, stalk them for life or anything.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, no, of course not. That's probably a good thing.

I was more interested because looking – I mean, if you're talking about anything with regard to addictions or anything like that, we're looking at long term, and then especially within cultural perspectives, healing is longer than sometimes the system allows for. You know, if we're talking about deaths on a nation, for any particular reason, the process of healing sometimes is longer than the process of actually getting involved in the system. There are significant overlaps there that may not always be able to help that family when they're ready. You want to step in right away, obviously, but that family or that community might not be ready to

take it. These are significantly complex pieces of that, so that's why I was asking.

It's great that they're engaging and connecting with the community. That's more what I'm, you know, wondering about. Once that file is closed, we just want to make sure that that community is prepared to wrap their arms around those folks, to take responsibility as well for each other, right? You do what you can to get people back up on their feet, but you certainly don't want to leave them hanging either. You don't want to stalk them, but you don't want to leave them hanging either. That was more what I was asking with that.

You added 60 FTEs specifically for child intervention as part of your workload assessment. That was last year. That's from the *Hansard* transcript, FC-715. I just wanted to ask: are all 60 of those FTEs in place now?

Ms Larivee: Certainly, we have them in place. We, I mean, obviously, continue to be challenged by recruitment and retention. It really is an incredibly rewarding area to work in, but it's also a very challenging role to work in. I'm really proud of the work that we've done in making sure that staff feel more supported in order to do that work. It's very much, you know, the whole putting your oxygen mask on first, making sure you can take care of others and making sure that we support staff to feel valued, to feel supported, and that they have the support they need in order to keep themselves healthy. Again, I'm looking forward to seeing some outcomes on that.

I think one of the interesting recommendations that I'm really excited about that came out of the panel's recommendations was the importance of actively encouraging people who are indigenous, who do look like, you know, diverse populations, to go into social work, to choose child intervention as a place to work. I'm really excited to move forward on that because I think there will be tremendous value in making sure that children and families have that. I mean, we are putting as much cultural training in place as we can and moving forward aggressively with that, but that doesn't replace having been born in that culture.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, we can't always assume that people who are born in that culture want to do that job either. We have a lot of kids that are, you know, I mean, culturally going into IT and all these other kinds of things. They don't necessarily want to go into social work, for sure. Have you seen any case reduction metrics as a result of having all of these wonderful new folks working in the capacity of the ministry?

10:10

Ms Larivee: We have had an increase in the number of kids in the province, so that was certainly one of the drivers for the increase in casework. But in terms of proportion, that's the same. In fact, over time we've actually seen a reduction in the number of cases, very much driven by the practice framework and supporting staff to be able to work in the practice framework, and they can't do that if they have exceptional caseloads. We're really excited to move forward with that.

Our cases have been steady. What we are seeing, actually, is more complexity in terms of the cases. That's actually a huge driver in terms of staff needing to have additional support to deal with those complex cases. Despite the same number, when they're more complex, it just takes more time and energy.

Mrs. Aheer: And that has to do with reducing stigma, too. People are feeling more comfortable to explain the complexity of their issues as well.

Sorry. Just to follow up with what you were saying, there are more kids in the province. How does that relate to your FTEs, like, percentage-wise? Can you explain what you meant by that?

Ms Larivee: You know, just as you have more children and youth in the province and there's an increasing population, it's just realistic that there are going to be some of those children who end up needing to be in care over time. I mean, we don't base it on the population. What we have seen is an increase in the need for casework as a result of that increasing population.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you.

We know that in order for children to receive the supports that they need from the child intervention system, we need support, obviously, from front-line workers. Last year you mentioned providing funding to work sites to conduct wellness-related activities for those workers as well as partnering with Shepell to provide an EFAP program. Can you describe what you mean by wellness-related activity? That's really open.

Ms Larivee: Sure. I'm happy to speak about that. I feel incredibly strongly that it's essential that we support our workers in the complex and very difficult work that they do. We've certainly heard loud and clear from our staff that they really need that additional support to help them be healthy themselves.

One of the things that we're excited about having put in place is a peer support program. With Children's Services a peer support co-ordinator will be leading the development of a peer support program, which we expect to be implemented this fall. The program will include a volunteer network of ministry employees who have had training in order to provide that peer support to help their peers deal with trauma impacts, you know, the secondary or vicarious trauma that they're exposed to that's just inherent with front-line positions. We will be ensuring that there are peer support volunteers recruited from all areas of the province and all areas of the ministry and different levels of the ministry, so no matter where you are, there would be someone that you could really feel is your peer that you could reach out to who would understand what your concerns were.

We're also working on an informal conflict management system that will provide staff with more options to address concerns and conflicts in the workplace. In terms of that, we have a psychological health and safety program in development, so building a comprehensive framework to support employees who have been exposed to trauma at work. We're looking forward to having a draft of that sometime later this spring. And we're continuing to discuss with representatives of AUPE and ministry employees to better understand the issues and determine a course of action as we go forward.

There is also the mental health in the workplace training that we talked about, partnering with Shepell in terms of providing mental health awareness training and a wellness your way program, which is kind of one of the more fun preventive programs. That provides funding to work sites to conduct wellness-related activities. Examples that some of the sites have chosen to move forward with include yoga or massage therapy or fitness classes. We had 56 applications for that in '17-18, and we're hoping to have increased participation over time as they move forward to decide within their office and at their site what wellness activities would be helpful to them.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. You actually answered all of my questions. I was going to ask you all of those.

I just wanted to ask about the internal conflict management. There are a lot of stakeholders that work with child and family

services that do a lot of that work. Is that program actually implemented already? Have you seen any feedback from that? This is one of the larger pieces of the puzzle in terms of wellness and being able to deal with that, and I know that any corporation of any sort has this issue. Did you base this on some of your stakeholder outreach and what you learned from those other community services that are working under the child and family?

Ms Larivee: Well, again, like I said, because of the trauma that they're exposed to and the difficulties, you know, sometimes staff just need some support in order to resolve differences between themselves within those high-conflict situations. That program is starting in May, so we're looking forward to seeing the outcomes out of that and evaluating its success.

Mrs. Aheer: That would be helpful. Awesome.

Okay. On page 26 of your business plan under performance measure 3(a) . . . [Mrs. Aheer's speaking time expired] Oh, no. That went by really fast.

The Chair: At this point I would like to invite Member Drever to introduce herself.

Drever: Deborah Drever, MLA for Calgary-Bow.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the next 20 minutes Mr. Clark and the minister may speak. Mr. Clark, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister's?

Mr. Clark: Yes, please. If that's all right with you, Madam Minister.

Ms Larivee: Sure.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is one of my last estimates. In addition to thanking you very much, Minister, for being here and your officials for being here, I just want to say thank you to all the folks who make these committees happen. Thanks to the pages, to the clerk, to the folks in *Hansard*, to the security folks, and everyone who's helped make this such a smooth process.

Again, Madam Minister, the opportunity to participate in the child intervention panel was one of the most eye-opening, challenging but rewarding experiences of my entire life, so thank you for including me in that process. I learned a lot, and I hope we have an opportunity to make a difference.

I will start with questions relating to the business plan, page 27, the performance indicators. You know, one of the things that we learned from the child intervention panel was the remarkable overrepresentation of indigenous children in care, but when we look at performance indicator 3(a), we're looking at children receiving child intervention services as a percentage of the overall child population in Alberta. I don't see this broken out by the number of indigenous children. Given the focus of the panel, what we've learned, what we know, and the recommendations out of that panel, I'm just curious if in the future we could break out children receiving services by the percentage of indigenous children receiving those services as well.

Ms Larivee: Yeah. I did, you know, just want to talk a bit about the fact that we regularly release information on the child intervention standards, which I think is where that information is captured quite strongly in terms of sharing that information. We did work with the

office of the Auditor General in terms of our practice measures, in terms of sharing some of that information. One of the standards that is shared is information on the representation of indigenous families within child intervention, certainly supporting the work of the DFNAs and that work.

If you do look at outcome 3 in terms of the performance measures, it does break out the percentage of indigenous children and youth who did not return for additional services within 12 months and then nonindigenous as well as those who are placed in family-based care. We did actually have three different measures throughout the business plan that are specifically breaking out indigenous versus nonindigenous to help understand that overrepresentation going forward.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Thank you very much.

Just looking at the next, 3(b), the percentage being around 40 per cent of indigenous children in foster/kinship care who are placed with indigenous families, it's good to see that that number is going up and is trending upwards, but that still leaves, you know, not quite 60 per cent of indigenous kids not within those families. That was, again, one of the really clear messages that we heard from the panel. What strategies do you have in place to make these numbers go even higher?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. Again, you know, I did speak about that a bit with Member Aheer. There are really complex situations, certainly, within indigenous communities and indigenous families in terms of the impact of historic trauma and the impact of poverty. I think there continue to be some challenges. We really need to deal with the root causes in terms of figuring out how we can keep communities healthy and families healthy so that there are more healthy families in order to do that.

10:20

Having said that, you know, our staff work very, very hard in order to do the family-finding work, to explore what all the possible options are and to try to find a family who's both willing and able to take that child and then to provide that child a safe and healthy home for them to live in. Certainly, we've looked very closely at how we assess homes, ensuring that the child can be safe and healthy there but making sure that the standards are reasonable so that we're not actually unintentionally risking out households that actually could provide a loving and safe home for those children. It's finding that right balance, again, of course, between making sure that they absolutely can provide a safe and healthy home for that child and, having found a family and having them be willing to do that, then ensuring that we work with them to make sure that they have supports.

They did get an increase this year along with foster families in terms of the per diem support for children, and that applies to kinship families as well. But we're certainly working with them to ensure that they have access to the training and support and education that they need to be able to support a trauma-informed perspective and all of the other complex needs that they might have to deal with with those children. I do expect that out of the conversations and engagement we have regarding the action plan, there are to be more. That's certainly one of the areas where I'm very much looking forward to being able to provide some additional supports to those families to make sure they can be a successful placement.

Mr. Clark: Thank you.

Turning now to staff within Children's Services, one of the discussions that happened through the panel was about the high turnover rate of front-line workers within Children's Services.

You've talked about a few of the strategies, peer mentoring and those sorts of things. Are there any other strategies in place, and have we got some data that we can track to identify trends and, hopefully, make those trends move in the right direction? If there is some data, is that something that could be included in future business plans?

Ms Larivee: That's a good question. Most of the measures that we just talked about are new. They're things where, since we became the Ministry of Children's Services and we've been able to do that focused work within the staff within child intervention to have those conversations, we've been able to get down and figure out what programs they needed. The peer support program is going to be put in place, you know, this fall. The conflict management program is going to be put in place this May. We don't have data from the outcomes of those yet, but certainly anecdotally I have heard from staff that they feel more supported and are very thankful for being able to be this separate ministry and are feeling valued. I'm looking forward to seeing that represented in the engagement assessment work that is done and seeing the reduced turnover over time.

Mr. Clark: I hope so, too, because there are some pretty remarkable people that work in the system, and obviously we want to keep as many of them as we can.

I guess I want to turn now to just continuing to go down this path. One of the great challenges in your ministry, in this whole area of Children's Services, is: how do we ensure that there is public trust, that Albertans know that Children's Services is acting on behalf of all Albertans in taking care of very, very at-risk children who've really gone through some pretty terrible circumstances? How do we ensure that we have public trust and that there's sufficient transparency? We've certainly seen a lot of feedback, let's call it, around a sense of a culture of secrecy. How do we square that with the legitimate need for privacy for not just the children receiving care but their siblings and families and relations, as you've talked about?

Also, how does that factor into what can look like a culture of blame? That's one of the things we talked about on the panel and that you and I have talked about. I really struggle with this as an opposition member. Something happens. We go into the Legislature, and we point fingers and we yell. You can see how that can cascade through the system, and people now just look for someone to blame, when, frankly, at times there's enormous complexity.

Now, if something has been done incorrectly or if someone has truly acted irresponsibly and there is accountability to be found, there should be. It's not to say that anyone who's done bad things should escape accountability. How do you square all of that, I guess, without taking the next 10 minutes to answer the question? I guess if you can just give as briefly as you possibly can some comments on that. That's something I know we talked about on the panel.

Ms Larivee: Yeah. You know, I think that that is a really great and very complex question. I mean, what you're talking about primarily is public perception. That is something that is complex. I think that when we bring children into – we all get very emotional about children, and it provokes a response that is often based on emotion. You know, I'm really proud of the work that our staff do. I mean, if you think that there are approximately 10,000 kids in care, we don't hear a whole lot of stories, which means that there are almost 10,000 stories which are actually providing quite successful service.

Again, the practice shift in terms of wrapping around families I think is making a huge difference in terms of outcomes but also the

relationship with families. I think we can't underestimate the fact that families, as they feel wrapped around and engaged and supported, are sharing with people within their circles about the fact that child intervention is helping them to be successful.

Having said that, I do think that some of the work that has been done will help in terms of shaping that. In terms of the OCYA, again, in continuing to do reviews, reviews of every single death, that will just help frame and understand patterns and understandings of what happens going forward.

In terms of our quality assurance process, it's being amended to be quite immediately responsive to any concerns that come up to ensure that it's that continuous quality assurance so that as things arise, we're seeing change immediately . . .

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Thank you. I really apologize.

Ms Larivee: Just one thing I want to say is that we are going to do a survey with families on the care that they receive. We'll look forward to sharing that information so that there can be some understanding of the positives that come out of that directly from families, which I think will be valuable.

Mr. Clark: Good. Thank you. That answers a question I was going to ask later. I would really encourage you – I mean, you know how I feel about data. That's certainly something I think we should always be gathering and not be afraid of it. You know, it is what it is, and I'd rather know. So that's fair.

One question about – again, we talked about this through the panel; you and I have talked about it – increasing representation of the front-line workers. It was a question that was asked previously by Mrs. Aheer, that workers who serve that population, the kinship care and the parents, look like the people of the population that they serve but equally that the leadership within Children's Services looks like the population they're leading. With the obvious exception of the people who are around the table and with you here today, that's obviously an important step in the right direction.

My understanding is that the population of Children's Services workers is overwhelmingly women, but that isn't necessarily reflected as we move up through the organization in terms of leadership. I think we saw some of that through the panel. I'm just curious if there's work going on to ensure that not just the workers who serve that population look as much like that population as possible but that those who lead the workers also look as much like that population as we can, perhaps even using GBA plus as a model. Is that something you have some specific strategies to achieve?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. You know, I think there are two different aspects there. I think you were, if I understand correctly, referring both to wanting to see more indigenous folks but also the female-male ratio. Is that right? Okay. I'll speak first to increasing opportunities for indigenous individuals to be part of our ministry. We do have the indigenous internship program. That was developed in 2012 to increase the representation of indigenous people in the workforce. As we increase the number of people who are indigenous across the ministry, there will be more opportunities to see them excelling in leadership as we go forward.

10:30

I also hear what you're saying. I think that, again, you know, internally looking at our GBA plus analysis, as we continue to move forward with that, we'll also be looking at our workforce and our leadership. I'm certainly proud when we get together for our senior leadership team to have some amazing individuals at the table. But in terms of who my deputy minister and the assistant deputy ministers are, there's only one male at the table, which is

representative, I think, more so of the percentage within the workforce. We are working with Education and the universities to increase the profile of the work that we do and help recruit and understand broadly, including speaking with indigenous students in terms of recruiting them as well.

Certainly, there is definitely more work to be done on this. One of the questions that we're asking in the engagement sessions that we're doing for the action plan is talking specifically to indigenous communities and their membership and their leadership to say: what could we do to increase the number of individuals from your community who choose social work as a profession and then are successful in making their way through education and then choosing Children's Services and being mentored through that? That's certainly going to be an ongoing process and is very much a high priority within our ministry to achieve.

Mr. Clark: Good. Glad to hear it. Thank you very much.

I want to move on to page 27, the risks in information technology systems infrastructure you've identified, and also outcome 3 on page 26, ensuring children are safe and supported. What IT security controls exist to ensure that all that data that exists within the system is secure, and does that extend to when workers are working off-site or outside kind of the four walls of the Children's Services office?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. One of the things that I've been really thankful that we've done as a government is centralizing some of those opportunities for those corporate services. Service Alberta and their expertise certainly has taken on the responsibility of that for us; however, we do absolutely follow best practice in terms of ensuring that. We take the protection of this incredibly intimate and private information very seriously and support continually moving forward with best practice and ensuring that as technology changes and opportunities change, we're current with the current challenges in terms of IT security.

Mr. Clark: Okay. How proactive are you in doing that? Do you have programs where you, you know, go out and look for instances of misuse or do random audits? If so, do we have any data that you can share on security breaches or inappropriate use of Children's Services' IT infrastructure?

Ms Larivee: Yes. But, again, Service Alberta is responsible for that and would be the ones who would have to share the details of that.

Mr. Clark: They kind of, if you will, contract that out to Service Alberta? That's their whole thing?

Ms Larivee: Yes.

Mr. Clark: Does that also include when Children's Services workers are working with a DFNA or off-site or travelling, kind of taking their laptop with them, that kind of thing? Is that something that happens within – is that your accountability in terms of providing that input to Service Alberta in terms of what your needs are, or are they entirely responsible for it?

Ms Larivee: We do have some sharing of data systems. That system would be maintained by Service Alberta, but in terms of a relationship with them, in terms of information management, it is part of the contract that they maintain privacy standards in terms of things that would be not electronic, if we're moving away from IT, in terms of the paperwork. In terms of electronic systems it would be the same.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Do they share with you any information about audits they do or proactive breaches, or is it all kind of reactive? Or does that just happen in Service Alberta?

Ms Larivee: If they found anything, then they would be sharing that with us.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Thank you.

I'm going to spend the last minute and a half here before the next round on a different topic, page 22 of the business plan, diverse families and child care. I'll try to get this question out and may have to come back to it later. The affordable child care spaces: one of my constituents who very much wanted to go back to work couldn't find an affordable child care space. I certainly laud your efforts to increase that. One of the concerns I have is that it's important we're helping the people who need help. So what I'm interested in is: have you thought about some means testing in the \$25-a-day daycare project? I've heard anecdotal/fairly well-established factual stories of people who have quite a substantial income who are taking advantage of these spaces. Frankly, they don't need the help. Lots of people do. Have you thought of any sort of means testing on this particular program?

Ms Larivee: Certainly, the ELCC centres have been from the beginning intended to demonstrate what universal access to affordable child care is and looks like. We are continuing to see what that model looks like. As much as, you know, we want to support those who need the financial support for it and demonstrate that, I think the particular sites that we've chosen often are helping families who solely need that economic support so they don't have to choose between diapers and child care. But I've also heard from nurse practitioners and teachers who are choosing to go back to work because of the ELCCs, so that's an important dynamic as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

At this point I would like to call the agreed-upon break. We will reconvene in five minutes. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 10:36 a.m. to 10:41 a.m.]

The Chair: Thank you. I'd like to call this meeting back to order.

As there is no independent or other member present, I would now like to invite for the next 20 minutes Ms McKitrick from the government caucus and the minister to speak. Ms McKitrick, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister's?

Ms McKitrick: Yes, please, but then I will pass it over to MLA Westhead.

The Chair: Thank you. Go ahead.

Ms McKitrick: Minister, thank you for the work that you do. I know as an MLA that I see up front the work that your ministry does and the staff in the ministry, so I wanted to really thank you.

I want to talk about child care. It turns out that I really got a lot of my start around my political advocacy and so on by advocating for child care in the community where I lived, as a parent. I remember bringing my children to meetings just to make the point that we needed child care. Child care is something I'm really passionate about, and, you know, I've had an appreciation for the complexity of the issue of child care and the challenge sometimes around making sure that there are the right policies around child care. That can really impact the ability of families to gain access to more economic opportunities and also to meet the needs of the ways that the workforce has changed a lot over the years, and the needs of parents may have changed in terms of full-time, part-time, and so on. So I really appreciate the work that your ministry has been doing around child care.

This is an issue for my constituency a lot. My constituency: I think that when I was doing statistical analysis about it, we have

some of the families with the most children in the province, and child care is definitely an issue. It's very complicated also in my constituency because there's a lot of shift work happening in the Industrial Heartland. We have a lack of child care not only in my constituency but, I know, throughout the province. Also, it's really an issue around the affordability of child care.

When I look at the budget, line 3.2, around child care subsidy and supports, I am really pleased to see that there has been an increase in the budget, but I'm just curious about how this funding will impact the people in my constituency and throughout Alberta. I was wondering if you could speak about what is included in this line item to make sure that everyone can have access to affordable child care.

Ms Larivee: Thank you for that great question and for your passion about child care. Certainly, you're reflective of our government and the fact that we believe that no family should ever have to worry about finding high-quality, accessible child care that is affordable for their little ones. That's why we increased funding for child care again in this budget. We certainly remain steadfast in our commitment to ensure that anyone who wants to access affordable public child care should be able to. So we're working to create more affordable child care options for everyone in Alberta.

Some examples of what is included in this include the licensing and inspection of child care programs, continuing to provide child care subsidy to those who are in financial need of that, access to child care for children with special needs – something that, certainly, families in the community continue to stress is important, to ensure that those families also have that access – approval of family day homes, and certification of child care staff.

The increase of \$52.4 million is primarily due to \$45.6 million being for the new early learning and child care centres, that we'll be announcing right away. That's thanks to a commitment by the federal government of some dollars for that as well as just workload pressures across the work that we do. You know, there are more and more daycares who want to participate in supporting their families with subsidies. We have an increasing number of children in the province. Very excited to have supported child care.

Ms McKitrick: Thank you, Minister.

I'm really happy – you know, you just spoke about exceptional child care and so on – because I know that for a lot of parents it's not just the access to child care but the access to quality child care, where they know their children will be safe and will have a really enriching program. That is really something that parents think about all the time. So I'm glad to see that and the increase in subsidies and then the focus on special-needs children, too. I think it's really problematic for a lot of parents whose children have special needs and they can't find the right child care.

In my constituency, as, I think, in many other constituencies, there are a lot of parents who work flexible hours or who have shift work. You know, I'm thinking of people who work, for example, in the Industrial Heartland or on hospital shifts, the 12-hour shifts, and so on. Sometimes both parents have to work an opposite shift. It's much more complex than in the past, where it was a 9-to-5 shift and Monday to Friday and so on. I know that these families have a lot of difficulties in finding suitable child care, so I was wondering how the budget is going to help them.

Ms Larivee: Yeah. Thanks for that great question. You know, we've made it very clear that our government has the backs of everyday working families in this province, certainly to support those who are having to work two jobs just to be able to support their family. We raised the minimum wage, capped electricity rates,

our school fees, freezing tuition, all of those things to help them affordably support their families. Again, also, why we invested in the Alberta child benefit: to ensure that they have the dollars to provide those opportunities to their families, because we know that the last thing that families need while the economy is recovering are concerns about how they can afford child care as well.

With that, very excited with the early learning and child care centres, to have supported and encouraged opportunities to provide more accessibility for families who do work flexible job hours. So some of those centres might choose to offer evenings or weekends, offer part-time to kind of accommodate the shift work, where sometimes they don't need to pay full-time, especially if they have, you know, a partner who works different shifts and might only need two or three days a month and they don't want to pay for full-time when that happens, and just in general extending those hours and providing that accessibility, including to those with special needs as well. Accessibility of child care is incredibly important and certainly something we've been promoting through the early learning and child care centres.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Minister.

I'll let my colleague MLA Westhead ask you some questions.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you very much, Minister. I also want to echo my colleague Annie McKittrick's comments about the important work that your ministry does. I know that as a registered nurse you bring a real passion and dedication and professionalism to the role that you play. So thank you for that.

I was also very honoured to participate in the child intervention panel. It was a very eye-opening experience. The stories that we heard were heart-wrenching across the province, but we also heard a lot of stories of hope and that there are a lot of opportunities for us to improve the system and empower families to be able to, you know, remain whole and provide the best possible care for children. I applaud the ministry on the work that you're doing. I know you're undertaking work to create the action plan that the panel recommended, and I really look forward to that coming out.

Some of the stories we heard on the panel were about the support for a growing caseload in the child intervention system. You've mentioned here today that there is additional funding support for the caseload growth. I'm just wondering if you can tell us how many front-line child intervention workers the department currently employs.

10:50

Ms Larivee: Thanks for that. You know, I'm thankful for your work on the panel, and I know it was a lot of commitment to be a part of that, so thank you for that. Very much so, our government takes the issue of keeping our province's children very seriously, and we've already, you know, taken action, in part thanks to the guidance of the panel, to make improvements to our child intervention system. That included the changes to the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. I'm really looking forward to the engagement and bringing the action plan forward.

In terms of how many front-line child intervention workers we have, there are about 2,800 front-line workers within the whole department. That includes some of the staff who provide support to child care as well. I can try to get the information breaking out just child intervention, but the majority of those would be child intervention.

Mr. Westhead: Okay. Thank you.

With the workload that they do encounter, what kind of resources are available for the front-line staff, who are under a lot of pressure to do the work that they do bringing support to families?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. Thanks. You know, certainly, you made reference to the fact that I'm a registered nurse and worked front line for years, and I've always felt, since taking on this ministry, that I needed to be connected to front-line staff to hear what their concerns are, to know what their suggestions are, to feel that they understood and knew that their minister was behind them and understood them and valued them and wanted to ensure they had the support they needed. Certainly, in those conversations I've heard from them – as well, the deputy minister has heard from them – on the need to ensure that they have support to deal with the vicarious trauma.

So I'm very excited to be moving forward with the peer support program coming this fall. That's something that I think will be tremendously valuable in providing that support to help them deal with that. It's not just, you know, the kids who are currently on your caseload. You're affected by stories that happen across the province. You're affected by stories that happen to other staff in your office, so not restricting it to just, you know, you only get the support if it happened to your child but just broadly, that they have that support and access. Whenever they need it, they confidentially can access that support, not only from the peer support program, but Shepell as well provides support in terms of that preventative mental health guidance and also support through the EFAP to provide that confidential counselling if needed.

Obviously, conflict at work creates incredible and tremendous stress. I think there's nothing worse than having conflict with co-workers to make you feel like you don't want to go to work as well. You know, I think the conflict management program that we're putting in place, starting right away, next month, is something we're piloting on behalf of all of the government, and I'm excited to see what might be coming out of that as well.

I had previously talked to Member Aheer about this, but the wellness your way program is something that they can take ownership of and create a plan for wellness for their office as well, you know, as well as support for mentoring across the GOA, supporting supervisors and managers in terms of their orientation and making sure that they're aware of how to support staff broadly across the ministry. We're working hard at that.

Certainly, I do know that what wouldn't help them at all would be having to be concerned about dealing with the pressures and threats of deep cuts and job losses. They're really struggling with workload at this point in time, and they're really happy to know that we value the work that they do enough to ensure that we proceed with the workload assessment model to ensure they have the staffing in order to do the work and deliver that quality care.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you. I can't tell you how refreshing it is to have a minister like you, who takes the time to listen to front-line staff. As a former front-line worker myself I often felt like my perspective wasn't valued by the former government. You know, I think it's so important, the work that you're doing, giving them the supports and resources that they need. They do do a difficult job, and, like you said, oftentimes these cases can become highly charged and politicized, which also can negatively affect the morale of the staff. I think it's important not to point fingers at people but to find solutions and work towards that. I'm really proud that your ministry is taking that on.

Ms Larivee: Thanks.

Mr. Westhead: Moving on to line item 4.2, regarding youth in transition, can you please explain what is encompassed within that line item? It's located under early intervention services for children and youth. I guess my question, too, is: is this more an after intervention or early intervention?

Ms Larivee: Thanks for that. You know, I think it's incredibly important – and I know the panel members understand that as well – that youth are supported to make their transition out of the intervention system into adulthood. I have an 18-year-old at home, and there's no way that he would be capable of taking care of himself without some support. He would be at dire risk of ending up challenged. You know, we need to support those youth to make that transition effectively.

The experience that youth in care have is even more troubling in terms of the trauma that they've had to deal with, the disconnect they have from family and community, some cultural isolation, and just those challenges that are unique to kids in care. We need to be really intentional and deliberate about our efforts around transition.

You know, from that perspective, we're really wanting to do that early intervention of creating a transition plan. The work has to be in place for a transition plan. By the time they're 16, there needs to be some solid work having been done with that youth as to what life is going to look like for them after they turn 18 and making sure we work to connect them to resources and connect them to the community. Again, we've extended care so they can provide those supports up to age 24, to ensure that they continue to have some engagement and support through that time to help them with that transition.

Within line item 4.2, youth in transition, there are opportunities for support and financial assistance for those youth. Something I'm really excited about and talked briefly about is the advancing futures bursary. That provides financial support to them: assistance with finding housing, covering tuition, transportation, child care if they have a child, books, you know, just the broad spectrum of costs that are associated with that.

But it's not just about providing the money. Along with providing that money, there's a mentor who works with them and provides that support and encourages them and helps keep them on track in their education as well. That money also helps to support the Alberta mentoring partnership program. We talked about mentoring already and the importance of that to ensure that they have support to smooth out that transition to adulthood and to support them as they age out of care and do that.

Again, I briefly spoke about the support and financial assistance agreements, but whether they choose to take advantage of the advancing futures bursary or not, they're not just left out on their own. There's financial assistance as well as mentoring support to support them in transitioning into adulthood.

Mr. Westhead: Great. Thank you. That's great to hear.

I recall that in one of the panel's meetings there was a young lady who had been in care and aged out of care and had a very good success story. Some of the recommendations that she made were to have these kinds of transition supports available and how important it is for kids to be given every chance. I really appreciate that the ministry is putting a strong emphasis on that as well.

Moving on to First Nations children, you've talked a little bit about the increasing number of First Nations children and youth in care. I'm wondering what kind of indicators you'll use to assess the progress on reducing the number of indigenous children and youth in care and also how the panel recommendations fit into that work.

Ms Larivee: Yeah. I do want to actually clarify that there's not an increasing number of First Nations children and youth in care. Actually, over time we've seen a decrease in the actual number, which is incredibly important. However, having said that, that does not negate the fact that indigenous children are vastly overrepresented in our child intervention system, something we are tremendously concerned about, as are indigenous communities, and

what that means for their children and their future. We're committed to working with them to develop an action plan that will help us move forward the recommendations from the panel.

Again, just this week I was in Bigstone First Nation and Paul First Nation having community meetings to talk with them and hear directly from community members as well as leadership: what would that look like? What would success look like? What do you need? What would a community-driven solution be in terms of dealing with these problems? You know, it ranged from ideas around what support kinship providers might need to have to be more successful, to talking about the impact of root causes and what could happen on that, to talking about how to get more indigenous kids in care.

11:00

It ranged quite vastly, but people are very passionate about their children. We all are. It makes us, you know, very emotional and invested and wanting more than anything else the best future for our children, and that's certainly what I hear from indigenous communities. I'm excited to really be part of a government who takes the stance that we want to hear from them, we want those community-driven solutions, and we really want to take action on the calls to action in terms of moving forward with reconciliation.

I would be remiss if I didn't say that we also need the federal government to step up to the plate and join in this important work. You know, we can't do this on our own in terms of that. I think we need to make sure that the indigenous communities and ourselves as well as the federal government are at the table figuring that out.

Again, thanks for your work on the panel, because I think those recommendations are solid, and I'm looking forward to moving forward on that.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the next 10 minutes I would like to invite Mrs. Aheer and the minister to speak. Are you wanting to combine your time with the minister?

Mrs. Aheer: That would be lovely if it's okay with the minister.

Ms Larivee: Sure.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I just wanted to follow up on something that Mr. Westhead has said. I wanted to just clarify for myself, for my son. I mean, we've been in the system for 19 years. He's an adult autistic, and when we were first in the system, when we were first in the child intervention and working through – I think it was the Gordon Townsend school at that point in time that was working with parents and whatnot and children and families that were just having these diagnoses. I have to say that Alberta was the place to be.

As much as I appreciate commentary on how much the government has improved, I do appreciate that this was the province to be in. I have friends that are doctors and social workers and hockey players and people from all over the country, in fact, from the United States, that moved here to get services for special needs children. On top of that, at the time when I was researching it, Dr. Ortiz was the main guy in the United States. I talked to his people. I never got to talk to him, but I spoke with his people.

Finding out as a mom – because you're told a whole slew of things of what your kid may or may not be able to do, and I appreciate that. As a mom you go: uh-huh, thank you so much,

moving on. But I want to be clear that this province has been absolutely ahead of its time in terms of services for special-needs children, and I feel completely blessed to have lived in this province. I said that from the beginning, when my child was first diagnosed, that I can't imagine having lived anywhere else to have had the services, the PUF, the transition, Renfrew, all of these things, all of these amazing people. I had people in my house every day helping my son through speech and OT and PT and everything else that goes along with that.

I'm so, so grateful to live in a country and in a province that sees that as a priority. I appreciate everything, the work that this government is doing, but that happened long before any of us were here. I just want to acknowledge that, because my son is who he is not just because of his family and his circumstances and the environment but because of those amazing workers. In fact, the speech pathologist that worked with my son is one of my best friends to this day. I'm so grateful for her, and I say to her every day: my son speaks because of you, because I certainly didn't have those strategies. I'm completely grateful, and I just wanted to be on the record to say that. Thank you, especially for those of you who've probably been here that long or at least for some portion of that. Thank you.

I have a question. Human service providers that have government contracts to do the majority of the heavy lifting in terms of front-line services: their costs have risen significantly due to government policy changes such as minimum wage increases, carbon taxes, and changes to labour legislation regarding staff overtime and mandatory holiday pay. When we were meeting with stakeholders, this was a major concern. Some of the child and family services were looking at increases of, like, \$330,000 because of carbon taxes. Also, on top of that, they have an option of being noncompliant with the legislation, but the result of that is cutting back services to these vulnerable populations that they serve or shutting down. Has the government provided these organizations with the funds they need to offset their rising costs, and is that reflected in the budget?

Ms Larivee: We're certainly incredibly committed to working with our agencies. They provide incredible work in terms of supporting the children and youth and families that are our shared responsibility together. We certainly have had a close relationship with them throughout, you know, our term in office over the last few years. One of the things from day one that they were concerned about is that they had not had an opportunity to address their increases in costs. I'm happy to say that in the budget this year we were able to provide some additional funds to our agencies in providing the care that they do, an increase that they have deserved for a long time, and thankful for the economic recovery that allowed us to provide that support that they have been asking for.

They do need to be supported. They do need to be supported to provide the incredible care that they provide, and I am proud to be part of a government that's chosen to value those Albertans and value their work and to ensure that we don't cut important front-line services like the work those agencies provide.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Minister.

Why are the child and family services groups not exempt from the carbon tax?

Ms Larivee: Well, certainly, in terms of moving forward, again, the recommendation that came out of the climate leadership panel was to move forward with a broad-based carbon tax. You know, you can speak to the Minister of Environment and Parks about the rollout of that program.

Certainly, what I can say is that, you know, what I don't hear from the agencies is, to be honest, anything about this. What I hear from them is that they need the support to provide the care to their kids. They need support to figure out how to manage the complexity of the care that's coming forward, and they need to be supported in the work that they do. I'm so proud to work with them. They're incredibly committed to supporting Albertans, and we'll continue to ensure that they do have that support and that they do get the contracts and they do have the dollars in order to provide the care that they want to for the children and families they're responsible for.

Mrs. Aheer: To that end, Minister, you were saying that because of various factors, you're looking like you might be able to compensate for some aspect or the other. I would think an exemption would be the best way to compensate versus going another direction.

However, how are you compensating those on the front lines like foster families, group homes, front-line workers for these increased costs? Because, as you know, I mean, these wonderful folks from family services: they're outreach workers; they're driving; they're picking up kids; they're taking family members to appointments and activities. How is this being compensated for?

Ms Larivee: Thanks for that question. I just want to take a moment to say thank you to all the foster and kinship providers, who really do step up to open their hearts and their homes to these children, many of them with quite complex needs and all of them having been traumatized by their experiences. You know, they're incredibly caring individuals, and we're very proud of the work that they do in providing stable, loving, temporary homes for some of our most vulnerable children while we work with the families to address their concerns that led them coming into our care.

Certainly, the basic maintenance per diems provide funding to cover the day-to-day costs of raising children in foster or kinship care as well as potential adoptive or private guardianship families and support for permanency caregivers. I was really thankful this year that we were able to increase the per diem for those families, you know, the first increase in a while thanks again to enough of an economic recovery that we could continue to support them through that. There was \$1.9 million in funding to increase basic maintenance rates for foster and kinship caregivers as well as for those with supports for permanency agreement.

Mrs. Aheer: How are the per diems calculated, Minister?

Ms Larivee: We'll have to get back to you with the details because it does vary depending on the family. It's not a simple calculation.

11:10

Mrs. Aheer: Right. Yeah. It would be interesting to see how that all works. Thank you so much.

Okay. On page 23 of your business plan you highlight the fact that in the last five years the number of indigenous care has declined by 16 per cent, just to correct Mr. Westhead once more. Can you point to the specific initiatives that have been taken – because this has been happening progressively over the last five years, right? I think since 2009 especially but then in the last five years we've seen a reduction. As you had said, Minister, that in no way takes away from the aspect to continue and to do better. Do you have any ideas about the reductions? I mean, are there specific things that you've noted that have shown those reductions that you're pushing forward with? Because some things work better than others. Can you give us some commentary on that?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. Certainly, the child intervention practice framework and through that utilizing the tool of signs of safety have been tremendously successful in providing strength-based care and that kind of wraparound care to families and connecting them to natural supports in both their family and communities. Having recognized that, we're providing tremendous support throughout the ministry to ensure that all of our child intervention staff have the support they need to embrace that tool, to own that tool, to move forward with the practice framework and ensure that their service delivery is within the parameters of that model that we know is making a real difference.

I think a big part of that is making sure that they have the capacity to be able to deliver that care. Certainly, the increase in the number of FTEs has been helpful to ensure that caseworkers can actually do it. You can't do that family-finding work, you know, if you don't have the time. You can't connect families to those resources without that time.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

At this point I would like to invite Ms McKitrick and the minister to speak for the next 10 minutes. Are you wanting to combine your time?

Ms McKitrick: Please.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms McKitrick: Thank you, Minister. We just started talking a little bit about kinship and foster care, and I just would like to talk a little bit more about it. I know that in my own constituency in Sherwood Park we have a lot of foster homes, and we also have a lot of people who are in kinship agreements. It's really an important issue in the community, and I also know how incredibly well these young people are doing in the schools and in their homes. I've had the pleasure of meeting many of them over the last few years. I really want to thank those people who have foster homes. I know it's not easy, and they just provide safe, loving, and caring homes. It's really wonderful. I met a young person who was 18. From foster care he went to being adopted when he was 18. I just think that was such a fantastic start.

You know, sometimes foster and especially kinship care homes don't feel they have enough support. Especially I've been meeting a lot of grandparents who are in kinship care with their grandchildren, and they're really struggling. When I look at line 2.4, foster care support, I was wondering if you could talk about specific programs and supports for foster parents or those who provide kinship care, especially maybe if they're grandparents. I would really appreciate it.

Ms Larivee: Thanks for that question. Again, you know, I can't thank our foster and kinship caregivers enough for the work that they do. I know that they don't do it for the money. They do it because they want to make life better for the kids that come into their home, but at the same time it really helps if they have the financial resources. That shouldn't be a barrier to being a foster family. That's why I'm so proud that we were able to in the budget provide an additional \$1.9 million for the basic maintenance funding to support foster and kinship caregivers as well as those who have supports for permanency agreements. Those supports do help cover the day-to-day costs of raising a child in foster or kinship care as well as to potential adoptive or private guardianship families and support for permanency caregivers. Certainly, more than

money, we are happy to provide them a number of educational supports as well.

Ms McKitrick: Thank you. I'm really glad to see the increase because I think that not only are these children vulnerable, but I know that it's a good start for them and finding a home is going to lead to much better outcomes. As you know, it's an issue that I personally have had experience with, so I'm very happy. Can you just maybe talk specifically about what increased funding might mean in terms of access for these families or any programs that are happening for these families that are providing foster and kinship care?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. As well as increasing the per diem, which hasn't been increased since 2014, so it was definitely overdue, education is also an incredibly important part of it. We've been rolling out the foundations of caregiver support training, which provides caregivers with the information that they need on child development, brain development, the impact of trauma, and understanding loss and grief. That trauma-informed perspective is so incredibly important to help those children heal and to grow up to be resilient and strong.

Those little ones have gone through a lot. Apprehension all on its own is a trauma, but oftentimes it's not just the apprehension; they've had other traumas in their life that they're struggling to deal with and to heal from. That can create challenging behaviours for them, that the foster parents have to deal with. You know, I'm just really incredibly proud of our kinship care providers and foster care providers for their willingness to step up and take in these children with complex needs. I think it's incredibly important that we give them the tools that they need in order to build some success for those children and help them to grow up and meet their full potential.

Ms McKitrick: Thank you, Minister.

We talked about child care. We talked about kinship and foster care. I just want to talk about some of the other things that your ministry is doing to support our youngest residents in Alberta and those young people who are going to be our future. I was wondering what other safe space your ministry is providing for children and how you're investing in childhood development. You know, when I look back at my own children and the fact that they didn't have any development for two years and they were deprived, I really know the importance of that early childhood development and the work that is going on to work with parents and children. So I was wondering: what specifically is the ministry doing, and where is it reflected in the budget?

Ms Larivee: Thanks. Yeah. Certainly, we've known for a number of years now how important those early years are and that those first few years of life are incredibly essential in terms of forming the building blocks for children as they are growing. With that, we recognize the importance of investing in those early years to make sure that all young Albertans have the support they need to meet their potential. I think we all know that our province's young people are going to be, as they grow up, our future doctors, teachers, politicians, veterinarians, lawyers, and that they will be the ones who are leading the economy as we go forward into tomorrow. We have, you know, invested substantially into those early years.

Certainly, examples of that include continuing with our parent link centres and ensuring that they have the support they need to continue to do that work. I think that oftentimes in times of economic challenges early intervention is a place that often is gone to and seen as a place for cuts. Certainly, within our ministry we

understood that the last thing that families that were struggling with economic challenges needed would have been to have supports such as parent link, which provides them with a free place to go to bring their children to support them through their development, those kind of resources, disappear.

Then, beyond that, for those families who need some more support in terms of that early time period, we also provide home visitation. You know, for those families who maybe have some more risk factors, they provide in-home parenting, education, and family support services to both expectant families and those with children up to six, who might be at risk without that support but through that support can have that healthy family and provide all those opportunities to their children. Again, I do think that this is an area that would be vulnerable to those who would be looking for cuts, and this is something I'd hate to see for these supports for these children in terms of supporting their early development.

11:20

Ms McKittrick: I want to thank you, Minister, because I actually worked for FCSS, and I know the importance of the parent link program and home visitation and what a difference both of these programs are making in the life of the family of a young person. I'm really glad to see ongoing support from the government and discussion around early intervention and early development and focus on that. I know that we've done a lot of work, especially in your ministry, in terms of making sure it's not just in the urban areas but that these programs exist throughout Alberta and rural areas, and it's a lot of effort to make that into all communities. I really wanted to thank you.

I'll let my colleague MLA Westhead ask a couple of questions at this point.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you again, Minister. I apologize. I misspoke in my last question about the indigenous children in care. What I meant to say was the disproportionality of the population.

Ms Larivee: Yes. I figured that.

Mr. Westhead: So I apologize for that.

I want to move on to the child care program. It's something that I'm quite thrilled about, and I know that people in my constituency and across the province for that matter are as well. Banff was lucky to be part of the pilot project with Puzzles daycare in Banff, and it's especially useful there in terms of the extended hours because residents there were often in the tourism industry and they worked shift work, so having the extended availability is extremely useful for them, not to mention how affordable it is.

We've talked a little bit about the ELCC pilot this morning.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the next 10 minutes I would like to invite Mrs. Aheer and the minister to speak. Are you wanting to combine your time?

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, please.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much.

Hello again, Minister. I wanted to talk a little bit about the PQR process for community providers. As you know, they bid for service contracts, and that ensures that those applying for government contracts have met the basic minimum threshold for service providers. Could you tell us: where do those costs associated with that PQR process show up in the budget?

Ms Larivee: Well, certainly, the cost of the actual delivery of care appears in the line items for the agencies, but in terms of the actual operational work of procuring in the first place, you would find it under line item 1.5, corporate services. That helps provide financial support to our centralized procurement office.

Mrs. Aheer: Oh, thank you so much.

You've been using this tool for a couple of years. Can you share the results that it's produced?

Ms Larivee: Sure. I mean, this is an evolution of how we engage with our agencies that was designed by – again, because of the relationship we have with those agencies, we were able to develop a system that we thought worked better for the government agencies but, most importantly, ensure the very best care to children and families. Certainly, throughout that process we are continuing to promote client choice and ensure that Albertans have an access to a range of service providers who they trust and that all contracted service providers are procured through the fair, equitable process. So I'm looking forward to doing some evaluation of that process.

One thing we certainly are very excited about is that we have issued an RFP for campus-based care, and that closed just this month. Looking forward to moving forward with that and seeing how we can work together with our agencies to proactively have a plan to manage the more complex cases that come into our care.

What was missing when I had become minister was, you know, a process by which we engaged with ensuring that we had resources in place for those more complex situations that often need some very intense support. That's certainly something we're working on. We do have a strategic procurement committee, and there was a four-year procurement cycle that was launched late last year to improve those processes. There are four phases to that as we move forward. Looking forward to being proactive rather than reactive and moving forward with that process.

Mrs. Aheer: Is that in the same line item, Minister, the procurement piece of the strategic procurement committee?

Ms Larivee: In terms of the work that the office does, that would be under corporate services in terms of the actual work of procuring services. But each of the services – for example, campus-based care would fall within child intervention services because the contract itself is how we're providing care to those clients.

Mrs. Aheer: Can you talk a little bit more about campus-based care?

Ms Larivee: Sure. Campus-based care refers to care that's provided not in a home. For example, secure services would be an example of that in terms of providing care to children where for various reasons it might not be an appropriate placement to be in a home. Some of those children might have very complex special needs or very acute mental health challenges or, you know, some substantial behavioural challenges that need to be managed ideally short term so that we can get them into a home-based placement.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. That's why I was asking, because you were talking about the strategic procurement committee and how that would relate to the campus based. Okay. Thank you so much for that.

Page 25 of the business plan, key strategy 2.1. We've heard from the stakeholders that work within the child intervention system. Their concerns are with the timelines. This is with regard to what you were just saying about when children are being removed and in that traumatic time period, that there's a timeline that's legislated

between the removal of a child from a home and then a PGO, specifically as it relates to that family and specifically indigenous families. The intergenerational trauma plays such a huge role for these families to heal and move forward. This is that timeline that I was sort of talking about earlier. The intervention timeline to the PGO is in the realm of about six months to a year, I mean, in our outreach, anyways, with some of the incredible people we've spoken to. We've heard from the stakeholders that the indigenous people are just starting to begin their healing processes around the two-year mark. That's within their own communities dealing with the traumas themselves. So how are you balancing the stability of children within those timelines for healing with our First Nation families?

Ms Larivee: Thanks for that question. You bring up how complex the realm of child intervention is in terms of, you know, finding those right supports for families. I think that if all of us had some way of seeing the future, you know, the work that our caseworkers do would be far less complex, and understanding the communities would be there as well.

Certainly, in terms of the care we provide to families, it really is with the intention of reuniting that family. That is our primary goal, to wrap around those families. You know, if the child can stay safe within the home, that's great. We do everything we can to create safety there, but if they do have to be apprehended, it doesn't mean that we don't really focus on supporting those families. Again, the practice framework that's utilized is designed to really intensely work with those families to help connect them to the resources to get them healthy so that they're ready for those children to come home. When we're seeing progress, then we continue to do that work. That's where that balance comes out. PGOs can be rescinded, and we have PGO status being rescinded on a regular basis, where we've done tremendous hard work in working towards reunification . . .

Mrs. Aheer: That was my next question.

Ms Larivee: Yeah.

. . . and ensuring that we do that work. Certainly, there are many instances whereby in working with those families, we've been able to help them become healthy and be ready for that child to be reunited, and we can move forward on the process.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much.

On page 26 of your business plan, under performance measures 3(a) and 3(b), you use that time frame of 12 months. Do you have any metrics to track the percentage of indigenous and nonindigenous youth who return for supports after the 12-month mark, and if so, can you share those?

11:30

Ms Larivee: Certainly, in terms of the child intervention standards there are a number of metrics that are evaluated and publicly reported on that have some details in terms of doing that. I mean, we can do the reverse math of looking at the indicator of saying that if 84 per cent actually didn't return, obviously that would be 16 per cent that did have to return.

Mrs. Aheer: Is that an actual fact? It is actually 16 per cent that returns? The reverse is not necessarily true, right?

Ms Larivee: Well, if 84 per cent did not return, then the other percentage would be those who did.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. In the same program line, then.

Ms Larivee: Yeah. In terms of needing additional services. Again, that doesn't necessarily mean in care; it just means that they need additional services.

Mrs. Aheer: That's what I mean.

Ms Larivee: Yeah. We'd had that conversation before, that, you know, thanks to the great work in building relationships with the caseworkers, sometimes families do need to come back and need a little additional support, but it does not necessarily mean that they're in care.

Mrs. Aheer: That's what I was wondering. So it could be a top-up versus an actual re-entrance. Okay. Thank you so much for the clarity on that.

Okay. Then key strategy 3.3 on the same page: you noted that your targets for cumulative time care were nine months for those under six years of age and 12 months for those over six years of age, with extensions of six months. That's from your *Hansard* transcripts. Would you mind describing what cumulative time of care is?

Ms Larivee: Sure. If they went back to their families and then returned in care again, we would be looking at the total time that they were in care.

Mrs. Aheer: The total time. Okay. How often are you meeting those timelines?

The Chair: Thank you.

For the next 10 minutes I would like to invite Mr. Clark and the minister to speak.

Are you wanting to combine your time?

Mr. Clark: Yes, please, if I may. Minister, would you like to go back and forth? Thank you very much.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Clark: I just want to pick up on where I left off on the last conversation. We talked about affordable child care, and that's something that's important to me and important to us. I know you've certainly taken some steps. In your previous response you said that, you know, the pilots have been chosen in places that would most likely help the right people. I'm sure that's absolutely true, but at the same time I guess I find it a bit odd that the policy is completely universal. I have actually heard feedback from people who've said: "Why are we eligible? We don't need this help. We'll take it, hey, all day. Great. We're happy."

I guess I'm wondering, again, you know, about some form of means testing or something. It feels like we're expending substantial resources in an area that's been traditionally underserved, and there absolutely are many successes, but it feels like we should really be focusing on helping the people who actually need the help. Is that something that you anticipate building into your policy frame going forward?

Ms Larivee: Well, as I was starting to answer – actually, before I even go on to there, I do want to just take a step back and thank you for your work on the panel. You put tremendous effort into it. I felt that you engaged in that nonpartisan process in good faith, and I was really thankful for your commitment to the whole process. I want to say thank you for that because I forgot to mention that earlier.

Going back to the child care conversation, I think that when we talk about who needs it, sometimes we think too narrowly. Is it

someone who couldn't absolutely afford it and is making that choice between diapers and child care? Absolutely, we want those people to have access to it, but it's much broader than that. As I was starting to reference, there are professionals who, right now, with the cost of child care, are going back to work basically to break even or to make a small amount. The only reason at this point to go back to work would be to maintain their professional status but acknowledging that there will be years in which they are working for nothing.

You know, some people make that choice, but others don't. In my community alone what I've heard of, you know, is an excellent, amazing teacher who is struggling as to whether she is going to go back to work or not now that she has two children. I mean, the cost of two children for child care basically would eat up almost her whole, entire cheque. She's an amazing, amazing teacher, and I think our children need her and our community needs her. It would be to the loss of our economy and the loss of our children to do that. Same thing with nurse practitioners.

You know, I think there is tremendous value in ensuring that we have the support, in terms of ensuring that there's access to that quality child care and making it reasonable and supporting those individuals. I do understand that because it's a pilot-based model, the differential for that, you know, is challenging. Again, as a pilot of a universal, affordable, to capture some of that data around what it means to families who you wouldn't traditionally think of as needing the money piece, it's making a real difference in terms of our communities.

Mr. Clark: I guess I'd love to see that data. That'd be really interesting to see because – you're right – those examples I would hope would be captured in a model that would work, or even some kind of subsidy if not entirely covering would make a lot of sense. There are some folks who are well beyond that, you know, who are really senior executives.

Ms Larivee: There are not that many of those.

Mr. Clark: There aren't, but it's not zero, right? So you look at that and say: okay; if we're going to allocate scarce resources, even if we're just going to take it to 5 per cent, whatever that is, that's a group of people who would get service who otherwise wouldn't. Fair enough.

We'll move on. Time is short here. Page 23 of the business plan. Resources have been put into survivors of residential schools and the '60s scoop. I think that's something that's long overdue, and I think that's very important. What I'm interested in is: for the survivors of the '60s scoop and the residential schools themselves, absolutely those resources. But we, of course, also have great challenges with intergenerational trauma and their immediate family members and extended family members. Do your strategies include that intergenerational trauma piece, casting a wide net, or is it limited only to direct survivors of the '60s scoop and residential schools?

Ms Larivee: That's a great question. I think the intergenerational trauma spans for a number of reasons. When I think back to the fact that they couldn't even leave the reserve without permission – you know, we can talk about residential schools and the '60s scoop as being some big examples, but just the general oppression over years and the trauma that endured because of that is something that we need to apologize for but also to do things differently going forward, making sure that we support ongoing healing.

You know, we are doing work at this point. I briefly referenced our foundations of caregiver support and the fact that all of our agencies and, moving forward, all of our staff as well as our

caregiver providers, foster, kinship, would have the tools to look at things from a trauma-informed perspective and ensure that they're supporting our children going forward to have that resiliency. I expect to hear a lot more as we go forward in terms of developing the action plan. Dealing with the historical trauma was factored into one of the recommendations from the panel. We'll be talking to the communities about what that looks like and what they need to be supported to heal themselves.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much. On a similar vein, then, Jordan's principle, key strategy 2.3 on page 25. You've got a good explanation of Jordan's principle. The question I have, I guess, is: what is the process for reconciling from a budgetary perspective? The principle is that wherever that child is first in contact with service agencies, there's the jurisdictional problem of going: well, that's the federal government, and this is the provincial government. Meanwhile, the child languishes and in certain cases has a very poor outcome. This is all about saying: whoever gets there first – in many cases it's the provincial authority even if it's a federal responsibility – we're going to care of it and we'll figure it out later. That's sort of my fairly simplistic understanding of how this works.

I guess what I'd like to know is: is there a reconciliation with the federal government? Is that reflected in the budget numbers? Can we actually see where that federal money is coming back as a result of services provided by the province that really were the jurisdiction of the federal government?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. At this point in time we've been working with the consortium and the federal government. There hasn't been a cost to us at this point in time because there has been a process to ensure that that happens. The feds have allotted dollars to that, and they're good partners in terms of this.

Mr. Clark: I'm actually very glad to hear that and I have to say a little surprised because this sort of feels like a kind of area where there could be a bunch of jurisdictional wrangling and pinching pennies and all of that. So you're saying that in fact the money tends to come. I've noticed that there's an increase in federal transfers in the budget. Is it reflected there? If I look at other federal transfers on page 28 under revenue, the budget for '17-18 was \$24 million, and we actually end up with \$70 million. Is that where that would be captured, or is that something else?

11:40

Ms Larivee: Primarily Jordan's principle applies to health, so where you're going to see Jordan's principle reflected would be in terms of working with them on the Health budget. The primary increase from the federal government is thanks to the over \$45 million they gave to us for the early learning and child care centres.

Mr. Clark: Okay. It's interesting, though. For performance measure 2(b) on page 25, percentage of Jordan's principle requests assessed within 48 hours, obviously there are Jordan's principle requests that fall within your ministry. But that's not a financial transaction so much with the federal government?

Ms Larivee: Certainly, our ministry has been appointed as the lead within the government of Alberta for Jordan's principle although when it comes to the actual cases, they do tend to be in Health. From our perspective generally the programs already exist in order to ensure we have the supports for the children who fall into our care, so it's not been an issue that we've had to manage.

Mr. Clark: Okay. Good.

Do you track the average amount of time it takes to fully implement OCYA recommendations, or is that taken case by case?

Ms Larivee: I mean, the Child and Youth Advocate's recommendations vary in complexity. Some of them are very easy and simple and straightforward to implement, and others may for example have to do with dealing with the root causes of children being brought into care in indigenous communities, which is a very long-term, complicated issue, which it'd be somewhat difficult to even ascertain completion of. We certainly have worked closely over the last year with the Child and Youth Advocate to ensure that that relationship has been enhanced so that everybody is very clear as to what success looks like for the recommendations and to ensure that we can be really clear that we all know when we've achieved success. In terms of how long, they vary because of the complexity.

Mr. Clark: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

For the next 10 minutes I would like to invite Mr. Westhead and the minister to speak.

Mr. Westhead, are you wanting to combine your time?

Mr. Westhead: Yes, please.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Westhead: Great. Thank you. Just before I got cut off last time, I was talking about affordable child care and the pilot project and helping people get back to work. I'm wondering if you can tell us how the ministry's budget helps empower women and parents and caregivers back into the workforce through the ELCC.

Ms Larivee: Yeah. Thanks. You know, I think that if you actually listen to women and value what they have to say, you will hear that child care is an incredibly important issue to them. In contrast to talking down to the women in this province and mansplaining which issue women should actually think is important to them, our government is working to ensure that women and their priorities are at the forefront of every decision that we make. Certainly, I would not be, and none of us are, wanting to hide from doing our jobs. We want to make life better for women in this province. It certainly doesn't take a Facebook video to know that one of the best ways to support women is to ensure that families are able to access affordable, accessible child care.

Mr. Westhead: I couldn't agree with you more, Minister.

People have, you know, roundly praised the \$25-a-day daycare program. I'm just wondering if you've given thought to going even further and making it even more affordable and offering something like \$15-a-day daycare.

Ms Larivee: Our government does know how important affordable child care is, and that's why we very much believe strongly that families should not be forced into poverty just to access child care. Clearly, we live in a very rich and prosperous province, and it's completely unacceptable that that would be the situation. While \$15 would be great, that's certainly not our focus right now. Our focus is on ensuring that the \$25-per-day pilot moves beyond a pilot and is accessible to every single family in this province. I'm looking forward to making an announcement quite soon about our next phase in the commitments, and I think you'll be really pleased to see how many children and families are going to benefit from those dollars.

Mr. Westhead: That's great. Thank you so much. I'm so glad to see that our government is committed to carrying on with this

project and trying to expand it where we can. The opposition sort of pushes us every step of the way and says that they don't think that this is a priority for Albertans, which is quite shocking.

In any case, I'd like to hand some more time over to my colleague MLA McKittrick.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you. I wanted to talk a little about the Alberta child benefit. If I look on page 58 of the guide, I know this has been a really important component of people's budgets, you know, low-income people. It's really made a difference for a lot of people in my own community and I know throughout the province. I want to continue to thank you for keeping on putting the money in the budget and making it a priority. I was wondering what kind of feedback your ministry had heard about the Alberta child benefit and if there had been adjustments in the thinking or in the policy based on the feedback.

Ms Larivee: Thanks for that. I mean, there's been incredibly positive feedback about the Alberta child benefit. I think, you know, addressing child poverty has been something that's been talked about in Canada for a very, very long time and something that needed some aggressive action in addressing here in this province. What I've heard from people who work in the areas of dealing with poverty and who are dedicated to reducing poverty is that they really see that the Alberta child benefit is a game changer in terms of Alberta families and their children, that these dollars have provided parents with the chance to buy winter clothes for their kids, to make sure that they're properly dressed when they go to school, or to be able to provide them with opportunities they never were able to, maybe to be able to go to swimming class or to participate in soccer. And we know how beneficial those extracurricular activities are.

I've certainly talked to families who've expressed their gratitude for this and talked about what a difference it's made for them and their families. I think, you know, most of us in this room have probably always taken it for granted that extracurricular activities were just something that you could provide for your families, but for these families it wasn't necessarily something they could, and it's made a real difference for them to have those opportunities and make it just a little bit easier for them to be able to meet the needs of their kids.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you. I know that it's a program that needs to be accessed because your income is on record with the Canada Revenue Agency and that you have to have filled in the appropriate paperwork. I know from working with low-income people or families who have multiple challenges that with some of that paperwork, sometimes having all the information to fill out income taxes is really challenging. I was wondering how you're able to get more and more families to do this so they can have access to the Alberta child benefit.

Ms Larivee: Thanks for that question. You know, I really, really, really want every single eligible family to be able to take advantage of this. I mean, the thought that there are children out there who could benefit from this, families who could benefit from this and aren't just actually makes me really quite devastated. As you've mentioned, in order to get the benefit, Alberta families do have to file their income tax returns, and as a result of having done so, they are automatically enrolled for the child benefit, and not just the child benefit but other supports that we know will make their life better.

Throughout the tax season I have been working with community agencies and encouraging families to file their tax returns. Again, I

hope all of you are doing the same in your communities and reaching out and making sure that families know they can take advantage of the benefit and connecting them to free tax prep clinics. There are free tax prep clinics all across the province that they can take advantage of. I know that the community organizations that take care of that would be incredibly excited to see more families coming in if it meant that they can take advantage of this benefit.

Otherwise, requirements are pretty straightforward. Families earning less than \$41,746 per year net income are eligible to receive the benefit. The payments are mailed or direct deposited in as many as four installments each year. The maximum annual benefit is \$1,114 for families with one child and up to \$2,785 for families with four or more children.

11:50

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Minister.

Because tax season is not really over and there may be some people listening in the ether, I hope that everyone will be able to go to your website and make sure to tell eligible families that they should fill in their income tax to access this benefit because I do feel this has been really beneficial to a lot of families in our community for many reasons. Hopefully, people have heard this discussion.

I want to go back to child care. We talked, you know, a little bit about child care today, but I want to talk about training for staff. Those who take care of our children, the child care workers, are so essential to creating the warm, affordable, and enriching child care that our children need. In your budget, when I look at 3.2, I was wondering what the ministry was doing to make sure that children were safe in child care facilities and what supports there may be to child care facilities to ensure that our children have safe places.

Ms Larivee: Yeah. You are absolutely right. Part of quality care is ensuring that we have a trained and qualified workforce that really is actually prepared to provide the high-quality child care that Alberta's children and families deserve. Certainly, you know, I spoke quite passionately about it. As a mom I know how important it was that when I dropped off my kids – and I know that other parents feel the same way – they would be taken care of in a way that would help them to meet their full potential. That means that they need to understand childhood development and understand what needs to happen in order to build them up, but not just that, also to provide them all the love and care and to make them feel welcome throughout the process. We invest, certainly, in terms of ensuring that they are safe spaces. The licensing and inspection of child care programs is part of that.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the remainder of the meeting I would like to invite Mrs. Aheer and the minister to speak. Are you wanting to combine your time?

Mrs. Aheer: That would be great.

The Chair: Thank you. Go ahead.

Mrs. Aheer: Minister, I get you for six and a half minutes. Okay. I just have a couple of questions, actually. Last year the Child and Family Services Council for Quality Assurance's annual report noted that only 16 per cent of caseworker contact files were meeting all applicable requirements. You noted that the statutory director had "identified three key areas of practice" that were priorities for documentation: "face-to-face . . . accurate placement information . . . accurate legal authority information." That's from your transcript

from last year. Would you mind providing us with an update of the percentage of caseworker files that are meeting the requirements and the compliance of the files specifically meeting the three priorities of the documentation that are laid out by the statutory director?

Ms Larivee: The newest stats do come out for the child intervention standards with the CQA annual report that's coming out. There is still one more CQA report that will be coming out, and those stats will be a part of that. I'm looking forward to sharing it.

I also do have some information on the caregiver rates if you wanted me to read that into the record for you.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, maybe, if you don't mind, I'll ask my questions first, and then if you have a couple of minutes . . .

Ms Larivee: Sure.

Mrs. Aheer: Is that okay with you?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. It was information that you had asked for, so I just wanted to say that I have it if you . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Yes. Even if you can pass that to me, that would be fantastic.

Ms Larivee: Sure.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much.

The only other question I had specifically about this is: once the CQA is done, what regulatory body oversees this, then, after?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. Certainly, we expect that that will now be included in our annual report as we go forward.

Mrs. Aheer: As the ministry itself?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. That will be incorporated into the ministry.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. I wanted to ask you about page 26 of the business plan, key strategy 3.4. You had mentioned two pilots that the ministry was undertaking to address cultural awareness, the Gently Whispering the Circle Back and the blanket exercises. Would you mind speaking to the impact that these pilot projects have had on your staff?

Ms Larivee: Thanks for that. Certainly, we recognize the importance of ensuring that our staff have all the supports to understand culture and to provide that culturally appropriate care. We at this point have a large number of staff who've participated in the blanket exercise in particular. There is very . . .

Mrs. Aheer: It's very profound.

Ms Larivee: Profound is a great word.

. . . profound feedback in terms of response to that. You know, staff often get very emotional and are actually crying, you know, as they come to understand what the experience was like, and it's certainly transformative in terms of ensuring that they have that support.

Having said that, you know, we're going even further than that and working on developing a cultural understanding framework for all staff within the ministry, and that will ensure a very consistent, co-ordinated indigenous training for a Children's Services worker, which we really think will, you know, help align with UNDRIP and TRC as well as recommendations from the OCYA and the Auditor General around the cultural awareness.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. You were saying that quite a few of the staff have participated. Sorry if I missed this. Do you know approximately how many or what percentage of your staff?

Ms Larivee: So far we've done a thousand staff, that have participated in the blanket exercises, but it will be all of them who will have completed it as we move forward with the cultural understanding part.

Mrs. Aheer: So it will be expanding beyond the pilot stage?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. It is very much part of a core process of orientating staff to the work that we do.

Mrs. Aheer: Does it fall under the GBA plus centres of excellence?

Ms Larivee: I think that is separate from the GBA plus analysis. It's more from the perspective of the work that we're doing in terms of implementing UNDRIP and the TRC.

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry. Centres of responsibility is what I meant to say. I apologize.

Ms Larivee: No worries.

Mrs. Aheer: Then for your metrics in terms of success are you doing, like, I don't know, a survey with the folks that took it to find out the impacts that it had on them?

Ms Larivee: Yeah. There is a pre- and postevaluation that's done as part of that orientation, but as we move forward in the cultural understanding framework, it was incredibly important to us to have evaluation be a part of that. You know, like our colleague Mr. Clark here at the table, I very much believe that data is important to help guide our direction going forward. So we will be doing both qualitative and quantitative analysis of that.

Mrs. Aheer: But sometimes anecdotal just can't be replaced.

Ms Larivee: That's why we will have qualitative.

Mrs. Aheer: Yes.

Ms Larivee: So we don't have that completely rolled out yet, but absolutely we'll be ensuring that there's a perspective from our

indigenous community giving us feedback, not just from the staff but also our indigenous people in this province seeing a difference in how we're engaging and delivering services.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. It's a great part of the training, you know, that cultural sensitivity.

Is there any expansion outside of indigenous affairs to do those culturally sensitive activities within other cultures that may also be sensitive to some of the things that happen, especially within child intervention? I mean, we've got so many cultures, so much diversity in this province. Are you expanding this to beyond First Nations, specifically into other cultures and traditions and whatnot?

Ms Larivee: Again, the cultural understanding framework is embedded within our response to UNDRIP and the TRC, so it's indigenous specific. But beyond that, we do do some tremendous work in terms of making sure that our staff have the resources to help new Canadians or refugees, you know, in terms of providing care and understanding what that family's needs are and challenges are. We do have the multicultural brokerage program, which helps front-line staff not only deal with language barriers but also to understand that culture and provide that care in a way that is most likely to be successful when it's embedded in that cultural framework.

Mrs. Aheer: I have time for one more. On page 26, 3.4. Last year you stated: "In 2017 the ministry will highlight statistical data collected on the parent link . . . upstart survey" in order "to see the impact of PLC programming on indigenous families and inform future program and policy direction." This was a great idea. Did you get any feedback because those were on-site – right? – that upstart survey, like, the parent line? That was specifically for indigenous families.

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for the item of this business has concluded.

This meeting completes the committee's schedule for the consideration of the 2018-2019 main estimates for the ministries within its mandate.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]

